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The Affordances of the Translator

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Abstract: This article explores affordance-theoretical readings of Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," looking first at Aleksei Procyshyn's mobilization of Anthony Chemero's "radical embodied cognitive science" approach to affordances, in which, as Procyshyn summarizes it, "language use is an enactive process of meaning creation, which affords an appropriately situated and capable agent specific potentials for further action." A closer look shows not only that Procyshyn has not drawn on the full potential of Chemero's theorization, but that Chemero himself has not developed a 4EA-cogsci affordance theory fully—and that the application of affordance theory to Benjamin ultimately doesn't work without a complex reframing of both Benjamin and affordance theory. Specifically, toward the end of Benjamin's essay he moves toward a more personalized understanding of human translators as situated agents—notably Friedrich Hölderlin, but also Martin Luther, Johann Heinrich Voß, A. W. Schlegel, and Stefan George—and another pass through Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutical theory of the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("nexus/intertwining of life"), which Benjamin invokes by name, helps flesh out both an affordance theory of translation and an extended application to Hölderlin's Sophocles translations. The historical chain from Dilthey through Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's *The Embodied Mind* ties hermeneutics, phenomenology, and 4EA cognitive science together under the rubric of the affordances of the translator.

Keywords: Affordances, Benjamin, Hölderlin, 4EA Cognitive science, *der Zusammenhang des Lebens*, *die Lebenswelt*.

1 Introduction

The title of this paper reflects Aleksei Procyshyn's 2014 claim that "[Walter] Benjamin's philosophy of language comes astonishingly close to contemporary affordance theories of meaning" (Procyshyn 2014: 368); his interesting reading of several early works by Benjamin culminates in a longish quotation from the 1923 essay "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," better known in English as "The Task of the Translator," in which Benjamin does indeed, at least in passing, seem to be adumbrating an affordance theory of *die Übersetzbarkeit* "translatability." There are problems with Procyshyn's reading, but with some tweaks I believe it can provide a springboard for a useful exploration of the convergences between the cognitive study of translation in terms of affordances and Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutical theory of the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("intertwining of life") which Benjamin also invokes in the "Aufgabe." Let's see how that works.

2 Reading Benjamin's -abilities as Affordances

2.1 Weber on Benjamin's -abilities

In 2008 Samuel Weber published a book cleverly titled *Benjamin's -abilities*, dealing with the many abstract adjectives Walter Benjamin used ending with the suffix *-bar* ("-able") and their noun forms ending in *-barkeit* ("-ability"): *übersetzbar* ("translatable") and *Übersetzbarkeit* ("translatability"), *mitteilbar* ("communicable") or "mediable" and *Mitteilbarkeit* ("communicability" or "mediability"), *kritisierbar* ("criticizable") and *Kritisierbarkeit* ("criticizability"), *reproduzierbar* ("reproducible") and *Repro-*

duzierbarkeit ("reproducibility"), and so on. In his introduction to the book Weber reports that his early interest in these terms in Benjamin was intensified by his experience translating Jacques Derrida's crushing 100-page retort to John Searle's would-be "correction" of Derrida's deconstruction of J.L. Austin's performativity with the notion of *iterability*:

> If one admits that writing (and the mark in general) *must be able* to function in the absence of the sender, the receiver, the context of production etc., this implies that this power, this *being able*, this *possibility* is *always* inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed *as possibility* in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark […] It follows that this possibility is a *necessary* part of its structure […] Inasmuch as it is essential and structural, this possibility is always at work marking *all the facts*, all the events, even those that appear to disguise it. *Just as iterability, which is not iteration*, can be recognized even in a mark that *in fact* seems to have occurred only once. I say *seems*, because this one time is in itself divided or multiplied in advance by its structure of repeatability. (Weber 1988: 48; quoted in Weber 2008: 5–6; Weber 2008's emphasis)

That "power or potentiality to repeat or be repeated," Weber observes, which (*pace* Searle) "is not the same as repetition" (2008: 6), is very similar to what Benjamin means by his "-abilities." Derrida's iterability, like the Benjaminian -abilities that Weber isolates for study, maps out "a structural possibility that is potentially 'at work' even there where it seems factually not to have occurred" (ibid.: 6). In affordance-theoretical terms, as we'll see, this effectively defines iterability as the "power or potentiality to repeat or be repeated" *in the (performative) environment alone*, even if no "animal" (human actant) ever repeats anything: an environmental affordance that need never afford actual performative iterations to actual humans. As we'll also see, this Derridean proto-affordance theory anticipates Procychyn's affordance-theoretical reading of Benjamin as well.

The other point to note vis-à-vis Procychyn's reading is that Weber's Derrida-influenced take on Benjamin is grounded not only in morphology but in the philosophy of mind/cognitive science, in terms of both *mental repetition and comparison* ("A 'mark' can be identified, which is to say, apprehended as such, only by virtue of its being repeated, at least mentally, and compared to its earlier occurrence," Weber 2008: 6) and *identity* ("Memory and repetition are thus constitutive elements of identity, which depends on iterability—that is to say, on the ability of any event to be iterated, repeated," ibid.).

Weber's exploration of Benjamin's -abilities tracks nearly the entire quarter century during which Benjamin was writing and publishing: from "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (Benjamin 1916/1991) ("On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," transl. Jephcott 1978/1986) through his doctoral dissertation, defended in 1919 and published in 1920(/1980), *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* ("The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism," transl. Lachterman 1996), and the essay on translation that he wrote in 1921 and published as a preface to his translation of Baudelaire in 1923, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" ("The Task of the Translator"), to his 1935 (/1980) essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," transl. Zohn 1968/2007), but also in the notes for the Arcades Project. I will focus here, however, solely on "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers"/"The Task of the Translator," with reference in English to the paraphrases in my commentary (Robinson 2023c).

2.2 Theorizing Benjamin's -abilities as Affordances

In "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Language" Aleksei Procyshyn (2014) notes Weber's monograph, but takes distance from it: "Samuel Weber dedicated a whole book to *Benjamin's -abilities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008), but failed to notice their affordance character. He overlooked the dispositional nature of Benjamin's argument, relying instead on Derrida's discussion of 'iterability.' Although illuminating, Weber's account remained unfortunately at the grammatical level of Benjamin's text" (381n19). While I find that negative assessment a bit extreme—as we've just seen, even in the introduction Weber engages the philosophical complexities of Benjamin's thought at a level far deeper than the grammatical—it's true both that Weber never expands his reading into the productive realm of affordances and that Procyshyn pushes Benjamin's -abilities to a whole new level of philosophical complexity, using Anthony Chemero's (2009) radical rethinking and reframing of the pioneering ecological psychological work Gibson (1979) did on affordances and the rich literature that has engaged Gibson's work since. As Procyshyn puts it,

> Benjamin's philosophy of language comes astonishingly close to contemporary affordance theories of meaning, with which it shares a view of meaning as a relational and agent-relative feature of an environment that can be apprehended directly—i.e. without discursive mediation. On this view, language use is an enactive process of meaning creation, which affords an appropriately situated and capable agent specific potentials for further action. (Procyshyn 2014: 368)

This is an extraordinarily fruitful addition to Benjamin studies, and Procyshyn is a philosopher whose nuanced engagement with Benjamin's early thought does bear abundant fruit. My brief in this section, however, is that Procyshyn's take on Benjamin's affordances has an Achilles' heel: that the "appropriately situated and capable agent" that is supposedly afford-

ed "specific potentials for further action" never quite puts in an appearance in his reading. This absence—which, as we saw in the previous section, haunts Derrida's deconstruction of Austin as well—is especially evident when Procyshyn (2014: 377) quotes the passage from the third paragraph of Benjamin's "Aufgabe" that most clearly spells out the affordance-theoretical resonances of what Benjamin calls *die Übersetzbarkeit* "translatability":

> Die Frage nach der Übersetzbarkeit eines Werkes ist doppelsinnig. Sie kann bedeuten: ob es unter der Gesamtheit seiner Leser je seinen zulänglichen Übersetzer finden werde? oder, und eigentlicher: ob es seinem Wesen nach Übersetzung zulasse und demnach — der Bedeutung dieser Form gemäß — auch verlange. [*Procyshyn's first ellipsis*] Nur das oberflächliche Denken wird, indem es den selbständigen Sinn der letzten leugnet, beide für gleichbedeutend erklären. Ihm gegenüber ist darauf hinzuweisen, daß gewisse Relationsbegriffe ihren guten, ja vielleicht besten Sinn behalten, wenn sie nicht von vorne herein ausschließlich auf den Menschen bezogen werden. So dürfte von einem unvergeßlichen Leben oder Augenblick gesprochen werden, auch wenn alle Menschen sie vergessen hätten. [*Procyshyn's second ellipsis*] Denn es gilt der Satz: Wenn Übersetzung eine Form ist, so muß Übersetzbarkeit gewissen Werken wesentlich sein. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10)

> A work can be translatable in either of two senses: whether among all of its readers a translator able to translate it is ever found, or, more authentically, whether its essence allows it to be translated and its form demands that it be translated. [*Procyshyn's first ellipsis*] Only the superficial thinker will deny the independence of the latter and claim that both come to the same thing. Certain relational concepts are best served by pulling back from an exclusive focus on human beings. Even if a life or a moment had been forgotten by every living human, it could still be considered forgettable if its Essence demanded that it be remembered. [*Procyshyn's second ellipsis*] For the dictum applies: If translation is a Form, it follows that the translatability of certain works must be part of their essence. (Transl. Robinson 2023c: 25–26, 28, 30, 32)

The first thing to note there is that Procyshyn has quoted selectively: his two ellipses leap strategically over critical points that would have problematized his claims. But let's come back to those two elisions in a moment, and begin with a look at his summary of that passage:

> Benjamin's characterization of "translatability" (*Übersetzbarkeit*) is, with one word, dispositional: it is relational, context-dependent, and involves some kind of stimulus or interaction that makes a distinct phenomenon manifest. Some texts thus *afford* translation, and the normative or practical attitudes we hold with respect to these environmentally situated affordances allow us to better specify what Benjamin has in mind when he invokes "mimesis." (Procyshyn 2014: 377; his emphasis)

The problem there is "Some texts thus *afford* translation." Afford it *to whom*? Or rather, in terms of the "relationality" that Procyshyn follows Anthony Chemero in claiming for the real existence of any affordance, "Some texts thus afford translation" *in relation to their reading by whom*? For Procyshyn the texts are the "environments" or "niches" in relation to which "appropriately situated and capable agent[s]" are afforded "specific potentials for further action"—but in his reading of Benjamin, the agents have vanished, or else never existed in the first place. As he adds on the next page, "a translatable text bears within itself a transformative potential (as yet unschematized) that can be made manifest" (Procyshyn 2014: 378). That "translatable text" is again the environment and that "transformative potential (as yet unschematized) that can be made manifest" is the affordance; but if there are agents "appropriately situated and capable" of responding to it, they are shadowy beings not only obscured by Procyshyn's nonspecific passive voice ("made manifest" *to whom*?) but, to the extent that they ever do come to exist, "selected" and shaped by the "potential." (As we'll see in the next section, this would seem to make the affordance-theoretical model Procyshyn

adopts not the disposition model, as he claims, but the resource model.)

True, in that passage from Benjamin we do have one agent, or the potential existence of one: "whether among all of its readers a translator able to translate it is ever found." But Procyshyn doesn't seem interested in that agent; nor, for that matter, does Benjamin himself. For Benjamin it is "more authentic" to care "whether its essence allows it to be translated and its form demands that it be translated"—and the passive voice in "be translated" is even less forthcoming in regard to possible translating agents than the possibility that "a translator able to translate it" might some day be found.

And this is where Procyshyn's ellipses matter. The sentence elided in the first is: *Grundsätzlich ist die erste Frage nur problematisch, die zweite apodiktisch zu entscheiden* (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10) ("Answering the first question is problematic; answering the second is apodictic," transl. Robinson 2023c: 26). This obviously consigns the agentizing search for a human translator to the scrap-heap of "an exclusive focus on human beings" and elevates the passivizing embrace of transcendental forms and essences to the realm of absolute theological certainty. In the sentence elided in the second ellipsis, the "apodictic" follow-up to "pulling back" from that focus on humans becomes an explicit shift to the divine:

> Wenn nämlich deren Wesen es forderte, nicht vergessen zu werden, so würde jenes Prädikat nichts Falsches, sondern nur eine Forderung, der Menschen nicht entsprechen, und zugleich auch wohl den Verweis auf einen Bereich enthalten, in dem ihr entsprochen wäre: auf ein Gedenken Gottes. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10)

> If its essence required that it not be forgotten, the predicate would not be false, but only a demand to which humans had been unable to respond, and also a reference to a realm in which it would be fulfilled, namely God's memory. (Transl. Robinson 2023c: 30)

There's the other potential agent: God. Just as God's memory could interact relationally with the "essential" unforgettability of the person whom all humans had forgotten, so too could God's translation skills interact relationally with the "essential" translatability of the literary classic which no human had proved able to translate. So in Benjamin the answer to the question I posed above—if "Some texts thus *afford* translation," to whom do they afford it?—is double: either the human translator (but that's problematic) or, apodictally, which is to say with absolute unquestioning certainty, and therefore *eigentlicher* "more authentically," the divine translator.

Read this way, Benjamin's "Aufgabe" seems an unlikely candidate for an affordance-theoretical application. The idea that the universalized God of Israel might be an "appropriately situated and capable agent" afforded "specific potentials for further action" in relation to a specific environmental niche seems a stretch. A Greek or Roman god, maybe (Hermes/Mercury?); an animistic spirit, more feasibly (the dryads?); but not a universal Creator God who "remembers" and "translates" infallibly because he (emphatically not she) stands outside the limitations of human social action. The Kabbalists' Ein Sof or "The Infinite," which many Benjamin scholars have seen him invoking in referring to the reassembly of the broken vessel (Benjamin 1923/1972: 18; transl. Robinson 2023c: 136–40), would not only be definitively beyond the affordance pale; it would be incapable of an anthropomorphic act like remembering or translating. In the Kabbala such acts might be performed by one or another of the ten divine emanations, among whom there is indeed one female (the tenth)—but as deities they still seem unlikely candidates for environmental affordances.

This shifting of focus from the human to the divine, and more generally to the transcendental, which does seem to

eviscerate an affordance-theoretical reading, is widely recognized as the truest thrust of Benjamin's essay. Antoine Berman (2008/2018: 40) in fact argues that the title of Benjamin's essay is a misnomer: it's not really about the task of the *translator*. "This is a text," he writes, "that is more preoccupied with translation than with the translator. We could perfectly well replace each occurrence of the word 'translator' with the word 'translation'." The word *Übersetzer* "translator" appears 20 times in the essay—one of those in the title—and according to Berman in not one of those cases does Benjamin specify what the translator must do to carry out his or her responsibility adequately. The ostensible task of the translator in every case is reportedly to achieve a mystical transformation of the source and target languages that no human translator could ever possibly *set out* to achieve. Hans Vermeer (1996), noting the same tendency in the essay, calls it "utopian" thinking. In Berman's and Vermeer's readings it is *translation* that achieves the mystical transformation to "pure language," whether the translator wills it or not, and whether the translator is aware of participating in it or not. But actually the transformation is not exactly achieved by translation either, as if that transformation were the *task* of translation; it is simply (or complexly) a kind of inevitable byproduct of translation. It is just sort of what happens when translation takes place. According to Berman there is no task, really. And according to Paul de Man (1986), the title doesn't even promise a "task": he argues that by *die Aufgabe* Benjamin actually meant "giving up." That is, after all, what the word means morphologically, and how it is used in certain contexts. Drawing our attention to Benjamin's self-admitted failure as a practical translator himself, of Baudelaire and Proust, de Man notes that in the normative understanding of the work the translator fails *by definition*: "The translator can never do

what the original text did. Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator as such is lost from the very beginning" (de Man 1986: 20). The translator's ostensible "task" is to give up.

In this reading, what the human translator is "afforded" is a recipe for abject humiliation and failure. Perhaps, therefore, Samuel Weber's deconstructive approach to Benjamin's -abilities was really the more trenchant one? Perhaps it is more useful to track (un)translatability and (im)mediability without consideration of affordances provided for situated, embodied, personalized agents?

Perhaps. I want to argue, however, that Berman, Vermeer, and de Man are partly wrong about Benjamin. He does move, toward the end of the essay, toward a more personalized understanding of human translators as situated agents—notably Friedrich Hölderlin, but also Martin Luther, Johann Heinrich Voß, A. W. Schlegel, and Stefan George—and a closer reading of the passages dealing with them will, I argue, yield interesting possibilities for an application of affordance theory. Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutical theory of the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("nexus/intertwining of life"), which Benjamin invokes by name (the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* name, not Dilthey's) on p. 10 (33–35), will also help us flesh out an affordance theory of translation. As I showed in the Introduction to this volume (pp. 34ff), Dilthey's 1910/1927 hermeneutical theory was the primary influence on Edmund Husserl's 1936 concept of the *Lebenswelt* ("life-world") in his last and most brilliant book; Husserl's *Lebenswelt* was a strong influence on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1961/1964 "Eye and Mind" (transl. Dallery 1964); Merleau-Ponty's last published essay was a strong influence on the development of 4EA (embodied, embedded, extended, enactive, and affective) cognitive science, which shaped Anthony Chemero's "radical

embodied cognitive science" retheorization of affordances. This historical chain ties hermeneutics, phenomenology, and 4EA cognitive science together under the rubric of the affordances of the translator.

First, then, let's familiarize ourselves with affordance theory, by tracking Anthony Chemero's (2009) seventh chapter (section 2); then take a closer look at Dilthey's hermeneutic theory of the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("nexus/intertwining of life") as it influenced both Benjamin and the 4EA cognitive science that Anthony Chemero mobilizes (section 3); then turn back to translation, with a brief outline of the affordances that made possible Hölderlin's translations of Pindar (section 4). I conclude (section 5) with a look at some possible affordances that Hölderlin's Pindar translations might yield us as translators and translation scholars.

3 Understanding Affordances

3.1 Idealisms

Let us begin, then, with the case of environmentally situated embodied agents—or what Anthony Chemero (2009) follows the ecological psychologists in calling "animals." Benjamin's apparently exclusive focus on transcendental vitalisms without situated, embodied agents would make his philosophy of language an idealism; and as Chemero notes, "For all the noise ecological psychologists make about being realists, it is not obvious at the outset that ecological psychology is not a form of idealism, in which perceivables exist only when they are perceived. It is a small step from this to a global idealism, in which the world disappears whenever I close my eyes" (Chemero 2009: 149). He is referring specifically to the tendency in ecological psychology to reify affordances not as

experienced by embodied animals in an environment but as part of the structure of the environment—intrinsic features that may be used by animals wandering into the environment but that are understood as existing in the environment whether any animals wander in or not.

By the same token, the effacement of agents in summaries like Procyshyn's "Some texts thus *afford* translation" and "a translatable text bears within itself a transformative potential (as yet unschematized) that can be made manifest" also seems to embrace that kind of idealism; and as I began to suggest in the previous section, Procyshyn seems to be invoking not a disposition model of affordances (on which more in a moment) but the Darwinian resource model advanced by Edward Reed: "Reed's (1996) conception of affordances as resources that exert selection pressure avoids this issue by making it the case that affordances exist unproblematically, even without animals capable of perceiving them" (Chemero 2009: 149). As Reed (1996: 18) himself puts it, "The fundamental hypothesis of ecological psychology […] is that affordances and only the relative availability (or nonavailability) of affordances create selection pressure on animals; hence behavior is regulated with respect to the affordances of the environment for a given animal." Note: "behavior is *regulated*." The affordances are properties of the environment that regulate the behavior of animals. In a translation application, "some texts thus *afford* translation" not in relation to translators but in the abstract, structurally; any human (or possibly even divine) translator that comes into the vicinity of such texts would be *regulatorily* afforded translation, which is to say forced to translate within normative confines imposed by the source-textual environment.

Chemero notes that other researchers, notably champions of the "disposition model" like Turvey et al. (1981), War-

ren (1984), Turvey (1992), and Michaels (2000), insist that "affordances must be complemented by the effectivities of animals" (Chemero 2009: 149), but it's never clear in their work whether "affordances *depend* in some sense on animals" (ibid.; emphasis added). The criterial question for Chemero is: "Do affordances exist without animals?" (ibid.).

Surprisingly, given his expostulations against idealism in affordance theory, he says yes—and to illustrate that answer borrows a thought-experiment from Daniel Dennett (1998), who draws a distinction between things that are lovely and things that are suspect. Things that are suspect must actually be under suspicion; but things that are lovely could be lovely even if no one is around to view them and pronounce them lovely. Affordances, Chemero argues, are "lovely":

> Affordances do not disappear when there is no local animal to perceive and take advantage of them. They are perfectly real entities that can be objectively studied and are in no way figments of the imagination of the animal that perceives them. So radical embodied cognitive science is not a form of idealism. But affordances do depend on the existence of some animal that could perceive them, if the right conditions were met. Because affordances, the primary perceivables according to ecological psychology, depend in this way on animals, the ontology of ecological psychology is not a simple form of realism. It is a form of realism about the world as it is perceived and experienced—affordances, which are inherently meaningful, are in the world, and not merely projected onto it by animals. (Chemero 2009: 150)

But this is problematic (not apodictic). Affordances that "are perfectly real entities that can be objectively studied and are in no way figments of the imagination of the animal that perceives them" are "perfectly real entities" *for* "the animal that perceives them." As Chemero himself insists, affordances are not features of the environment but relationalities experienced *in situ* by animals in their environment; and as he also makes clear, drawing on the "radical empiricism" of William

James (1912/1976), relationalities are empirically real, because they are *experienced* as real. But a *potential* relationality that *might* be experienced by an animal in a specific environment is not real, because it is not being experienced by that animal. It is certainly true that properties of the environment are real even in the absence of animals that experience them; but those properties only become *affordances* in experiential relationality with the animals that experience them. An affordance is indeed "a form of realism about the world *as it is perceived and experienced*"—not an idealism that shapes possible worlds that might some day be experienced by an animal. Chemero's point is that "affordances, which are inherently meaningful, are in the world, and not merely projected onto it by animals," and I agree completely: affordances are real situated embodied relationalities *and not* mere projections. But without that situated embodied relationality between environment and animal an affordance is precisely an ideal structure reified and projected onto the environment in and by a god's-eye view from above—an artifact of bad theory obtained by *subtracting* the experiencing animal from the experienced relation.

I noted in section 1 that Procyshyn's effacement of the "animals" or agents of translation seems to link him more strongly to Edward Reed's "resource model" than to Michael Turvey's "disposition model"; but in fact the two models aren't all that different, and Chemero, an eloquent advocate of "radical embodied" (4EA) cognitive science, recommends persuasively that we move past both. In Chemero's analysis, the difference between the two models is that "unlike Reed's view of affordances as resources, Turvey's account of affordances as dispositions is nonselectionist" (Chemero 2009: 138), which is to say that in the disposition model "affordances per se cannot exert selection pressure on animals.

Properties of the environment are not affordances in the absence of complementary properties of animals" (ibid.). In Turvey's approach those "complementary properties of animals" are *effectivities*, which are effectively *dispositions*; in Chemero's summary they are "defined as the organismal complement to affordances qua dispositional properties of the environment (Turvey et al. 1981; Shaw, Turvey, and Mace 1982; Warren 1984; Turvey 1992)" (ibid.: 145). But as Chemero notes, if "affordances are not properties of the environment ... there is no need for the complementing property in the organism" (ibid.); and, he adds, "the problem with seeing abilities as dispositions is that when coupled with the right enabling conditions, dispositions are guaranteed to become manifest" (ibid.). Not only does this disparaging summary align well with Procyshyn's affordance-theoretical reading of Benjamin's "Aufgabe"; it anticipates (and perhaps conditions) his specific phrasing in "a translatable text bears within itself a transformative potential (as yet unschematized) that can be *made manifest*." "Individuals with abilities are supposed to behave in particular ways, and they may fail to do so," Chemero adds. "Dispositions, on the other hand, never fail; they simply are or are not in the appropriate circumstances to become manifest" (ibid.). Translators experiencing a specific text in a specific professional "environment"—hired to translate that text for a specific purpose for a specific audience, as skopos theory would put it—may come to the task with a generalized "ability to translate," but in "relation" (engagement) with that text in that environment may find their skill inadequate to the task. More on that in section 4, below; the point to note here is that Procyshyn's "some texts *afford* translation" shimmers between the resource model (where the text selects and regulates the translator) and the disposition model (where the task activates the translator's disposition) without

enabling further determination, because it effaces the translator entirely. For Procyshyn the translational affordance is a stable property of the source text.

Chemero's own insistence on moving past both Reed's resource model and Turvey's disposition model mobilizes two 4EA transgressions of the static: first, *relationality* as a reciprocal constitutivity in which the engagement of animals with their environments generates affordances as a sharing or exchanging of enabling powers (as opposed to the static resource and disposition models in which stable properties of environments afford action-potentials to the stable properties of animals); and second, *dynamism* as change across time (as opposed to Chemero's own earlier view [2001a, 2001b, 2003] that the affordance as an environment-animal relationality too is a stable thing).

3.2 (In)direct Perception

As I noted at the end of section 1, Chemero's 4EA reframing of affordances as embedded/extended relationalities between an environment and the animal that experiences it points us back to a century-long intellectual history beginning in 1910 with the hermeneutic theory of Wilhelm Dilthey and proceeding through the *Lebenswelt* ("life-world") concept that Edmund Husserl based on Dilthey's *Zusammenhang des Lebens* and Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind" to the enactivism of Varela et al. (1991). In anticipation of that discussion in section 4, let's track some problems in this early formulation Chemero offers:

> For radical embodied cognitive science to eschew mental representations, it must take perception to be direct, to be the pickup of information from the environment. Furthermore, animals must be able to use that information to guide action without complex processing, without mental gymnastics. This requires that perception be

> of affordances, or opportunities for behavior. Animals, that is, must be able to perceive what they can do directly. (Chemero 2009: 135)

By perceiving "directly" he means the ability "to use that information to guide action without complex processing, without mental gymnastics"—which he glosses as without "mental representations." But obviously "complex processing" is a scalar concept: how complex does the processing have to be before it crosses the line from "direct" into "indirect" perception? The middle ground between direct and indirect perception is obviously not a wide DMZ but a heap, a fuzzy-logic sorites series: perception in different contexts may *seem more or less* direct without allowing the imposition of a stable binary logic. Yes, in one binary logic "The animal (or rather its brain) performs inferences on the sensation, yielding a meaningful perception" (Chemero 2009: 135): that would be the idealization of "indirect perception," as mediated by mental representations. But Chemero is on shaky ground, I would argue, in simply flipping our understanding of the situation to the opposite binary logic, the idealization of "direct perception":

> In direct theories of perception, on the other hand, meaning is in the environment, and perception does not depend on meaning-conferring inferences. Instead the animal simply gathers information from a meaning-laden environment. The environment is meaning laden in that it contains affordances, and affordances are meaningful to animals. But if the environment contains meanings, then it cannot be merely physical. This places a heavy theoretical burden on radical embodied cognitive science, a burden so severe that it may outweigh all the advantages to conceiving perception as direct. (Chemero 2009: 135)

This early in his chapter, Chemero might be read as tracking the thinking of early affordance theories, and *not* affirming this "direct perception" binary logic as the foundation of his

own approach; but he does explicitly associate that logic with the "radical embodied cognitive science" of his title.

The tension between the crypto-idealism of "direct perception" and Chemero's "radical embodied cognitive science" emerges most uncomfortably when he gets around to redefining his earlier relationalizing definition of affordances in *dynamic* terms—which is to say, affordances as they develop over time, and in "developing" actually change both the environment and the animal's relationship with the environment. Surely one defining aspect of that dynamic relationship is *learning*: the animal enters a familiar environment with past experience of it "under its belt," as it were. If "the animal simply gathers information from a *meaning-laden* environment," surely the environment has previously been *laden* with meaning dynamically, which is to say imbued with meaning in and through the animal's own evolving relationship with it. "The environment is meaning laden in that it *contains* affordances," Chemero says, but "contains" is a static verb that oversimplifies the dynamic processes by which the environment *comes* to contain affordances through the animal's enactive engagement with it, and by which the learning processes based on repeating and remembering past engagements phenomenologically "freezes" or reifies mutable experience as objective external fact: relationally experienced and relied-on affordances as "contained."

The next step past this static "containment" might of course be to the -abilities of poststructuralist thought: Derrida's iterability is not just *always* but *always already* "inscribed as possibility in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark." Elided in Derrida's transphenomenological deconstruction of Austin and Searle is the relational and temporal phenomenology of *co-experiencing* that iterability as a possibility, and indeed of *iterably* co-experiencing it, co-experiencing it

so often that it comes to seem first like an individual experience and then, ultimately, like an "inscri[ption] in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark."

A similar elision is arguably at work also in Benjamin's transcendental metaphysics, according to which *Wenn Übersetzung eine Form ist, so muß Übersetzbarkeit gewissen Werken wesentlich sein* (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10) ("If translation is a [Platonic] Form, the translatability of certain works must be part of their [transcendental] Essence," transl. Robinson 2023c: 33): the temporal trajectory of the phenomenological co-experiencing of the relational affordances that make a text first seem to be translatable, then to possess a stable abstract quality called "translatability," and finally to possess that quality even after the destruction of all human life on earth, is again elided.

For a fuller account of the phenomenological organization of that co-experience, let us next turn back the clock to Wilhelm Dilthey's 1910 hermeneutical theorization of the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* (3a) and Edmund Husserl's 1936 phenomenological theorization of *die Lebenswelt* (3b).

4 Understanding Affordances Hermeneutically

4.1 *Der Zusammenhang des Lebens* in Benjamin

One of Walter Benjamin's keywords in the "Aufgabe" has somewhat surprisingly gone unnoticed in the extensive scholarly literature on the essay, namely *Zusammenhang*.[1] Variously

1 Of all the commentators on Benjamin's "Aufgabe," Anthony Phelan (2002) comes closest to stumbling on the connection with Dilthey, in an article titled "*Fortgang* and *Zusammenhang*: Walter Benjamin and the Romantic Novel"—but without once mentioning either "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" or Dilthey, let alone Dilthey's (and Benjamin's) keyword *der Zusammenhang des Lebens*.

rendered in the four full English translations as "context," "connection," and "structure," and in Chantal Wright's 2018 translation of Berman (2008) as "interrelation," Benjamin's eleven mentions of that term are most specifically localized in the concept of *der Zusammenhang des Lebens*:

> Dennoch steht sie mit diesem Kraft seiner Übersetzbarkeit im nächsten Zusammenhang. Ja, dieser Zusammenhang ist um so inniger, als er für das Original selbst nichts mehr bedeutet. Er darf ein natürlicher genannt werden und zwar genauer *ein Zusammenhang des Lebens*. So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem ›Überleben‹. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10; emphasis added)

> Still, the translation is closely intertwined with this power of the source text's translatability. Indeed the two are the more closely intertwined precisely because that intertwining means nothing for the source text. That intertwining can be called natural; more precisely it is *an intertwining of life*. For in the same way as expressions of life are intimately intertwined with living beings, without having any significance for those beings, so does a translation emanate from the original—not from its life so much as from its "superlife." (Robinson 2023c: 35–36; emphasis added)

It is of course fairly easy to guess at what it might mean for a translation to be intertwined with its source text; more difficult, perhaps, to guess at what it would mean for a translation to be intertwined with "this power of the source text's translatability"; but in what sense exactly is that intertwining "natural," and what, finally, is it a *Zusammenhang des Lebens* or an "intertwining of life"?

4.2 *Der Zusammenhang des Lebens* in Dilthey

Finding that *der Zusammenhang des Lebens* is a keyword in Wilhelm Dilthey's late work *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in*

den Geisteswissenschaften (1910/1927; in English *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, transl. Makkreel and Rodi 2002), one that was picked up by Martin Heidegger as well in *Sein und Zeit*/*Being and Time* (§77), helps orient us to what Benjamin was doing with the term several years before it appeared in Heidegger's magnum opus. Dilthey begins his monograph ("First Study") with a discussion of *Der psychische Strukturzusammenhang* ("The Psychic Structural Nexus"), then moves on in the Second Study to a discussion of *Der Strukturzusammenhang des Wissens* ("The Structural Nexus of Knowledge"). In the first he is concerned with "psychic structure," but specifically the nexus of psychic structure, how the psyche "hangs together" structurally—which is to say how each person's lived experience of their own psyche hangs together, what holds the inner relations of our lived experience of the psyche together in a coherent structure. In the second he backs up one step, from the *Zusammenhang* ("hanging together", nexus or intertwining) of what is known to the nexus or intertwining of knowing. Following Schleiermacher, who was following Herder, he begins the Second Study with an epistemological look at *Gefühl* ("feeling"), which I traced in the Introduction (pp. 14–21). The Third Study, which becomes Part II, deals with "The System of the Humanities" and "The World of Spirit as a Productive Nexus."

It's not until Part III, then, "The Plan for the Continuation of the Formation of the Historical World in the Humanities," that he comes to *der Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("the nexus of life"). In one passing aphorism, for example, *das Leben* ("life") is shorthand for *der Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("the nexus of life"): "Das Leben ist wie eine Melodie, in der nicht Töne als Ausdruck der realen dem Leben einwohnenden Realitäten auftreten. In diesem selbst liegt die Melodie" (Dilthey

1910/1927: 234) ("Life is like a melody in which the notes do not express realities embedded in life. The melody lies in life itself," transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 254). Life, in other words, is not an empirical reality, but a phenomenological one, a lived experience, like the lived experience of music. "Life," in other words, is not an object but a sociocultural nexus. As for the pithy statement that "The melody lies in life itself," which is to say in the nexus of life, this is an interesting shift from his talk of "parts and wholes" throughout; in many of his formulations the tones would have been the parts that constitute the melody as the whole, as an analogue of the "realities embedded in life" as the parts that constitute the nexus of life. Here, analogically, the nexus lies in life, or *is* life.

In the six numbered paragraphs that follow, however, the first three seemingly restore the mechanistic relationship of parts to wholes, through the analogy of language, as understood through the building-block theory:

> 1. Der einfachste Fall, in welchem Bedeutung auftritt, ist das Verstehen eines Satzes. Die einzelnen Worte haben jedes eine Bedeutung und aus der Verbindung derselben wird der Sinn des Satzes abgeleitet. Das Verfahren ist also, daß aus der Bedeutung der einzelnen Worte das Verständnis des Satzes sich ergibt. Und zwar besteht eine derer die Unbestimmtheit des Sinnes, nämlich die Möglichkeiten eines solchen und die einzelnen Worte, <bestimmt wird>. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 234)

> 1. The simplest case in which meaning arises is the understanding of a sentence. Each individual word has a meaning, and we derive the sense of the sentence by combining them. We proceed so that the intelligibility of the sentence comes from the meaning of individual words. To be sure, there is a reciprocity between whole and parts by virtue of which the indeterminacy of sense, namely, the possibilities of sense, (are established) in relation to individual words. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 254–55)

Letters are the building blocks of words, and words are the building blocks of sentences. It is only by combining the

word-block-meanings in sentences that sentential "meaning" or "sense" arises. Dilthey goes on:

> 2. Dasselbe Verhältnis besteht zwischen den Teilen und dem Ganzen eines Lebensverlaufes, und auch hier wird das Verständnis des Ganzen, der Sinn des Lebens aus der Bedeutung […]. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 235)

> 2. The same relationship exists between the parts and the whole of a life-course, and here also the understanding of the whole, the sense of life [arises] from the meaning […]. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 255)

That leap at the end, where "the understanding of the whole" is added to the mechanistic part-whole combinatory logic as a kind of holistic supplement to the mechanism, and "the sense of life [arises] from the meaning [of sentences and of life-courses]," seems to belie the part-whole misstep. Just as "The melody lies in life itself," surely the understanding of the whole meaning of life lies in life itself as well. But the combinatory part-whole building-block theory of sentences stands, stuck in Dilthey's craw.

Significantly, too, Benjamin sought to break the isomorphism between 1 and 2: for him it is precisely by smashing the sentential sense-nexus in 1 that one becomes able to contribute to the transcendental Neoplatonist life-nexus in 2.

Dilthey next sums up 1 and 2 in 3:

> 3. Dieses Verhältnis von Bedeutung und Sinn ist also in bezug auf den Lebensverlauf: die einzelnen Ereignisse, welche ihn bilden, wie sie in der Sinnenwelt auftreten, haben wie die Worte eines Satzes ein Verhältnis zu etwas, das sie bedeuten. Durch dieses ist jedes einzelne Erlebnis von einem Ganzen aus bedeutungsvoll zusammengenommen. Und wie die Worte im Satz zu dessen Verständnis verbunden sind, so ergibt der Zusammenhang dieser Erlebnisse die Bedeutung des Lebenslaufes. Ebenso verhält es sich mit der Geschichte. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 235)

> 3. With reference to a life-course, this relationship of meaning and sense is as follows: The particular events that constitute the life-course as it unfolds in the sensible world have a relationship to something that they mean, like the words in a sentence. Through this relationship, each particular lived experience is gathered together for its meaning on the basis of some whole. As the word in a sentence are connected into its intelligibility, so the togetherness of these lived experiences produces the meaning of a life-course. It is the same with history. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 255)

What makes Benjamin's "Aufgabe" so difficult to understand, of course, is that he deliberately and apparently perversely overturns this humanistic understanding of meaning. Not only does he say in effect that "as the words in a sentence are *dis*connected into *un*intelligibility, so the clashes of these lived experiences produce the meaning of sacred history"; he also doesn't even try to persuade us that his counterintuitive (which is to say, anti-humanist) formulation is true, by mobilizing the kinds of evidential and argumentative support that we humanists accept as persuasive.

Dilthey's next paragraph begins to move on to larger concerns:

> 4. So ist also dieser Begriff der Bedeutung nur in bezug auf das Verfahren des Verständnisses zunächst gediehen. Er enthält nur einen Beziehung eines Äußeren, Sinnfälligen zu dem Inneren, dessen Ausdruck es ist. Die Beziehung ist aber von der grammatikalischen wesentlich verschieden. Der Ausdruck des Inneren in den Teilen des Lebens ist etwas anderes als das Wortzeichen usw. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 235)

> 4. This concept of meaning [associated with a life-course or a history] has emerged only with reference to the procedure of understanding. It involves merely a relation of something outer, given in sense, to something inner of which it is the expression. But it is essentially different from a grammatical relation. When the parts of life express something inner, this is not just a mode of verbal signification, etc. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 255)

This is closer to what Benjamin outlines, except that in Benjamin the relation is not of "something outer, given in sense, to something inner of which it is the expression"—it is rather of something outer, involved in rubbing and abrasion, to something inner that is living and hidden in what is abraded. What is outer is translation, the clash of languages that translation brings about; what is inner and living and hidden is pure language. We will later see Dilthey imagining the discovery and presentation of things (affordances?) hidden in the life-environment as the task of the poet—a notion that Benjamin borrows for the poet-translator from Friedrich Hölderlin.

In 5, Dilthey begins to worm his way around to a subtler understanding of understanding:

> 5. Sonach sagen uns die Worte Bedeutung, Verständnis, Sinn des Lebensverlaufes oder der Geschichte nichts als solches Hindeuten, nichts als diese in Verstehen enthaltene Beziehung der Geschehnisse auf einen inneren Zusammenhang, durch den verstanden werden. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 235)

> 5. Accordingly, the words "meaning," "intelligibility," "sense of a life-course," or "history" do nothing more than indicate the relation inherent in understanding between events and the inner nexus by which they are understood. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 255)

The two questions that this passage begs are "what is that 'relation inherent in understanding'?" and "what is that 'inner nexus by which they are understood'?" Paragraph 6 finally brings us to *der Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("the nexus/intertwining of life"):

> 6. Was wir suchen, ist die Art des Zusammenhanges, die dem Leben selber eigen ist; und wir suchen sie von den einzelnen Geschehnissen desselben <aus>. In jedem derselben, das für den Zusammenhang benutzbar sein soll, muß etwas von der Bedeutung des Lebens enthalten sein; sonst könnte sie aus dem Zusammenhang derselben nicht entstehen. Wie die Naturwissenschaft gleichsam ihren allge-

> meinen Schematismus an den Begriffen hat, in denen die in der physischen Welt herrschende Kausalität dargestellt wird und ihre eigene Methodenlehre in dem Verfahren, diese zu erkennen, so öffnet sich uns hier der Eingang in die Kategorien des Lebens, ihre Beziehungen zu einander, ihren Schematismus und in die Methoden, sie zu erfassen. Dort aber haben wir es mit einem abstrakten Zusammenhang zu tun, der nach seiner logischen Natur ganz durchsichtig ist. Hier sollen wir den Zusammenhang des Lebens selber verstehen, der dem Erkennen niemals ganz zugänglich werden kann. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 235–36)

> 6. What we are seeking is the type of *connectedness or nexus or intertwining* that is proper to life itself—*a connectedness/nexus/intertwining* rooted in particular life-events. For any event to contribute to this *connectedness, this nexus, this intertwining*, it must possess something of the meaning of life; otherwise, this meaning could not arise from the nexus of events. Just as the natural sciences have their universal schematism in concepts that explicate the causality prevailing in the physical world, and a distinctive methodology for attaining conceptual cognition of it, so the categories of life disclose to us their relations to one another, their schematism, and the methods to grasp them. With the former, however, we are dealing with an abstract system whose logical nature is completely transparent. With the latter, we expect to understand the *nexus or intertwining* of life itself although it can never be entirely accessible to conceptual cognition. (Transl. Makkreel/Rodi 2002: 255; translation modified)

4.3 Affordances in Dilthey and Benjamin

Transparency in the natural sciences, achieved through abstraction; inaccessibility in the humanities. Dilthey's word for transparent is *durchsichtig*; a synonym would be *durchschaubar*, morphologically "through-viewable." Transparency is specifically *afforded* natural scientists and their readers and students through abstraction; complete accessibility to the nexus of life, though expected, is *not* afforded humanists. Why not?

One possible explanation might be generated out of a closer reading of the passage I discussed in the Introduction, while

presenting Dilthey's *Zusammenhang des Lebens*, to which I promised to return here in the context of affordances: "Unter den phänomenal gegebenen Körpern findet sich der menschliche, und mit ihm ist hier in einer nicht weiter angebbaren Weise das Erleben verbunden" (196). I'll translate that myself this time, more literally: "Among the phenomenally given bodies finds itself the human one, and it is here bound up with lived experience in a not further specifiable way." Obviously, as I mentioned in passing in the Introduction, *die Unangebbarkeit* ("the unspecifiability") of that way is an -ability akin to Walter Benjamin's *Unübersetzbarkeit* ("untranslatability") and *Unmitteilbarkeit* ("immediability"). What is specifiable in thinking about that pronouncement is that on this passing point Dilthey is methodologically—though of course all unawares—aligned with Edward Reed's resource model of affordances: for him that specifiability is simply a missing resource in the environment. As Reed puts it, "only the relative availability (or nonavailability) of affordances create selection pressure on animals" (Reed 1996: 18), and for Dilthey the ability to specify further the way the human body is bound up with lived experience in the environment of human life is simply unavailable. The connection between the human body and lived experience is the environmental reality in which he as a philosopher lives, and he would like to be afforded the ability to specify it further, but that affordance simply is not available. To paraphrase Aleksei Procyshyn, the specifiability-affordance is a "theoretically transformative potential (as yet unschematized)" that not only has not been made manifest for Dilthey in 1910 but never will be made manifest for any of the philosopher-animals that may hypothetically need it in the future.

But of course we know that the phenomenologists just a few decades after 1910—Husserl in 1936 and Merleau-Ponty in

1961—were afforded that (specifi)ability. How did the environment change in the interim? As Chemero's model would predict, it changed through the dynamically changing relationship between the philosopher-animals and their environment. And tellingly, Dilthey himself, despite declaring the environment irredeemably closed to such affordances, helped change the environment. At the end of his life Edmund Husserl was able to expand the affordances somewhat, thanks to Dilthey's theorization of *der Zusammenhang des Lebens*; at the end of his, Merleau-Ponty was able to rip it wide open, thanks to the transformative contribution of Husserl's posthumous book. By the 1990s, thanks to Merleau-Ponty, the environment was primed for philosopher-animals to specify the bond between the human body and lived experience not only "further" but brilliantly, with long and heated debates over numerous specifications.

Another passage in Dilthey that seems to point ahead to the theory of affordances, and this time to something closer to the relational and dynamic model advanced by Anthony Chemero, is this (I will again retranslate the passage more literally than Makkreel and Oman did, to highlight the affordances):

> Der Zusammenhang des Erlebens in seiner konkreten Wirklichkeit liegt in der Kategorie der Bedeutung. Diese ist die Einheit, welche den Verlauf des Erlebten oder Nacherlebten in der Erinnerung zusammennimmt, und zwar besteht die Bedeutung desselben nicht in einem Einheitspunkte, der jenseits des Erlebnisses läge, sondern diese Bedeutung ist in diesen Erlebnissen als deren Zusammenhang konstituierend enthalten.
>
> Dieser Zusammenhang ist sonach eine in der Natur *alles Erlebbaren* enthaltene, ihm eigene Beziehungsweise oder Kategorie.
>
> Worin die Bedeutung des Lebens liege, das ein Individuum, ich oder ein anderer oder eine Nation, durchlebt hat, ist nicht eindeutig dadurch bestimmt, daß eine solche Bedeutung besteht. Daß sie statt-

> findet, ist dem Erinnernden als Beziehung *des Erlebbaren* immer gewiß. Erst im letzten Augenblick eines Lebens kann der Überschlag über seine Bedeutung gemacht werden, und so kann derselbe nur eigentlich momentan am Ende des Lebens auftreten oder in einem, der dies Leben nacherlebt. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 237)

> The *nexus/intertwining* of lived experience in its concrete reality lies in the category of meaning. This is the unity that brings together the run of the experienced or the re-experienced into memory, and indeed stands the meaning thereof not in a unity point that lies beyond lived experience, but this meaning is contained in these lived experiences constituted as their *nexus*.
>
> This *nexus* is therefore a way of relating or category contained in the nature of all that is experienceable and typical of it.
>
> Wherein lies the meaning of life that an individual, I or another or a nation, has lived through is not manifestly therethrough determined, that there stands such a meaning. That it occurs is to the rememberer ever certain as a relation of the experienceable. First in the last eyeblink of a life can the somersault over its meaning be made, and so can the same only truly at the moment of the end of life step forth—or else in one who re-experiences this life. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 256–57; translation modified by Robinson; emphasis added)

Here the affordance of experienceability is not a stable property or resource of the environment—not *ein Einheitspunkt, der jenseits des Erlebnisses läge* ("a unity point that lies beyond lived experience"), and it's not *daß eine solche Bedeutung besteht* ("that such a meaning exists") either. It is rather *eine Beziehung des Erlebbaren* ("a relation of the experienceable") that is so dynamic, so constantly growing and emerging out of that relationality, that it cannot step forth as a stabilized affordance until the last moment of the rememberer's life—or in someone else's re-experience of that life after the rememberer's death.

Benjamin's version of this in the passage where he calls translatability a *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("a nexus/intertwining of

life") seems subtly to shift from the resource model to the dynamic relationality model and then back again. When he first broaches the subject it seems that translatability is a permanent and stable affordance of the source-textual environment:

> Übersetzbarkeit eignet gewissen Werken wesentlich — das heißt nicht, ihre Übersetzung ist wesentlich für sie selbst, sondern will besagen, daß eine bestimmte Bedeutung, die den Originalen innewohnt, sich in ihrer Übersetzbarkeit äußere. Daß eine Übersetzung niemals, so gut sie auch sei, etwas für das Original zu bedeuten vermag, leuchtet ein. Dennoch steht sie mit diesem kraft seiner Übersetzbarkeit im nächsten Zusammenhang. Ja, dieser Zusammenhang ist um so inniger, als er für das Original selbst nichts mehr bedeutet. Er darf ein natürlicher genannt werden und zwar genauer ein Zusammenhang des Lebens. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10)

> Translatability is built into the Essence of certain works. This does not mean that it is essential for the source text that it be translated; rather, it means that a certain significance resident in source texts expresses itself in translatability. Obviously no translation, no matter how good it is, can have the slightest significance for the source text. Still, the translation is closely intertwined with this power of the source text's translatability. Indeed the two are the more closely intertwined precisely because that intertwining no longer means anything for the source text. That intertwining can be called natural; more precisely it is an intertwining [nexus] of life. (Transl. Robinson 2023c: 33–35)

Übersetzbarkeit eignet gewissen Werken wesentlich ("Translatability is built into the Essence of certain works"): as an affordance it is not only a stable but a transcendental resource. But as Benjamin begins to work out just how the translatability affordance is made manifest, he introduces the temporal sequentiality of historicity:

> So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem ›Überleben‹. Ist doch die Übersetzung später als das Ori-

> ginal und bezeichnet sich doch bei den bedeutenden Werken, die da ihre erwählten Übersetzer niemals im Zeitalter ihrer Entstehung finden, das Stadium ihres Fortlebens. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10–11)
>
> For in the same way as expressions of life are intimately intertwined with living beings, without having any significance for those beings, so does a translation emanate from the original—not from its life so much as from its "superlife." After all, the translation comes later than its source text, and when one arises out of a truly significant work—the kind that never finds its chosen translator in the era of its genesis—that indicates that the work has reached the stage of its ongoing life. (Transl. Robinson 2023c: 33–35)

As in Dilthey on experienceability, the affordance of translatability is made manifest dynamically in time, so that it is only at a specific point in time that the translatability of a certain source text becomes experienceable—not at the moment of death, as in Dilthey (and in the "afterlife" translations of *das Überleben* in Zohn and Rendall), but at the moment of fame-based supercharging, the inception of *das Stadium ihres Fortlebens* ("the stage of its ongoing life"). The other divergence from Dilthey, of course, is that even in the dynamic relationality of time the translatability affordance for Benjamin is never made manifest to translator-animals, or editor-animals, or necessarily to living beings ("experiencers") of any sort. Translatability for Benjamin here in the opening paragraphs of the essay is not actually an experienceability. For Dilthey, on the other hand, as a post-Kantian and post-Romantic humanist, the dynamic relationality is between the environment and *der Erinnernde* ("the rememberer-animal"), or else *der Nacherlebende* ("the re-experiencer-animal"). In this case Dilthey is clearly in line to participate in and shape the dynamic relationality between *der Zusammenhang des Erlebnisses* ("the nexus/intertwining of lived experience") and the philosopher-experiencers to which it affords transformative thinking and feeling; Benjamin not only reverts to the re-

source model but seemingly (at least early in the essay) banishes all past, present, and future experiencer-animals from the transcendentalized environment.

Another Dilthey-based reflection on affordances points us ahead to section 5f, in which Friedrich Hölderlin (the poet-translator-animal) works with Pindar (the source author/text as his poetic environment) to develop new poetic affordances in dynamic interrelationality:

> Die Bedeutsamkeit, die so die Tatsache empfängt als die Bestimmtheit des Bedeutungsgliedes aus dem Ganzen, ist ein Lebensbezug und kein intellektuelles Verhältnis, kein Hineinlegen von Vernunft, von Gedanke in den Teil des Geschehnisses. Die Bedeutsamkeit ist aus dem Leben selbst herausgeholt. Bezeichnet man als Sinn einen Lebensganzen den Zusammenhang, wie er sich aus der Bedeutung der Teile ergibt, dann spricht das dichterische Werk vermittels des freien Schaffens des Bedeutungszusammenhanges den Sinn des Lebens aus. Das Geschehnis wird zum Symbol des Lebens.
>
> Von der anthropologischen Reflexion ab ist alles Aufklärung, Explikation des Lebens selbst, so auch die Poesie. Was in den Tiefen des Lebens enthalten ist, welche der Beobachtung und dem Räsonnement unzugänglich sind, wird aus ihnen herausgeholt. So entsteht im Dichtenden der Eindruck der Inspiration. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 240)

> Significance, which appropriates a fact as a meaning-constituent determined by a whole, manifests a life-concern and not an intellectual relationship, and does not project reason or thought into this part of the overall event. Significance is derived from life itself. If we designate as the sense of a life-whole the connectedness resulting from the meaning of the parts, then the poetic work expresses the sense of life by means of freely creating a meaning context. The event becomes a symbol of life.
>
> Starting with anthropological reflection, everything involves the illumination and explication of life itself; it is the same with poetry. What is hidden in the depths of life and is not accessible to observation and reasoning, poetry is able to mine. Thus poets and writers

create the impression of being inspired. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 260)

We observe first that this passage provides a further explanation of the "facticity" that Dilthey posits as what he calls *das gegenständliche Auffassen* ("objective grasp")[2] of the nexus of

2 Dilthey has a whole section on "Das Gegenständliche Auffassen" ("Objective Apprehension"), which he defines like this:

Das gegenständliche Auffassen bildet ein System von Beziehungen, in dem Wahrnehmungen und Erlebnisse, erinnerte Vorstellungen, Urteile, Begriffe, Schlüsse und deren Zusammensetzungen enthalten sind. Allen diesen Leistungen im System des gegenständlichen Auffassens ist gemeinsam, daß in ihnen nur Beziehungen von Tatsächlichem gegenwärtig sind. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 121)

Objective apprehension forms a system of relations in which perceptions and lived experiences, remembered representations, judgments, concepts, inferences, and their combinations are contained. All these functions in the system of objective apprehension are alike in that only relations within the factical are present. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 143)

What exactly is a *Tatsache* ("fact") in a system composed entirely of "perceptions and lived experiences, remembered representations, judgments, concepts, inferences, and their combinations"? The passage to which this note is attached offers one explanation. Makkreel/ Rodi (2002: 2–3) explain that Dilthey borrowed Hegel's term *der objective Geist* ("objective spirit") for the objectified "elementary understanding" that we inherit from the past: "We are already historical because we grow up amidst the ways in which the spirit of the past has been objectified and preserved in our present context. Objective spirit is the medium through which we participate in our socio-historical situation, understand our place in it, communicate with each other, and interact." In Hegel objective spirit was ideal and universal; in Dilthey it assumes a pragmatic, empirical, realistic character (see Dilthey 1910/1927: 148-52; Makkreel and Oman 2002: 170-74). The role of the humanities is to raise that low-level local empiricism to a higher transregional and transnational (and ideally "universal") level and thus to "transform[] the real knowledge of ordinary life into the conceptual cognition of disciplinary discourse."

life: facts are *appropriated* by *die Bedeutsamkeit*, which is not, *pace* Makkreel and Oman, exactly "significance." The *-sam* suffix can be used in two ways, to indicate a quality (compare *-haft*, *-voll*) or an ability (compare *-bar, -abel*[3]). For example, *biegen* is "to bend" and *biegsam* is "flexible, bendable." Facts, we might venture, are appropriated by *signifiability* as what more literally might be translated "the determinedness of the meaning-link/-joint out of the whole." And just as signifiability is not a meaning but an ability either to mean or to find or assign a meaning, and as a *Bedeutungsglied* is not a meaning, or even a mechanical meaning-link or meaning-joint in an articulated machine, but an affordance provided to living experiencers attempting to link the meanings of individual events into the meaning of a nexus of life, so too is a fact not an extrahuman object but another affordance mustered by those human life-experiencers in their construction of a meaning-nexus.

The moment in that passage that is signifiable for Hölderlin's poetic affordances comes in the second paragraph. "Everything involves the illumination and explication of life itself," and the poet is engaged in that same effort; but some properties of the life-environment seem to be unavailable to the animals that live and function in it, and the poet has the ability to "mine"—expose not just as facts but as affordances—those hidden or obscured things. "So entsteht im Dichtenden der Eindruck der Inspiration," Dilthey writes: "So arises in the poet the impression of inspiration." As we'll see Charlie Louth noting in section 5f, "Hölderlin wanted the same immanence in his own time, he wanted his poetry to be able to provoke the passage of the Spirit, to be inspired, as he

3 *-abel* is a Latinate suffix, like English -able: acceptable is *akzeptabel*, disputable is *disputabel*, incommensurable is *inkommensurabel*, and so on.

saw Pindar's to have been. Pindar provided the traces of the Spirit, one of its best and most expressive forms" (Louth 1998: 125).

Another way to put it: the "inspired" Hölderlin stands to ordinary life-experiencers as the "inspired" Maurice Merleau-Ponty stands to Wilhelm Dilthey. As Hölderlin was able to mine "the passage of the Spirit" as poetic affordances that for lesser poets (not to mention non-poets) were simply missing resources, so too was Merleau-Ponty able to mine and specify as affordances the facts of the way the human body is bound up with lived experience in the environment of human life, which for Dilthey were simply "not further specifiable."

4.4 The Narrativization of Mental Representations

Elsewhere Dilthey writes:

> Im Erleben war uns das eigene Selbst weder in der Form seines Abflusses, noch in der Tiefe dessen, was es einschließt, erfaßbar. Denn wie eine Insel erhebt sich aus unzugänglichen Tiefen der kleine Umkreis des bewußten Lebens. Aber der Ausdruck hebt aus diesen Tiefen heraus. Er ist schaffend. Und so wird uns um Verstehen das Leben selber zugänglich, zugänglich als ein Nachbilden des Schaffens. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 220)

> In lived experience we grasp the self neither in the form of its full course nor in the depths of what it encompasses. For the scope of conscious life rises like a small island from inaccessible depths. But an expression can tap those depths. It is creative. Thus in understanding, life itself can become accessible through the re-creation of creation. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 241)

What makes *das Leben* ("life") *zugänglich* ("accessible") to *das Verstehen* ("the understanding")? What, to put it in affordance-theoretical terms, *affords* life to the animal's ability to act? Not necessarily (in)direct perception—though arguably Dilthey's formulation is another way of framing what Che-

mero calls direct perception. For Dilthey, it is *ein Ausdruck* ("an expression"). To us word-oriented humanists that immediately suggests a verbal utterance, but of course an *Ausdruck*/expression can also be a nonverbal response of some sort, a facial expression or other kinesthetic expression of feelings or other body states, in humans or other animals; and, as we'll see, Dilthey also explored music as an *Ausdruck eines Erlebnisses* ("expression of lived experience"). Dilthey's paraphrase of that *Ausdruck*/expression at the end of the quotation just above is specifically *so wird uns um Verstehen das Leben selber zugänglich, zugänglich als ein Nachbilden des Schaffens* ("in understanding, life itself can become accessible through the re-creation of creation"). The (here nominalized) verb *nachbilden* implies the creation of an accurate after-image: creating an after-image of life makes life accessible to humanity, and thus for the humanities.

Would that be a "mental representation," then? To the extent that the brain (not just in humans) is in the business of converting sense data into coherent representations of the world, yes, of course. Chemero explains that "the role of mental representations in explanations of adaptive behavior is as causally potent, information-carrying vehicles," and that "the representation plays a role in the causal economy of the agent, and, because it carries information about the environment, allows the behavior it causes to be appropriate for the environment" (Chemero 2009: 50). In his campaign for radical embodied cognitive science Chemero champions "direct perception" as an *exclusion* of such representations; but the unsuspecting reader of that advocacy is left wondering not only how any animal could survive in any environment without cerebrally mediated information about it, but how any living creature with a brain could possibly *exist* without receiving such information.

It turns out that what Chemero wants to exclude is not mental representations as such but the inferential *processing* of such representations:

> To claim that perception is direct is to claim that perception is not the result of mental gymnastics, of inferences performed on sensory representations. The direct perception view is anti-representationalism about perception, so it is just the right kind of theory of perception for radical embodied cognitive science. When an animal perceives something directly, the animal is in nonmediated contact with that thing. This implies, of course, that the perceiving isn't inside the animal, but rather is part of a system that includes both the animal and the perceived object. (Chemero 2009: 98)

The problem, in other words, is not mental *representations* but mental *gymnastics*: logical inferences, which is to say conscious propositional thought. Presumably Chemero wants to imagine environmental affordances for say single-celled organisms that move toward food sources and away from extremes of hot or cold—or at the very least for animals without language, and thus without the access to logical operations that language makes possible. It's difficult to imagine what sort of information single-celled organisms receive about their environment, but in order to explain their ability to move in directions that seem purposive to us we do have to theorize their access to such information; and certainly it has long been an accepted scientific fact that wolves, birds, and bees receive and act on extensive information about their environments.

It disturbs me, however, that Chemero wants to call that "*nonmediated* contact." The systemic perspective in which perception (and thus "mind") is *extended* as well as embodied, embedded, and enactive is an important corrective to older individualized models of perception; but in what sense exactly is extended perception "nonmediated"? Surely (see Robinson 2013) extended perception, whether visual, haptic, or

kinesthetic, *is* mediation? Surely what Chemero means is that the animal is in embodied, embedded, extended, enactive, and affective (4EA) *mediated* contact with the thing—and indeed that that mediated animal-thing contact of engagement is itself the systemic basis for the dynamic relationality of affordances?

One might be inclined to argue that Dilthey's take on all this remains individuated, perhaps because he theorized the *Zusammenhang des Lebens* nearly a century before Varela et al. (1991: enactivism) and Clark/Chalmers (1998: extended mind) and the beginning of 4EA cognitive science: for him the hermeneutical intertwining of life is the "autobiographical" phenomenology of the individual's entire life as experienced historically, not just one moment at a time but one hermeneutical interpretation of life at a time, intertwined directionally. He uses the analogue of music:

> aber was so fixiert ist, ist eine Idealdarstellung eines Verlaufes, eines musikalischen oder dichterischen Erlebniszusammenhanges; und was gewahren wir da? Teile eines Ganzes, die in der Zeit vorwärts sich entwickeln. Aber in jedem Teil ist wirksam, was wir eine Tendenz nennen. Ton folgt auf Ton und tritt neben ihn nach den Gesetzen unseres Tonsystemes; aber innerhalb desselben liegen unendliche Möglichkeiten, und in der Richtung von einer derselben gehen die Töne so vorwärts, daß die frühere bedingt sind durch die späteren. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 220–21)

> What is fixed in this way is an ideal bodying forth of a process, of a musical or poetic nexus[4] of lived experience. And what do we ob-

4 A "nexus" of course is a connectedness or a connected group, like a network or a web, from the Latin for binding, tying, or fastening together; Makkreel/Oman (2002), who mostly use "nexus," also often translate *der Zusammenhang* as "connectedness" or "context," whenever they believe Dilthey is using it descriptively rather than as a technical term. Carr (1986: 76) translates Dilthey's *Zusammenhang* as "coherence," from the Latin for "clinging together." All four are accurate and useful translations of the German sense of "hanging to-

> serve here? Parts of a whole that develop and move forward in time. In each part there is operative what we call a tendency. Tone follows upon tone and aligns itself with it according to the laws of our tonal system. This system leaves open infinite possibilities, but in the direction of one of these possibilities, tones proceed in such a way that earlier ones are conditioned by subsequent ones. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 241; translation modified slightly)

Each *moment* is directionalized—*wirksam* ("operative") with *was wir eine Tendenz nennen* ("what we call a tendency")—because it's not an ontological moment but a hermeneutical one, a phenomenological one, an active part of *ein Erlebniszusammenhang* ("an intertwining of experience") that organizes experience in meaningful ways.

But the apparent individuation of that *Zusammenhang* is only notional, based on the default assumption—another traditional and therefore collective *Zusammenhang*—in the early twentieth century that all experience is individual. In fact, of course, Dilthey's invocation of *die historische Kontinuität der Tradition* ("the historical continuity of tradition") makes the *Erlebniszusammenhang* ("nexus/intertwining of lived experience") or *Lebenszusammenhang* ("nexus/intertwining of life") not individual but collective:

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gether." In translating Benjamin's use of the phrase, however, I have retranslated *Zusammenhang* as "intertwining," for two reasons: one, Benjamin also uses the verb *zusammenhängen*, and there is no verb form of "nexus," and two, in those four Latinate terms the semantics of clinging/binding/tying/connecting together is buried in the Latin roots, and the kinesthetic intensity of Benjamin's rhetoric in the essay seems to demand a more robust embodiment of the clinging. This is especially true, it seems to me, because the entities that cling together in Benjamin's essay are not prehermeneutic life and hermeneutic expressions of life but languages and texts imagined as large animate creatures that tussle and clash.

> In einem weiteren Sinne ist auch Musik Ausdruck eines Erlebnisses. Erlebnis bezeichnet hier jede Art von Verbindung einzelner Erlebnisse in Gegenwart und in Erinnerung, Ausdruck einen Phantasievorgang, in welchem das Erlebnis hineinscheint in die historisch fortentwickelte Welt der Töne, in der alle Mittel, Ausdruck zu sein, sich in der historischen Kontinuität der Tradition verbunden ist. (Dilthey 1910/1927: 221)

> But there is a wider sense in which music too is the expression of lived experience. Here "lived experience" designates every kind of linking of specific experiences in the present and in memory; analogously, "expression" designates an imaginative process in which lived experience illuminates the historically evolved world of tones, in which all the ways of being expressive have been connected in the historical continuity of the tradition. (Transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 242)

Here the musical analogy makes it clear that *der Zusammenhang des Lebens/Erlebnisses* ("the nexus/intertwining of life/lived experience") is *eine Verbindung* ("a linking") *einzelner Erlebnisse in Gegenwart und in Erinnerung* ("of specific experiences in the present and in memory") not just of the individual but of the collective that has afforded the individual the ability to engage the environment productively, which is to say constitutively.

Lest we leap to the conclusion that this constitutivity is an origin myth, an event that happened once some time in the past and is simply "encountered" by individual animals, we should remember the dynamism of Chemero's radical embodied cognitive science: the relationality of animals and environment is constantly being *(re)constituted* as affordances, as the operative arm of *der Zusammenhang des Lebens/Erlebnisses* ("the nexus/intertwining of life/lived experience"). I noted earlier that the affordances generated in and by and through the engagement of animals with their environment are *learned*, so that an animal entering (or waking up to) a familiar environment is not participating in a *new* extended perception of a "meaning-laden environment," as if the lading of that envi-

ronment with meaning had happened long before the animal engaged it and now must be generated from scratch; rather, the animal is *reactivating* the learned meanings with which that same extended-perception system (i.e., including the animal) had previously laden it. What Dilthey's hermeneutic adds to that formulation is the *directionality* or *historicity* of what has been learned: there is a possibly *unconscious narrativity* to the *Zusammenhang*.

Unconscious? I take it that is what Dilthey means by *wie eine Insel erhebt sich aus unzugänglichen Tiefen der kleine Umkreis des bewußten Lebens* ("the tiny ambit of conscious life rises like a small island from inaccessible depths"): *conscious* life rises from the depths of the *unconscious*. And if those depths are not so much the Freudian unconscious of the repressed but simply whatever we're not consciously aware of, they can also be the depths of habit, of actions and abilities that have been automated through habitualized repetition. I also take it that something like habitualization is a large part of what Chemero means by "direct perception": we are typically not aware of what we're perceiving, or of the extent to which our perception is extended out to co-experience with our environments. Any sudden change in our environment—a loud noise, a large shadow suddenly falling on us from above, etc.—may drive our co-experiential perception a few steps "up" into "more" conscious awareness; but even for humans, and *a fortiori* for non-human animals, there is no clear demarcation between "full" unconsciousness and "full" consciousness.

Narrativity? I take it that is what Dilthey means by *in der Richtung von einer derselben [Möglichkeiten] gehen die Töne so vorwärts, daß die frühere bedingt sind durch die späteren* ("in the direction of one of these possibilities, tones proceed in such a way that earlier ones are conditioned by subsequent ones"). It is difficult to fathom just how subsequent "tones" (or remembered

"events") might condition earlier ones, except insofar as what we are co-experiencing is what Derrida calls an iterability that is built into the recursive structuring of the hermeneutical *Zusammenhang*. Not a first time, in other words, but an nth time: always in the middle of a sequence that is constantly doubling back on itself, finding its laters in its earliers, and using those laters to impose *die Mitteilbarkeit* ("communicability" or "mediability") on those earliers.

5 Understanding the Affordances of the Translator

5.1 Benjamin on the Source Text as Unmetaphorically Alive

And now, finally, let us return to translation. I mentioned before that Benjamin early in the essay forecloses on translationality as an affordance for human life-experiencers, and thus on experienceability; for Dilthey too *die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen* ("expressions of life are intimately intertwined with living beings"), but as Benjamin rereads him they are so intertwined *ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten* ("without having any significance for those beings"). In Benjamin's Diltheyan analogy, the source text is the "living being," and the translation is the "expression of life" that has no significance for the source text.

But what does it mean for the source text to be alive? Benjamin tells us that we are to understand the "life" or aliveness of a text *in völlig unmetaphorischer Sachlichkeit* (Benjamin 1923/1972: 10) ("in fully unmetaphorical objectivity," transl. Robinson 2023c: 36); but in what way can a *text* be objectively and unmetaphorically alive? The mystical symbolism that Benjamin takes from the thirteenth-century Lurianic Kabba-

lah would suggest that texts are low-level emanations of the divine, or at least of ideal Forms from Plato's Realm of Ideas/ Forms, as mobilized by the demiurgic Logos of Philo Judaeus (ibid.: 142); they are given fully unmetaphorical life by the spark of the divine, but because they come in contact with human beings, that spark is concealed by a shell that Kabbalists call Kelipot. In Benjamin's mystical hermeneutic the task of the translator is to translate literally, finding the point of maximum friction between the source and target languages, so as to rub the shells up against each other until ultimately, some time in the utopian future, they crumble away and reveal the divine light of pure language.

5.2 Finding Hölderlinian Affordances in Benjamin

But let us now attempt to read that scene with higher granularity, informed by the imagistic path we have been pursuing through affordance theory in sections 2–4. As I mentioned in section 2.2, Benjamin's brief but supercharged engagement with the affordances of the translator comes toward the end of his essay, when he comes to the translations of Pindar and Sophocles by Friedrich Hölderlin:

> Gar die Wörtlichkeit hinsichtlich der Syntax wirft jede Sinneswiedergabe vollends über den Haufen und droht geradenwegs ins Unverständliche zu führen. Dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert standen Hölderlins Sophokles-Übersetzungen als monströse Beispiele solcher Wörtlichkeit vor Augen. … Hierfür wie in jeder andern wesentlichen Hinsicht stellen sich Hölderlins Übertragungen, besonders die der beiden Sophokleischen Tragödien, bestätigend dar. In ihnen ist die Harmonie der Sprachen so tief, daß der Sinn nur noch wie eine Äolsharfe vom Winde von der Sprache berührt wird. Hölderlins Übersetzungen sind Urbilder ihrer Form; sie verhalten sich auch zu den vollkommensten Übertragungen ihrer Texte als das Urbild zum Vorbild, wie es der Vergleich der Hölderlinschen und Borchardtschen Übersetzung der dritten pythischen Ode von Pindar zeigt.

> Eben darum wohnt in ihnen vor andern die ungeheure und ursprüngliche Gefahr aller Übersetzung: daß die Tore einer so erweiterten und durchwalteten Sprache zufallen und den Übersetzer ins Schweigen schließen. Die Sophokles-Übersetzungen waren Hölderlins letztes Werk. In ihnen stürzt der Sinn von Abgrund zu Abgrund, bis er droht in bodenlosen Sprachtiefen sich zu verlieren. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 17, 20–21)

> In fact a literal rendering of the syntax totally flips the reproduction of meaning on its head and threatens to lead straight into the incomprehensible. To the nineteenth century Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles stood as monstrous examples of such literalism. … Hölderlin's translations are prototypes of their Form. … They stand in relation to even the most perfect transpositions of their source texts as "primordial image" (*Urbild* = prototype, archetype) to "pre-image" (*Vorbild* = model, exemplar, paragon). Any comparison of Hölderlin's translations of Pindar's third Pythian Ode with Borchardt's will show that clearly. And because of that, in them lurks the most appalling primal peril of all translation: that when the gates of language have been so savagely sprung they may slam shut and enclose the translator in silence. The translations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* were Hölderlin's last work. In them sense plunges from abyss to abyss until it risks losing itself in the bottomless pit of language. (Transl. Robinson 2023c: 131, 179)

What stands out there in affordance-theoretical terms is the clashing convergence of the imageries of superhuman success ("prototypes of their Form") and all-too-human failure ("enclose the translator in silence"). What affords Hölderlin the ability to surpass every other translator who has ever lived also encloses him in silence. The cognitive and perhaps affective dissonance between those two outcomes—and arguably even two divergent affordances, one for success and one for failure, each inside the other—has proved insurmountable for some readers, and they have sought to collapse the dissonance into simple failure. Paul de Man (1986: 62), for example, first turns the dark Romanticism of Hölderlin plunging from abyss to abyss into a fairly mundane technical literary

reference—those "abysses" were nothing but "a *mise en abyme* structure, the kind of structure by means of which it is clear that the text itself becomes an example of what it exemplifies"—and then into another example of the inevitable failure of the translator to translate.[5] And Peter Fenves (2011: 150) argues that Benjamin *does not* celebrate Hölderlin's achievement, indeed disapproves of it, so that Benjamin's horror at silence becomes a horror at a translator's failure to translate properly: "The translations of Sophocles have no regular interval Δ, hence no direction, and therefore verge on senselessness." These readings, of course, ignore Benjamin's insistence that Hölderlin's translations were prototypes of their Form. For Benjamin, near-perfection; for de Man and Fenves, failure.

Another way of resolving the apparent clash of affordances might be to lodge a factual correction: "The translations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* were [*not*] Hölderlin's last work." He finished them in 1803–4, just before their 1804 publication, and continued to write poetry for the rest of his long life, living in Zimmer's tower till he died in 1843 at the age of 73; his later work included the famous 1812 lyric "Die Linien des Lebens" ("The Lines of Life"). Sometimes after playing the piano for the tourists that showed up at the tower to see him and ask for his autograph he would write an impromptu poem for them. And if the implication is that trans-

5 See Bannet (1993: 583) for a persuasive deflation of de Man's offhand attempt to deflate Benjamin's mysticism by making everything in the "Task" about either death—for de Man translations "'kill the original' (C 84) by using language 'destructively' and 'nihilistically' to plunge the original 'from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language' (C 84)"—or mere technicalities "in the service of linguistic fundamentalism and an ultimate and ironic political nihilism" (Pence 1996: 85; see also Porter 1989).

lating Pindar and Sophocles drove him crazy, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia in the late 1790s, *before* he set his hand to translating Pindar (1800), and well before he tackled Sophocles. The prognosis that gave him no more than three years to live came after the 1804 publication of the Sophocles, in 1806; but there is no reason to assume that he was any "crazier" then than he was at his first diagnosis seven or eight years earlier.

In the light of this historical correction Hölderlin's apparent "failure" might be revealed as nothing more than Benjamin's desire to punch up the actual life-intertwining affordances of Hölderlin's experimental translations from ancient Greek into a more dramatic story. It may in fact be that Benjamin simply didn't have reliable access to Hölderlin's biography, and that the lurid imagery of "the gates of language had slammed shut and enclosed Hölderlin in silence" and "sense plunges from abyss to abyss until it risks losing itself in the bottomless pit of language" were therefore simply productions of his own dark Romantic imagination.

5.3 Pindarian Affordances in the Classical Study of Ancient Greek

Rather than taking sides on Benjamin's failure/success cluster, I propose in subsections 5.3–5.6 to make a brief pass through Charlie Louth's (1998: 103–49) chapter on Hölderlin's translation of Pindar.

Our starting point for that story, however, has to come before the moment at which Louth starts the account, namely the classicist *normativization* of (the nexus of) literary translation from the ancient Greeks. Hölderlin, after all, knew not only how Pindar had been translated into German before him, but the obvious facts that we tend to take for granted:

the differences between ancient Greek and modern Greek; the differences between Greek and German; the fact that Pindar was a poet; the fact that since antiquity he has been considered both the greatest and the most difficult of the nine lyric poets of ancient Greece; what poetry is, what lyric poetry is, what verse form is, and in what verse forms Pindar wrote; and so on. These are all affordances provided Hölderlin by "the tradition," the historical life-nexus of translating from ancient Greek into German. They are relational objects "thematized" in and by and as his life-world, and they are specifically normative ones—affordances considered "correct" by the tradition. As such they would have been learned—dynamically—by Hölderlin in the course of learning ancient Greek; but presumably he would not have read or been told that these are *norms* of modern Pindar translation. As I argue in Robinson (2020), a dynamic (temporal) phenomenology of normativity tends to construct norms participatorily, through the experience of repetition: "the norms of translation" as studied by Gideon Toury (1995) and Andrew Chesterman (1993) and others as stable laws are the products not only of learning but of forgetting that one has learned.[6] What a normatively stabilized environment affords the translator is not

6 For a reading of translational norm theory from Chesterman (1993) and Toury (1995) to Robinson (2020), see Halverson/Kotze (2021). They note that Toury's (2012: 284-89) revised edition of Toury (1995) makes the shift from the earlier notion both he and Chesterman promoted of a conscious propositional "legislation" or at least "negotiation" of norms to a model in which translators unconsciously imagine audiences and audience responses, and that by not taking Toury's 2012 revision into account, I end up caricaturing his norm theory based on the earlier formulations alone (Toury 1995: 58–59). What remains new and important in my account, however, they say, is that I am the first to couch norm theory explicitly in the context of 4EA cognitive science.

only the safety of conformity—of knowing how to conform—but the reassuring illusion of a stable hierarchy between law-givers and law-obeyers.

Pushing a little harder on that initial formulation, we can begin to explore how a specific translator like Hölderlin is afforded the desire and the ability to translate a difficult poet like Pindar. Remember, from p. 248 above, that Benjamin outlined the *less* authentic definition of translatability as *ob es unter der Gesamtheit seiner Leser je seinen zulänglichen Übersetzer finden werde?* ("whether among all of its readers a translator able to translate it is ever found"). In my commentary on that passage in Robinson (2023c: 26) I noted that this "has to do with the relative difficulty of the source text and the relative translation skill of the human translator, and the impossibility of being 100% certain of either. How difficult does a text have to be to translate for that to count as a problem? How good does a translator have to be at translating that specific text for the translation that results to count as a translation?" While these questions are impossible to answer in the abstract, and very difficult to answer for either any individual translator considering whether to undertake a specific translation or any editor seeking to hire a translator in a specific translational environment, "this is," I added, "the commonsensical level on which we typically think about translatability."

It is also, of course, the realm in which the *task* of the translator is typically normativized, and thus in which both the translator and the editor must decide whether the translator has what it takes—the affordance(s)—to complete the task. As Jacques Derrida puts it,

> Le titre dit aussi, dès son premier mot, la tâche (*Aufgabe*), la mission à laquelle on est (toujours par l'autre) destiné, l'engagement, le devoir, la dette, la responsabilité. Il y va déjà d'une loi, d'une injonction dont le traducteur doit répondre. (Derrida 1985: 219)

> The title [of Benjamin's essay] also says, from its first word, the task (*Aufgabe*), the mission to which one is destined (always by the other), the commitment, the duty, the debt, the responsibility. Already at stake is a law, an injunction for which the translator has to be responsible. (Transl. Graham 1985: 175)

Like the "laws" that Toury (1995) and Chesterman (1993) call translation "norms," of course, those injunctions or expectations are not laws at all but affordances organized and mobilized collectively by that *Lebenszusammenhang* or *Lebenswelt* that we call the translation marketplace, and learned dynamically, and often unconsciously, by translators as they become increasingly competent in the "community of practice" (Wenger 1999) of that marketplace.

5.4 Romantic Literalist Affordances

Now one could argue that Walter Benjamin's theory of translation was an idiosyncratic view shaped as an affordance not by the marketplace but by the Jewish mysticism in which he had been dabbling for nearly a decade with his friend Gershom Scholem. But in fact there was a larger esoteric *Zusammenhang des Lebens* ("nexus/intertwining of life") that had been shaping his orientation not only to Jewish mysticism but to his transcendental metaphysics of translation, namely, German Romanticism. Antoine Berman (2008, Wright 2018 in English) and other Benjamin scholars have wanted to claim that German Romanticism was the *total* environment shaping Benjamin's translation-theoretical affordances; and while that is manifestly not true—his pre-Kantian transcendental essentialism may be difficult for some of his admirers to swallow, but it really is undeniable—it did nevertheless wield enormous influence. It was a major affordance in Benjamin's early philosophy of language. And given his assertion that Friedrich Hölderlin was the greatest translator who ever lived—

that his translations of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* were "prototypes of their Form," more perfect than even the most perfect human translations ever—it is worth noting that the German Romantic *Zusammenhang des Übersetzens* or translational life-nexus yielded both Hölderlin and Benjamin (and of course many others) a literalist affordance of translation. For German Romantics and post-Romantics, and arguably for anachronistic pre-Romantics like Benjamin as well, literal translation was a "marketplace" norm. Hence Louth (1998) devotes his first chapter to the emergence of that marketplace norm through the work of the German translators who Benjamin says *[haben] morsche Schranken der eigenen Sprache [gebrochen]: Luther, Voß, Hölderlin, George haben die Grenzen des Deutschen erweitert* (Benjamin 1923/1972: 19) ("[have] smashe[d] through the target language's rotten barricades: Luther, Voß, Hölderlin, and George all pushed back the boundaries of the German language," transl. Robinson 2023c: 164)—specifically by translating literally. Luther is famous as a staunch opponent of literal translation, of course—he insisted that you have to go into the houses, the streets, the markets and watch Germans' mouths move as they speak, and translate that way (Robinson 1997/[3]2014: 87)—but as Louth (1998: 9) points out, he did also admit that in certain passages he translated literally, because, as Jerome had put it long before, in those places the word order contained a mystery.

Voß was perhaps the prime mover of this Romantic affordance of translation:

> Voss's method was to adopt a very close equivalent to Homer's hexameters (essentially identical, allowing for the different nature of metrics in German and Greek) and to retain too, as far as possible, the syntax, the word-order and the forms of individual words. Doing this, he found that German was capable of a reflection of the Greek not previously imagined possible, and the whole idea of the shape of German was changed. Voss found for it a flexibility and plasticity it

> had not hitherto possessed, or which had been deadened by the normalization and rationalization the *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] had subjected it to. […] The new resources of expression Voss opened or retrieved were not solely due to the direct influence of Greek: he also revived old and dialect words in the manner of Luther, who was a model in this respect. (Louth 1998: 26–27)

Note there the resonances with our discussion in the Introduction (p. 38–39): "the whole idea of the shape of German was changed" is obviously what Husserl calls *ein Wandel der Thematik* ("a change/transformation of the theme"), and possibly, as that new literalist "theme" took hold—"Voss did effect a kind of revolution in taste, in that what was at first almost universally misunderstood came to be accepted as a classic" (Louth 1998: 28)—what Dilthey called the *Richtung* or directionality in which *gehen die Töne so vorwärts, daß die frühere bedingt sind durch die späteren* ("tones proceed in such a way that earlier ones are conditioned by subsequent ones") The new "flexibility and plasticity" that Voß found for German was a new affordance, one "it had not hitherto possessed, or which had been deadened by the normalization and rationalization the *Aufklärung* had subjected it to." "The new resources of expression Voss opened or retrieved" were also affordances of translation that later Romantic translators, notably A. W. Schlegel in his brilliant Shakespeare (1797–1810)—still today, two centuries later, the standard go-to German translation—put to good use.

But what about those two centuries? Louth makes clear that the Romantic literalist affordances of translation took hold in German in a deeply transformative way. Those Romantic and post-Romantic affordances do not extend down into the professional translation marketplace, but for high-level German translators of classic literature they are still in force. Not necessarily as norms—certainly not as laws—but as affordances, *Zusammenhänge* that make literal translation

not only doable but attractive. (Another way of saying "not only doable but attractive" would be that they are affordances for translators and target readers alike.)

As for the long century from Schlegel's Shakespeare to Benjamin's "Aufgabe," the key name in Benjamin's list of German-expanders for his own time was Stefan George (1868–1933), whose *Umdichtungen* of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Dante, Shakespeare, and many other poets were saturated in the German Romantic literalist affordances. The relations between Benjamin (and other Jewish literati) and the George circle in the 1920s and early 1930s, before Hitler came to power and George fled Germany to neutral Switzerland (and died there the year after, in 1933), were complex. George was himself not anti-Semitic, and there were a few Jewish members of his circle, but George was wary of letting Jews become a majority. Also, his nostalgic aristocratic ethos and the emphasis he placed in his poetry on self-sacrifice, heroism, and power were appealing to the Nazis, who claimed him as one of their own—though George secretly opposed Hitler, and two members of his circle were later ringleaders of the July 20 (1944) plot to assassinate Hitler. One of the major affordances of German Romanticism beginning early on, during the occupation of the German principalities by Napoleon from 1806 to 1814, was a nationalistic nostalgia for the medieval greatness of Germany—the Hohenstaufen emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, the *Nibelungenlied,* and later Wagner's *Ring* cycle—and that whole life-nexus did tend to afford Nazi proclivities and hatred of the Jews as rootless "internationals." After the destruction of Nazi Germany in the war, too, George's work was banned due to suspicion of Nazism. But his 1928 book *Das neue Reich* ("the new realm"), which contained a poem titled "Geheimes Deutschland" ("secret Germany"), was a paean to an aristocratic Germany, not *das*

dritte Reich ("the Third Reich"). Benjamin's early attraction to ancient mysticisms tended to link him in many people's mind to this same nationalistic Romanticism; indeed in addition to Benjamin, the most prominent admirers of Hölderlin's radical translations of Pindar and Sophocles in the 1920s were Martin Heidegger and the George circle.

When Benjamin wrote the "Aufgabe" in 1921, then, the life-nexus that afforded him the fervent commitment to literalism that supercharges the essay was not ancient history. It was very much the cultural environment in which he lived and wrote. For whatever reason, however, it was not the cultural environment in which he translated, and above all published his translations; hence the gulf, on which many Benjamin scholars have commented, between "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" and the stiff, musty translation of Baudelaire to which that essay was attached as *Vorwort* ("foreword"). One is tempted to blame "the marketplace" and its sense-for-sense norms for this, but Stefan George was publishing his brilliantly Romantic transcreations in that same marketplace, and presumably Benjamin could have done the same; perhaps it is enough to say that the German Romantic literalist affordance enabled him to write *about* translation in ecstatic ways that he was unable to mobilize when he *made* translations, without speculating on the reasons for the split.

So now let us turn to Hölderlin's Pindar translations, as tracked by Charlie Louth (1998). What, let us ask, were the affordances of that translation, and how did the reciprocity of his engagement with his cultural environment generate those affordances, and how did he act on them? And then, in the Conclusion (section 6): what affordances do they generate for us? How can and do we use them?

5.5 The Affordances of Influence

First, consider what literary historians discuss under the rubric of "influence." An influence is manifestly a literary affordance, but an affectively-becoming-cognitively fraught one: since the transformative work on influence by Harold Bloom (1973, 1975) we have known both its enabling and its disabling power, and the convoluted lengths to which poets can go to manage and mobilize the resulting anxiety. Louth too invokes Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* in discussing Hölderlin's career as a poet and translator (Louth 1998: 133–35); he notes that the first major influence on the young Hölderlin, in his mid-twenties, was Friedrich Schiller, who took to Hölderlin immediately and was busy launching him on an illustrious career when the young ephebe suddenly left Jena, without warning. Schiller apparently was furious and would not answer Hölderlin's letters for a year and a half; and Hölderlin scholars to this day do not know what precipitated the departure. One line of speculation, which Louth too raises (ibid.: 132), is that the anxiety of influence was too overwhelming: Hölderlin had to cut and run to avoid being subsumed into the orbit of Schiller's precursor-power. He was already writing exclusively Schiller-influenced poetry.

From a very early age, Hölderlin had known that he wanted to look for guidance from F. G. Klopstock (1724–1803) and Pindar; "of these," Louth notes, "Pindar affected Hölderlin's poetry most directly and radically, though Klopstock probably provided the means for that to be possible, a language into which Pindar could come" (Louth 1998: 132). (Elsewhere Louth notes that "probably none of the versions [of Pindar by Hölderlin] would have turned out thus without the revolution in poetic diction performed by Klopstock" [ibid.: 52–53].) Pindar of course had the advantage of being

long dead, giving Hölderlin the distance and freedom to manipulate his influence, especially by translating him; but "coming under Pindar's influence, though spared the tensions of personal contact, he was also subject to the total historical pressure of antiquity" (ibid.: 132), and Hölderlin was "aware that even the desire for originality was only a reaction against an attitude of subordination to antiquity which had become the norm, and that there could be no simple evasion of its prerogative" (ibid.). By the time Hölderlin came to translate Pindar, in 1800, numerous notable attempts had already been made to render him into German, by the Swiss Johann Jacob Steinbrüchel (1729-1796) in 1759, by Voß "in the style of Klopstock" (Louth 1998: 47) in 1777, by Friedrich Gedike (1754–1803) also in 1777 (this one Hölderlin owned), and by several of the other usual Romantic suspects, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and A. W. Schlegel. By the time Hölderlin began translating Pindar in 1800, in other words, the leading literati in the German-speaking principalities had been at work generating affordances for the literal translation of Pindar for nearly a half century.

5.6 The Affordances of Romanticized Ancient Greece

In addition, of course, there was the German Enlightenment/Romantic veneration of ancient Greece, which had been emerging over roughly that same half century. As Louth puts it, "ancient Greece was principally important to Hölderlin as a time and place of divine immanence" (Louth 1998: 125), but that conception of ancient Greece was another early-Romantic affordance. When Louth adds that "Pindar's poetry had both recorded and itself been a manifestation of the immanent Spirit" (ibid.), he means not the printed Greek words of Pindar's poems but the Pindar affordance emerging

out of the engagement of dozens of late-Enlightenment/early-Romantic translator-"animals" with the textual-becoming-cultural environment they called "Pindar." And Louth's summation of that affordance shows Hölderlin mobilizing it not just *for* translation but *through* translation for his own poetry: "Hölderlin wanted the same immanence in his own time, he wanted his poetry to be able to provoke the passage of the Spirit, to be inspired, as he saw Pindar's to have been. Pindar provided the traces of the Spirit, one of its best and most expressive forms" (ibid.).

Hölderlin did not translate Pindar for publication. It was a private school for him, an exercise, a training ground for his own poetry. He translated Pindar in an attempt to transform the way he wrote poetry. As Louth notes, "in the main, and sometimes for long stretches of text, Hölderlin proceeds 'mechanically,' letting himself be guided by each Greek word as it comes, in a remarkable attitude of submission" (Louth 1998: 111). He was like the diligent student spending long hours practicing a difficult translation task in order to shine in the foreign language classroom—and perhaps, later, in the foreign country (though Hölderlin had precious little experience of foreign countries). But as the preceding paragraphs should make clear, he did not choose Pindar at random. In a very real sense the "extended mind" or life-nexus of the Romantic intellectuals and artists in the German-speaking world of his day, including of course Hölderlin himself, chose Pindar for (and by and as) him. Literalism was an affordance for translating Pindar, not necessarily because Voß and Schlegel and the others had afforded literalism for Romantic literati as the most brilliant way to showcase an author in German (as Benjamin would later claim), but because Hölderlin wanted to *get inside* Pindar, to feel what it was like to write poetry like

Pindar. But also for him Pindar was an affordance for writing a new kind of poetry:

> In Hölderlin's poetics a poem works to bring the Spirit into its dynamics, but the poems themselves inevitably fail to do so and what they voice is its absence, a sense of what it would be like through the almost unbearable desire for it to be there. Now in a sense with translation it is the same: the Greek poem can never be fully reconstituted in the German, a lack of discrepancy is always implied. But whereas in the poetry the absence, however strongly the need and the longing be realized, must always remain an absence and as such only definable in negative terms, in the translations what cannot be fully conveyed is quite specific and actual: the Greek text. By making the analogical transposition from poetic Spirit to Pindar's Greek, the poetics, at their most extreme, can be turned into a form of practice. (Louth 1998: 126)

6 Conclusion: Hölderlinian Affordances for Us

6.1 Affordances of Reading Hölderlin's Pindar

In addition to this pragmatic instrumentalization of both Pindar and literalism for the transformation of his own poetry, however, Hölderlin also developed new Pindars and new literalisms—each by working on the other. In a sense the very patient and diligent and almost "mechanical" mobilization of the Pindar-and-literalism affordances for the purpose of transforming his own poetry itself became a new environment in which Hölderlin participatorily, by engaging with it in embedded and extended ways, enacted new affordances for translation. It's not just, as Louth puts it, that "Pindar's Greek was also an established, transmitted form, and Hölderlin seems to have approached it with the intention to break it, guided by the belief in the transience of all forms, in the necessity of their yielding to new ones" (Louth 1998: 120). Nor is it just that "Hölderlin's extreme, disturbing method of

translating thus has the extra purpose of contriving a personal Pindar, of displacing him" (ibid.: 134). It's also, as Louth too insists throughout his chapter, that Hölderlin does violence to both the Greek and the German in order to make them meet in the middle. He's pushing on Pindar to make him German, and pushing on German to make it Pindar, and the result, as Louth doesn't mention, is a radically new kind of literalism that can be used by other translators—a new affordance for translators.

Louth does note that "translation is entirely a matter of relation: the nature of the relation between original and version determines the type of translation in question" (Louth 1998: 127), and that if that relation is always a change, a transformation, even a mutilation, there are countless, perhaps unlimited ways of transforming a source text in the direction of a target language. "The question for the translator," he adds, "is how that change should be managed, and whether it should be elided (concealed), or accented" (ibid.: 128). Because of the way he grappled with Pindar, Hölderlin ended up accenting the change, drawing attention to the process—indeed apparently leaving Pindar half-translated, leaving the translation process suspended in early draft form. The private purpose of the translation job allowed this, of course: in translating the two Sophocles plays for publication a few years later he polished and edited obsessively, but he was translating Pindar for himself, not for a public. As Louth expresses this, "It is a translation in which the crossing over, the intermediary stage which a conventional translator will skip over or repress, becomes uncomfortably apparent. The gap is translated. If we think of a translation as a modulation (as in music) out of the original, then the Pindar translation is an unresolved chord, with the modulation in progress. But the unresolvedness is exactly its rich potential" (Louth 1998:

119–20), and thus also its enabling affordance for later translators. But it's complicated:

> to read [the Pindar translation] is to be set in a region which is almost pre- or non-lingual or before the ordering of consciousness, because it is an unresolved mixture of different systems where the very articulation of sense seems to be both impeded and enacted. The Greek is dismantled into German words, and its structure cannot signify in them; German is given a foreign structure in which its words cannot properly operate. But this region is also extremely fertile—the translations are rich in exciting juxtapositions and sequences of syntax that startle into a new awareness of the possibilities of language. There is the sense of a resource not quite tapped. (Louth 1998: 121)

A resource, of course, is an affordance, and *not quite tapping* that resource is another kind of affordance. The latter can frustrate the target reader who expects of a translation "normal" (normative) accessibility: for the target-cultural ignorances of the source-cultural environment to be accommodated; for the prose sense of the source text's strangeness to be simplified and stylized; for the reader to be made to feel at home in a new text. The "extreme fertility" of "this region" is easy to miss, because it requires of the reader a special kind of imagination—indeed a special kind of imaginative and critical *work*. The "exciting juxtapositions and sequences of syntax that startle into a new awareness of the possibilities of language" have to be *read* that way—and reading that way is extraordinarily difficult, and therefore often frustrating.

6.2 Reifying Relational Affordances as Dispositions

In fact there is a strong affiliation between the assumption that avant-garde translations are *intrinsically* too difficult for target readers and the disposition model of affordance theory that Aleksei Procyshyn champions. If the translation-nexus in culture "universally" constructs target readers as disposi-

tionally unable to read anything difficult, the tens or hundreds of thousands of people whose lived experience enactively maintains that nexus will tend to shape translation norms around easy accessibility. Their participation in that nexus will tend to impose regulatory limits on the act of translating, so as to define and delimit translatorial effectivities as intrinsically aimed at creating a translational environment (the target text) that will in turn regulatorily afford target readers' understanding *at that low dispositional level* of critical understanding. Hence such supposed "universals" of translation as the lexical simplification of the source text, with the notorious result that "the language [of translations] is usually flatter [than that of original writing], less structured, less ambiguous, less specific to a given text, more habitual, and so on" (Pym 2010: 79, summarizing Toury 1995: 268–73).

And of course by the very principle of dynamic relationality for which Anthony Chemero advocates, the normative pressure to dumb the target-textual "environment" down to suit the static affordance-theoretical conception of the hypothetical target-lectorial "animal" as dispositionally incapable of understanding a difficult translation tends in turn to dumb actual target readers down as well. As Chemero (2009: 149) puts it, in Turvey's disposition model "affordances must be complemented by the effectivities of animals": a static regulatory environment imposes normative limitations on the animals that can function in it, and in so doing shapes and consolidates ("perfects") their "effectivities."

But that is too simple. A more nuanced formulation would have it that the normative dumb-down pressure has had the effect of transforming the target readership into two camps, a "normal" booboisie that has thoroughly and comfortably adapted to the "normal" dumbed-down target-textual environment and an "abnormal" and therefore peripher-

al and profoundly suspect elite that despises "normal" translations and either reads only in original source languages or seeks out innovative and even experimental translations (see Robinson 2023b).

But now note the tensions between the dynamism of "transform the target readership" and the static binary of "into two camps": clearly the binary in the previous paragraph is still too simple. If we allow the transformative dynamism to leach over into and ultimately overrun the static binary, we may find that the relationship between the target-textual environment and the target-lectorial "animals" that function in that environment to be in *constant* transformation. Even the readers whom we might be inclined to despise as the "normal booboisie," in other words—the ones who supposedly have to read at a fourth-grade level and must never be intellectually or affectively challenged—are subject to change. They too can learn. And to the extent that they don't learn, that they show no signs of changing, that fact should itself be understood not as an indication of some static "ideal" disposition that defines and determines "universals of translation" but as the ever-active (re)shaping of the affordances of their relational participation in specific textual environments.[7] Nor does the mere fact of being willing and even eager to participate in a more challenging relationship with a target-textual environment guarantee membership in some reified elite. Even to poetically and translationally sophisticated readers, for example, Hölderlin's Pindar transla-

7 The three sentences preceding this note are obviously reframings of the theory of foreignization from Schleiermacher through Berman to Venuti, with the greater narrative/explanatory detail afforded by the intellectual trajectory from Diltheyan hermeneutics through Husserlian and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology to 4EA cognitive science.

tions offer poetic and translational affordances that may seem more daunting and discouraging than enabling—until they find that they *need* that affordance, even perhaps weren't looking for it but turned out to need it after all.

It's like our MA students in translation programs who don't like theory and don't want to take our theory classes because all they need is practical translation and/or interpreting skills in various domains thank you very much—and then, somehow, almost against their will, they get excited by this or that theoretical approach, and realize just how enabling that approach is *for their practical translation work*. They realize that translation is not just a mechanical and submissive reproduction of turgid source texts but can be creative and transformative—which ultimately means that their own future careers don't need to be boring and mechanical and submissive but can be creative and transformative as well. When they least expect it, the "useless" but required environment of the theory class affords them a potential for career excitement.

6.3 Hölderlinian Affordances for Experimental Translation

In closing I would say that, Walter Benjamin to the contrary, Friedrich Hölderlin is not intrinsically an exemplary or "prototypical" case. Benjamin thinks he is because Hölderlin is the most brilliant exemplar of the translation strategy for which he is arguing—and also because he has foreclosed on the target reader from the very start, and indeed in some sense on human "animals" from the very start, including the translator, and therefore is not ideally positioned to think about translation in terms of affordances for the translator or the reader. The fact is, though, that Hölderlin's translational affordances

are very much a niche affair, useful (if at all) to a very small minority.

But for some of us—some very few of us, perhaps, who translate experimental works that defy conventional translation strategies—Hölderlin's affordances can indeed be transformative. This does not necessarily mean imitating Hölderlin's precise translation strategies—indeed it would be fair to say that Hölderlin himself didn't imitate his own precise translation strategies. (He developed them, and kept developing them as he translated.) I have, for example, experimented with a radical literal translation of Benjamin's "Aufgabe" that not only seeks out German-English cognates as a (West-) Germanic version of Hölderlin's tendency to translate the etymological back-stories of Greek words into German, but also plays with line-breaks to help readers parse the strange English that results:

> Nirgends erweist sich einem Kunstwerk oder einer Kunstform gegenüber die Rücksicht auf den Aufnehmenden für deren Erkenntnis fruchtbar. (Benjamin 1923/1972: 9)

> N'wher'any erwits self to one couldwork
> or to one couldform
> againsto'er the ridgesight
> up the upnimmers
> for her erkenn'dness
> fruitbear.
>
> (Robinson 2023b)

The inciting question behind that experiment, obviously, is why an essay that despises sense-for-sense translation should be translated sense for sense; the follow-up question concerns what affordances the textual environment of Benjamin's "Aufgabe" might provide the translator of that essay

who feels impelled to act on the pressures arising from the inciting question. Mining Hölderlin's Pindar translations for those affordances, even if the result does not perfectly align with Benjamin's theory of translation, is one—not the only possible—response arising out of a dynamic environmental affordance relation with the essay.

But the affordances we derive from Hölderlin's Pindar might be deployed more broadly as well, to enable other kinds of experimentation. How does one translate nonsense poetry—say, заум/*zaum* ("beyonsense", see Robinson 2017b: 156–60)—or translate a homophonic translation like the Zukovskys' Catullus into another language? How does one translate lipogrammatic writing, where the source text never uses a specific letter, or, more radically, excludes all vowels but one?[8] How does one translate a collage novel, or

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8 See e.g. the first stanza of Ernst Jandl's German lipogrammatic poem "ottos mops," probably written in 1963, published in 1970:

ottos mops trotzt
otto: fort mops fort
ottos mops hopst fort
otto: soso

Elizabeth MacKiernan (Jandl 2000) has translated that like this:

Lulu's pooch droops
Lulu: Scoot, pooch, scoot!
Lulu's pooch soon scoots.
Lulu brooms room.

That's an innovative shift, from excluding every vowel-letter but "o" to excluding every vowel-phoneme but [u:]. In traditional semantic-equivalence terms, of course, "droops" is somewhat problematic for "trotzt," which involves some sort of defiant resistance, possibly including snarling and growling and the baring of teeth. How about "hoots," or "loots"? How about "croons," or "tunes"? How about "pukes," or "spooks"? (Does the "u" in "tunes" or "pukes" disqualify it? There are two "u's" in Lulu … How about the silent "e" in those words? A lipogrammatic poem takes letters [γράμματα/*gram-*

mata], not phonemes, as the criterial elements to be included or excluded; would MacKiernan's translation actually be lipophonetic?) "Brooms room" is apparently necessitated by the fact that "so so" is not a way of talking to a dog in English; MacKiernan apparently imagined an alternative scenario in which the pooch is shedding ("drooping"?) and Lulu has to sweep up the fur.

It's not difficult, though, to stick to the lipogrammatic exclusion of "a," "e," "i," "u," and "y," leaving only "o":

otto's dog won't go
otto: off dog off
otto's dog lollops off
otto: so so

"ottos mops" is online at <https://www.lyrikline.org/en/poems/o ttos-mops-1232>, where there are also links to full translations into MacKiernan's English as well as French, Russian, Turkish, and Czech (accessed January 18, 2022).

In English, of course, "so so" or "so-so" is an adjective meaning "not bad," not an adverbial interjection; and while one could read that as Otto's judgment on the way the *Mops* "pug" leaves the room, in German Otto is actually chiding/comforting/praising the *Mops* mildly, along the lines of "you poor dog, having to leave, but you were bad for refusing and are now good for obeying." But then one of the affordances generated by experimental translations like Hölderlin's Pindar and Hölderlin-celebratory essays like Benjamin's "Aufgabe" is that slavishly reproducing the source-textual sense is not the only possible goal of translation.

If one wanted to push harder on that along Hölderlinian lines, one could try something like this:

otto's dox mox
otto: forth dox forth
otto's dox hops forth
otto: zo-zo

"Dox" there is one possible Old English etymological source for "dog"—the etymological lineage is not known for sure. It may come from something like *doc-* plus the pet-form diminutive *-ga*, like *frocga*

for frog and *picga* for pig; but then an alternative source for *frocga* is *frox*, and *dox* in Old English means "dark" or "swarthy."

Trotzen is a Germanic verb with no English cognates. Rather than taking the easy colloquial way out with "won't go," as I did above, I decided to jump to another Germanic cognate that in some contexts works as a translation of *trotzen*: "to mock." It's unlikely that Otto's *Mops* is *mocking* him, of course, but "to mock" derives from Middle Low German *mucken* ("to talk with the mouth half-open, to grumble") and Middle Dutch *mocken* ("to mumble"); Modern German *mucksen* is "to mumble, to grumble, to utter a word," and Modern Dutch *mokken* is "to mope, to sulk, to pout," but also "to grumble"—and dogs do mope, sulk, pout, mumble, and grumble. *Trotzt* "mox" as what Dilthey called *ein Ausdruck eines Erlebnisses* "an expression of lived experience."

"Dox" and "mox" also open up all kinds of other interesting associations. These days, more than a half century after Jandl wrote the poem in 1963, "dox" is a slangy respelling (like pix, hax, vax) of "docs," meaning either doctors or (especially) documents; to dox someone is to publish their documents on the Internet. "Dox" also suggests doxie (sweetheart, but also dachshund) and the "mox" respelling of "mocks" suggests moxie (the gumption to refuse your master's order). And if a doxie doxes those dox with moxie and does it *soon* (Latin *mox*), then, well, anything is possible.

"Forth" is a no-brainer: it is the obvious English cognate of German *fort* "away."

"Hop" is not only the most obvious translation of *hopsen* but its cognate.

And "zo-zo" is not only the way German (or Yiddish) *soso* would be pronounced, but the actual Dutch equivalent.

I was introduced to Jandl's "ottos mops" in 1987, in my first semester as Acting Associate Professor of Finnish-English Translation Theory and Practice in the newly formed Department of Translation Studies at the University of Tampere, Finland. As part of my teaching load I was asked to offer a lecture series to one entire intake cohort of the department each year, with roughly one hundred students from the English, German, and Russian divisions—and to teach it in Finnish, since many of the students from the other two

mobilize heteronyms to transform a translation or a translation history into a parable of heterotopia (Robinson 2023b)? Earlier, too, I had occasion to mention the stratagem of repurposing obsolete words and phrases in the target language, as used by Luther and Voß (and urged by Leibniz [Robinson 1997/2014: 184–86], and used also in Robinson 2017a, 2020): this would be a less radical strategy that is arguably also enabled by Hölderlin's Pindar affordance.

The primary affordance emerging out of these ruminations, however, might be not for translators but for translation scholars. All too often hermeneutically minded and cognitively minded translation scholars thematize their research in opposed ways, as "humanistic" and "scientific," respectively, with a huge gap in between. What the convergences among Diltheyan hermeneutics, Husserlian phenomenology, and the radical embodied cognitive science of Anthony Chemero would appear to offer is an affordance that reshapes the research environment of translation studies in ways that find science inside the humanities and human culture inside cognitive science. That, surely, should help all of us research "animals" develop the affordances of what Wilhelm Dilthey calls a more effective and far-reaching *Wirkungszusammenhang* (Dil-

divisions didn't have enough English to follow the class. I decided to give a lecture one week and then lead a workshop the next, with the texts for the workshop sessions brought in by students, each week from a different division.

One week the Finnish-German students brought in "ottos mops," and the rousing practice session it inspired—the Finnish-Russian and Finnish-English students working in language-pair-specific groups to translate it, the Finnish-German students serving in each group as source-text experts—etched the first stanza of that poem into my memory. This is my long-belated thanks to those students from so long ago, for one of the high points in that class.

they 1910/1927: 152–88) ("productive nexus," transl. Makkreel/Oman 2002: 174–209).

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