

The 'Permanent Unease' of Cultural Translation in the Fiction of Guillermo Fadanelli

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the work and potential translation of Mexican author Guillermo Fadanelli through the lens of 'cultural translation'. Fadanelli's dirty realist fiction, widely celebrated among Mexican critics and readerships, is inseparable from the urban space of Mexico City: a setting brimming with tension, cultural mutation and heteroglossic dialogue. At once beguiling and repugnant, this ambivalent space is the site of a great unease; caught between traditions, it occasions the Frankensteinian genesis of new and 'other' cultures. Drawing upon the theories of Homi K. Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini and Gayatri Spivak, this article situates the act and concept of translation – both 'cultural' and literary – within a similar dynamic of multilayered and constantly re-articulated Otherness. Interlingual translation, itself a play of tensions and differences, takes place in an equally uneasy space across and between cultures, an interstice where anxiety gives way to production. Like Fadanelli's Mexico City, the hybrid site of translation not only represents Otherness but itself engenders difference, multiplicity and newness.

KEYWORDS: cultural translation, dirty realism, Guillermo Fadanelli, literary translation, Mexico City, third space

Since its conception, the notion of cultural translation has been inextricable from the political and ethical realms of postmodern scholarship. As Harish Trivedi (2007) notes, the concept of cultural translation as it exists within the domain of postcolonial and postmodernist discourse has little to do with the conventional preoccupations of translation scholars; to borrow Trivedi's words, this is "a beast of similar name but very different fur and fibre" (2007: 282). That said, discussions of interlingual literary translation can (and do) take place within the discursive framework of cultural translation. Just as translation scholarship has come to embrace a distinct postcolonial discourse of migration, displacement and hegemony, so the term 'translation' itself has experienced a conceptual shift towards a different field of meaning, bringing the term closer to the spatial metaphor of its etymological origins (*translatio*: to bring across) while simultaneously extending it beyond the narrow realm of 'translation proper'.¹ After mapping some of these shifts across the discursive terrains of translation and cultural studies, this article will examine the ways in which the broadened

¹ I refer here to Roman Jakobson's notion of interlingual, as opposed to intralingual and intersemiotic, translation (1992: 145).

framework of cultural translation illuminates both our readings of Guillermo Fadanelli's work and the practice of its interlingual translation into English. The urban, cultural and literary space of Mexico City will be analyzed as an inherently translated site of tension, "permanent unease" and production that finds its reflection in the ethical act of interlingual translation. Drawing predominantly upon the conceptual schemata of Homi K. Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini and their respective notions of hybridity, translation and third space, as well as on my own experience as the first translator of Fadanelli's novel *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* (1999/2009), this article attempts to elucidate the political and poetical possibilities of a 'cultural' approach to literary translation.

Cultural translation: shifting discursive spaces

While the political foci of translation theorists are far from uniform, many are concerned with exposing and defying the dominant cultural traditions which, overtly or covertly, manifest themselves in literature. With the convergence of translation and cultural studies in the 1990s, there came an acknowledgment of the contextual, cultural and socio-historical aspects that define and delimit translation activity. Constituting what Mary Snell-Hornby (1990) terms the 'cultural turn' in translation scholarship, this acknowledgment signalled a shift from translation as text to translation as culture and politics. The situation of translation within its full cultural, social and political context(s) called for a re-examination of the concept of the Other – a revolutionary shift in light of the historically ego- (and Euro-) centric perspectives of traditional translation scholarship – and gave rise to polemic theories of feminist and postcolonial translation. The objectives of these new theories were overtly political: in the case of feminist scholars, the vindication and recovery of the voices of women writers "lost in the patriarchy"; for postcolonialists, "the carnivalesque inversion of power" epitomized within "the cannibalistic metaphor of *antropofagia*"² (Wallace 2002:66). Both the 'cultural turn' and the rise of postcolonial studies formed part of a multifaceted paradigm shift involving multiple branches of (predominantly Western) scholarship, constituting, in Amaryll

² The notion of *antropofagia* (cannibalism) as a literary concept was first proposed in Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928) and later revived by the pioneers of Brazilian *poesia concreta* and *tropicalismo*. Applied to translation scholarship by prolific scholar (and practising translator) Haroldo de Campos, the *antropofagia* metaphor found its origins in sixteenth-century Brazil when a Tupinamba tribe – probably out of homage – devoured a Catholic priest, terrifying Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. Appropriated by de Andrade, de Campos and others as an allegorical representation of the way in which the colonized could shake off their colonial restraints, "[devouring] techniques of composition in order to produce something new" (Schwartz 2000: 77), *antropofagia* evolved into a poetics of translation which resonated in postcolonial literature, history, culture and politics (Wallace 2002: 72).

Chanady's words, "una celebración generalizada de la diferencia, bajo las etiquetas de la hibridez, la transcultura, la multicultural, la traducción [...] y el mestizaje cultural [a generalized celebration of difference, under the labels of hybridity, transculture, multicultural, translation [...] and cultural *mestizaje*]" (Chanady 1997).³

Framed by postcolonial discourse, and subsequently reincorporated into translation studies theory within what Pym (2010) has called the cultural translation paradigm, the term 'translation' itself experienced a similar transformation. Theorists such as Tejaswini Niranjana and Gayatri Spivak cast interlingual translation as a domain of cultural activity in which ideological tensions and power relations were played out, weaving poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist discourse into discussions of the translation of social and literary 'texts'. Translation, indeed, was perceived as one of the key discourses informing "the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of colonial rule" (Niranjana 1992: 33). The structures at work here were not those of the Empire, but rather of a persisting "absentee colonialism" (Niranjana 1992: 2) that perpetuated itself through the circulation of language, literature and cultural images. Translation, it was argued, both "shapes, and takes shape within" this asymmetrical power structure that rewrites (and therefore constructs) the colonial Other (Niranjana 1992: 8). Given the radical reconceptualizations of terms like 'colonialism' and 'hegemony', the very concept of translation became inherently postcolonial. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi note in the introduction to their collection *Post-colonial Translation*: "In current theoretical discourse [...] to speak of postcolonial translation is little short of tautology" (1999: 13). As a result, the term 'translation' was (re)loaded with connotations of migrancy, exile and diaspora, in a sense returning to its etymological roots. To quote again from Bassnett and Trivedi, "the word 'translation' seems to have come full circle and reverted from its figurative literary meaning of interlingual transaction to its [...] physical meaning of locational disrupture; translation seems to have been translated back to its origins" (1999:13).

At once reinventing and expanding upon the notions of exile and spatial dislocation, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural translation provoked another significant shift in translation scholarship. In Bhabha's work, the term 'translation' was further translated towards a metaphorized discourse of migration and the 'transnation' (cf. Ashcroft 2009), becoming a

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations and back translations are my own.

kind of “circulating metaphor/metonymy” (Rao 2006: 89) that diverges considerably from its traditional meanings. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha offers several characteristically enigmatic interpretations of the concept of translation, one of which states that:

Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication. It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (énoncé, propositionality). And the sign of translation continually tells, or ‘tolls’ the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its performative practices. The ‘time’ of translation consists in that *movement* of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that, in the words of de Man, ‘puts the original in motion to decanonize it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile’ (1994: 228).

Translation construed as a process of destabilization and negotiation, as an implicitly subversive process of movement and potentiality, has proven to be an abiding and influential theme in contemporary translation scholarship. This new and ambivalent understanding of ‘translation’ (which, after Bhabha, I will call cultural translation) itself enacts the fundamental theories of postcolonial thought. Cultural translation is a performative process of spatial and temporal ‘negotiation’ within the interstitial postcolonial space; it combines, in Sathya Rao’s terms, “a process of disjunction (which interrupts the mimetic connivance between the original and the copy) and a performance of re-enunciation or ‘revaluation’ (which offers to the copy its full autonomy as a postcolonial and creative subject)” (2006: 89). As an act of rewriting and rupture, then, as well as an act of appropriation, the process of interlingual translation can also be seen as a ‘re-articulation’ of the Other’s arbitrary subject position – arbitrary, indeed, because the site of oscillating hybridity opened up by cultural translation enables us to perceive the space of the Other (which, in the context of translation proper, is also the space of the origin or source text) as a vast “multiplicity of incommensurable cultural locations” (Rao 2006: 89).

Mutants, hybrids and contradictions: readings of Mexico City

This shifted (and shifting) understanding of translation is particularly useful when we begin to dissect works of literature that are at once products and producers of a postmodern (ir)reality and whose temporal, spatial and cultural locations are increasingly difficult to pin down. The fiction of Guillermo Fadanelli, with its chaotic urban settings, polyphonic narratives and

layers of contradiction, is representative of such work. Viewed through the optic of cultural translation, Fadanelli's writing opens itself to new and provocative readings that, in turn, offer hybridized readings of Mexico as both a literary entity and a living cultural location.

Fadanelli's writing is firmly rooted in the inexhaustible metropolis of Mexico City, "esa cárcel imposible que parece haber salido de la mente de Piranesi [that impossible prison, like something out of the mind of Piranesi]" (Frías 2008: 67). The city – Fadanelli's birthplace and home – is at once the framework and true protagonist of his novels, and the strange or tragic predicaments of his characters enact the uneasy relationship that persists between the writer and his milieu. Fadanelli is quick to criticize the intrinsic violence, corruption and derangement of the Mexican capital. In his numerous interviews and non-fiction pieces, Fadanelli paints a relentlessly grim portrait of "el caos inabarcable de la Ciudad de México [the vast chaos of Mexico City]": the city is a "territorio de guerra [war zone]"; a "metastasis" (Herrera-Pahl 2010); "una enfermedad que mata al espíritu, pero no al cuerpo [a sickness that destroys the spirit, but not the body]" (Ramos Martín 2004). In an interview with Guadalajara newspaper *El Informador* (14 Mar. 2009), Fadanelli endows the capital with a cruel and gargantuan persona, portraying it as "una ciudad reptil, saurio, que devora cualquier tipo de sensibilidad y de entusiasmo [a reptilian, saurian city that devours all sensitivity and enthusiasm]". His tone is derisory at times: "Me gusta referirme al Distrito Federal como una mala broma de Dios", he writes. "Es una una ciudad que desde un punto de vista razonable no debería estar en pie [I like to refer to Mexico City as a bad joke played by God. It's a city that, from any reasonable point of view, ought not to be standing]" (Ricárdez 2008). This cynicism tinges Fadanelli's fictional descriptions of Mexico City and the abhorrent (or abject) characters that populate it. As a writer whose underground prestige has brought him to the verge of the mainstream,⁴ Fadanelli is recognized as somewhat of a dirty prophet of the vile and vulgar. He is also, in some sense, a 'translator' between two subcultures: that of 'lo culto' (art, literature and so-called 'high culture') and the literal *subculture* of the base, the underground, that which lies beneath the plebeian façade of "la cultura masiva" (cf. García Canclini 1990: 237). Indeed, Fadanelli's translation of the visual, guttural Mexico City idiom

⁴ As Carlos Martínez Rentería comments in his book *La cresta de la ola: reinversiones y digresiones de la inoContracultura en México* (2009), counterculture "paradójicamente, sólo cumplirá su sentido de ruptura al hacerse de nuevo cultura [paradoxically, only fulfils its disruptive objective when it once again becomes culture]" (2009: 10). Fadanelli's graduation from little-known, countercultural literary magazines such as *La regla rota* (1984-1987) and *La pus moderna* (1989-1997) to national forums such as *El Universal* and *Letras Libres*, along with his growing readership, demonstrates this point. It could be argued that Fadanelli has already come full circle, in which case his 'underground' status might well be questioned.

into the culturally ‘valuable’ discourse of fiction is an art form with which he has come to be strongly associated. As Valeria Luiselli notes, Fadanelli’s work, despite meeting with general acclaim in the urbane realm of literary criticism, has become synonymous with the underbelly of Mexico City:

[L]a obra entera de Fadanelli es indisociable del DF, de sus personajes – reales o arquetípicos – de sus ergástulos, puteros, cantinas y alcantarillas; y también es verdad que hay un DF que es ahora indisociable de este escritor – hay lugares y personas reales que parecen una mala broma de Fadanelli.

[Fadanelli’s body of work is inseparable from Mexico City, from its characters (real or archetypal), from its ergastuli, whore mongers, cantinas and gutters; it is also true that there exists a Mexico City that is now inseparable from the author – there are people and places that seem like a bad joke played by Fadanelli (2011: 88).

Fadanelli’s bleak urban narratives offer manifold representations of a complex “*via crucis mexicano*” characterized by “chantaje, corrupción e impunidad [extortion, corruption and impunity]” (Fadanelli 2003: 35). This rather predictable conjunction of ardent Catholicism, political ineptitude and deeply entrenched violence is nevertheless a deliberately misleading one; upon closer analysis, Fadanelli’s writing reveals a much more nuanced representation of Mexico City and its inhabitants, and despite his disparagement of the capital there is more than a hint of self-contradiction in Fadanelli’s discourse. In a (perhaps deliberately) hyperbolic interview with Rosana Ricárdez, for example, he states: “México no es un lugar habitable, ni remotamente [Mexico is not a liveable place, not even remotely]”. The motivation to write, to fictionalize the space around him – he affirms – is the product of an “indispensable” desire to construct “un espacio o [...] un universo alternativo a esa ciudad [an alternate space, or alternate universe removed from that city]”. Here, Fadanelli echoes the notion of the supermetropolis as “an unfit place for human existence” (Carlson 2000: 142), a place where relentless ecocide has reared something like a “cultura del post-apocalipsis [post-apocalyptic culture]” (Villoro 2009: 10). In light of this, one might expect the creative act to become something like a form of escapism. And yet, Fadanelli’s writing is far from escapist; on the contrary, it is at once fearless and deeply compassionate in its portrayals of the complex realities of Mexican society. Indeed, Fadanelli has been lauded as an important proponent of Mexican *realismo sucio* [dirty realism] (González Boixo 2009: 12), a (sub)genre characterized in both its North and Latin American guises by “seedy settings [...] uncompromising descriptions of violence, sordid sex, and the dreary hopelessness of its

downbeat characters” (Stringer 1996: 171-2). *Granta* editor Bill Buford’s initial appraisal of the genre, which arose around the work of North American writers such as Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff and Richard Ford, characterized the dirty realist aesthetic as urbane, minimalist and tragic, defined by its “[u]nderstated, ironic, sometimes savage, but insistently compassionate” depictions of the “belly-side of contemporary life” (Hemmingson 2008: 11). The numerous comparisons between Fadanelli’s writing and that of Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski (comparisons also spurred, one imagines, by Fadanelli’s professed love of these writers) point to a common, unflinching approach to the ‘unliveable’ reality of postindustrial urban society. With its scathing irony, debauched urban landscapes and latent pessimism, Fadanelli’s writing certainly conforms to the dirty realist aesthetic. This aesthetic, as grim as it appears, actively resists facile reductionism in favour of a certain behavioural and moral complexity. Dirty realist narratives, Tamas Dobozy argues, tend towards contradiction and hypocrisy as a kind of passive-aggressive reflection of capitalist culture – Dobozy has gone so far as to posit the existence of a ‘hypocrisy aesthetic’ – which simultaneously confuses and subverts traditional representations or imaginings of society. The dirty realist system, in other words, is in fact an antisystem, “a logic of continual and consistent contradiction” (Dobozy 2001: 51).

In Fadanelli’s work, this logic is most transparent in the short story collections that see a plurality of anonymous narrators feeding into a confused discourse of dreams, musings, and truncated dialogues. Early publications such as *El día que la vea la voy a matar* (1992) and *Terlenka* (1995) demonstrate Fadanelli’s unbridled vigour for controversy, and the staccato narratives (often no more than a page in length) brim with dissonance and inconsistency. The narrator of “El Mala Muerte”, for example, deliberately befuddles his monologues with blatant self-contradiction. He recounts:

Apenas ayer salí a la calle y con toda naturalidad violé a una adolescente que tenía los labios pintados de rojo: la abandoné exhausta en un parque. Después me fui a emborrachar con mis amigos; durante la juerga tuve que medirme dos veces: la primera con los puños y la segunda armado de una navaja, en ambas terminé victorioso. Para celebrarlo salí de la cantina y castré a dos perros y a un viejo que pasaba por ahí. No es necesario que confiese que he vuelto a mentir, a las cinco tengo un partido de tenis con el ingeniero Moreno y en la noche tomaré un avión hacia Londres por lo que tendré que tomar pastillas.

[Just yesterday, as natural as anything, I went out and raped a teenage girl who wore red lipstick: I left her exhausted in a park. Then I went and got drunk with

my friends; twice during the revelries I had to show my mettle, the first time with my fists, the second armed with a knife, and both times I was victorious. To celebrate I left the cantina and castrated two dogs and an old man. I need not confess that I've just told another lie; at five I have a tennis match with Moreno and tonight I'm catching a plane to London, for which I'll have to take tablets] (Fadanelli 1992: 99-100).

The above passage exhibits a kind of double-barrelled contradiction: the self-confessed narrative contradiction ("I've just told another lie") is couched within a latent stylistic contradiction, evident in the incongruity of an apparently sophisticated, bourgeois narrator relating tales of rape and castration. In another story of the same collection, "Tan bello, tan azul, tan claro," the narrator's own vivid imagination throws the reality of urban life into stark relief. After describing (in voluptuous detail) his paradisiacal existence on a Caribbean island, he admits:

En realidad no vivía allí, sino en el condominio de una vieja unidad habitacional, en un departamento pequeño cuyas recámaras medían dos metros por dos metros y en donde se escuchaba perfectamente el ruido de las tuberías transportando la mierda de los vecinos que habitaban el piso de arriba.

[In reality I didn't live there, I lived in an old housing complex, in a small apartment with bedrooms measuring two square metres, where you could hear with perfect clarity the sound of the plumbing transporting the neighbours' shit from the apartment upstairs] (Fadanelli 1992: 103).

Realism here contradicts the utopian imagery that precedes and envelops it (the passage goes on to muse on the delights of the narrator's imaginary lover, a twenty-one-year-old movie star, before again confessing reality, enacting a kind of willed vacillation between fantasy and truth), enacting a double subversion that at once deprecates reality and sabotages the imagined utopia. This, too, is a kind of translation: the imperfect translation of intangible dream into tangible reality, from which neither will emerge unscathed.

Fadanelli's incoherent antisystem is also at work in the 1999 novel *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, in which four disparate narratives intertwine to form inevitably grim but ultimately surprising patterns. Mingling internal dialogue with detached narration, *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* weaves together scattered glimpses of four lives that (as the novel's epigraph forewarns) "no merecían haber formado parte de novela alguna [were never worth writing about in any novel]" (Fadanelli 2009: 7). The varied voices of Fadanelli's four protagonists – among them Cristina (a mildly optimistic prostitute), Ulises (a solitary Fonacot employee), Adolfo (an

unemployed pseudo-veterinarian) and Olivia (the adolescent daughter of a family of Jehovah's witnesses) – paint a painfully unremarkable portrait of the modern urban dystopia; of its invisible disillusion, of the daily tragedies and anonymities of its inhabitants. The contradictions within these fragmented spaces lie in Fadanelli's disturbing juxtapositions of the archetypal and the aberrant, the pedestrian and the depraved, the traditional and the postmodern. Thus we find graphic descriptions of Olivia's rape interjecting swathes of banal dialogue between her bickering parents (Fadanelli 2009: 89-97); we are privy to the perverse musings of Ulises as he encourages an unforeseen erection with mundane office banter (Fadanelli 2009: 25-27); and we witness the compulsive voyeurism of Adolfo who, from his bedroom window, observes the innocent and mundane activities of his teenage neighbour (Fadanelli 2009: 38-40).

The urban space framing these disconcerting narratives is continually signalled as an irrational and incongruous construction: “¿Quién inventó las ciudades?”, ponders Cristina. “¿Quién tuvo la idea de poner una casa tras otra? [Who invented cities? Whose idea was it to put houses one after the other?]” (Fadanelli 2009: 13). The postmodern metropolis is construed as a complex “mosaico humano [human mosaic]” (Fadanelli 2009: 39) composed of heterogeneous fragments, sitting uneasily between the third and first worlds.⁵ It is a space where the structures of capitalism (a form of neo-colonialism, which might still be considered within a postcolonial framework) are by turns absorbed and othered by a series of fractured and plural narrative voices; a place where the tortillería and the Unidad Habitacional coexist with “el Seven Eleven” and “el Blockbuster de la Avenida Taxqueña” (Fadanelli 2009: 39). In the short story “La posmodernidad explicada a las putas”, which constructs a revealing dialogue between two prostitutes, a literature professor and a middle-class yuppie gathered at a hot dog stand, the hybrid identities of Mexico City are neatly summarized in a playful microcosm of the postmodern megalopolis. With an elegance and humour that recall the words of Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña –“Me estoy desmexicanizando para mexicomprenderme [I am demexicanizing myself in order to mexicomprehend myself]” (García Canclini 1990: 302) – Fadanelli superimposes capitalist iconography and snippets of English terminology (Pepsi, Cartier, hot dogs, “el *young professional*”) upon a thoroughly

⁵ This fragmentation is, of course, linguistic as well as cultural. In the words of Juan Villoro: “La gran ciudad carece de lenguaje estructurado; la energía con que avanza, su exuberante desorden, requiere un mosaico roto [Large cities lack a structured language; the energy that propels them, their exuberant chaos, requires a broken mosaic]” (Villoro 2005: 138)

Mexican setting and vernacular (“¡Vivan los tacos, hijos de la chingada!”), resulting in a dynamic that falls somewhere among the interstices of “[p]osmexica, prechicano, panlatino” culture (García Canclini 1990: 302). The story’s final sentence, scrawled in “salsa catsup” upon an anonymous city wall, echoes the postmodern maxim underlying much of Fadanelli’s work: “Todos somos mutantes, no habrá ya juicio final [We are all mutants, there will be no judgement day]” (Fadanelli 1992: 118).

Comparisons between literature and visual art are, in this instance, rather illuminating. Indeed, Fadanelli’s literary mosaics (be they in the form of fragmentary short story collections or polyphonic novels) have much in common with the iconic murals that, somewhat like ‘high culture’ graffiti, adorn the public spaces of Mexico City. As Néstor García Canclini notes:

Rivera, Siqueiros y Orozco propusieron síntesis iconográficas de la identidad nacional inspiradas a la vez en las obras de mayas y aztecas, los retablos de iglesias, las decoraciones de pulquerías, los diseños y colores de la alfarería poblana, las lacas de Michoacán y los avances experimentales de vanguardias europeas.

[Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco proposed the iconographic synthesis of national identity, at once inspired by Mayan and Aztec works, religious altarpieces, the images adorning pulquerías, the colours and designs of artisanal pottery, the lacquer art of Michoacán, and the experimental work of the European avant-garde] (1990: 78-79).

Just as the “synthesis” proposed by Mexico’s celebrated muralists drew from Mexico’s hybrid culture a thread of unprecedented creativity and innovation, so does Fadanelli’s writing suggest new readings of Mexico City as an inherently translated crossroads of histories, cultures and tongues. In his seminal work *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (1990), García Canclini foregrounds the notion of hybridity as an intrinsic characteristic of Mexican (and, more broadly, Latin American) society. “La perspectiva pluralista”, he writes, “que acepta la fragmentación y las combinaciones múltiples entre tradición, modernidad y posmodernidad, es indispensable para considerar la coyuntura latinoamericana de fin de siglo [the pluralist perspective, which accepts fragmentation and multiple combinations among tradition, modernity and postmodernity, is indispensable for considering the Latin American conjuncture at the turn of the century]” (García Canclini 1990: 329-330). Mexico City in particular, which is central to García Canclini’s anthropological and cultural theses, is construed as a site of deeply entrenched historical and

social hybridity. Indeed, the city's irremediably chaotic and remarkably fertile commingling of cultures, voices and creative styles epitomizes postmodernity itself: "El posmodernismo no es un estilo sino la copresencia tumultuosa de todos, el lugar donde los capítulos de la historia del arte y del folclor se cruzan entre sí y con las nuevas tecnologías culturales [Postmodernism is not a style but the tumultuous co-presence of all styles, the place where the chapters in the history of art and folklore are crossed with each other and with the new cultural technologies]" (García Canclini 1990: 307).

The notion of cross-breeding evoked here (one that also recurs with some frequency in translation discourse) betrays the biological origins of the 'hybridity' metaphor, which has met with considerable debate since its integration into the field of literary and cultural studies. As Josef Raab and Martin Butler note, the term 'hybridity' has long since shucked the burden of "negative implications and connotations of inferiority, contamination, miscegenation and perversion" (2008: 2) and has become a familiar metaphor in the conceptualization of cultural contact, transfer and exchange, especially in the field of postcolonial studies (cf. Zapf 1999: 303). In seeking to describe that "ongoing condition" of transculturation that allows no space for "zones of purity" and homogeneity (Rosaldo in García Canclini 1995a: xv), the concept of hybridity stands in direct opposition to essentialist conceptions of culture or identity; "wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism" (Young 1995: 27). That said, the concept of hybridity is itself a hybrid construct. As Robert Young points out, "there is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes" (1995: 27). The term's shaky foundations, straddling a number of (often divergent) theoretical perspectives, thus ensure that the term itself, like the cultural phenomenon it attempts to name, remains in an ongoing condition of change and contestation. Despite this, García Canclini's observations remain pertinent: his evaluation of Latin America as a site of "echoes" and "contradictions" considers both its "historia híbrida [hybrid history]" (García Canclini 1990: 69) and its ever-changing cultural hybridity, establishing a base from which a number of analyses, in diverse areas of knowledge, can be launched. The translatability of García Canclini's terminology itself points to the potential fertility of 'hybridity' as a cultural concept. Much like de Andrade's notion of *antropofagia*, the process of hybridization involves a significant degree of interpretation and translation; the way in which a culture receives and incorporates various elements might even be described as a kind of 'reading', ultimately resulting in the creation of something new and unrepeatable. Indeed, in a hybrid

context like Mexico City, to create means “importar, traducir, construir lo propio [to import, translate, and construct one’s own]” (García Canclini 1990:73).

Mexico City as third space

Fadanelli’s fragmented city of “mutants” and García Canclini’s hybrid sites of Latin American difference are both translated spaces; both, for this reason, occupy what many theorists (after Bhabha) have come to call a ‘third space’. This terminology, however, should again give us pause. The abstract notions behind words like ‘hybrid’, ‘translation’ and ‘space’ diverge significantly, in Bhabha, from conventional scholarly use. As a result, Bhabhian theory is often misapplied in other branches of scholarship; it is worth keeping in mind Ovidi Carbonell’s remark that “postcolonial translation studies simplify Bhabha’s concept of a third space” (2006: 48). In order to approach Bhabha correctly, then, some elucidation is required. James Clifford’s notion of ‘re-articulation’ proves helpful in this respect. Clifford (2000) defines social and cultural formations as collective yet contingent constructions, as “articulated ensembles”. These formations do not come about organically, as terms such as ‘hybrid’ and ‘mutant’ might suggest, but rather are artificially configured and constructed: “An articulated ensemble is more like a political coalition or, in its ability to conjoin disparate elements, a cyborg”, Clifford writes (2000: 478). Clifford’s terminology helps to clarify, to some extent, the murky waters of the in-between. If the elements of interstitial space are understood as both contingent and constructed, then its inhabitants are agents who navigate and ‘negotiate’ that space at will, hooking and unhooking parts onto their respective structures and (re)constructing themselves intermittently. When we think of the in-between state as ‘articulation’, we avoid misleading connotations of passivity, absence and indecision and approach “the actual contingent and liminal state of all contemporary subjects” (Ashcroft 2009: 150). As Robert Young reminds us, “the third space is above all a site of production, the production of anxiety, an untimely place of loss, of fading, of appearance and disappearance [...] of contestation and of negotiation” (2009: 82-3).

There are echoes (or, better, presages) of these ideas in the work of García Canclini, whose contributions to Latin American cultural theory offer a kind of parallel to those of Bhabha.⁶ Raymundo Mier's observation in an appendix to *Culturas Híbridas* brings these connections to the fore: "Lo híbrido", he notes,

designa una liminaridad, una materia cuya existencia exhibe la afirmación dual de una sustancia y su falta de identidad, lo que está en el intersticio, lo que se perfila en una zona de penumbra, lo que escapa, cuando menos en su surgimiento, a la repetición

[The hybrid designates a liminality, a material whose existence exhibits the dual affirmation of a substance and its lack of identity, that which is in the interstices, which profiles itself in a zone of shadow, which escapes, at least in appearance, repetition] (García Canclini 1990: 361).

The space of cultural translation, then, can be described as an arbitrary, unstable, hybrid (cyborgian) space situated somewhere *in between* the Self and the Other. For Bhabha, this in-between site is inextricably related to his concept of 'third space', which is likewise inseparable from the concept of cultural translation. Bhabha's descriptions of the third space as a "split-space of enunciation" are notoriously slippery, but it is clear that he intends translation to be a "motif or trope" (Bhabha 1998: 210) through which to grasp and discuss the concept. In a 2009 essay entitled "In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space", Bhabha illuminates this connection through a choral metaphor, describing the moment when, amidst the movement and multiplicity of voices, a "momentary stillness" emerges as "several voices hold the same note". He continues:

The precarious tension involved in holding the thought – or the note – in common, vibrating beyond the control of any one voice, is the timbre of translation working its way into our thinking [...] To hold, in common, a concept like third space is to begin to see that thinking and writing are acts of translation. Third space, for me, is unthinkable outside the locality of cultural translation (Bhabha 2009: ix).

⁶ In another instance of the nexus between the many faces of translation, the translation of Latin American theorists into English in the mid-1990s signalled an important moment in postmodernism; as Román de la Campa puts it: "la crítica literaria y el mercado de diseminación en lengua inglesa del pensamiento literario-posmoderno han sido, y siguen siendo, los códigos predominantes del discurso sobre la posmodernidad en general, y sobre la literatura latinoamericana en particular [literary criticism and the English-language dissemination of postmodern literary thought have been, and continue to be, the principle codes for the discourse of postmodernity in general and Latin American literature in particular]" (de la Campa 2001: 22).

Within this interstitial site of enunciation, of language *in actu*, “of splitting and a hurried stapling together”, the *I* is displaced, fractured, constantly “refashioned, reconstructed, stitched together” by the recognition of the Other, for the subject comes into being “only as a signifier in the field of the Other” (Young 2009: 85-6). This specularity “does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid” (Bhabha 1994: 114). As Bhabha himself notes, this process of “identification” is often theorized “through a psychoanalytic analogy” (1998: 211); terms like ‘anxiety’ and ‘tension’ thus emerge as fundamental states of the hybrid subject. Michael Cronin interprets this tension in kinetic terms as a “continuous oscillation”, one which maintains the interstitial space of translation in a state of perpetual motion. The gap of the “entre-deux”, he writes, “should be conceived of less as a space, a reified entity tending towards stasis, than as a constant movement backwards and forward in which there is no fixated identification with either of the poles” (Cronin 2000: 166). As these passages indicate, hybridity is not a reconciliatory term capable of resolving, “in a dialectical play of ‘recognition’” (Bhabha 2004: 14), the tension between two cultures; on the contrary, it is an inherently uneasy term immersed in a space of cross-contamination and instability.

Both the megalopolis and the postmodern work of fiction, with their respective cacophonies of voices and images, are apt and well-worn symbols of the multiplicity and anxiety of cultural spaces. Viewed through the lens of cultural translation, then, a place like Mexico City (and particularly its fictionalized manifestation in the work of Fadanelli) can be analysed not only as an interstitial space of oscillation and anxiety but as a site of great productivity and creative potential. In her illuminating work *Cities in Translation* (2012), Sherry Simon examines the postmodern metropolis as a site of friction and transformation, a place composed of incoherent parts (and languages) threaded together by “simultaneous, parallel conversations taking place across urban terrain” (Simon 2012: 2). Drawing upon the theoretical work of Catalan architect Manuel de Solà-Morales, Simon cites the notion of the “esquina urbana” [street corner] as the “single most salient feature of the urban landscape” (Simon 2012: 2). For de Solà-Morales, indeed, the city is “el lugar de mezcla e intercambio, lugar plural y contradictorio por excelencia [a place of mixing and exchange, plural and contradictory par excellence]”, a place defined by “la diferencia y la fricción, del acuerdo forzado o fortuito, de tensión y conflicto permanente [difference and friction, forced or fortuitous agreement, tension and permanent conflict]” (de Solà-Morales 2004: 131). This is the dynamic that palpitates in Fadanelli’s Mexico City: an inherently contradictory space

fraught with underlying (and often all too visible) tensions. The city's fictional incarnation reflects Fadanelli's own uneasy relationship with his place of birth. As he admits to Ricárdez, the "caos constante [constant chaos]" of the capital at once seduces and repels him, producing a kind of "vértigo necrológico [morbid vertigo]", "una tensión que transgrede las fronteras de lo estético [a tension that transgresses the limits of aesthetics]". This ambivalence echoes the distinctly self-contradictory logic to which Fadanelli is given; as noted earlier, his portrayals of Mexico City tend to veer between that of an "unliveable" post-apocalyptic wasteland and that of a complex and poignant human reality. There is no doubt something unpleasant – "irrational", even – about living in a city of such disorienting dimensions. And yet, Fadanelli comments: "Me atrae la idea de habitar una locura, y vivir en permanente desasosiego [I am attracted to the idea of inhabiting madness, of living in permanent unease]". This "permanent unease" is a condition of tension and anxiety, a constant wavering and motion that belongs most fully to sites of transition, cultural contact and, indeed "translation" (Pratt 1991: 6). The merciless compassion of Fadanelli's writing and the dirty realist "aesthetic of contradiction" that it epitomizes is again a form of cultural liminality. Tension, unease, translation, anxiety, hybridity: these states define Fadanelli's Mexico City as a postmodern interstice, a "metrópolis sin límites ni centro precisos [metropolis with no precise limits and no precise centre]" (Luiselli 2011: 88), a space that does not lie *between* borders, in any essentializing or spatial sense, but dissolves the binary suppositions that impose such borders.

This notion is central if we are to comprehend the potential of translation (both 'cultural' and interlingual) as it applies to the work of Fadanelli. Simon notes that "[a]ccents, code-switching and translation are to be valued for the ways in which they draw attention to the complexities of difference, for the ways in which they interrupt the self-sufficiencies of 'mono' cultures" (2012: 1). For her, the multiplicity of voices and the movement between them implies an unease or "friction" that has positive repercussions for culture (if what we perceive as positive is heterogeneity over homogeneity, 'multi' over 'mono'). This concept of disruptive, translatorial friction applies to Fadanelli's writing on several levels: both internally, through the heteroglossic nature of his fiction, and externally, through the proposed translation of that fiction into other languages. As their etymological origins suggest, 'heteroglossia' (different tongues) and 'polyphony' (many sounds) are useful concepts when it comes to the convergence of literature and language. Of particular importance is Bakhtin's theoretical enrichment of these terms, in which literary analysis – especially of the novel, "the genre that most favours [...] polyphony" (Todorov 1984: x) – plays an important role. For

Bakhtin, the variation and stratification within literary language means that words are set or “scattered” on different planes, implying the existence of “internal contradictions” as well as a kind of *social* heteroglossia: a “Tower of Babel confusion of languages” (Bakhtin 1976: 300). For the writer of prose, then, the discursive object is “a condensation of heterological voices among which his [the writer’s] own voice must resound” (Bakhtin 1981: 91-92). Analysed from this perspective, Fadanelli’s writing is undoubtedly heteroglossic, giving place to a multiplicity of social voices. The fractured dialogues of *¿Te veré en desayuno?*, discussed earlier, illustrate this well: within the first few pages of the novel, five distinct tongues have already differentiated themselves,⁷ all speaking from within the sphere of Cristina’s experience (which, come chapter two, is juxtaposed to those of the other three protagonists, adding layer upon layer). If this polyphony houses the internal ‘friction’ of Fadanelli’s writing, then the external friction is a result of its contact with the Other: in this case, with non-Mexican (and, in particular, Anglophone) readers of Fadanelli. If Simon is correct in her assertion that “the friction of languages [...] is a good thing” (Simon 2012: 1), then the notoriously ‘mono’-lithic Anglophone culture has everything to gain from embracing Fadanelli’s abrasive, unsettling, translated literature.

⁷ Several voices coexist in the first chapter of the novel: the erudite voice of the narrator, Cristina’s unspoken voice (or internal dialogue), and the colloquial spoken exchanges between characters, each of whom displays a distinct vocabulary or ‘accent’; here we find Cristina, her criminal brother Alfil, the *policía*, and a pious *viejita* who, comically, insists that Cristina read the Bible between clients. At one point we hear several of these tongues vying for space in a single paragraph, the dialogue between Cristina and Alfil less a conversation than a case of two voices ‘talking past’ one another:

Encima de la cajuela, árida y fría como el aire de la noche, Cristina colocó su polvera y a un lado el maltratado y esbelto tubito de gas lacrimógeno que escondía en el bolso; no porque creyera que lo necesitaría alguna vez, “como si no pudiera defenderme con mis propias uñas”, sino por tratarse de un regalo del Alfil, su hermano menor.

- Tómallo, las armas nunca están de más, siempre hay un hijo de la chingada que te quiere joder.
- Te ves muy delgado, tienes que cuidarte, Alfil.
- Apuntas a los ojos y aprietas aquí.
- ¿Cuántas veces comes al día?

[On top of the cold, arid trunk of the car Cristina arranged her powder compact and beside it the slim, battered tube of pepper spray she kept hidden in her handbag, not because she thought she’d ever need it, “as if I couldn’t defend myself with my own two hands”, but because it had been a gift from her younger brother, Alfil.

- Take it, you need a weapon, there’s always some motherfucking hijo de la chingada trying to fuck you over.
- You look thin, Alfil, you have to look after yourself.
- Aim at the eyes and squeeze, right here.
- How many meals do you eat a day?]

(Fadanelli 1999: 11)

“A love song to our mongrel selves”: translation and other spaces

De Solà-Morales points out that, if cultural diversity is to be comprehended, then the city must be imagined not as a “mosaico de exotismos [mosaic of exoticisms]” but rather as a place that breaks away from the usual “reducciones demasiado simplistas o sistemáticas [overly simplistic or systematic reductions]” (de Solà-Morales 2004: 131). As a writer who openly declares his antiestablishment leanings,⁸ Fadanelli might well agree. His work, in any case, certainly suggests a rejection of facile exoticism in favour of the gritty yet nuanced realism he has come to exemplify. As noted earlier, the heteroglossic and contradictory nature of Fadanelli’s fiction allows him to capture the complex and multiple realities of Mexico City without lapsing into the tropes of stereotypical or moralizing discourse. Trite questions of Mexican identity or *Zeitgeist* are replaced by ones of tension, crisis and becoming. In the words of Bernardo Sagastume:

La mexicanidad de los retratos que pinta Fadanelli toma distancia del culturalismo y de cualquier obsesión por determinar una identidad del mexicano. Se limita a ver la vida de la gran capital como el destino no deseado de un país que aún está por ser.

[The Mexicanness of the portraits Fadanelli paints distances itself from culturalism or any kind of obsession with Mexican identity. It limits itself to looking at life in the capital as the undesirable destiny of a country that is still on the brink of being] (2008: 102).

This resistance to the politics of cultural identity is reaffirmed by the socio-literary context in which Fadanelli’s writing emerged.⁹ In Latin America in the mid-1990s there arose two significant (albeit self-appointed) literary movements: the transatlantic ‘McOndo’ movement and the Mexican ‘generación del Crack’. The former defined itself in opposition to the reductive, exoticizing norms of magical realism; the latter in opposition to the superficial, mainstream pabulum of so-called ‘literatura light’ (Carbajal 2005: 123). In 1996, Chilean novelist Alberto Fuguet pioneered the McOndo movement with the publication of a short

⁸ A candid example: inside the front cover of Fadanelli’s second novel, *Para ella todo suena a Franck Pourcel* (published in 1999 by Fadanelli’s own subversive publishing house, Editorial Moho), there appears the following affirmation: “Tienes en las manos la novela que [...] otras editoriales se negaron a publicar al considerarla una obra frívola y poco correcta. En Moho nos arriesgamos a publicarla debido a que estamos interesados estrictamente sólo en aquello que no tiene future. [You have in your hands the novel that other editors refused to publish on the grounds that it is a frivolous and politically incorrect piece of writing. At Moho we have taken the risk of publishing it as we are strictly interested in books that have no future.]”

⁹ Fadanelli published his first short story collection (*Cuentos Mejicanos*) in 1991, and his first novel (*La Otra Cara de Rock Hudson*) in 1997.

story anthology of new Latin American literature, simply entitled *McOndo*. Deriving its name from a capitalist perversion of García Márquez's 'Macondo' (the fictional setting of his novel *Cien años de soledad*), the McOndo movement distanced itself from the fanciful, rural tropes of magical realist literature. Latin American literature and society, its proponents argued, had progressed beyond the banana republic and the dictator novel. In a 2001 article entitled "Magical Neoliberalism", Fuguet reasserts this point: "Latin America is quite literary, yes, almost a work of fiction", he writes, "but it's not a folk tale [...] More than magical, this place is weird. Magical realism reduces a much too complex situation and just makes it cute. Latin America is not cute" (2001: 69). McOndo literature considered itself representative of a distinctly postmodern reality: one in which Latin America was not reduced to the symbolic essentialisms of the Other, but rather was revealed as a culturally, ethnographically and demographically diverse landscape. It was also an increasingly *urban* landscape, defined less by the spectre of Spanish colonialism than by the cultural (and moral) saturation of capitalist and consumerist values. The contribution of Crack originators Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, Eloy Urroz et al.¹⁰ had a less defiant objective, but was nonetheless significant in redefining the Mexican literary context.¹¹ In their *Manifiesto Crack*, also published in 1996, they did not propose a radical new avant-garde aesthetic, nor a rupture with past literary traditions –on the contrary, they declared a return to the stylistic and thematic sophistication of the Boom-era 'novela profunda' – but rather reconfigured the literary landscape to reflect the "realidad dislocada [dislocated reality]", social multiplicity and "polifonía narrativa [narrative polyphony]" of contemporary Mexico. The spatiotemporal realm of the Crack writers was an unmistakably postmodern one: "No espacio, ni lugar. Todos los espacios y lugares [Not space, not place. All spaces and all places]" (Castillo Pérez 2006: 84).

As Alberto Castillo Pérez argues, the very appellation of the Crack generation "señala ya un afán de internacionalización, si no de anglofilia [signals a certain internationalist, if not anglophilic, zeal]" (2006: 83). Certainly, Crack writers took a decidedly non-introspective, antinationalist approach to literature – the *Manifiesto*'s "first commandment" declares: "Amarás a Proust sobre todos los otros [Thou shalt love Proust above all others]" – and the

¹⁰ The five authors whose work was published in the *Manifiesto Crack* (1996), and who contributed to the manifesto itself, are considered the founding members of the generation. All born in the 1960s, they are: Jorge Volpi (1968); Ignacio Padilla (1968); Eloy Urroz (1967); Pedro Ángel Palou (1966); and Ricardo Chávez Castañeda (1961).

¹¹ Despite proclaiming itself a distinct literary generation, 'la generación del Crack' never professed to be a literary movement at all; as Padilla himself observes, "si algo está ocurriendo con las novelas del Crack, no es un movimiento literario, sino simple y llanamente una actitud [if there is something happening with Crack novels, it is not a literary movement but, quite simply, an attitude]" (Carbajal 2005: 124).

postmodern perspectives of both the McOndo and Crack movements encompassed a broad range of literary and social influences. Fadanelli dismisses the suggestion that he is himself a Crack-generation writer; as he comments to Ricárdez: “El *crack* es pasta de coca con queroseno y ácido sulfúrico, y me ha hecho mucho daño [Crack is coca paste mixed with kerosene and sulphuric acid, and it has done me a lot of damage]”. Nevertheless, his writing clearly demonstrates a common international heritage when it comes to the absorption of imported literature and culture. This goes further than his close acquaintance with the work of Fante, Carver, Roth and Pessoa. As mentioned above, Fadanelli’s unsettling portrait of Mexico City as a postmodern urban space “on the brink of being” challenges the repetitive or exoticizing representations that have come to define Mexico as a literary entity. Fusing the traditional and the contemporary, Fadanelli writes “una visión de Anáhuac¹² contemporánea: una ciudad cosmopolita, hermosa y monstruosa por partes iguales [a visión of contemporary Anáhuac: a city as beautiful and cosmopolitan as it is monstrous]” (Luiselli 2011: 89). It is a literary space in which two traditions converge: the foreign tradition, predominantly North American but also broadly Iberoamerican, and the national tradition, “cuyo mito fundacional ha cambiado de nombres pero no de esencia [whose foundational myth has changed in name but not in essence]” (Luiselli 2011: 89).

Urban space in Fadanelli, then, is a space of negotiation, in the Bhabhian sense of the word; it is the hybrid and heteroglossic site of a clash of traditions, where culture and identity are constantly unsettled, interbred, re-produced and re-articulated. This space, oppugning the separation of Self and Other into binaries and archetypes, is a breeding site for innovation and creation. Indeed, Fadanelli suggests that such restlessness is an essential element of the arts: “La idea de las fronteras físicas suele ser demasiado primitiva”, he comments. “Las ideas, el arte o la literatura cruzan las paredes a su antojo [The idea of physical frontiers is usually too primitive. Ideas, art and literature cross borders as they please]” (cited in Ricárdez 2008). Such notions lie at the centre of contemporary translation ethics. There is little doubt that the contemporary institutions housing translation shun the unconventional, the complex and the foreign (but *not*, one notes, the exotic). Theorists like Andrew Chesterman (1997) have claimed that, at least within the modern Western context, translation theory and practice tend to favour target-oriented norms that facilitate communication and understanding, rather than innovation and complexity. Descriptive translation theories thus reveal an unmistakable

¹² Anáhuac is a Nahuatl placename for the ancient Aztec area roughly coterminous with modern-day Mexico.

normative trend towards conformity and conservatism (cf. Toury 1995), particularly in Anglophone literary systems (cf. Venuti 1995/2008). Antoine Berman (1984), one of the first to critique the deforming, homogenizing tendencies of ‘naturalizing’ translation strategies, argued that translators too often allow their work to diverge from its “properly *ethical* aim”: that of allowing readers to receive the foreign as foreign, the Other as Other (Berman 1984/2000: 241). “The essence of translation”, Berman insisted, “is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering” (Berman 1984/1992: 4).

The notion of cross-breeding and dialogue as ethical guides is essential when we consider the interlingual translation of a distinctly postmodern writer like Fadanelli. In my own efforts to translate the already manifoldly translated space of Fadanelli’s fiction, I have attempted to engage in the same subversive process that Fadanelli himself epitomizes: intermingling traditions, multiplying voices, strewing the text with contradiction and irony. Rather than cloning Frankensteinian Fadanelli’s monstrous, mutant fiction, I aim to dismember it and create a new monster in its place. Returning to Bhabha, we see that this notion of re-creation is in fact central to his theses of third space and cultural translation. “The importance of hybridity”, he writes, “is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Bhabha 1998: 211). The kernel of insight to be extracted here is that the anxiety and uncertainty implicit in the third space – that is, in the uneasy space of Fadanelli’s fiction – does not inhibit but in fact *enables* acts of subversion and creation. The “other positions” that Bhabha mentions find their parallel in the perspectives (themselves both subversive and creative) opened up by interlingual translation. If the meanings and symbols of culture are never fixed, always hybrid, then acts of cross-cultural communication can no longer be considered as the mere relaying of a unitary and immutable reality. Rather, they become processes of Bhabhian ‘negotiation’. As Sherry Simon observes: “Instead of serving as a bridge between already given cultural entities, translation becomes an activity of cultural creation. The bridge, in other words, brings into being the realities which it links” (1996: 143). Simon’s ‘bridge’, a rather too spatial metaphor that still relies on images of binary opposition (two opposing shores), might perhaps be replaced with Bhabha’s ‘boundary’; unlike bridges, which must be burnt, boundaries can be blurred, blended, or erased altogether. Metaphorical terminology aside, however, this ambivalent border space is the site of important innovations: “The boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing” (Bhabha 1994: 5). Echoing Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator”

(1923), Bhabha argues that something as arbitrary and hybridized as culture cannot be captured – nor indeed translated – via mimesis. “The specificity of signification”, he writes, “cannot be reproduced in an imitative sense; it can only be re-presented as an iterative, re-initiation that awakens the sign (as mode of intention) to another, analogical linguistic life” (Bhabha 2009: xi). As Benjamin put it: the “original” (culture, text, signification) “can only be raised anew and at other points of time” (1968/1992: 77).

The concept of raising ‘anew’ is a recurring theme in Bhabha’s work, and one that is explored most exhaustively in a chapter of *The Location of Culture* entitled “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation”. The chapter involves a discussion of Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*, and it is from Rushdie himself that Bhabha borrows the phrase “How Newness Enters the World”. A brief glance at the words’ original context reveals a clear correspondence with Bhabha’s favoured themes of hybridity and migration:

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas [...] It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves (Rushdie 1992: 394).

Fadanelli’s writing is perhaps closer to a burlesque than a love song, but it certainly revels in its own mongrel spirit, assaulting readers with “new and unexpected combinations” of people, place and culture. Among the cultural and discursive “hotchpotch” of Mexico City, Fadanelli’s characters are continually thrown into cruel, bizarre and often repulsive scenarios. Fadanelli combines the erotic and the appalling without batting an eyelid, and constantly defies the expectations of his readers. His early short story collections, in particular, are rife with nasty surprises: “Las hijas de Pedro [Pedro’s daughters]” concludes with an interminable, graphic sex scene between a male character and two mentally disabled adolescents in his care; in “Suicidio en las calles de Tacuba [Suicide in the streets of Tacuba]”, a disgruntled office employee about to throw himself off a building is persuaded out of suicide not by some reassuring, life-affirming encounter but by the jeers and insults of impatient onlookers. Fadanelli, like the Mexico City he evokes, so thoroughly transgresses the limits of aesthetics that any attempt to confine his writing within conventional boundaries is,

at best, ethically questionable; at worst, it is doomed to inadequacy. As a translator of Fadanelli, I therefore seek to commit a new act of transgression and “violence” (to borrow Spivak and Derrida’s term), a new act of “change-by-fusion” and change-by-confusion, deliberately violating target language norms and expectations just as Fadanelli violates those of his own culture.

Gayatri Spivak is one of the most influential theorists to propose an ethics of translation along these lines. In her 1993 essay “The Politics of Translation,” Spivak foregrounds the “specificity of language” as a condition of tension and interplay – in her terms, a “jagged relationship” – that pertains between logic and rhetoric in every language. Working “in the silence between and around words” (that is, in an interstitial space), she argues that rhetoric disrupts the “logical systematicity” of language; the translator’s responsibility, then, is not to take the “safe” path of the logical (at the expense of the rhetorical) but rather to take risks, to brave the possibility of “violence to the translating medium” (Spivak 1994: 180). Drawing upon Derrida’s notion of dissemination, she writes:

[L]anguage is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a *dissemination* cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations (Spivak 1994: 180).

Translation, in other words, is a special act of reading capable of “fraying” the contained (logical) edges of language and meaning. Spivak’s “*frayages*” and “*facilitations*” are French and English translations, respectively, of the Freudian term *Bachnung* – also discussed by Derrida – which is perhaps better translated as ‘breaching’ or ‘path-breaking’. For Freud, the term related to the forging of new neurological pathways in the brain when neurone resistance was finally overcome; for Derrida, “breaching, the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path, which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached” (Derrida 1978: 200). These images help visualize what Spivak means when she refers to the “fraying” of the language-textile: translation strategies that engage with the rhetoricity of a text, that are willing to explore the “spacy emptiness” of its silences and alterity, are capable of disturbing the smooth, established patterns of target-

language poetics and thus engender new ways of perceiving and reading the world; to return to Rushdie's phrase, they bring "newness" into the world.

In an echo of Spivak's textile metaphor, Bhabha reminds us that the generative potential of the "in-between" lies in the very instability of the interstice, in the unease of the postmodern text-space; it consists in

the 'foreign' element that reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the 'unstable element of linkage', the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which 'newness comes into the world' (Bhabha 1994: 227).

Representing the "Other as Other", then, is a matter of exposing the tensions involved in the (translatory) interplay with the foreign; tensions that are brimming with productivity, creativity, potentiality. In order to take part in this violent and innovatory process, which mirrors the transgressive yet compassionately productive aesthetic of the dirty realist, the translator facilitates dialogue and cross-contamination between texts – the "opening" that Berman mentions – and descends into the hybrid site of the interstice, "a space that is ruptured and imaginatively transformed" by its subjects (Gopinath 2005: 79). The interlingual translator, in other words, also engages with the motifs of cultural translation: she, too, inhabits that anxious third space, thus suspending herself within another kind of permanent unease.

Conclusions

The remarkable translatability of the term 'translation', and the interesting ways in which its various incarnations connect across multiple fields of inquiry, reinforces just why translation studies belongs at the forefront of probing, interdisciplinary thought. The framework of cultural translation, itself a 'translated' concept that crosses the borders of cultural studies, literary studies and anthropology, provides a useful vantage point from which to observe and analyze both the context and potentiality of Fadanelli's fictional worlds. Fadanelli is at once a product and producer of that most postmodern of spaces: the infinitely translatable City, the city as fiction and dialogue, the multiplicity of places and voices that exemplifies and occupies the ungraspable space of cultural translation. Examined from this perspective, Fadanelli's writing invites novel readings of Mexico City and of urban space in general; it

allows us to imagine the city as a fractured third space of great potential, where creativity is born of chaos. When this already translated space is translated across languages, the underlying concepts are the same: from cultural translation to interlingual translation, the process is one of cross-breeding and constant, incalculable transformation, one that occurs among the interstices and suspended points of language and culture. Entwined in this process, the “permanent unease” of the translator is itself translated: into innovation, transgression, production. By harnessing the creative potential of the anxious act, the interlingual translator also becomes a cultural translator, sowing seeds of ‘newness’ in the cracks of the mosaic.

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