Translaboration: Translation and Labour

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Abstract

Translaboration, a concept derived from blending 'translation' and 'collaboration', has the concept of labour at its core. This paper investigates the dimension of labour in online collaborative translation, relates translational labour to Arendt's categories of work and action, and proceeds to broaden the discussion to the labour involved in translation more generally. It also considers what effect the application of these concepts has on the interests of translators and other stakeholders. Probing the labour of translation not only has a profound bearing on framings of both voluntary and professional translation practices, but can also reshape discussions of the translation concept as such. Rather than pitting 'work' and 'labour' as competing concepts, this paper shows that labour, work, and action all apply to translation and can be brought into productive dialogue in the translaborative space.

Key words: translaboration, (collaborative) translation, labour, work, action

1. Introduction

Translaboration, as a "blended concept" (Fauconnier and Turner 2003), brings together 'translation' and 'collaboration', two distinct concepts that, as Zwischenberger (2020) has shown, are inextricably linked with one another and share a common fate. As a performative concept, translaboration is not a fixed, static concept but an evolving one that focusses on investigating the processes emerging from the blending of 'translation' and 'collaboration'. So far, research into translaboration has focussed on the interrelatedness of 'translation' and 'collaboration' in the contexts of (online) collaborative translation and the translational dimensions of collaboration. It has also engaged with the concept of translation used in other

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disciplines, thus actively reaching beyond the disciplinary borders of Translation Studies (Alfer 2017; Zwischenberger 2020).

With this paper, we shift our focus to examine labour as a third concept emerging from blending translation and collaboration. The paper will investigate the labour/work/action dimensions of online collaborative translation, where translators mostly work on a voluntary basis, and then broaden the discussion to the labour involved in translation more generally. Probing this dimension of translation has, we will argue, not only a profound bearing on our framings of the practice of translation, but also has the potential to reshape current discussions of the translation concept as such.

Online collaborative translation is a meta-concept which has attracted much research interest in recent years (e.g. Jiménez-Crespo 2017; Zwischenberger 2021). The various types of online collaborative translation are all characterised by a division of labour based on the fragmentation of the translation process into small parts that are translated and then brought together as a whole. The entire process thus depends on the collaboration of mostly voluntary translators. Translation crowdsourcing is employed by for-profit companies like Facebook or Skype, where voluntary and thus non-remunerated translator-users are utilised, and, more recently, also by the translation industry and platforms like Smartling, Gengo or Translated.com, who pay their translators far below market rates. Translation crowdsourcing is also used by non-profit organizations like TED or Kiva, using voluntary translators. In addition to these solicited forms of online collaborative translation, there are also unsolicited ones, such as Wikipedia translation. The various types of online fan translations (fansubbing, fandubbing, scanlation and translation hacking of video games) also belong to the broad realm of online collaborative translation.

Despite the wide use of the term 'collaboration' in Translation Studies, it is often used as a mere buzzword, or in its everyday sense of "working together", and much of the respective literature features dictionary definitions rather than an engagement with collaboration as an academic concept. By undertaking detailed conceptual work, however, one uncovers a whole network of concepts that are related to a given core concept. As a result, one also develops a new language for speaking in a more nuanced way about, and ultimately advancing, both one's own research and the discipline in which it is situated (Zwischenberger 2022).

A rich body of literature on 'collaboration' can be found in Organisation Studies, although in the more than thirty years since the publication of Gray's (1989) seminal work

that laid the foundations for a theory of collaboration, no uniform definition of collaboration has emerged. There is consensus regarding the basic constituents of collaboration though. Collaboration is an interaction that takes place between at least two people or organizations and involves, among other things, shared resources and the diverse perspectives stakeholders bring to the table, which, in their confluence, "lead to the creation of something greater than any one individual could produce on their own" (Mayer and Kenter 2015, 48). These components also appear in the pioneering definition of 'collaboration' by Gray (1989, 5): "Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible." Thus, depending on the amount of perspectives and shared resources, the final product, solution, or outcome is characterized by a high degree of hybridity and diversity. This high degree of hybridity and diversity is a particularly prominent characteristic of online collaborative translation, and specifically translation crowdsourcing, where hundreds or even thousands of translators contribute individual portions of translated material to, for example, the interfaces of Facebook or Twitter. This clearly also points towards the decidedly transcultural nature of collaboration, and specifically (online) collaborative translation, as prototypical transcultural communication where something new is generated as the result of a multitude of entangled visions and resources (Welsch 1999).

The transcultural dimension of collaboration is reinforced by the prefix "trans-" in translaboration (Zwischenberger 2020). It designates not only the confluence of multiple voices and visions, for which Alfer (2017) explicitly references the "third space" category as an experimental space where translation and collaboration are brought into an open conceptual play with one another (Alfer 2017, 285-286); it also stands for something that reaches or is brought across in the process of conceptual blending – something that is, in other words, *trans*lated.

It is the *labour* of the translated, a topic and concept so far largely ignored in Translation Studies, which will be put centre stage in this paper.

2. Labour and Work

English grants the possibility of distinguishing between "labour" and "work", even though this conceptual distinction is rarely made in everyday usage, where work and labour largely overlap. The possibility per se, however, does exist, while in many other European languages

it does not. In German, "Arbeit" is used as the general term. The same applies to French with "travail", Spanish with "trabajo", or Italian with "lavoro".

The conceptual distinction between work and labour in English broadly defines labour as human effort involved and intertwined with capitalist relations of production, while work describes the rest of human energy expenditure taking place in non-capitalist realms, whether these be reproductive tasks that may be subsumed under the category of care or all sorts of (creative) activities that are performed during leisure time. Work in this scheme is usually associated with unwaged efforts of a communal, volunteer and/or affective nature (Narotzky 2018, 31-32).

2.1 The roots of the differentiation between labour and work and their connotations

The fundamental differentiation between work and labour can be traced back to the Ancient Greek differentiation between the two concepts of *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Poiesis* stands for production and making. Slaves were involved in *poiesis* and had to work hard for others while being completely unfree in their existence. *Praxis* was reserved for the free Greek citizen. Being a full Greek citizen meant participating in philosophy and politics and thus in *praxis*, while engaging in non-slave labour or *poiesis* was equally if not more contemptible than the labour performed by slaves. The Ancient Romans had an equally strong contempt for wage-labour. Both classical and medieval Latin distinguish between *labore*, with its negative connotations of toil, exertion, distress and trouble, and *industria* with mainly positive connotations such as diligence, assiduity and positive effort. The English term *labour* assumed many of these negative connotations of toil and pain but was not associated with value generation (Theocarakis 2010, 8-10). Deriving directly from the French *labour* according to Williams (1983, 176-178) and his *Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, it first appeared in the English language around 1300. The term *work*, by contrast, derives from Old English "weorc" and denotes the broad notion of doing something (Williams 1983, 334).

It was only in 13th-century Scholastic economic thought that labour began to be seen as a possible explanation for value generation. Christian theologians attributed moral value to (manual) labour and thus heightened its status. Labour as a determinant for value then had a breakthrough in the 17th century with, according to Marx, William Petty's input-based theory of value and the beginnings of Classical Political Economy (Theocarakis 2010, 11-12).

2.2 The Marxist perspective: The labour theory of value

According to Fuchs and Sevignani (2013, 274), Marx, in his labour theory of value and occasionally in the *Manuscripts*, distinguishes between "Arbeit" and "Werktätigkeit" and views "Werktätigkeit" as "an anthropological feature of all society and therefore characterizes human being as […] working species being" (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 276). While the term "Werktätigkeit" is rarely used in German today, its associated verb "werken" still is. While the etymological roots of "Arbeit" are in the Germanic term "arba", which meant slave, "Werk" derives from the Indo-European term "uerg", meaning doing, acting. Both "Werk" and "werken" in German connote creative, artisan and also artistic work. In fact, both Austria and Germany have a school subject called "Werken", in which primary and secondary pupils are supposed to foster their creative talents and approaches to problem solving (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 275-277).

On a translation note, it is interesting to note that Marx's distinction between "Arbeit" and "Werktätigkeit" has not been consistently retained in the English translations of his works, with a clear leaning towards universal use of the term "labour" (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013), presumably to present a more coherent and consistent idea of Marx's notion of "Arbeit" that is more in tune with his labour theory of value and the notion that labour is productive in the sense that it generates surplus-value that can be exploited for capital accumulation.

From a Marxist perspective, labour produces surplus-value resulting from surplus-labour, i.e. effort expenditure that goes beyond the time necessary to satisfy basic human needs and/or the production of the labourer's means of subsistence. Labour is appropriated and owned by a dominant class that exploits labour's creation of surplus. Labour, thus, creates alien property. In capitalist societies, property is dependent on alien labour where the labourer has no control over the product of their labour or the circumstances of production. Labour, thus, is productive in as much as it produces capital and/or surplus-value for the capitalist (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 244-246).

Work, by contrast, is not associated with the creation of surplus-value or profit, coercion or competition. It creates use-values that are socially necessary. Work is about the social life and social cohesion. It is also about self-realization. Work "constitutes humans' metabolic relation with nature for satisfying human needs" (Lund 2015, 66).

2.3 Two alternative and philosophical perspectives

A more philosophical differentiation between labour and work that also gives consideration to the fact that work and labour often overlap and that the term 'work', at least in everyday parlance, is also commonly used for waged efforts is the one provided by Management and Organisation studies scholar Nancy Harding (2013). Harding centrally draws on the work of Judith Butler (2009) and vividly argues in favour of differentiating between work and labour. While labour stands, according to Harding (2013), for the task of 'merely' doing a job that is repetitive, monotonous, and involves toil and pain, work grants individuals the possibility of developing, actualising, or realising a self: "the desire for *work* is a desire to construct the 'me' I wish to be" (Harding 2013, 15; emphasis in original). This possibility may be found in both waged and unwaged human effort and energy expenditure.

In relation to labour, by contrast, Harding (2013) introduces the image of the 'zombie-machine':

> I am using the term "zombie-machine" as shorthand to capture that form of the self which organizations seem to prefer in their employees: devoted to the work, devoid of any objectives or pleasures save those which relate to the organization's purpose and little more than extensions of organizational technologies – that is, computerized machines made out of human flesh but without any desire for agency save that which is required to fulfil organizational objectives. (Harding 2013, 5-6)

The zombie-machine prevents individuals from becoming the selves that they wish to be and makes them feel less than human. On the question of what is human, Harding (2013, 25) refers to Butler (2009), according to whom the human who is denied their humanness is akin to a piece of gravel – an inanimate, anonymous object that others simply tread on. Thus, being human requires recognition: "To recognise and to be recognised is to give and receive acknowledgement that one is human; failure to do so renders one abject. […] That is, in seeing people's faces we accord them recognition that they are human" (Harding 2013, 29-30). Labour negates faces, inasmuch as a machine-like individual who just performs a job is easily replaceable; work, by contrast, gives an opportunity to create a self that is human and does something meaning- and impactful. If the self cannot develop and blossom in people's everyday, regular jobs, they will search for something in their lives outside of their waged employment where they can create the self they want to be. This may explain why people

engage in activities such as online collaborative translations, where they may feel able to make a (social) impact (Fayard 2021).

As Fayard (2021) points out, Harding's (2013) differentiation between work and labour is similar to Arendt's, although Harding (2013) does not refer to Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958/1998). To Arendt, labour corresponds to the practices necessary for maintaining life and is close to the natural world. Labour produces products for immediate consumption in order to sustain life. It leaves no durable goods and thus no traces. What is produced is almost immediately consumed (Arendt 1958/1998, 87). As such, labour is a necessary evil that is never-ending. It is monotonous and meaningless as it repeats itself over and over again. Arendt (1958/1998) also frequently refers to Antiquity and in particular to Greek notions of labour as associated with toil and pain and the non-freedom of people, who tried to divest themselves of the burden of labour via the institution of slavery (see section 2.1). Referring to Marx, Arendt (1958/1998, 93) points out that, in the modern age, labour has been elevated by the discovery of its "productivity", which "resides in the potential surplus inherent in human labor power." Work, on the other hand, creates works belonging to an artificial world that, as in architecture, will last beyond their creation. Work, thus, has durability and sustainability, and while labour is never-ending, work is a means to an end, a purposeful activity associated with humanization and liberation. Arendt (1958/1998) thus consistently distinguishes between "animal laborans" and "homo faber". However, work and labour are not the only relevant categories here. The *vita activa*, according to Arendt (1958/1998), also comprises a third category, namely that of 'action' (Arendt 1958/1998, 175ff.)

Action, to Arendt, is the highest form of activity. It stands above work in terms of its potential for self-expression. It is entirely performative in so far as to act means to take an initiative or to begin something new. It is in action that people really fulfil and express their uniqueness, and it is in the instance of initiating something that humans really become human and also free. Action is closely intertwined with speech in this respect:

> Through [both speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human." (Arendt 1958/1998, 176).

Action thus cannot happen in isolation but needs the other and the togetherness of people. However, while Arendt (1958/1998) praises action, she also warns of its dangers, which lie in the unpredictability of action and the lack of control over its consequences.

3. Online collaborative translation as labour, work, or action?

The question of "labour", "work", and "action" in the realm of online collaborative translation becomes most obviously pressing in the context of translations performed for for-profit social media companies like Facebook or Twitter, for which thousands of volunteers translate in their spare time and without remuneration yet seem perfectly fine with this arrangement, as shown by studies into their motivation. They see their activities as a hobby and as a way of meaningfully contributing to and interacting with their communities. (Dombek 2014).

Since the advent of Web 2.0 and its associated possibilities of interaction, user participation in content creation, and the emergence of social media platforms, a consistent blurring of the lines between play and labour can be observed in the digital space.

Basically, there are two camps in the research into user activities on social media and online content creation in general when it comes to the classification of these activities as either something positive, democratizing and creative, or as something that is productive and thus exploitable by capitalist interests. The first camp is characterised by its celebratory accounts and approaches to user-generated content and user engagement:

> Instead of speaking of digital labour they use other concepts such as peer production, prosumption, produsage, and crowdsourcing. This makes it difficult to differentiate, even at the most basic political-economic level, between digital practices where user cooperation and collaboration is being exploited for private profits (e.g. Google, Facebook) and activities that are instead focused at building a real commons-based society (e.g. Wikipedia). (Allmer, Sevignani, and Prodnik 2015, 153-154)

This first camp emphasizes the empowering effects of participation of ordinary users, who can creatively realize themselves over the Web and also do something good for their communities, which strengthens both themselves and their community. The wisdom of the

crowd can be tapped for the benefit of society at large. The representatives of this camp do not conceptualize the activities performed by users as in any way intertwined with capitalist interests. Rather, they effectively advocate viewing these activities as falling under the category of "work".

The second camp advocates for theorizing social media users as labourers (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013; Fisher and Fuchs 2015; Fuchs 2018). They argue against the notion of social media companies as simple renters of advertising space and of social media users merely as users of a free service. Social media exploit user data as a commodity that is not simply rented out. A usual rented out good, like a picture or a house, does not need constant production and reproduction. Facebook, like many other social media platforms, depends on targeted advertising for its profit generation. It depends on the amount of time users spent on its platform. The more profile, browsing, communication-behavioural and content data users generate, the better for the social media company and their sales of user data for targeted online advertising (Fuchs 2018). This is even more true for users that do not just spend time on Facebook as regular users but also translate the interfaces of Facebook or Twitter for free – a service for which the companies would have, and could afford, to pay if there were no willing volunteers.

Social media companies, however, obscure this via their rhetoric of presenting themselves as a gift to users instead. Translating for free is presented as something from which only the community benefits, according to Facebook's Terms Applicable to Translate Facebook: "You understand that your participation in the Project is for the benefit of the Facebook user community as it will allow users whose participation is currently limited by language to more fully participate" (Facebook 2009).

Regular social media users create two use-values, of which one is a commodity that, according to Fuchs (2018, 682), can be sold. The first use-value consists in the creation of data that is sold as a commodity and transformed into exchange-value, while the second use-value consists in the generation of social relations and affects. Both use-values are interdependent and prominently supported and reinforced by translation crowdsourcing. Via translation crowdsourcing of the interfaces of social media, additional data is generated through the translators' activities. Furthermore, translated interfaces ensure that more people have access to social media platforms, resulting in even more user data being available for sale to advertising companies.

When translating collaboratively, the second use-value of affects and social relations plays an important role and is actively supported by social media companies such as

Facebook or Twitter to keep translators highly motivated. Social media work with strings as their unit of translation. A string usually consists of a word, a phrase or, at maximum, a sentence or two. Their translations are then voted on by users. Furthermore, social media also work with leaderboards and rankings in order to showcase the most active translators, who are then awarded badges with names and user photos attached (Dombek 2014; Wetzel 2013). Translation, thus, is presented as a competitive and fun game, in which translators constantly produce affects and social relations with their translations and votes.

The involvement of machine translation in translation for social-media platforms is also worth mentioning in this context. Twitter has cooperated with Google and Microsoft for the translation of tweets since 2017. Facebook fully switched to neural machine translation for translating posts and comments in 2017. Users, thus, also help improve machine translations with their hidden labour coded into corpora. Social media are therefore not just a playground for translation crowdsourcing initiatives but also for machine translation and NMT learning.

For all these reasons, translating for social media can definitely be considered productive labour that produces a considerable amount of additional surplus-value over and above the surplus-value already produced by regular social media use. It is highly productive labour that is exploited for profit accumulation, even if it may not feel like labour to the user-translators since social media companies make sure the translations look like a gift the translators make to their community and also to themselves.

Not all unpaid translation crowdsourcing is, however, as easily classified as labour. Translation crowdsourcing for a non-profit or even humanitarian organization like TED or Translators without Borders may, conventionally, not be seen as labour, although recent research by Piróth and Baker (2020) has shown that the humanitarian rhetoric of Translators without Borders hides underlying corporate activities. As an offshoot of the commercial translation agency Eurotexte, Translators without Borders is highly intertwined with the corporate world, and Piróth and Baker (2020) have shown how long-term language assets created by an unpaid crowd are subsequently used for corporate purposes.

While translation crowdsourcing is actively sought by organizations and companies via a call, online collaborative fan translations are unsolicited and self-managed by a community. Strictly speaking, all online collaborative fan translations are unauthorized and illegal but production companies do not pursue legal actions, and with good reason.

Fan activities are frequently presented as frivolous, a mere pastime, not to be taken seriously (the term 'fan' derives, after all, from the Latin *fanaticus* (De Kosnik 2013, 98)). According to De Kosnik (2013), however, all such fan activities should be regarded as productive labour since they all constitute (albeit unauthorized) marketing for a wide variety of products. Thus, the translational labour involved in subtitling or dubbing a movie or series well in advance of its official launch in a given country helps heighten its popularity and profile and thus helps generate revenue. The same applies to the translation hacking of video games or the scanlations of comics. Therefore, this kind of fan labour is anything but an activity to be dismissed as a mere hobby; rather, it ultimately represents an important link in the chain of surplus-value generation.

The situation is somewhat different with Wikipedia-translations. These are not translations in the traditional sense of being based on source text material, but rather constitute a hybrid between translated elements and original target-language content, additions and edits (Jones 2018). The translations undertaken collaboratively for Wikipedia may indeed be seen as work, contributing as they do to a commons-based undertaking situated outside of capitalist property relations, owned by all, and open to everyone wishing to contribute.

What nevertheless unites all of these types of online collaborative translation is that individuals participating in these mostly voluntary translation activities can be said to seek and derive the benefits of 'work' from their involvement. Participation offers them a space for self-actualization or self-realization where they can become and ultimately be the selves that they desire to be (Harding 2013). This space is often constructed as a playful one, replicating features of a game such as voting, leaderboards, and badges. It thus generates affective engagement, which may well produce a liberating effect for participants. What is more, participants in these various online collaborative translation initiatives have a chance to do something that they see as meaning- and thus purposeful for themselves but also for others. (Arendt 1958/1998).

This is borne out by several studies into the motivation of voluntary translators participating in various types of online collaborative translations. These voluntary translators want to work because they desire to have relevance and make a social impact, and this applies to both profit-oriented and not-for-profit initiatives.

The vast majority of these voluntary translators are motivated by intrinsic motives as shown by a survey conducted among 75 respondents taking part in the translation of

Wikipedia content into English (McDonough Dolmaya 2012). They are primarily motivated by making information available outside the source-language community, engaging in intellectually stimulating work, practising their translation skills, and supporting the organisation – Wikipedia – behind the initiative (McDonough Dolmaya 2012, 187). TED-translators are motivated by very similar and also mostly intrinsic reasons, such as enabling others to benefit from TED and the sharing of ideas. A third factor for motivation falls under the category of 'impure altruism', i.e. the feel-good factor that voluntary translators derive from helping others and which, in turn, motivates them further. Being part of a community was also cited as a motivator for TED-translators (Olohan 2014, 25-26). Very similar and mostly intrinsic motivators were found by Dombek (2014), who, in her comprehensive study of Polish Facebook translators, focussed on the issue of motivation. Doing something beneficial for the Polish language community who do not know English but want to use Facebook, improving one's own English and translation skills, promoting the Polish language globally, as well as the translation initiative simply being a source of satisfaction were the reasons for participating that scored highest (Dombek 2014, 204-205). Again this shows that the voluntary translators want to have an impact by doing something that is meaningful in their eyes. Facebook's leaderboards, as mentioned above, foster similar sentiments by actively showcasing the humans behind its translations.

While Facebook is an example of translation crowdsourcing where a corporate entity has set up a translation platform and App, launches a call for translation, and manages the entire translation process, other online collaboration translation efforts are self-managed and unsolicited. With the various forms of online fan translations or in Wikipedia-translation, the voluntary translators themselves initiate and set up everything. These self-managed and unsolicited types of translation may be conceptualized as 'action' in Arendt's (1958/1998) sense. While work and labour do not necessarily need a public, action as self-expression is wholly dependent on the other, on togetherness, and on communication. Online fan translations in particular involve communities with a great sense of "we as a community" and a lot of communication that goes far beyond translation issues, involving opportunities for talking about private and even intimate matters in fora, as shown by Li's (2017) study on the Chinese fansubbing group *The Last Fantasy (TLF)*. Voluntary translators in these initiatives undoubtedly have an opportunity for self-revelation (Arendt 1958/1998, 175ff.).

Ultimately, however, few, if any, online spaces can be said to be completely free from, or operate entirely outside of, systems of capital(ist) interest. Among the 2019 "major

benefactors" to the Wikimedia Foundation, the "nonprofit that hosts Wikipedia and […] other free knowledge projects" (Wikimedia Foundation, no date), are Google, Apple, and Microsoft, who all contributed undisclosed amounts to the foundation via their Matching Gift programmes. Several other major players in the banking, social media, and computing industries are listed as "Patron Donors ($15,000 – $49,999)" or "Leading Donors ($5,000 – $14,999)" on the Foundation's website (Wikimedia Foundation, no date). Thus, the question Fayard poses in relation to the voluntary work performed for/on OpenIDEO, "a crowdsourcing platform for social innovation […] with more than 100,000 members located in 100-plus countries" and "[s]pearheaded by IDEO, a globally recognized design and innovation consultancy" (Fayard 2021, 213), clearly applies more broadly to a wide range of commons-based efforts on the part of individuals volunteering their time and expertise to these projects: "How to reconcile or at least juxtapose work as an activity conducted outside of a profit-motivated relationship (for the participants) and the output, which produces value, if not profit, for sponsors?" (216).

Conceptualising all forms of online collaborative translation as labour, i.e. not as a capital-neutral effort on the part of individuals for their own gratification or the benefit of their communities, but as an activity structurally embedded in capitalist chains of surplus-value production should not only help to investigate these phenomena more closely from a socioeconomic perspective, but also, and importantly, articulates the ways in which work and labour are enmeshed to create idealised narratives of action that foreground the processes of work to mask the labour involved in producing outputs whose value is, quietly or overtly, appropriated by those with a stake in the means of their production. Here, too, transculturality comes into play, albeit as the site of an often unarticulated and certainly unresolved tension between two competing *and* converging cultural narratives that pivot on conceptions of value as, on the one hand, inextricably bound to and, on the other, posited firmly "outside of a profit-motivated relationship".

4. Translation as Labour

While the willingness of participants in various online platforms, including those for online translation, to be exploited because they enjoy the activity poses particularly obvious and pressing questions in relation to the unarticulated dimension of labour in translation, there is, we argue, value in also probing translation as such in terms of its conceptual ties to 'labour',

'work', and 'action'. Translation, whether it is undertaken in virtual or physical spaces, collaboratively or in loser constellations of stakeholder-agents, clearly bears several of the hallmarks of 'work' – perhaps, certainly in its enunciative particularity, even 'action' in Arendt's sense. It is, as not least Nord (1997) has reminded us, a purposeful and profoundly communicative activity, creates socially operative artefacts that outlast the process of their creation, and is seen by many practitioners as characterised by a relatively high degree of self-determination and as holding at least the potential for self-actualisation or self-realisation. In Katan's 2008 survey of 890 professional translators and interpreters, translation and interpreter trainers, and their students, over 50% of respondents, for example, feel they "are the specialists who alone can decide and realize the final product" (Katan 2011, 74) and enjoy a high degree of professional autonomy, defined as the "degree of control over [their] own work, and also the degree of control over the work of others" (73) as well as as "the exercise of autonomous thought and judgement, and responsibility to clients and wider society" (Lester 2009, 2, qtd. in Katan 2011, 73). Roughly 77% report "pretty" or "extremely" high levels of personal satisfaction with their work compared to their initial expectations (Katan 2011, 82-83). They thus emphatically do not view their efforts as monotonous, meaningless or endlessly repetitive, nor themselves as "zombie-machines" in Harding's sense (2013, 5).

Nevertheless, the same respondents painting this rather rosy picture of the translator as artisan worker – "a standard trope" as Cronin (2017, 118) notes – are, in Katan's words, also "acutely aware of unfair treatment in the workplace, of their lack of visibility and status" (2011, 82). One respondent quoted by Katan sums up this somewhat paradoxical state of affairs as follows:

> 'It was the best job in the world, it was the worst job in the world', … and you never get to a point where you can say This is it, or I'm it. You're learning something new every day, and contributing to nothing else than the history of world literature, which is a history of translations…In return for all this, you get little money, little respect, many humiliations, and the occasional Thank you. Which makes it all worth the effort. (Katan 2011, 83)

Dam and Korning Zethsen (2010), who surveyed 244 company, agency, and freelance translators in the Danish market on their perception on translators' occupational status, cite one of their respondents making a similar point: "Considering the low external status it is

necessary that translation provides inner satisfaction" (204). Such statements are, on the one hand, clearly indicative of translation being experienced as satisfying, meaningful, and humanising work, but they also speak of a profound internalisation on the translator's part of a narrative that foregrounds work and its emotional and social rewards while strategically masking the dimension of labour operative in producing translations whose exchange-value is appropriated by those holding substantial stakes in the means of a translation's production – resulting in what Katan (2011, 84), following Simeoni (1998) aptly terms the "voluntary servitude" that characterises translators' professional habitus.

Surveys of this kind are often framed in terms of furthering the cause of translators' status advancement and usually centre on efforts to achieve, or at least scope the possibility of, translation's "transformation [from] an occupation into a profession" (Katan 2011, 84). A usefully balanced overview of the debate is provided by Kujamäki (2021, n.p.), who not only spells out the "apparent contradiction" in the depiction of translation as "both a professional service and as a poorly paid occupation", but also examines the debates through the specific lense of professional service provision. She concludes that the translation industry represents "a sector with a substantial internal variation in terms of dimension related to professional service". A decade earlier, Katan (2011, 84), had reached similar conclusions and ultimately professed himself happy enough "not to attempt to change [the] reality" of "the clearly entrenched (and satisfied) LAP [lower autonomy professional] world of the translator", arguing instead for "a new broader HAP [higher autonomy professional] role [to] be carved out" for the select few. Among these, Katan counts "interpreters" (though interpreters themselves may well argue with their default HAP designation here, given that they often find themselves fighting the same battles as translators for recognition, status, decent working conditions, and adequate remuneration), as well as what Katan rather nebulously describes as "the relatively few […] translators who have a HAP status" and "those who, for example, are recognized as Language Providers, Localizers or Cultural Interpreters". All other translational activity, meanwhile, is envisaged to "remain a text-centered LAP occupation" (84). Bad luck, voluntary serfs.

Dam and Korning Zethsen (2010, 208), by contrast, are explicitly invested in "win[ning] the battle for recognition" of translation as an "emerging profession" and see their research into the social and economic status of translators as contributing to removing the barriers "to full professionalization" that are so far proving "highly detrimental to translator status".

Laudable as such efforts may seem, the routine framing of such studies in terms of the occupation/profession binary ultimately perpetuates rather than counters a narrative about translation that foregrounds work (and both the processes and the products of this works as potential sites of action) at the expense of labour. The attempt to elevate the translator's social and economic standing within capitalist economies from mere labourer to self-determined worker not only precludes an examination of the structural embeddedness of the labour of translation in capitalist chains of surplus-value production, but also consolidates the very structural inequalities it purportedly sets out to overcome. Homing in on, rather than obscuring, the notion of labour in relation to translation should, by contrast, help "us to start rethinking our knowledge on translation as a cultural *and* socioeconomic category" (Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell 2017, 193; emphasis in original).

There is, thus, a wider case to be made for interrogating translation in all its forms as labour, and to complement perfectly valid and valuable conceptions of translation as work as well as a view of translation as, ideally, a site of action, by shining a spotlight on the surplus-value that is inherent in translation as the commodifiable expansion of a source text. Such a focus on the labour of translation first of all underscores the by now widely documented and recognised "ambiguous and unfavourable legal status of translation, both in copyright law and in actual contractual arrangements" (Venuti 2008, 8) that, in very concrete terms, diverts both tradable value and, ultimately, the profits drawn from translational labour away from the translator, who, as Venuti (2008, 9) notes, is, as a result, "alienate[d] from the product of his or her labor with remarkable finality". More broadly, interrogating all translation as labour foregrounds translation as a practice of, and bounded by, commerce, and counters the notion of translation as a secondary activity that cannot but bring forth mere copies of a source posited as primary.

Translation is labour, first of all, in as much as it is a prime instance of Marx's category of objectified labour: an "alteration in the object of labour which was intended from the outset" but in which "[t]he process is extinguished in the product" (Marx [1867] 1990, 287) – that is, "labour which has been congealed in an object […] which has become material" (Marx [1844] 2007, 69). Translation's objectified labour is conceptually also closely allied to what Ertürk and Serin (2016, 3), following Benjamin ([1916] 1996), call "the bourgeois conception of translation", which

abstracts from the source text a universalized or universalizable conceptual content and understands any given product of translation as an instance of such abstraction. As such, it recapitulates the governing logic of the commodity form, which establishes the relation between the universal and the particular as a relationship of essential identity. (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3-4)

Against such "logic of the commodity form", Ertürk and Serin (2016, 3) propose, again with clear echoes of Benjamin ([1921] 1996), a conception of translation "as an event of iteration that is requested and anticipated by the 'original' […] itself", rather than "as mere derivation" or "as the reproduction at a distance of an abstract content of communication that was always identical to itself" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3).

Conceiving of translation as labour on the grounds of the commodification of its objectified processes and alienated products is arguably more intuitive than the proposition to view translation as labour on account of its being singularly productive rather than re-productive. This certainly remains the case as long as the labour concept is defined as, and indeed relegated to, the monotonous, meaningless, and repetitive efforts of "zombie-machines" (Harding 2013). For scholars like Ertürk and Serin, however, it is precisely a derivative and repetitive view of translation that fosters and perpetuates a bourgeois conception of translation that "recapitulates" rather than challenges "the governing logic of the commodity form" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3) on which capitalist chains of surplus-value production rest. Recognising and indeed foregrounding translation as productive labour, by contrast, would enable both Translation Studies and its neighbouring disciplines to interrogate translation as a socioeconomic category (and one that also harbours the potential for considerable socioeconomic loss in the case of bad translations) and acknowledge it as an anything but capital-neutral practice centrally characterised by its production of commodities that function (or malfunction, as the case may be) both as consumables and as catalysts of commercial, cultural, disciplinary, social or political value-accumulation.

5. **Translational Labour and the Translation Concept**

Arguments advocating for a view of translation as a productive practice are, of course, not new, nor has their binary productive/reproductive framing gone uncontested (Blumczynski and Hassani 2019). Particularly in his early work, Venuti, for one, explicitly links these

arguments to a conception of translation as labour, where the dimension of labour is specifically rooted in "the transformative process of translation" whose social determinants, "while external to the translated text, are inscribed in its materiality" (Venuti 1986, 185). Venuti proposes a conceptualisation of translation as a socially determined and essentially productive practice that he defines, with Althusser, as

> any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labor, using determinate means (of "production"). In any practice thus conceived, the determinant moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the labor of transformation itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means. (Althusser 1977, 166, qtd. in Venuti 1986, 186)

Conceiving of the productive process as pivoting on "the moment of the labor of transformation" serves Venuti with a conceptual constellation that is well-suited to exploring not only the socioeconomic boundedness of translation – translation as "the methodically organized employment of determinate means of production within the framework of determinate relations of production" (Althusser 1977, 167, qtd. in Venuti 1986, 186) – but also the very nature of translation as a productively transformative practice. This, in turn, furnishes us with a notion of translational labour that allows work, as the site of transformative actualisiation, and action, as the site of communicative disclosure of the irreducibly particular, to rejoin labour as constitutive dimensions of translation. Such trivalence also helps overcome the occupation/profession binary that was shown above to obscure rather than ameliorate the structural inequalities resulting from translation's embeddedness in capitalist chains of surplus value production, challenges a bourgeois conception of translation that "recapitulates" rather than contests "the governing logic of the commodity form" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 4), and has a bearing on the translation concept itself.

The question of what translation is in the first place has garnered growing attention in recent decades, largely though not exclusively as a result of the increasingly "broad use of the concept of translation" in Cultural Studies and other Humanities and Social Science disciplines, where much of the conceptual capital ascribed to a broadened translation concept rests on it being "separated from 'real' translation" (Nergaard and Arduini 2011, 8).

Interestingly in our context, the resulting debates often deploy a binary framing that bears a striking structural resemblance to the occupation/profession, reproductive/productive, and indeed the work/labour binaries referenced above.

A case in point is the widely cited 2009 special issue of *Translation Studies*, edited by Doris Bachmann-Medick, in which contributors set out to investigate the 'translational turn' in Cultural Studies and the wider Humanities and Social Sciences. It set in motion an intense debate about what we mean when we talk about translation that tends to play out between 'translation proper' in Jakobson's (1959) sense, and a more broadly and largely metaphorically conceived 'translation category'. In the discourses on 'cultural translation' in particular, 'translation proper' typically features narrowly as a largely mechanical practice bounded by what Bachmann-Medick (2013, 187) calls "the familiar categories of text-related translation", namely "notions of the original, equivalence, and faithfulness". While such a conception of translation is more commonly, and regrettably persistently, found in the various professional associations' public-facing narratives on translation and interpreting, the proponents of 'cultural translation' habitually ascribe it to a (largely undefined) category referred to as "traditional translation studies" (e.g. Buden 2008; Nergaard and Arduini 2011) – a category Fuchs (2009, 21; emphases in original), too, seems to have in mind when he characterises "debates on translation" as having been, "for a long time", primarily preoccupied with

> "*what* is transmitted and how transmission affects what is being transmitted (meanings, contents), as well as [with] the (usually two) *contexts* of the production and reproduction of meanings, usually taken as distinct and separate – as source and target contexts respectively" (22).

The "extended concept of translation" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 175) championed by the majority of contributors to Bachmann-Medick's special issue, meanwhile, sees translation as "increasingly liberated from the linguistic textual paradigm and recognized as an essential practice" (ibid.) capable of opening up "new analytical categor[ies] and ... new categor[ies] of action itself" (Bachmann-Medick 2009, 3).

The structural continuities between these characterisations of 'translation proper' (and Translation Studies) and Harding's "zombie-machine" (2013, 5), Katan's (2011, 84) "LAP world of the translator", and "the governing logic of the commodity form" of Ertürk and Serin's (2016, 4) "bourgeois conception of translation" are evident enough. They are, however, as detrimental to the project of expanding and refining the translation concept as the politically and socioeconomically unexamined efforts to elevate translation from a labouring

occupation to professional work are to translators. Similarly, the "liberated" and "extended concept of translation" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 175), its elevation to "an essential practice", a "new analytical category and ... new category of action itself" (Bachmann-Medick 2009, 3), ultimately reinforces, just as the idealised narratives of translational action discussed above, the tension between two competing yet conflated narratives, whether they pivot on competing conceptions of value or on competing claims to ownership of the translation concept.

By contrast, a conception of translation as a (textual) "labor of transformation" (Althusser 1977, 166) that activates and intersects with the work of translation and its potential for enunciative action would allow a more meaningful re-probing of the translation concept, as well as a "rethink [of] our knowledge on translation as a cultural *and* socioeconomic category" (Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell 2017, 193; emphasis in original). This, however, requires a collaborative, transdisciplinary, transcultural, and indeed translaborative effort, drawing on shared rather than competitively guarded resources and perspectives to "lead to the creation of something greater than any one individual could produce on their own" (Mayer and Kenter 2015, 48). Expanding the translation concept could thus itself be envisaged as a productively transformative labour and indeed "as an event of iteration that is requested and anticipated by the 'original' […] itself" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3).

6. Conclusion

Both work and labour, as well as at least the potential for action in Arendt's sense, are fundamental dimensions of translation. Participants in the various forms of online collaborative translation consistently report deriving personal satisfaction and a sense of self-actualisation from their engagement with both for-profit and not-for-profit volunteer translation initiatives and clearly perceive their efforts in these contexts as meaningful, purposeful, and impactful at both an individual and a societal level. Where companies and organisations stand to profit, directly or indirectly, from these efforts, they are frequently taking active steps to reinforce a framing of translation crowdsourcing activities as work to sustain, successfully so, participants' motivation and engagement. The situation is remarkably similar in the professional world, where translators can be seen to be firmly invested in the "inner satisfaction" (Dam and Korning Zethsen 2010, 204) derived from the

intellectual challenges of translation, as well as in their sense of contributing to a common good. As professional translators, they are, perhaps predictably, more explicitly aware than their online volunteer counterparts of the economically exploitative structures of the translation markets they operate in, but they cite personal satisfaction and the deeply felt meaningfulness of their work as offsetting low status, low pay, and contractual disenfranchisement. There is no doubt that these sentiments around the work of translation are valid and sincerely held. Translation as an activity is not a meaninglessly repetitive churning process but a complex intellectual operation that grants translators a high degree of control and self-determination over their work.

As persistent narratives around 'faithfulness' and 'equivalence' in the professional translation realm attest, however, "zombie-machine" (Harding 2013) notions of translation are alive and well not only in Cultural Studies' efforts to forge an "extended concept of translation" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 175) out of the embers of 'traditional' Translation Studies. They are also remarkably common in practitioner, professional association, and industry discourses that, often in the same breath, cast translation as work precisely to offset the less palatable "mere derivation" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3) connotations of translational labour.

Inserting explicit discussions, and further empirical and conceptual research, about translational labour into both professional and academic discourses on the practices, products, and concepts of translation is, we contend, an urgent task. It will, for one thing, allow us to articulate flows of translational capital and value accumulation, and challenge exploitative practices in translation markets, whether these are configured as online or as physical spaces. This should, in turn, empower both voluntary and professional translators, and their representatives, to develop alternatives to the "voluntary servitude" (Katan 2011, 84) narrative that entrenches rather ameliorates their "alienat[ion] from the product of [their] labor" (Venuti 2008, 9). At a conceptual level, foregrounding labour as a fundamental dimension of translation redresses an imbalance in academic debates that have tended to neglect the socioeconomic over the cultural and linguistic dimensions of translation, thus, wittingly or unwittingly, perpetuating a "governing logic of the commodity form" (Ertürk and Serin 2016, 3) that reduces translation to little more than an act of mechanical transposition and (erroneously, in our view) locates translation as a "category of action" (Bachmann-Medick 2009, 3) outside of the realm of translation proper.

From a translaborative perspective, the focus on translational labour emerging from translaboration's blended origins not only highlights the necessarily collaborative and

transdisciplinary effort required to further probe both translation's socioeconomic realities and its conceptual possibilities, but also provides a frame within which to explore translational labour, work, and action as distinct yet intimately intertwined constitutive dimensions of translation.

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