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AESTHETIC COSMOPOLITANISM, WORLD LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION

Any cursory glance at the existing literature on what has been referred to as aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which is relatively scarce when compared with the proliferation of works on other aspects of contemporary cosmopolitanism, reveals that, as Nikos Papastergiadis points out, 'since the Stoics the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of cosmopolitanism have been slowly disregarded' (Papastergiadis 2012: 82). In addition, one can soon perceive significant misunderstandings or confusions in current notions of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Three of the most salient of these are identified in what follows. First, I would like to refer to the ambiguity of the term itself and rather favour, for my purposes, a narrower concept of artistic cosmopolitanism. The notion of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is useful to call attention to the predominantly moral and political emphasis of current concepts of cosmopolitanism, as Papastergiadis suggests. However, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is not just limited to art. It includes a whole range of experiences, from the awe-inspiring admiration provoked by a sublime landscape in the Alps to the ugliness associated with certain urban or industrial settings. The problem lies, according to Theodor Adorno (1997), in reducing this much wider notion of the aesthetic to the artistic. This is why he defends the fundamental difference between natural beauty and the artificiality of art, even if they have increasingly become confused in the philosophical tradition since Hegel. In this respect, artistic cosmopolitanism appears as a more accurate term to refer to the world-opening projects and experiences that are specifically the product of an artistic or literary endeavour. Moreover, the notion of artistic cosmopolitanism also allows us to distinguish between the forms of high and low culture, a distinction that is obliterated in more general conceptions of cultural cosmopolitanism. This distinction is highly relevant whereas mass culture can easily lead to banal cosmopolitanism, in Beck's terms, a trivial, unconscious and deformed cosmopolitanism based on what is (Beck 2006: 19), artistic cosmopolitanism can teach us what radical openness to, and engagement with, the other means, and open up imaginary spaces for living

with difference. This is the reason why the latter is significant not only as an expression of relevant developments in the cultural sphere, but should also be recovered for, and referred to, more general notions of critical or reflexive cosmopolitanism (Mignolo 2000; Delanty 2009, 2014; Mendieta 2009).

Second, there are issues in periodising artistic cosmopolitanism, for instance, in Motti Regev's problematic distinction between the aesthetic cosmopolitanism of early to high modernity, dominated by an essentialist image of ethno-national uniqueness, and that of late modernity, when more rigid forms of national culture are replaced by fluid conceptions that are open to foreign influences (Regev 2007: 125). This distinction between the cosmopolitanism of high and late modernity would seem to mirror Delanty's statement that 'from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century the national imagination for the greater part prevailed over the cosmopolitan imagination' (Delanty 2009: 51). This may be true for a cosmopolitanism that is conceived primarily in political terms, but actually the opposite is the case with respect to artistic cosmopolitanism. In fact, high modernity can be characterised as the heyday of artistic cosmopolitanism, as an expression of the autonomy of art that was the product of a rebellion against both bourgeois and national culture. It was enacted by exiles and émigrés gathered in the great Western metropolises whose art reflects a fundamentally cosmopolitan experience of restless mobility, homelessness and estrangement. Thus, Raymond Williams refers to Paris, Vienna, Berlin, London and New York as transnational capitals of an art without frontiers, precisely at a time when frontiers were starting to become much more strictly policed (Williams 2007: 34), whereas Pascale Casanova defines Paris as the capital of those who proclaim themselves nationless: the artists (Casanova 2004: 29). In this respect, contemporary artistic cosmopolitanism fundamentally continues rather than breaks with an earlier tradition of international Modernism, a continuity which is well captured by Rebecca Walkowitz's concept of cosmopolitan style (Walkowitz 2006). What has changed today is that the experience of rootlessness and estrangement that was once typically associated with the living conditions of artists – and marked their distance from a more settled bourgeois society – has become generalised to the rest of the population.

Third, it is necessary to consider artistic cosmopolitanism from the point of view of both production and circulation/reception. Thus, views of artistic cosmopolitanism as 'an open conversation between the local and the global' and as an 'imaginative engagement' with the other (Papastergiadis 2012: 9) need to be complemented with an examination of the transnational patterns of circulation of contemporary art and literature. In the next two sections, I will be referring more narrowly to literature, rather than the arts, through the introduction of the notion of world literature and an examination of the role of translation in a transnational literary space.

World literature

The concept of world literature, which David Damrosch has defined as 'all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language' (Damrosch 2003: 4), was first used by Goethe in 1827. It appears

in the *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret* just after a reflection on a Chinese novel, which is readily compared to Goethe's own *Hermann and Dorothea* and to the English novels of Samuel Richardson, but distinguished, in its thorough morality, from Pierre-Jean de Béranger's songs. In this context, Goethe remarks:

Poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men ... I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise every one to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.

(*Eckermann 1850: 350–1*)

The term also famously appears in Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) as an illustration of 'the cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country' that originates in the exploitation of the world market by the bourgeoisie (1967: 83):

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

(*Marx and Engels 1967: 84*)

This formulation preserves the original sense that Goethe attributes to world literature as the expression of a new historical epoch in which a market for international literary exchanges becomes generalised. The emphasis lies in the notions of 'intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations', of which Goethe's *Conversations* contain abundant examples. Interrelations and exchanges between literatures are at the centre of his conception of world literature, which is thus 'less a set of works than a network' (Damrosch 2003: 3). They are expressed in the intense literary practice of polyglots, such as Goethe himself, who not only profusely read and reflect on a multitude of foreign works, but also avidly borrow, incorporate and transform elements taken from them to their own benefit:

Walter Scott used a scene from my 'Egmont', and he had a right to do so; and because he did it well, he deserves praise. He has also copied the character of Mignon in one of his romances; but whether with equal judgment, is another question. Lord Byron's transformed Devil is a continuation of Mephistopheles, and quite right too. If, from the whim of originality, he had departed from the model, he would certainly have fared worse. Thus, my Mephistopheles sings a song from Shakespeare, and why should he not? Why should I give myself the trouble of inventing one of my own, when this said just what was

wanted. If, too, the prologue to my 'Faust' is something like the beginning of Job, that is again quite right, and I am rather to be praised than censured.

(Eckermann 1850: 198–99)

Literary traditions are shaped by this intensified process of appropriation and transformation of foreign elements in a highly interconnected literary space, while world literature refers to the active co-existence of all contemporary literatures (Berman 1992: 56). Moreover, Goethe is especially interested not only in reading and borrowing from other literatures, but also in finding through the international reception of German works, a mirror image of his tradition that is far more revealing because it reflects a vision of oneself through the eyes of the other. This type of cosmopolitan reflexivity that world literature makes possible is explicitly highlighted by him:

It is pleasant to see that intercourse is now so close between the French, English and Germans, that we shall be able to correct one another. This is the greatest use of a world-literature, which will show itself more and more. Carlyle has written a life of Schiller, and judged him as it would be difficult for a German to judge him. On the other hand, we are clear about Shakespeare and Byron, and can perhaps, appreciate their merits better than the English themselves.

(Eckermann 1850: 432)

Pheng Cheah has rightly pointed to Goethe's conception of the world in the higher sense of spiritual intercourse, transaction and exchange as identifying a normative dimension of worldhood and a notion of worldliness that is crucially distinct from globalisation (Cheah 2012: 141). Thus, according to Cheah:

World literature is an ongoing work of negotiation between a range of particulars in order to arrive at the universal. This negotiation is properly worldly because it creates the world itself as intercourse in which there is appreciation and tolerance of the particular.

(Cheah 2012: 138)

What matters in this vision is the activity of imagining and creating the world, which is both the product of but also essentially autonomous from the processes that configure today's globalised market and therein lies its world-making potential.

Goethe's concept of world literature also centrally identifies a notion of cosmopolitanism as translation, because translation both allows and incarnates the international literary exchanges that for Goethe come to define the new modern era. As Antoine Berman points out, '*Weltliteratur* is ... the age of generalized intertranslation, in which all languages learn, in their own way, to be languages-of-translation and to live the experience of translation' (Berman 1992: 57–8). Goethe not only spoke several languages and translated many works,¹ but also particularly welcomed

the translations of his own works into other languages, finding his words mirrored and regenerated in the strangeness of foreign tongues. Thus, he states about his *Hermann and Dorothea*: 'I love it best in the Latin translation; there it seems to me nobler, as if it had returned to its original form' (Eckermann 1850: 200).

Translated works can recover an original novelty that the originals themselves may have lost. They point to a view of translation that emphasises its effects for the translated culture in terms of 'regeneration' and 'revival', not just its significance in mediating foreign works to readers who do not know the language and in introducing newness to the translating culture and language (for an elaboration of Goethe's formulation of the active reciprocal relation between literatures through translation centred around the concepts of participation, mirroring, rejuvenation and regeneration see Berman (1992: 64–7)).

In the age of generalised intertranslation, the German cultural tradition has something to offer that can be of benefit to all contemporaries: a conception that aims 'to make the translation identical with the original', overcoming 'the greatest resistance' and shaping 'the taste of the multitude' towards it (Goethe, quoted in Berman 1992: 59). This is a form of foreignising translation – according to Berman the most advanced expression of classical German thought on translation – that is explicitly conceived as opposed to the then dominant French mode of translation based on appropriating the foreign. Goethe refers as follows to its potential value to nationals of all countries and speakers of all languages, and not just of German:

Young men do well to come to us and learn our language; for ... no one can deny that he who knows German well can dispense with many other languages. Of the French I do not speak; it is the language of conversation, and is indispensable in travelling, because everybody understands it, and in all countries we can get on with it instead of a good interpreter. But as for Greek, Latin, Italian, and Spanish, we can read the best works of those nations in such excellent German translations, that ... we need not spend much time upon the toilsome study of those languages. It is in the German nature duly to honour after its kind, everything produced by other nations, and to accommodate itself to foreign peculiarities. This, with the great flexibility of our language, makes German translations thoroughly faithful and complete.

(Eckermann 1850: 190–1)

This constitutes the most persuasive argument about the cosmopolitan potential of foreignising translation: to serve as a vehicle for an experience of the foreign, potentially to all contemporaries, as opposed to a narcissistic experience of the recognition of dominant cultural values of one linguistic group. German thus becomes, through a form of translation that is particularly open to the foreign, a privileged language for the acquisition of a cosmopolitan culture, whereas French (English today) merely represents a more pragmatic choice for ordinary travel and exchange. In this context, we must not forget that Goethe's cosmopolitan views are a product not only of his explicitly universalistic political and moral stance, conceived in

opposition to the new forces of nationalist mystique and militant chauvinism that were emerging in Europe and especially in Germany (Steiner 2013:119–20). They are also the result of the latter's rather peripheral role in Western culture at the time, in contrast with the Anglo-American ethnocentrism and closure to foreignness that Venuti denounces in the contemporary context.

Through his understanding of world literature, Goethe is to artistic cosmopolitanism what Kant is to moral and political cosmopolitanism. Moreover, Goethe's view of world literature as a cosmopolitan space where national literatures are not abolished but are existing and growing through intensified contact and interaction with each other is closer than Kant's to contemporary notions of a critical cosmopolitanism. It highlights the interrelation between localities and between the local and the global, pointing towards social relationships that are primarily conceived in post-universalistic terms (Delanty 2009). This is why it is highly relevant and should be incorporated in a conception of cosmopolitanism beyond the cultural sphere.

Gained in translation

David Damrosch has characterised world literature as 'writing that gains in translation' (Damrosch 2003: 281). This refers to a form of valorisation to which traditional literary histories have been typically blind, minimising the extent and significance of the increasingly global factors that shape the production and circulation of literary works in modernity. These predominantly national histories have been challenged in recent decades in an attempt to come to terms with the cosmopolitanisation of reality. Johan Heilbron drew on world systems theory to provide a structural analysis of the international flows of translated books, approaching translation as a measure of centrality: the more central a language is in the international translation system, the more books are translated from this language. Conversely, the most central languages tend to have the lowest proportion of translations in their own book production (Heilbron 1999: 438–9). Pascale Casanova explored the role of transnational exchanges in a literary field that she characterised as global from the start (Casanova 2004). She showed how literatures are constituted relationally in a highly unequal international field, which she called the world republic of letters. While literature is initially national, bound to language and to political institutions, there is, according to Casanova, a process of progressive autonomisation. Autonomous fields become denationalised, and Paris acquires, in the nineteenth century, a unique role, a power of universal consecration: Paris dominates the literary world, it is the measure of literary modernity and consecrates the texts arriving from the peripheries.

In this context, translation becomes an element of valorisation of texts and diffusion of literary modernity. In the movement from centre to periphery, translation serves a basic function of capital accumulation: for poorer languages, it is a means of acquiring capital and prestige. Through translation, the great universal texts are nationalised (for example, in German romantic translations of the classics of Greek and Roman antiquity, which opened a new status for German as a literary language).

Conversely, translation facilitates the international diffusion of central literary capital and expresses the power of a language and a literature. However, Casanova is especially interested in the way translation functions when the transfer proceeds in the opposite direction, from the periphery to the centre of the literary space. In this case, she describes the function of translation as one of consecration or literarisation: translation gives writers in dominated languages literary recognition, international existence and also allows and reinforces the existence of an autonomous international position within their national field, while for the dominant languages it is a way of appropriating works from the peripheries. For Casanova, this quantitatively smaller, often neglected function of translation in consecrating peripheral texts is of key importance, because it is in this form that the great literary revolutions that help to radically change the whole of the literary space take place.

In recent decades, Paris' position as the capital of the international republic of letters has been eroded. Casanova already pointed to the multipolar nature of the international literary field since the second half of the twentieth century, identifying the importance of literary capitals such as London and New York, which increasingly challenged Paris' central role in the universal consecration of literary works. However, she also asserted that the low number of translations that are published as a percentage of total book production in English was the reason that London and New York could not replace Paris in the global literary power structure. Rather, she analysed the growing weight of the English-speaking centres in terms of the generalisation of the commercial model and the growing power of the economic pole. In a chapter appropriately entitled 'From literary internationalism to commercial globalization?' she maintained that the autonomy of the whole literary space is currently challenged by the ever more powerful transnational circulation of American or Americanised commercial culture, which has acquired literary legitimacy through the imitation of autonomous culture.

Nonetheless, Casanova might have underestimated the degree of cultural diversity that is present in small-scale production in the US, as Gisèle Sapiro's comparative examination of literary translations in the US and France demonstrates (Sapiro 2010). Further, it can be argued that, by equating the commercial with the national, Casanova finally fails to account adequately for key structural transformations in the transnational circulation of literary works. The existence of new novels that achieve international success is not limited, as she claims, to the generalisation of the North American popular canon or to the creation of a 'world fiction' especially and artificially designed for international circulation. The next chapter analyses the reception of Roberto Bolaño's novels in Spanish and English. Bolaño's case, which combines international commercial success with critical acclaim in national and regional fields, as well as posthumous global consecration promoted by the translation of his works into English, illustrates the changing power balance in the international literary field.

Accounts centred on the transnational circulation of literature identify the key role translation plays in the cosmopolitanisation of reality. However, they are blind to the ethical and political dimension of translation in this process. If we take

cosmopolitanism as an ethical and political commitment towards opening ourselves to others and sharing with them the world we live in, then translation also emerges as a crucial manner in which this commitment can be materialised. In chapter 1, I presented a view of translation, understood as the experience of the foreign, as essentially coterminous with a definition of cosmopolitanism as openness to the world and to others. In this approach, translation's gain is not principally one of facilitating the access of new readers to works or of increasing the symbolic value of these works, but of promoting a form of cosmopolitan reflexivity that leads to the reconsideration and transformation of self through engagement with the difference of the other. Only certain forms of translation – what in the contemporary context is primarily approached as foreignising translation – make such a gain possible. Since the mid-1970s, the dominant position of English as a global language has led to a growing market for translations from non-European languages as 'a quick way to "know a culture"' (Spivak 2005: 94). Domesticating translation, which responds to prevalent market demands and renders translation invisible, contributes to a form of valorisation and exchange that could actually be seen as a loss in cosmopolitan terms. The normative claims of a cosmopolitan approach can thus contribute to generalise the argument about the ethical and political relevance of foreignising translation, which has been challenged in translation studies, particularly with reference to its suitability in the case of subaltern cultures (Pym 1996; Hatim 1999: 219; Tymoczko 2007: 211–12; Shamma 2009).

Politicisation of art

Translation, as the experience of the foreign, is also intimately connected to the reflexive movement of self-examination in light of the encounter with the other that drives cosmopolitan engagements in the production of art. In the rest of this chapter, I return to the issue of what a perspective centred on artistic and literary cosmopolitanism can contribute to the cosmopolitanism debate. I have already referred above to Pheng Cheah's insistence on literature's world-making potential. It is worthwhile to recall his warning about the failure to distinguish the two different meanings of the word world that are clearly perceivable in Goethe, which leads to obscuring the normative dimension of worldhood by conflating worldliness with globalisation:

The world in the higher sense is spiritual intercourse, transaction, and exchange aimed at bringing out universal humanity. It does not abolish national differences but takes place and is to be found in the intervals, mediations, passages, and crossings between national borders. The world is a form of relating or being-with. The globe, on the other hand, the totality produced by processes of globalization, is a bounded object or entity in Mercatorian space. When we say 'map of the world', we really mean 'map of the globe'. It is assumed that the spatial diffusion and extensiveness achieved through global media and markets give rise to a sense of belonging to a shared world, when one

might argue that such developments lead instead to greater polarization and division of nations and regions. The globe is not the world. This is a necessary premise if the cosmopolitan vocation of world literature can be meaningful today.

(Cheah 2012: 141)

The author thus critiques Casanova and Damrosch's accounts of world literature for failing to grasp the normative aspects of worldhood and taking the world for granted (Cheah 2012: 148). By contrast, in Cheah's view:

Literature can play an active role in the world's ongoing creation because, through the receptibility it enacts, it is an inexhaustible resource for contesting the world given to us through commercial intercourse, monetary transactions and the space-time compression of the global culture industry.

(Cheah 2012: 145)

He therefore argues for a narrower conception of world literature as literature of the world: 'imaginings and stories of what it means to be part of a world that track and account for contemporary globalization as well as older historical narratives of worldhood' (Cheah 2012: 146).

Papastergiadis similarly identifies how contemporary art can provide 'a new grounding for the debates on the politics of globalization, the ethics of hospitality, and the culture of cosmopolitanism' (Papastergiadis 2012: 8), proposing artists as 'knowledge partners in the theories of cosmopolitanism and innovators in the modes of global belonging' (ibid.: 10). His excellent book explores new modes of cosmopolitan agency in the politicisation of art as a response and alternative to contemporary forms of aestheticisation of politics, most notably in the political rhetoric of the 'war on terror' and the fears associated with shifts in the meaning of human mobility.

It is perhaps appropriate in this context to revisit Walter Benjamin's original formulation of this dichotomy in order to show precisely what is at stake in the politicisation of art and to discuss its significance in a cosmopolitan context. It appears in an epigraph to one of Benjamin's most well-known essays, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (2007) [1935], where the author discusses the effects of mechanical reproduction in art, which has far reaching social consequences beyond the realm of art itself. According to Benjamin, photography and cinema lead to the overcoming of the art work's uniqueness, which is substituted by reproducibility, thus making possible the emancipation of art from tradition, particularly from its ritual function. The emancipation of art from ritual allows it to be based on another practice, politics, and facilitates, at the same time, a different form of perception and reception of works, a qualitative transformation of the nature of the art work in which 'the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental' (Benjamin 2007: 225). The changing nature of art in late capitalist society is, for Benjamin, not only due to the wide ranging social effects of the new techniques of

mechanical reproduction, but also expresses the increasing social significance of the masses in contemporary life. It is the greatly increased participation of the masses that has produced a change in the mode of appreciation of works, from individual contemplation to new forms of collective reception in a state of distraction, in which habit and tactile appropriation replaces the attention demanded by (optical) contemplation.

Film is the art that best represents the new possibilities of perception facilitated by mechanical reproduction, through which a hidden, invisible part of the familiar world that surrounds us is revealed and, at the same time, the petrified character of an oppressive reality is torn apart:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject.

(Benjamin 2007: 236)

Benjamin understood how the very same social developments and techniques that made possible the emancipation of art from tradition and its assumption of a pre-eminently political role could also be used towards the aestheticisation of politics. Thus, fascism responded to 'the growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses' by introducing aesthetics into political life, putting the political apparatus to use in the production of ritual values. The culmination of 'all efforts to render politics aesthetic' is war (Benjamin 2007: 241), readily celebrated in the aesthetics of Futurism, where war supplies 'the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology' (ibid.: 242), in which Benjamin saw the consummation of the position of *l'art pour l'art*. The alternative is to politicise art.

The resonance of Benjamin's original formulation of the dialectics between aestheticisation of politics and politicisation of art in a cosmopolitan context is remarkable. It not only directly speaks to a central cosmopolitan concern with the conditions for peaceful coexistence in announcing perpetual war as a necessary consequence of making politics aesthetic. It also delineates the relation of art to a widespread deepening in perception fostered by technology, a change that can be related to increased global connectivity and to current experiences of globality

that the mass media both portray and help to produce. The way Benjamin refers to the picture of reality obtained by a cameraman as consisting of 'multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law' (Benjamin 2007: 234), making the representation of reality by the film 'incomparably more significant than that of the painter' for its contemporaries, reminds me of what Anthony Giddens described as the collage effect of modern news media, which juxtapose totally unrelated stories and promote the intrusion of distant events into our everyday consciousness, thus producing an experience of global simultaneity that is a fundamental element of the spatio-temporal transformations of globalising modernity (Giddens 1991). Benjamin identifies how art centrally articulates our changing, technologically mediated experience of space and time, and how it can challenge and redefine a world we make but which also becomes our prison; its world-making potential. Art directly addresses our senses, our perception of reality, and in appealing to our ingrained social experience embodied in habit, it can transform that very experience in powerful ways.

The world-making potential of art as a form of social knowledge that is not principally mediated by concepts but rather by the artistic materials to which it gives shape is at the centre of current arguments around the significance of a specifically artistic cosmopolitanism, of a cosmopolitan imagination 'that is premised upon an embodied, embedded, generous and affective form of subjectivity in conversation with others in and through difference' (Meskimmon 2011: 6). According to Marsha Meskimmon, for whom art is one of the most significant modes through which the cosmopolitan imagination is articulated:

Cosmopolitan imagination generates conversations in a field of flesh, fully sensory, embodied processes of interrogation, critique and dialogue that can enable us to think of our homes and ourselves as open to change and alterity. Understanding ourselves as wholly embedded within the world, we can imagine people and things beyond our immediate experience and develop our ability to respond to very different spaces, meanings and others.

(Meskimmon 2011: 8)

Whereas Meskimmon's approach rests on the adoption of Appiah's notion of conversation as a basis for cosmopolitan openness (see chapter 1), it has been argued in this book that a concept of translation can better capture the dynamics involved in a radical experience of the foreign that leads to a re-examination of the self in the light of the difference of the other. I am, however, advocating a similar view on the interconnection between translation, imagination and art, a perspective that points to a different but no less significant form of cosmopolitan ethics and politics because, as Meskimmon argues, its register is affective, not prescriptive (Meskimmon 2011: 8). This perspective has not yet received sufficient attention within the cosmopolitanism debate but it is the affective dimension that most clearly can challenge and break with the logic of instrumental rationality that has driven globalising modernity all

along, facilitating the development of a much needed capacity for learning to live with others in a world in danger.

Cosmopolitanism and the politics of writing

Benjamin's enthusiastic celebration of the revolutionary role of new techniques such as photography and film in promoting profound changes in perception and in the reception of cultural works must not blind us to the fact that mechanical reproduction or, better, reproducibility, fundamentally changed the nature of all art, including the most traditional forms that were once the province of individual contemplation. In the essay referred to above, Benjamin seems most optimistic about the possibilities of cinema in fostering a collective experience of distracted absorption, a progressive reaction from the masses characterised by 'the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert' (Benjamin 2007: 234). However, at the same time, he already indicates there, in a seemingly contradictory manner, that 'a heightened presence of mind' (ibid.: 238) is the only way to cushion the shock effect of film. I have noted above how Benjamin approached the revolutionary role of film in substituting 'an unconsciously penetrated space' for 'a space consciously explored' (ibid.: 236). Nevertheless, the constant change and sudden interruptions that characterise the shock effect of film also hinder the spectator's normal process of association and thought, putting in danger subjective experience itself. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, it is necessary to look elsewhere.

Benjamin's essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (2007) is especially concerned with how the poet articulated what will here be approached in terms of an experience of shock. On the other hand, the dynamics that turn viewers into experts and readers into writers, erasing the very distinction between author and public as first alluded to in 'The Work of Art ...', are closely examined in the essay 'The Author as Producer' (1999). Significantly, both works are concerned with a more traditional form of expression – writing – revealing how its political role in the context of radically changed conditions of artistic production is no less revolutionary than that of film. It is particularly in the essay on Baudelaire that I am interested in this context and what remains of this section is intended to show its significance for a conception of critical cosmopolitanism that is not ignorant of the affective dimension of artistic and literary cosmopolitanism.

For Benjamin, the greatness of Baudelaire's poetry (a greatness that the poet consciously pursued as his mission) was to capture something characteristic of modern life in a context in which experience was impoverished and the very possibility of producing a type of lyric poetry that could connect with its readers became challenged as a result. With reference to Henri Bergson and his main disciple but also immanent critic, Marcel Proust, as well as to Freud, Benjamin elaborates an account of experience as intimately related with the unconscious (or *mémoire involontaire*, in Proust's terms), which alone retains a living trace of the past, as opposed to the intellect (*mémoire volontaire*). Like Simmel, Benjamin approaches the effects

of modern urban life in terms of a heightening of the intellectual function, which allows its inhabitants to protect themselves against the multiple shocks and stimuli of city life. In this context, the impact of photography (and of cinema) is viewed in less optimistic terms (Aguilera 2015b: 65). For if mechanical reproduction reveals hidden aspects of our everyday reality, as Benjamin already indicated in the essay on 'The Work of Art ...', this very extension of consciousness reduces the scope for the play of the imagination and hinders the articulation of poetic experience.

Benjamin approaches Baudelaire's poetry as an attempt to articulate an experience of shock, so as to recover for experience (*Erfahrung*) the impressions that an attentive intellect has doomed to remain in the sphere of mere lived moments or episodes (*Erlebnis*). This is what makes his mission heroic, and it is Baudelaire's image of the poet as a fencer – and of the creative process as a duel – that most acutely represents the task of parrying the shocks to which he applied himself, bodily as well as spiritually. This is opposed to another significant image in Baudelaire's work, that of the gambler, who succumbs to an infinity of lived moments that cannot add up to any meaningful experience; a time in hell, as 'the province of those who are not allowed to complete anything they have started' (Benjamin 2007: 179). Against the path chosen by the gambler, but also as an alternative to a form of literary creation that is nostalgic of the past and therefore increasingly divorced from the experience of its potential readers, Baudelaire 'exposes the passing moment in all its nakedness' (*ibid.*: 185). His poetic mission, conceived as one of exposing an experience of shock that has become generalised in modernity, thus leads him to reveal the public, collective nature of an experience that in Proust is conceived in the strictly private terms of the *memoire involontaire*: to articulate a politics of writing that is capable of responding to the social changes that have led to the decline of individual experience. As Antonio Aguilera maintains:

A high degree of consciousness allows to assimilate the shocks, the startles, to arrange them in such a way that, instead of an emptying of the web of what has been lived through ... the fullness of a web articulated from the modes of objectivation that belong to modern life is produced: photography and cinema, but also a lyric poetry like Baudelaire's, a prose that is open to modernity.

(*Aguilera 2015b: 66–7*)

Just as Baudelaire's ambivalent notion of the big city crowd is profoundly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's story 'The Man of the Crowd', which he translated, Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire's poetry is mediated by his translation of Baudelaire, by the intimacy with its expressive material that he acquired from the task of rewriting it. In 'The Task of the Translator', which initially appeared as a translator's preface, Benjamin articulated this experience in what remains a classic and still puzzling account of translation. 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' is the work of a mature Benjamin who has incorporated the insights and conceptual tools of historical materialism and returns to Baudelaire's work in order to trace how art can

articulate and respond to widespread changes in its social conditions of production. It not only shows with remarkable depth how individual and collective experience are intimately connected, but also how the experiences of translating and writing intermingle and their knowledges intersect. In this way, it demonstrates how an interpretation productively derived from a combination of both can articulate in unexpected ways a particularly fruitful approach to the social nature of art in modernity.

Baudelaire not only managed to produce a poetry that could express the experience of the modern city in a context characterised by a generalised atrophy of experience. In so doing, he connected with the masses (who no longer had the interest and receptiveness once demanded by lyric poetry) and managed to extend the reach of his work beyond its original linguistic territory. According to Benjamin, '*Les Fleurs du mal* was the last lyric work that had a European repercussion; no later work penetrated beyond a more or less limited linguistic area' (Benjamin 2007: 192). A comparable achievement should be expected from the best of world literature today. More generally, Benjamin's interpretation of Baudelaire contains some key insights for cosmopolitanism in at least two respects. First, in the way he analyses the connection between technological means and subjective experience. Second, in the notion of an experience of shock that captures something essential of modernity and allows a reflexive individual who puts to work a 'heightened presence of mind' to face up precisely to what cannot easily be assimilated in the form of experience.

In his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin refers to modern newspapers – and to the principles of journalistic information more generally – as constituting one important evidence that the modern individual is 'increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience' (Benjamin 2007: 158). Moreover, the intention of the press is precisely 'to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader' (ibid.: 158). While the global media bring a sea of information about the world, they make it impossible to relate this world to our subjectivities, while also diminishing the scope for the play of the imagination. The paradox thus lies in the fact that the global media bring the world closer to us, but they simultaneously close it off to our experience and, as a consequence, to the cosmopolitan imagination. From a Benjaminian perspective, rejecting the transformations brought about by modern reproduction techniques would only lead to the adoption of a reactionary position. Instead, the revolutionary possibilities of the new means must be recognised and celebrated: by bringing the world to the masses, they not only make possible cosmopolitan empathy, but also a different form of democracy that can work on a global scale, the basis of a truly cosmopolitan democracy. Technical means have extended our consciousness of the world in previously unimaginable ways. What remains is to learn to use our extended capacities of perception in a way that is sensitive to the lives of those who exist in what has become fully visible in an ethical and political way. A politics is needed to put the new technical means and their possibilities to cosmopolitan ends, a politics of art that allows us to imagine a world that we can all call home,

and a politics of writing that is not only art, two instances of which will be closely examined in chapters 7 and 9.

Today the strangeness of Baudelaire's city is the strangeness of the whole earth. Baudelaire's experience of shock, as a distinctively modern response to the diversity of stimuli and the startles that exceed the individual's capacity of assimilation, can provide a way to face up to the complexities of a world that has become increasingly strange. In this interpretation, strangeness refers to what can no longer be integrated by individual subjectivity, what takes individuals beyond themselves. In the heyday of high capitalism, the individual could still try to find a refuge in the bourgeois interior. Today, under conditions of increased penetration of all spheres of life by globalising forces and the blurring of the very distinction between inside and outside, such protection is no longer available. However, it is precisely when the subjective capacity to integrate, in the form of experience, a world which is increasingly beyond its reach is endangered, that the cosmopolitan imagination becomes a space for reconstituting sociality and perceptiveness in the midst of strangers, not by closing ourselves to others, but by opening ourselves unconditionally to them, at least in art. Art provides an opportunity to deal with what is radically strange. It is in this form that an experience of the foreign that allows us to open ourselves to the world, and which calls for 'a heightened presence of mind' in the form of cosmopolitan reflexivity, can contribute to living peacefully with others in a highly interconnected space.

Conclusion

Notions of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and world literature provide a corrective to a concept of cosmopolitanism that is predominantly conceived in moral and political terms and illustrate the world-making capacity of interaction and exchange in the context of intensified cultural contact between different traditions. No one has described these relationships better than Goethe, for whom the experience of the foreign, the active reciprocal relation between literatures, penetrates and revitalises national traditions in a cosmopolitan context. Goethe's cosmopolitanism, which puts translation at the centre and identifies the major cosmopolitan potential of foreignising translation, is immensely valuable to forms of critical cosmopolitanism today.

This chapter has specified the relevance of what is gained in translation, while also showing the weaknesses of prevalent approaches to translation as a process of valorisation of texts in a transnational literary space. It has explored how artistic and literary cosmopolitanism can contribute to enrich the cosmopolitan imagination through Benjamin's reflections on the politicisation of art and the significance of articulating an experience of the foreign in a context in which the very possibility of experience itself becomes increasingly jeopardised.

Goethe and Benjamin share a foreignising view of translation that places translation at the centre of the cosmopolitan exchanges which take place in a highly

interconnected globe. In this understanding, translation is seen as making possible an expansion, not just of meaning or knowledge, but of the very sociality that constitutes the basis of what makes us human. In both cases, the depth and radical nature of their insights emerge from a politics of writing based on the essential continuity between writing and translating and on the indispensable relationship between these two forms of knowing, expressing and relating to the diversity of the world.

Note

- 1 According to George Steiner, Goethe translated from a vast and diverse range of materials in 18 languages and his activity as translator covers an astonishing 73 years of his long life (Steiner 2013: 115).