Translation and Film:
On the Defamiliarizing Effect of Subtitles

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ABSTRACT
This paper brings together aspects of film theory (Benjamin, Dayan) and translation theory (Venuti, Nornes) in order to investigate some of the aesthetic and political implications of subtitling. It sets out by comparing film and translation as distinct modes of representation in which the wish for realism and authenticity is revealed and concealed in equal measure. The paper then examines the ways in which this paradox complicates the act of subtitling. It is argued that interlingual subtitles have a defamiliarizing effect over both "dominant" and "peripheral" audiences. Subtitles give rise to perceptions of foreignness which have to do with linguistic and cultural difference as well as with the semiotic difference between the verbal and the audiovisual dimensions. However, even as subtitles emphasize questions of alterity, the extent of editorial manipulation they normally undergo is such that their potential for enhancing awareness of the foreign is drastically restricted.

KEYWORDS: Film, Translation, Subtitling, Defamiliarization, Foreignness

Introduction

A lot of theoretical attention has been recently paid to the cultural, aesthetic, and political implications of subtitling. Just as the study of translation reveals different ways in which different linguistic communities historically see themselves and relate to each other, so the study of subtitling helps us to understand such relationships in a contemporary context. In particular, interlingual subtitling expresses and influences perceptions of foreignness in the cultures that use it and simultaneously affects determinations of these cultures' sense of subjectivity. While the role of subtitles is to facilitate access to audiovisual products in a foreign language, they at the same time raise questions about the ethno-linguistic identity of those products as well as of their viewers. Watching films with subtitles can be considered as a special identity-forming experience, in so far as such films constitute fields of tension between their foreign and native elements, both of which are present at the same (film-viewing) space and time.

In this paper, I intend to explore this tension and some of the ways in which it has been addressed by film and translation theorists. In the first part, translation and film – the two components of subtitling – will be discussed as separate forms of representation which open a privileged and distinctly modern space for issues of alterity and identity to arise. The question will then be asked whether this shared feature of translation and film extends to the ways in which they have historically foregrounded or suppressed such issues. In the second part, I shall look into the particular ways in which subtitling raises questions of foreignness and I will refer to the opportunities for novel responses that subtitles offer as a result of their singular semiotic makeup. I will suggest that subtitles have a defamiliarizing effect, in that they call attention to the distance that separates viewers from foreign films. However, I will

qualify this argument, by examining whether the defamiliarizing effect of subtitles actually translates into an increased awareness of the presence of foreignness during and beyond the film-viewing experience.

Translation, Film, Foreignness

Translation has always been about the experience of the foreign. However, perceptions of foreignness vary dramatically from culture to culture, and indeed from one historical period to the next. In the West, Enlightenment tradition has perceived foreignness as an inflection of the dream of universal human identity, a perception still operative in various domains, including the political. As Antoine Berman points out in his study *The Experience of the Foreign* (1992), the moment when the foreign challenges the familiar, in whatever constructive or aporetic fashion, can be located in (German) Romanticism. It was then, again according to Berman, that questions of nationality and internationality, mother and foreign tongue, properness and otherness acquired cultural relevance and philosophical urgency. The German Romantics – Schleiermacher, Humbolt, Hölderlin – looked at translation as the privileged practice in and through which these queries and themes could be accounted for in relation to each other. Translation thus enters modernity as an intellectual space for the thinking of modernity itself. Inasmuch as issues of linguistic, ethnic and cultural belonging – or exclusion – inform the modern critique of Humanism and the Enlightenment, translation becomes a paradigmatic discipline for modernity.

This can be seen in Heidegger's understanding of translation as the movement by which "we seek to win back intact the naming force of language and words" (Heidegger 2000:15). Translation is considered by Heidegger as an attempt at restoring authentic significations by removing layers of speculative interpretation of words such as *physis* and *adikia* through history. For example, Heidegger claims that the Latin translation of the Greek word *physis* as *natura* was "the first stage in the isolation and alienation of the originary essence of Greek philosophy" (2000:14). According to him, this translation kicked off a historical process in which attention was shifted from the spirituality of *physis* to the materiality and concomitant scientism implicit in *natura*. Regardless of whether Heidegger is right on that particular point, his understanding of translation as a constitutive historical force is typical of the emphasis that modern philosophy and historiography placed on language. As Gentzler (1993:155-156) argues, "Heidegger has progressed to the point Foucault suggests is characteristic of a certain kind of twentieth-century thought: rather than any one person speaking, language is speaking itself and man is listening". Heidegger arrived at his own controversial translations from Greek – e.g. *adikia* (injustice) as 'disjunction', *alētheia* (truth) as 'unconcealment' – thus suggesting that the process of setting historical misinterpretations right should again involve the moment of translation.

A comparable understanding of translation can be found in Benjamin's specification of the task of the translator as the work of lovingly reconstructing pure language. As is well known, the latter term signifies a "central reciprocal relationship between languages", a "supra-historic" relationship between source text and target text, which makes translation possible.
To be sure, Heidegger's notion of authenticity and Benjamin's concept of purity are not straightforward. Both thinkers emphasize the loss, betrayal and lack of equivalence involved in every act of translation, so that the restored authenticity is always an illusion, a future projection. Far from restoring autonomous meanings and authorial intentions, translation emerges in the modern world as a way of foregrounding fragmentation and difference. It

becomes a technique for exploring the non-linear and non-realist relationship that the self maintains with the world. As such a technique, translation begins by questioning the very desire for ethno-linguistic identity at the heart of European politics, and forms part of the critique of universalism as it takes place in modernity.[1]

Benjamin saw a similar potential in another typically modern endeavour, namely film. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', he notes the fundamental shift in modernity from the auratic work of art – which preserves canonical connotations of self-sufficiency, totality and uniqueness – to the fragmented cinematic sequence, with its associations of heteronomy, plurality and mass culture. Benjamin does not explicitly compare translation and film, but he treats both as fragmentary forms of representation which challenge the unity and self-evidence of what they are supposed to represent. Just as translation distorts the original text, so film distorts our perception of reality. Just as translation shows the original's lack of originality, so film foregrounds reality's illusory character. The remedial function of translation and film consists, paradoxically, in showing how our relationship with the world remains elusive, overdetermined, present only as a future possibility.

There is a further correspondence between film and translation as specific instantiations of modernity. Benjamin notes that the amazing realism of film is due to the strict exclusion of all equipment – such as cameras, lighting and recording facilities, and so on – from the cinematic image. Absolute cinematic immediacy is achieved through an excess of mediation. As Benjamin puts it, in film, "the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology" (1992b:226). Much has been written about this insight of Benjamin's,[2] but what interests me here is that, by achieving such a degree of realism, film reclaims for itself the aura that it deconstructs in classical forms of aesthetic representation.

In a similar way, translation claims immediacy by replacing the source text and dissimulating the processes of omission, compensation, paraphrase, spatio-temporal summarization, prioritization and so forth that lead to the target text. Translation resembles film in its capacity to offer a carefully distorted representation of an original source. This process puts into question the originality of the source, and both the "original" and its representation are shown to be fragments of an absent reality – Benjamin's forever broken vessel (1992a:79). One may thus venture to argue that film is to classical art what translation is to classical literature. Through similar processes of repression and reproduction, film and translation simultaneously disguise and expose the foreign and derivative character of what we tend to perceive as domestic and authentic.

This enigmatic play of concealing and revealing has a direct political significance. In Translation Studies, this has been expressed in terms of two translational strategies, foreignization and domestication. The Bible translator Franz Rosenzweig famously argued that "to translate means to serve two masters": the foreign writer in his foreignness and the domestic reader in his desire to appropriate (1977:110).[3] These two strategies reflect theoretically distinct – though practically intertwined – ways in which the experience of the foreign has been thwarted or encouraged at an ethno-linguistic level. Translation has been historically used to sustain or to deconstruct national mythologies of homogeneity; to reveal or to conceal structures of power and dominance.

In his influential essay 'The Measure of Translation Effects', Philip E. Lewis introduced the notion of "abusive translation" as a reaction to the strategy of repressing the discursive and

poetic plurality of the source text, so that the translation becomes easily appropriable by a target culture. Despite its radical undertones, the term "abuse" does not denote a desultory translational practice, but a "controlled textual disruption" (1985:43) aspiring to counteract conventional perceptions of the usage, usefulness and usualness of translation. As Lewis (1985:40-41) states:

> To accredit the use-values [of translation] is inevitably to opt for what domesticates or familiarizes a message at the expense of whatever might upset or force or abuse language and thought, might seek after the unthought or unthinkable in the unsaid or unsayable.

The "unthought" and the "unsayable" can be understood as those expressive, performative and polyvalent aspects of a text whose rendering into another language would trouble it so much as to occasion loss of semantic equivalence. Abusive translation would yield similar results as Heidegger's translations of such Greek words as *adikia* and *alētheia*, mentioned earlier. As in the case of Heidegger, lack of equivalence – as well as lack of "usefulness" and "usualness" – directs the reader's attention away from the quest for semantic identity, towards textuality and the incongruous ways in which it is instantiated in different languages.

Yet another critic, Lawrence Venuti, has criticized the ideal of fluency in translation, arguing that "by placing a premium on transparency and demanding a fluent strategy" the conventional translating practice "can be viewed as a cultural narcissism which carries imperialistic tendencies: it seeks an identity, a self-recognition, and finds only the same culture in foreign writing, only the same self in the cultural other" (1991:18). The dialectic of sameness and otherness remains suppressed under the authority of the same, for as long as translation submits itself to the aesthetics of fluency. The effect of transparency to which Venuti refers may be linked to Roland Barthes's notion of the effect of the real, in that in both cases there is the illusion of continuity and mutual belonging of reality and its representation, of the so-called original and the so-called copy (Barthes 1982).

This critique of realism, which is equally a critique of political essentialism, was applied to film early on. As I pointed out earlier, Benjamin refers to the "sight of immediate reality" achieved by the cinematic image as a result of the formal characteristics of film. In 'The Work of Art' essay, he doubts whether film's innovative nature actually harbours any politically subversive content: "So long as the movie makers' capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art." While Benjamin emphasizes the cognitive potential of film, he immediately predicts that such a potential will be overshadowed by the cinema of spectacle and ideology: "Under these circumstances, the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations" (1992b:225, 226).

One need only think how effective a propaganda tool cinema has become for modern totalitarian regimes. Most emblematically, in the hands of the Nazis absolute cinematic realism transformed into absolute illusion. Thus, speaking to *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1965, Leni Riefenstahl said of her film *Triumph of the Will*: "Not a single scene is staged. Everything is genuine. And there is no tendentious commentary for the simple reason that there is no commentary at all. It is *history – pure history*" (mentioned in Sontag 1976:36, emphasis in the original). Responding to this extreme perception of authenticity, Susan Sontag commented – not without a hint of irony – that Riefenstahl "had told the truth": "*Triumph of the Will* represents an already achieved and radical transformation of reality: history become theatre" (ibid.). More than any other art, cinema effects a total *translation* of reality, a masterly –

because technologically empowered – representation aiming at camouflaging linguistic and geopolitical divides. Historically, cinema has become the total work of art and an appropriate artefact for the total state.

It still sounds risky to suggest with Lacoue-Labarthe that the phantasmagoria of total cinema, best exemplified by the cinema of propaganda, is "in fact the Hollywood aesthetic itself, the 'mass soap opera'" (1990:64). But as powerful as this aesthetic is culturally, it hardly bears scrutiny when it comes to questions of foreignness. For the process of appropriation and naturalization of otherness in film has assumed concrete political dimensions. As Scott MacQuire (1998:202-203) points out:

> Hollywood's notorious lack of interest in other countries and cultures as anything more than background locations for established stars and storylines was matched only by its intolerance toward "non-American" accents, and its indifference or outright hostility to indigenous peoples, blacks, working-class and migrant cultures. […] The obsessive repetition of standard narrative patterns, and the political repercussions which arose from their transgression in the occasional "ground-breaking film" testifies to an intimate collusion between textual margins and social and political boundaries.

Undoubtedly, any single statement on such a global and complex cultural phenomenon as Hollywood will veer toward generalization. Moreover, Hollywood is certainly not representative of all cinema, even as it remains the most influential model of film production. Still, it is necessary to emphasize the link between realist narrative forms in classical Hollywood cinema and mythologies of properness as well as perceptions of exoticism in Hollywood and beyond. It is also possible to refer to these narrative forms in terms of the aesthetic of transparency and fluency, that is, the very aesthetic whose imperialistic tendencies Venuti decried in the context of translation.[4] To the extent that this aesthetic continues to infiltrate mainstream cinema, the foreign continues to remain in an undialectical opposition with the native. This opposition is undialectical, because it does not lead to a synthesis whereby the social and aesthetic construction of national and linguistic identities is recognized. In both dominant and non-dominant cultures, foreignness remains marginalized and even contributes to the negative formation of putatively self-sufficient national and linguistic identities.

So far I compared translation and film as two forms of representation which challenge the unity of their respective referents (the source text; the experienced reality) and simultaneously problematize conventional perceptions of foreignness and identity. I qualified this discussion by referring to different normalizing strategies in cinema and in translation – such as the primacy of fluency and semantic equivalence, domestication, Hollywood realism, and so on – applied in order to contain the impact of the foreign element on local readerships and audiences. I will now turn to subtitles, to consider whether they inherit from translation and film a similarly ambivalent political dynamic.

The Defamiliarizing Effect of Subtitles

As Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour argue in their book *Subtitles*, "Every film is a foreign film, foreign to some audience somewhere – and not simply in terms of language" (Balfour and Egoyan 2004:21). Balfour and Egoyan's attention to marginality and heteronomy is appositely conveyed in the title of this collection of essays, interviews and artworks: *Subtitles*. By exploring this privileged, if uncertain, space where film and translation meet, they

emphasize a double instance of foreignness. Firstly, formal foreignness, in the sense that subtitles belong properly neither to the text nor to the image; they occupy a hybrid and intermittent site that is never fully their own. Secondly, and more obviously, geopolitical foreignness: by allowing access to a film in a different language, interlingual subtitles both bring a "foreign" product to a "domestic" market *and* challenge cultural and linguistic stereotypes. Overall, subtitles exert a defamiliarizing effect; they intervene in the film-viewing experience and draw attention to the formal and aesthetico-political characteristics of the cinematic medium itself.

While this effect may be stronger in non-subtitling cultures, it is arguable that subtitles have a defamiliarizing effect on all audiences, including those which are accustomed to them. For one thing, interlingual subtitles are always perceived as a supplement to film, signalling in an immediately visible way the presence of an audiovisual artefact from the other side of the linguistic border. Further, as I will discuss below, subtitling conventions and rules – including time and space constraints, the need for consistency with the image, the special use of punctuation and so on – result in a specific type of strongly edited and heteronomous text which departs from established linguistic norms. Thus the defamiliarizing effect of subtitles does not refer to a feeling of estrangement (although this, too, might be present); it rather designates a response to being exposed to a linguistic and cultural context with which an audience is not familiar.

The question remains whether the defamiliarizing effect of subtitles actually serves to foreground alterity or, as market practices rather suggest, it is considered as a necessary evil on the way to naturalizing the foreign. There is no doubt that subtitles, along with other accessibility techniques such as dubbing and voice-over, have historically been used much more efficiently to promote mainstream – mostly American – film and television products to less dominant markets, than the other way round. With regard to the proverbial American resistance to subtitled films, B. Ruby Rich, one of the contributors to *Subtitles*, suspects that it is "part of a national narcissism that sees a mythical version of its 'own' culture as primary and consigns all others to a secondary status of bothersome detritus" (2004:163). It is intriguing how Rich's condemnation of the fear of subtitles coincides with Venuti's criticism of the fear of translation: both are based on similar ideas of ethno-linguistic narcissism and the failure of the dialectic between the same and the other.

Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge, along with Egoyan and Balfour, that the past twenty years have witnessed an impressive diversification in global film distribution, with box-office successes of subtitled films in the West and a growing interest in international film festivals. So, are subtitles finally having an effect on the way we view films and, more specifically, on dominant perceptions of otherness?

It is important at this point to distinguish between subtitling and dubbing as cultural phenomena, for they operate differently in relation to the effect of transparency. In dubbing or re-voicing, the voices of dubbing actors fully replace the voice track of the film, following rules of lip synchronization, in addition to space, time and other linguistic constraints. In this way, dubbing aspires to reproduce the impression of authenticity of the film as an aesthetic object. On the contrary, subtitles are *interposed* between the viewer and the film, allowing the audio stream fully to be heard by the audience. This important formal difference means that subtitles interrupt the effect of transparency and the concomitant perception of naturalness in film. If, as Benjamin stressed, the "sight of immediate reality" is achieved in film through the total exclusion of mechanical equipment from the image, then subtitles represent the return of

the repressed artificiality. By disturbing the supposed continuity of cinematic space and time, they help to dissolve the aura of film. The authenticity of the cinematic representation gives way to a polysemiotic and visibly mediated reality.

As an external addition which disputes the claims to authenticity of the original artefact, subtitles may be considered as the supplement of the language of film. The word "supplement" is here used in the Derridean sense of an element that needs to be cast out of a system so that this system can appear total and autonomous. Derrida has used the idea of supplementarity on various occasions, including in order to describe the secondary status of translation in relation to the original in "Des Tours de Babel" (1985). Transposing this relation to the context of film and audiovisual translation, and with reference to Hollywood cinema as the dominant discourse in film-making, we may argue that subtitles are such a supplement which film represses in order to exist autonomously. Indeed, if film was an authentic representation of reality, as Hollywood realism would have it, then everyone would have immediate access to it in its original form. But the simple fact that the filmic image is in need of translation in order to reach a considerable part of its audience signifies its originary "inauthenticity". It shows that the passage from experienced reality into filmic field, itself a translation of chaotic polyglossia into staged monolingualism, was not accomplished in the first place. The nominal role of subtitles is to rectify the constitutive incompleteness of film; only, by doing so, they draw our attention to that very incompleteness.

This situation does not simply indicate the formal or aesthetic implications of subtitling. It also suggests that the resistance to subtitling can be interpreted in geopolitical terms, in the sense that dominant languages and cultures refuse to come to terms with the heteronomy of aesthetic representation in general. The refusal to read subtitles would then be part of the pathology of national narcissism – to use Venuti's and Rich's terms – a mark of linguistic essentialism, and a mechanism for perpetuating cultural dominance.

From a different but closely related perspective, it is worth referring to the notion of ideological "suture" used by such film theorists as Jean-Pierre Oudart and Daniel Dayan in the '60s and '70s. Writing in 1974 on the ideological manipulation in film at a structural-semiotic level, Dayan noted that ideology works by producing an effect of familiarization or "naturalization".

> [Ideology] must hide its operations, "naturalizing" its functioning and its messages in some way. Specifically, the cinematographic system for producing ideology must be hidden. As with classical painting, the code must be hidden by the message. The message must appear to be complete in itself, coherent and readable entirely on its own terms. In order to do this, the filmic message must account *within itself* for those elements of the code which it seeks to hide – [… above all] the questions "Who is viewing this?" and "Who is ordering these images" and "for what purpose are they doing so?" (1976:447, emphasis by the author)

According to Dayan, naturalization of the cinematic codes, through which the effect of the real is produced in film, is carried out by a series of visual sutures. This is a process by which questions apropos of the cinematic code spontaneously raised by the spectator of a film are patronisingly answered by the film itself. As Martin Jay (1994:474) explains,

> Such techniques as shot/reverse shot alterations […] stitch together the dispersed and contradictory subjectivities of the actual spectator into a falsely harmonious whole by encouraging him or her to identify seriatim with the gazes of the characters in the film, gazes which seem to come from centred and unified subjects.

This stitching-together of structural filmic elements (e.g. shots) produces the "suture" of subjectivities and the impression of a unified point of view in film. The cinematic code thus seems natural and eventually becomes naturalized, that is, it sustains national cinematic traditions. It is this situation which subtitles challenge. They halt the process of naturalization and suture by adulterating the image and the editing of the film, and introducing both a different authorial perspective (that of the subtitler) and a different language (that of the spectator).

Yet such is the call for narrative unity, that the subversive ambiguity of subtitles is rarely used to enhance viewer awareness. Trinh T. Minh-ha, for instance, has argued that subtitles are often left on screen for longer than needed "as part of the operation of *suture*", whose aim is "to collapse […] the activities of reading, hearing, and seeing into one single activity, as if they were all the same" (1992:102, emphasis by the author). Minh-ha's point here is that by being left on screen for longer, subtitles are visually assimilated by it, thus becoming part of the invisible cinematic code. In this way, rather than resisting the system of suture, subtitles in fact reinforce it.

While the overlong duration of subtitles is more often than not due to carelessness and human error, Minh-ha's argument is correct in principle. Spotting (the process of timing the appearance and disappearance of subtitles on screen) does not simply follow the pace of film dialogue, as is often thought, but involves an active and complex effort to minimize the visual impact of subtitles. For example, the "on" and "off" times of a subtitle are very often defined by shot-changes, rather than by the actual enunciations which they are supposed to translate. Further, the duration of intervals between subsequent subtitles follows strict rules which have only partly to do with the flow of the dialogue. The list of tricks used by subtitlers to ensure the unity of image, sound and text is long, and is almost always imposed from above, that is, the subtitling companies. The defamiliarizing effect of subtitles is thus played down, since they no longer bring about a rupture of the filmic flow. Subtitles become complicit in the strategy of authentication of film – a strategy which involves the conflation, or suture, of image, sound and text into a unified marketable product.

The project of suture extends to the actual linguistic content of subtitles. Abé Mark Nornes has been explicit about the subtitlers' accountability in creating what he calls "corrupt subtitles". He writes:

> Facing the violent reduction demanded by the apparatus, subtitlers have developed a method of translation that conspires to hide its work – along with its ideological assumptions – from its own reader-spectators. In this sense we may think of them as *corrupt*. They accept [… a practice of translation] that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign (1999:18, emphasis by the author).

It is not clear whether by "subtitlers" Nornes has in mind individual professionals or the companies for which they work. In any case, the choice of the word "corrupt" is infelicitous, as subtitlers have an ethical commitment to follow guidelines specified in screen translation commissions. Still, Nornes's point is valid as a general account of the processes of domestication usually at work in subtitling. He ventures to suggest that this form of subtitling is now obsolete and a new mode of cinematic translation is emerging, whereby "the original [will not be considered as] an origin threatened by contamination, but as a locus of the individual and the international which can potentially *turn the film into* an *experience of translation*" (ibid., emphasis by the author). Inspired by Lewis and Derrida – whom he nonetheless criticizes – Nornes proposes for this new practice the title "abusive subtitling".

He offers examples taken from experimental and amateur Japanese subtitling, including the so-called fansubs, where daring lexical solutions as well as graphological and calligraphic innovations are employed in the subtitles, and the entire screen is used as the space for a colourful interplay between the foreign audiovisual material and its local reception.

Nornes's suggestions will perhaps meet with little support at the current point in time, but they are professedly based on a traditional perception of literal translation, where priority is given to the lexical and the performative rather than the semantic element (ibid.:29). Literalism, the old favourite of such translators and theorists as Hölderlin and Benjamin, seems to find new supporters in more recent scholars, such as Ricœur, Steiner and, to a qualified extent, Venuti.[5] It is also welcomed among some audiovisual translation scholars, as it takes into account the question of untranslatability and acknowledges linguistic and geopolitical alterity.

Conclusion

The study of subtitling as a culturally and politically significant mode of translation involves a pluri-disciplinary approach drawing from film and translation studies, as well as from aesthetic, political and social theory. There can be no doubt that this globally accepted and constantly used practice is meaningful both as a cultural fact and as a channel for the expression of specific, local considerations and sensibilities. The interest of interlingual subtitling as a cultural fact lies primarily in its bringing together, literally in the same room, two disciplines – translation and film – and at least two linguistic (and often national) traditions. Subtitling therefore constitutes a privileged forum not only for the comparative examination of such traditions, but also for an assessment of the (cinematic) representations of these traditions.

Ultimately, subtitling is a good forum for the study of representation itself and its cultural and political implications in the post- or late modern world. As I pointed out in the beginning of this paper, the two components of subtitling, translation and film, are textual and aesthetic strategies with a potential to subvert the classical perception of the unity of representation. This potential lies behind what I called the defamiliarizing effect of subtitles – an effect which is present even in cultures with a subtitling tradition. My question was whether this effect can, or does indeed, lead to an increased awareness of foreignness, and whether it is allowed to enrich the film-viewing experience.

On the theoretical evidence discussed in this paper, the answer has to be a qualified no. The extensive translation practice of mobilising different strategies of text normalisation, so as to prevent the contamination of the domestic culture by the foreign source, applies also in subtitling. What is more, the exigencies of narrative unity in cinema determine the content, duration and positioning of subtitles, thus minimizing their visual impact.

This conclusion certainly needs to be backed by pragmatic evidence.[6] It also needs to be supplemented by sustained reference to "non-domesticating" types of translation, audiovisual or otherwise, and to other cinematic traditions beyond Hollywood. I suspect that such evidence will only reinforce it. Like translation itself, subtitling in its present forms does not, as a rule, do justice to the otherness of the foreign artefact; nor does it simply operate as an agent of acculturation. Rather, in subtitling, contemporary perceptions of nativeness and foreignness are thematized and problematized, without being rectified.

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Notes

1. On Heidegger's and Benjamin's understanding of translation as part of the critique of universalism, see Andrew Benjamin (1989), especially Chapters 1 and 4.
2. For a comprehensive discussion of this point, see Hansen (1987).
3. I borrow my phraseology here from Paul Ricœur, *Sur la traduction* (2004:41).
4. McQuire writes: "If Hollywood no longer exists in its classical form, this should not be read as evidence of its disappearance from contemporary culture, but in terms of its saturation of contemporary life" (1998:207). If this is so, then it is possible to suggest that the effect of transparency is no longer produced through Hollywood's strand of cinematic realism, but through an osmosis between the real and the cinematic unreal. To Sontag's "history become theatre", quoted above, one could then add: "reality become film".
5. Both Berman (1984) and Steiner (1975) are known advocates of literalism in translation; Ricœur has expressed himself in favour of literal translation in Ricœur (2004:67-68); the case of Venuti is more complicated, as he considers himself as following "a line of thinking [… that] goes beyond literalism to advocate an experimentalism" (Venuti, 2000:341), but see also Pym's judgement in Pym (2004).
6. A good essay on that topic is 'The Manipulation of Language and Culture in Film Translation' by Peter Fawcett (2003).