Translating the Anthropocene: Ulrike Almut Sandig's 'In die Natur' and Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* as Feminist Eco-translation Practices

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Recent translation and anthropological scholarly works have opened new intellectual avenues for thinking about translation in relation to the climate crisis. In the field of translation studies, both the material turn and the emergence of ecotranslation studies have enticed us to explore the material and ideological ecological constructions embedded in translation (Littau, 2015; Scott, 2018; Cronin, 2016; 2017; 2020; 2023; Sealey, 2019; Marais, 2019; 2020; 2023). Alison Sealey's recent work, for example, suggests 'parallels between the political issues recognised by translation scholars – of exclusion, misrepresentation and speaking for 'the other' – and those raised by biosemiotics, the study of signs in all living systems' (Sealey, 2019, p.305). There are vital ethical reasons to take ecological boundaries seriously in translation studies. As Michael Cronin puts it: 'Not taking living and non-living matter seriously means the relentless pillaging of extractive industries whereby physical environments are degraded and/or destroyed' (Cronin, 2017, p.92). In this essay, I will extend recent ecological critique of translation norms to the forms of social dominations embedded in the ecology of translation as a discipline, borrowing the term 'planetary' from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to broaden the field of translation beyond the biopolitical framework of national languages and cultures so as to explore more-than-human animacies as translational forces.

Elaborated as a counter-theorisation of globalisation's project, Spivak argues that, unlike the theoretical framework of globalisation: 'The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan' (Spivak, 2005, p. 77). In contrast with other relational ontologies which can be encountered in non-Western discourse, the Anthropocene functions as a profoundly "de-animating" concept by both centring human actors and absolving social models and ideologies responsible for climate change from responsibility. It does so by situating the Anthropocene in a particular modern temporality of progress which separates human intellectual and technological development from society and nature, creating, as Hornborg puts it, 'highly specialized occupations, each emphasizing its own specific application of objectification and detachment, so that the total impact of

modern society is unrestricted by moral concerns' (Hornborg, 2006, p.24). The Anthropocene, then, like other modern universal categories, is able to universalise and objectify the social and environmental destruction brought about by climate change by divorcing scientific progress from social and cultural responsibility, silencing other non-Western models of more-than-human social relation into pre-modern epistemic irrelevance (Todd, 2015; Heather and Todd, 2017; Ferdinand, 2022). In contrast, Hornborg writes of animist epistemologies:

> an animistic or 'relational' ontology is a mode of knowing that is not only constitutive of both the knower and the known – as is *all* knowledge […] but that crucially also *acknowledges* this fundamental condition, and thus also the responsibilities that must always adhere to the very act of 'knowing''. (Hornborg, 2006, p.28)

To what extent, then, should we understand the modernist temporality in which the Anthropocene is embedded to be a de-animating discourse, and how can translating the Anthropocene act as an epistemological critique of what modernism's strategy of 'not knowing' its own social responsibility (Hornborg, 2006)?

Putting the Anthropocene in dialogue with other cultures which value more-than-human animacies, this essay will offer a reading of ecofeminist and indigenous translations which explore and translate the Anthropocene from situated and experiential perspectives. Focusing on creative-critical and multimodal translation practices which have sought to re-animate translation with more-than-human practices, I will ask: To what extent does our understanding of translation as a 'word-based' linguistic task, to borrow Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal's term, curtails our geographical imagination to the heteropatriarchal borders of the nation? (Campbell and Vidal, 2018, p.xxv) Which lives are 'mattered' in translation as an exclusively linguistic practice, and which are excluded? As Vidal and Campbell explain: 'While word-based languages are confined to linguistic borders, which often coincide with national or even regional borders, non-word-based forms of communication can transcend such borders, while of course still being influenced by cultural traditions' (Campbell and Vidal, 2018, p. xxv-xxvi). Restricting the boundaries of translation studies to word-based communication is also to restrict it to the human gaze. Rooting my planetary concept of translation studies in Campbell and Vidal conceptualisation of experiential translation as a more-than-linguistic practice, I will turn to creative-critical translation practices which have built new planetary and biopolitical frameworks of

translation through a practice-based, experiential perspective and more-than-lingual translation framework. I will show that experiential and multimodal approaches to translation which perform thresholds and boundaries between human and non-human communication can play a key part in broadening the ethical field of translation studies and other disciplines from the problematic biopolitics of internationalism to planetary ethical concerns.

In my book *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice*, I explored a type of creative-critical translation I call 'transtopian'. Transtopias, I argued, are 'translation art and literary translations which use experimental forms of translations to challenge normative representations of place and identity funnelled by the nation' (Grass, 2023, p.46) This essay will expand on this concept by exploring ecofeminist and indigenous creative-critical translation practices which have mattered and visibilised these borders through 'epistemic disobedience' of the national linguistic norms (Mignolo, 2010). Deconstructing traditional Western-centric epistemological contexts, these works challenge the anthropocentric framework of national differences and the hegemonic agency of the human gaze which such categories of difference maintain. Writing back from the perspective of practice and experience, they challenge the division between the practice and knowledge of translation to build a situated and relational framework of translatability. I will discuss how the experimentalism of these translations offer an alternative to the linguistic framework of word-based 'equivalence' and transaction to, instead, make space for different planetary attachments and imaginaries. I will begin my analysis by focusing on Ulrike Almut Sandig's ecofeminist translation of Emma McGordon's poem 'Magnetic'. In my analysis, I will argue that Sandig's anagram translation of McGordon's text is an exploration of the space of friction between national belonging and wider environmental concerns. Mirroring Gordon's exploration of the patriarchal gaze by challenging passive constructs of 'nature' in her translation, I will argue that Sandig elaborates a planetary gaze capable of making visible the sensorial ecologies which sustain world cultures and languages. In the second part of the essay, I will turn to the works of Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist, writer, teacher of TEK and Citizen Potawatomi Nation whose memoir *Braiding Sweetgrass* explores the grammars of animacy of Potawatomi. I will show how Kimmerer uses the memoir form to translate indigenous epistemologies into English and create a new understanding of translation as a relational, situated and 'braiding' practice. I will contend that both Sandig and Kimmerer's

ethical engagement with translation elaborate an ideological critique of animacy in translation by showing how the very division between nature and culture in Western societies function simultaneously as a social and ecological mechanism of repression.

1. Ulrike Almut Sandig's In die Natur: A Feminist-Ecocritical Translation

In 2019, I organised an event and series of workshops for Lancaster Litfest entitled 'Found in Translation: Literary Dispatches from the Periphery of Europe' (Grass, 2019). For the event, which was programmed on the day Great Britain should have existed the European Union, I invited several artists to translate each other's works to explore the themes of peripherality and belonging which had pervaded many debates about national identity surrounding Brexit. A contextual symptom of the resurgence of nationalist narrative in Europe and the Western world, discourse supporting Brexit relied on a particular narrative of peripherality and exceptionalism which the works presented at the festival explored through experimental translation practice. As the author-translators did not use "bridge translations", each had to rely on the material qualities of languages, such as sound or alphabetical specificities, to translate the other's work. One particular translation by Ulrike Almut Sandig entitled 'In die Natur' challenged the anthropocentric and romanticising discourse of nationalism on nature by exploring the relationship between translation practice, cosmopolitics, and climate change by focusing on the material dimension of language in her translation (Sandig, 2019/2022).

For her commissioned piece, Sandig selected one line of Emma McGordon's poem 'Magnetic' (McGordon, 2019). Originally from the Cumbrian coast town of Whitehaven, McGordon's poem reflects on the relationship between the changeability of the landscape, her Cumbrian dialect and the gender identity of the first-person narrator. Rather than rooting her identity within the landscape, her poem explores the changeability of her relation to it and to her own body through her accent and gender identity:

> 'The body is a changing landscape,
> above all a truth taker.
>
> A body describes land,
> water, work evidence and proof.

A map is a memory of an old story
once told.' (McGordon, 2019 np)

Throughout the poem, McGordon explores the power of using the body and the senses as experiential mapping instruments. Putting gender identity in dialogue with both social and ecological landscape, McGordon explores her changeable relationship to Cumbria as her place of origin, showing the body itself to be a location where both gender and local identity can intersect and sometimes enter into conflict.

For her creative-critical translation of the poem into German, Sandig selected the last line of McGordon's text: 'The Tongue is a Needle. And I am true North. Telling lies.' and transmaterialised this line into 12 different German anagrams of the English text. The anagram translation procedure reveals new locations, themes and correspondences materially hidden between the two texts and languages. In rebuilding a poem out of the last lines of McGordon's, the text deterritorialises both the UK and Germany as countries of reference in the translation process and translocates McGordon's text in the Gilli Islands instead. A home to Sasak people, the Gili islands are an archipelago off the coast of Indonesia. Here, the poem explores the disappearance of these islands and its species threatened by climate erosion:

DE:

The tongue is a needle. And I am True North. Telling lies.
in der Heimat tollten Rettungshunde als Alge. o, ein Ei!
hatte es unterm Hut getragen. Lea in den Lilien o. Lidos
liegende, rinnende Gottesstatue, holla, reiht an! Im Ul-
tragruen d. Auen tosten Satelliten, Goldhelme, hiinei-
n in die Natur! Die Tiere heulten Moos, lallten: eggs! hat
uns hier eine angelogen? Lea, du trottest dahin mit ell-
enlangen, teuren Automaten, heilst Heide, grillst Dio-
den, und hinterher? ausgeatmete Gili-Inselatolle, Not.
du, mandelaeugige Lea, nennst es Nitrithoelle. tot, ihr
Norden, heiter tot! huell die Gaumensegel in Atlantis.
The tongue is a needle. And I am True North. Telling lies.

Die drei zu Indonesien gehörenden Gili-Inseln liegen nur wenige Meter über dem Meeresspiegel. An den Stränden legen fünf Arten von Schildkröten ihre Eier ab.

"The tongue is a needle. / And I am True North. / Telling lies." ist Emma McGordons Gedicht MAGNETIC entnommen.

EN:

The tongue is a needle. And I am True North. Telling lies.
Late underdogs rattle in the home, ingest all. ‘Nu ein Ei’!
Hide it in a hat. Lea runs legend-lost to unreel teeming
data. Hello, in line! No suing the ultra-green tides. Meet
a satellite retinue hounding neater gold helmets in
to nature! genuine stellar lights, one alien theme. Did
someone tell a lie? Lea, treading dust, uttering her inn-
er need to linger: slum it, atone, still aged heath, ennui.
Latent turn made true. The Gili-isles inhaled. Gone. One
nitrate hell intuited, almond Lea’s egg rite unseen. Oh!
The North ill, undone. See Lea, mud-genii, greet Atlantis.
The tongue is a needle. And I am True North. Telling lies.

Note: On the shores of the Gili Islands several endangered species of sea turtles lay their eggs. Stop climate change now.

Translated by Karen Leeder (Sandig, 2019/2022)

Beyond its anagram shape, Sandig’s creative translation of MacGordon’s text, here skilfully translated by Karen Leeder into English, resembles a rondeau poem. Through repetition of the first at the end characteristic of this form, the text seems to close in on itself in the image of an island, but this self-enclosure is contrasted with the act of exposing the poem to the environmental force of the ocean and climate-induced erosion symbolised in its anagram form of each line and subject matter. In Karen Leeder’s anagramic translation, the themes and scopes of the poems are maintained, but objects seemingly move, disappear and reappear across the page due to the constraints she observes. As if translating the poem from the perspective of the rising oceans, Sandig’s translation cuts the symbolic cliff-end of McGordon’s text (the last line of her poem) by impersonating the crumbling effect of coastal erosion in the form of her anagram translation. In so doing, her material translation visibilises the interconnectedness of these wor(l)ds and their difference simultaneously to produce a translation which is more reliant on its multilingual referentiality to resist complete destruction. This visual representation of landscape and place through text formatting is not unusual in Sandig’s works. As noted by Nicola Thomas, ‘several poems in the volume *Streumen* are printed in landscape format’, and the multimodality of ‘In die Natur’ is further developed in Sanding and Semenchuk’s musical and filmic performance of

the text. Her intersemiotic translation of the text is therefore characteristic of a more general expansion of Sandig's literary practice into wider networks of signification and meaning making processes capable of accommodating more-than-human signs and perspectives.

In 'In die Natur', the act of translating McGordon's text from the elements' perspective is further evidenced by Sandig's film-poem of the musical version of the text. Through the visual technique, non-human forces of circulation are re-embodied in the moving, floating letters effect present in the film-poem made of this translation, where the translator and author Ulrike Almut Sandig is slowly submerged by water:

[1]

Throughout the film, Sandig, featured in the still of the video-poem, remains silent. The only movement perceptible are that of the water and the shape-shifting, translated lines captioned at the bottom of the poem. The non-human dimension of the poem is further illustrated by the make-up worn by the poet-translator, which highlights her poetic bond with the ocean as a translator. What is more, the silent performance of Sandig's face being submerged by water also signifies the interdependency between humanity, language and the environment. Rather than translating across cultural boundaries, the poem is here translated across semiotic borders generated by non-human forces: human meaning emerges, as it were, from within the material constraints of the climate-induced catastrophe which the poem experientially performs. In this translation, traditional cultural elements such as human language are symbolically overwhelmed by the biosocial forces of climate change. The English of the source text, estranged and foreignized by the ocean's force as an agent of what Amitav Ghosh named 'the great derangement', is transformed by

[1] Still image from Ulrike Almut Sandig and Grigory Semenchuk's 'In die Natur' (2022), trans. by Karen Leeder <https://www.faust-shop.org/in-die-natur-into-nature/>.

its unfamiliar encounter with a new material agency (Ghosh, 2016). Other examples of creative-critical translation practices which reflect on the nature of language and identity in the context of the climate crisis illustrate this derangement, or foreignization of language and categories of representation explicitly.

'In die Natur''s representation of the ocean as a non-human translator exposes correspondences with other languages and cultures. In Sasak language, 'Gili' ꦒꦶꦭꦶ means islet, or little island (Hakim and Hidayat, 2017, p.159).[2] Through this found translation, a double meaning emerges: 'gili island' can be read as an inverse translation of 'Great Britain', highlighting a contrast between the great in 'Great Britain' and its smallness in relation to the vastness of the ocean's forces in Sandig's. In this transtopian, ecological contact zone between local identity and climate change, writing and translating emerge as co-emerging and relational: borders are made and unmade through translation as a way of putting places, people and languages in relation. But in redefining the borders of translation as taking place across 'nature' and material realities as well as across pre-defined 'cultures', Sandig minoritises all languages in the context of climate change.

Both McGordon's 'Magnetic' and its creative-critical translation by Sandig explore the location of human identity within nature in different ways. In 'Magnetic, this comes in the form of questioning gender identity:

> I have been stopped by a woman from going into the women's toilets,
> the body of evidence is unstable seen through another's eyes
> the body of water changeable, we say the sea is choppy,
> Chop and change. (McGordon, 2019, np)

The identity of the 'I' speaking in this stanza is divided and translated by external representations of heteronormativity which assign a particular sexual identity to the speaker. In McGordon's poem, both body and changing coastal landscapes are translated into each other to explore the plasticity of bodily identity and gender representation. The poem thus divests the simplified interconnectedness between land and nature traditionally represented in Romantic pastoral literary traditions by likening this relationship to the unstable link between nature and embodied gender identity:

[2] I am grateful to Prof. Peter K. Austin, a specialist of Sasak language, for confirming this and for recommending a *Kamus Sasak-Indonisian* dictionary as reference. In the Sasak-Indonesian dictionary Prof. Austin has recommended, the word 'Gili' is translated into 'pulau kecil', otherwise 'small island' or 'islet' in English (Hakim and Hidayat 2017, 159).

> Nothing about the body is guaranteed
> its boundaries can shift and change
> land around these part is known to be unstable
> holes in the earth have opened up and swallowed house
> as thought they were lies. (McGordon, 2019, np)

In her creative-ecocritical translation of McGordon's text, Sandig continues the work of deconstructing nature already at work within McGordon's poem's questioning of gender identity by voicing the agency of the land and of nature itself beyond the patriarchal gaze which has traditionally framed it as 'passive' in literature. Rather than staging the source of cultural differences to be in well-defined geographical national boundaries, 'nature' is represented as dynamic and evolving: a source of common instability between bodies, voices and cultures. The reproductive function of translation is re-apropriated and mobilised as a creative practice to embody planetary forces and agencies traditionally erased and subdued in patriarchal discourses of imperial conquest and discovery. Both McGordon's evocation of the compass ('The adult human mout has 32 teeth/And the Mariner's compass 32 points') and Sandig's anagrammic translation seem to ask us more generally: What does it mean, for cultures to exist "in nature" and for natures to exist in 'cultures'? How should we locate and orient ourselves within wider semiotic, non-linguistic worlds?

Sandig's translation seems an attempt to complicate the locatability of the here and now of identity in nature, and of nature in culture. Her multimodal translation reanimates what is de-animated by logocentric representations of planetary forms. In a lecture she wrote for the university of Bonn where she discussed the poem's multimodal journey and eventual translation by Karen Leeder, she asks: 'Preisfrage: Was ist jetzt der Körper des Gedichtes? Das Original? Die Vorlage des Originals? Die Adaptionen? Der Text? Das Audio? Die Performance? Also die verwirrende Klarheit auf halbem Weg zu euch?'/ 'The million dollar question: What is the body of the poem? The original? The pattern of the original? The adaptations? The text? The audio? The performance? (last line needs to be translated) (Sandig 2021). Through her concrete, material translation of McGordon's line, Sandig represents the forms of material translations at work in the environment as a source of both cultural instability and transformation. Paradoxically, the destruction through the concrete movement of coastal erosion as translation performed in the poem also reveals what is in common between the two languages, English and German, since they both share the same

alphabet. Sandig therefore connects two worlds, two different geographical locations, through the performance of their material sameness and difference in anagram translation, thereby highlighting that our bodies intersect with human constructs such as sex and gender, but with other material and non-human forms. Her watery translation procedure is a powerful way of turning her back on an ontological framework which encases human identity in discourses of mastery and self-reliance. As Astrid Neimanis puts it: 'Watery embodiment […] presents a challenge to three related humanist understandings of corporeality: discrete individualism, anthropocentrism, and phallogocentrism', and as such, reminds us that we are 'never really autonomous' (Neimanis, 2017, p.2).

The interrogation of "nature" from the perspective of heteronormative gender constructions in McGordon's poem is in many ways continued in the queering of human gaze at work in Sandig's ecotranslation. The practice of questioning the "nature" of translation as a practice that is uniquely delineated by human-made linguistic and cultural borders echoes Barad's critique of performativity as a uniquely human phenomenon. For Barad, the exclusion of non-human others from performativity does not go far enough in dismantling the apparatus of exclusion queer and gender norms subject us to:

> Performativity has been essential to queer theory. And yet, performativity has been figured (almost exclusively) as a human affair; humans are its subject matter, its sole matters of concern. But human exceptionalism and other anthropocentrisms are odd scaffoldings on which to build a theory that is specifically intended to account for matters of abjection and the differential construction of the human, especially when gradations of humanness, including inhumanness, are often constituted in relation to nonhumans. (Barad, 2011, p.122)

As Barad highlights, cultural constructions of 'nature' as a stable reference point and matrix of exclusion is precisely based on a material distinction between humans and animals. As such, Barad argues that the dismantling of heteronormative and racial hierarchies must extend our understanding of performativity to non-human materialisms:

> 'the "posthumanist" point is not to blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman, not to cross out all distinctions and differences, and not to simply invert humanism, but rather to understand the materializing effects of particular ways of drawing boundaries between "humans" and "non-humans". Crucially, then, such an analysis cannot figure cuts as purely a matter of human practices of differentiating, that is, as cultural distinctions. Whatever a "cut" is must not assume some prior notion of the "human."" (Barad, 2011, pp.123-124)

While human-centric understandings of performativity limit our understanding of how "nature" and non-human forms are implicated in mechanisms of gender and racial exclusions, my arguments regarding translation and materialism are slightly different here. Stretching the definition of translation to include the anagram as a form evokes the possibility of the role of non-human agents in translation, and demand that we re-evaluate translation from a different materialist perspective. Apprehending translation as a material as well as a linguistic practice are numerous would expand the definition of translation to include the role of non-human agents in shaping and transforming languages. In this context, the function of translation is expanded to include the possibility of representing forms of non-human, and indeed material, interventions in translingual communication.

Translation, Sakai reminds us, isn't simply the act of crossing existing boundaries through language, but is implicated in the very practice of constructing, reinforcing and upholding these boundaries by dint of the translation norms it applies (Sakai 1997). The consequences for translation studies from an ecocritical standpoint are twofold: on the one hand, by considering interlinguistic translation to only count as "translation proper", translation studies exclude other forms of materialities from the study of translation practice. Secondly, the exclusion of non-human forces and materialities from translation almost certainly prevents us from fully understanding the material semiotics at work in the violent translations and ultimate destruction of many cultures and languages confronted with the consequences of climate change.

Most semiotic encounters with climate change in eco-poetry generally does not encompass friction between the material reality of climate change and the temporal or geographical worldlings of nationalism. This is likely because, as aptly remarked by Malcom Ferdinand in *Decolonial Ecology*, in 'nature writing', human asociality is posited as the condition for an encounter with nature , meaning as the condition on the basis of which nature can be seen and read. […] What persists there is an inability to think about nature from a collective experience, even if it is a conflicting one.' (Ferdinand, 2022, p. 232). Translation studies, meanwhile, is framed by an international tradition which regards signs as cultural objects stabilised by national cultures. But what we see in the case of both Sandig's oceanic translation is that unequally redistributed, but nonetheless global environmental conditions both undercut the individual constructions of both individual and

national languages, rewriting and performing new geographies of existence and planetary belongings in the process which are not mapped in this current framework of international relations. While, in national-linguistic frameworks, the sign is perceived to be a stable object of cultural representation rather than a process, creative-critical eco-translations such as Sandig's explore the possibility of sharing the same language differently, opening translation practice to different modalities of expression, ontologies and natures. As such, extending the work of translation to different "matters" as well as cultures is a performative acknowledgement that we live not only in a multilingual, but in a material world: that the work of biological and human semiosis, in other words, entails forms and practices of multimodal communications, frictions and transformative encounters which a practice-led engagement with translation theory can help us examine.

2. Re-animating the Language of the Anthropocene through Translation in Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*

The creative-critical ecotranslation of Ulrike Almut Sandig, as I have shown, builds a planetary context for translation which bridges social and ecological questions. Her feminist eco-translation invites us to move away from the human gaze of word-based translation framework to explore other forms of knowing and translating. Translating McGordon's exploration of the patriarchal, heteronormative gaze into a practice-based critique of nature's agency, she performs nature as a translational force by showing how the ocean and the wind can be responsible for changing and a transforming signs into other signs, cultures into other cultures (through dispersion brought on by climate catastrophe, for example). In doing so, she makes visible the material entanglements between biological and linguistic extinction. Sandig's experiential, embodied practice of translation, in other words, locates translations which exist beyond the human gaze of national cultures, making visible other forms of planetary dwellings.

For Naoki Sakai, the regime of translation is defined by what he calls 'the homolingual address': 'a regime of someone relating herself or himself to others in enunciation whereby the addresser adopts the position representative of a putatively homogeneous language society and relates to the general addressees, who are also representative of an equally homogeneous language community' (Sakai, 1997, pp.3-4). In

the homolingual address, the speaker or writer assumes an immediate apprehension of the message, and therefore summons, through its form of address, a homogeneous linguistic community in the image of the nation. As Sakai explains further in 'The Modern Regime of Translation and the Emergence of the Nation':

> It is through the assumption of shared language and everyday routines that a collectivity of people imagines itself, not as a multitude of disparate individuals, but as an organically unified commonality. The imagined homogeneity and organicity ascribed to the nation is supposed to derive from the facticity (Faktizität in Martin Heidegger's vocabulary) of a shared language. (Sakai, 2017, p.105)

The homolingual address described by Sakai defines and codifies affects, communities of care and ecologies of belonging both within and beyond one's immediate human nation. But the familial bonds established also exceed individual cultures. The German romantic writer Herder, for example, writes not only of individual nations, but of nation-states in familial terms: 'fatherlands […] lie quietly side by side and assist each other as families do' (Herder, 2004, pp. 116-117). For Herder, the nation, similarly to the family unit, is the most 'natural state' and form of community (Patten 2010). This description, however, offers no recognition of more-than-human worlds contained within national territories. The homolingual address not only assumes the cohesion of cultures into one language, but separates national subjects from their environments in quite a radical way. Indeed, by creating boundaries which are exclusively national and therefore idealistically modelled on human languages and cultures, nationalism separates human subjects from the possibility of establishing more-than-human planetary kinship relations. The Romantic kinship of nations dreamed by Herder therefore cuts across and brushes over ecological relations in a drastic way.

Contrarily to the forms of exclusively human communal ties imagined in nationalist ideologies, recent works by indigenous scholars and anthropologists have analysed the socio-linguistic ties which makes it possible to make kin with more-than-human entities within the environment. Such works explore the ways in which the practice of translating or interpreting non-human language participate in shaping such kinship frameworks. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimerer explains her journey into learning Potawatomi, a language which, in its very grammatical structure, challenges the anthropocentrism of Western languages:

> I grabbed a dictionary and flipped more pages and all kinds of things seemed to be verbs: 'to be a hill', 'to be red', 'to be a long sandy stretch of beach', and then my finder rested on *wiikwegamaa*: 'to be a bay'. 'Ridiculous!' I ranted in my head. […] And then I swear I head the zap of synapses firing. […] To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. (Kimmerer, pp.54-55)

In this passage where she describes the grammar of animacy of the Potawatomi language, Kimmerer reveals the variety of subject positions which is embedded in the very grammatical structure of this language. Potawatomi, she explains, non-humans are granted agency in the same manner as humans. Stones, rivers, birds, fish, all are considered to have their own animacy and ways of being. What is more, being itself is never a solitary experience: to be is always to be in relation to others. Knowledge, it follows, is co-emergent and therefore implicates a form of practice-led and embodied way of thinking.

Kimmerer's work as a scientist and educator, she explains in her memoir, is also that of translating this Potawatomi epistemological framework into scientific practice. Seeing the non-human world as agential and animated with its own form of being means that science becomes not so much a practice of 'discovering' through the study of inanimate objects as a practice of 'translating' what the plants are saying to the scientist. Kimmerer explains:

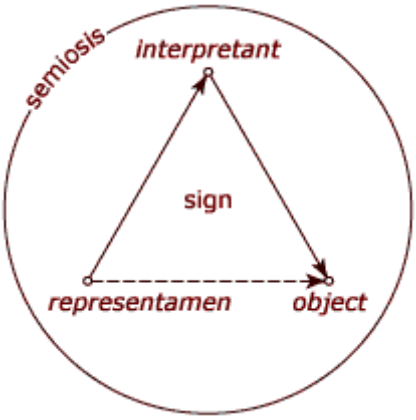
> To me, an experiment is a kind of conversation with plants: I have a question for them, but since we don't speak the same language, I can't ask them directly and they won't answer verbally. But plants can be eloquent in their physical responses and behaviors. Plants answer questions by the way they live, by their responses to change; you just need to learn how to ask. I smile when I hear my colleagues say "I discovered X." That's kind of like Columbus claiming to have discovered America. It was here all along, it's just that he didn't know it. Experiments are not about discovery but about listening and translating the knowledge of other beings. (Kimmerer, p.158)

As a botanist and educator, Kimmerer sees her work also as that of a more-than-human translator. Her memoir is a detailed exploration of the double action of translating non-human animacies into English and of her efforts to translate indigenous epistemologies into English-speaking contexts. Her practice requires both a rethinking of science and of translation as neutral and a-cultural epistemes. She explains: 'While science could be a source of and repository for knowledge, the scientific worldview is all too often an enemy of

ecological compassion' (Kimmerer 345). In so doing, Kimmerer is once again keen to reposition the role of the scientist as that of a translator: 'Trying to understand the life of another being or another system so unlike our own is humbling, and for many scientists, is a deeply spiritual pursuit' (Kimmerer 346)). As a translator of indigenous animacies into science, then, Kimmerer' writings re-animates a world de-animated not by scientific practice per se, but by the deeply entrenched bias of Western humans towards the more-than-human world. Her work, as an indigenous writer and author, is thus to bridge and translate on behalf of more-than-human subjectivities erased by Western constructs of subjectivity.

In Kimmerer's memoir, translation and philosophical practices are closely intertwined. Kimmerer shows that translating Potawatomi grammars of animacy into Western epistemes challenges certain biological hierarchies which are structurally embedded into our language and communication practices. Many other scholars, many among which are anthropologists, have tried to map the more-than-human social practices embedded in indigenous cultures (Descola, 1996; Kohn, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 2014). In his book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2013), Eduardo Kohn recalls a conversation with Juanicu, a Quecha speaker, on ways of sleeping which might discourage jaguars from attacking: 'sleep faceup! If a jaguar comes he'll see you can look back at hum and he won't bother you. If you sleep facedown he'll think you're aicha [prey; lit., "meat" in Quichua] and he'll attack' (Kohn, 2013, p.1).Kohn's anecdote and book host deep connections between human and non-human worlds which go beyond materiality and shared embodiment. An anthropologist who spent years in the Amazonian forest, Eduardo Kohn's work challenges our understanding of signification and language as being a purely human property. For Kohn, 'signs are not exclusively human affairs. All living being sign. We humans are therefore at home with the multitude of semiotic life. Our exceptional status is not the walled compound we thought we once inhabited' (Kohn, 2013, p.42). Kohn's anthropological research, which aims to 'provincialise language' in broader semiotic contexts, is based on a post-saussurian understanding of meaning translated from Amerindian human to non-human translation and communication practices by Charles Anders Pierce and Terrence Deacon. Unlike Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Pierce 'argued that the mental processes that interpret signs are also signs' and located the process of making meaning in a triadic conception of the sign relation called 'semiosis', a triadic relation involving a sign vehicle (representamen), an object of reference, and an

interpretant sign (Deacon, 2015, p.9; Pierce 1931). This triadic relation of semiosis can be illustrated as follows:



Kohn's narrative encounter with the semiotics of the forest, encrypted here in the jaguar, can be both contextualised and go further than Pierce's triadic sign relation. In more than human narrative contexts, as Kohn's narrative reveals, such sign relations do not happen at a distance: things enter into friction, are touching and are exploded by semiotic contact. In the context where the interpretant is a jaguar, and the 'representatem' is human, the object might be translated into "dead meat", or into a fellow person depending on the position they sleep in. In other words, humans are no longer the privileged sovereigns of interpretations. Interpretants can be jaguars, chickens, plants or fungi and interpret (or eat) other signs: the act of interpreting the world is not a distanced verbal activity, but a materially embedded signified practice where humans are not sovereign in the position of interpretant, and where all involved in the process of signification are entwined multispecies, more-than-human semiotic relations. In this context, as explained by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, translation happens in a multinatural as well as a multicultural world. Glenn H. Shepard, Jr. and Lewis Daly explain Castro's perspectivism as follows: 'in contrast to the Western scientific viewpoint, which postulates a single, all-encompassing universal "natural world", multinaturalism implies multiple variable, perspectival natures that are determined by the unique lifeways of difference animal and plant species and human cultural groups' (Shepard and Daly 89). Such a vision of the world, explains Viveiros de Castro, invites not only a form of cultural relativism, but a multinatural perspectivism:

> Cultural relativism, which is a multiculturalism, presumes a diversity of partial, subjective representations bearing on an external nature, unitary and whole, that

> itself is indifferent to representation. Amerindians propose the inverse: on the one hand, a purely pronominal representative unit – the human is what and whomever occupies the position of the cosmological subject; every existent can be thought of as thinking (it exists, therefore it thinks), as "activated" or "agencied" by a point of view – and o the other, a real or objective radical diversity. Perspectivism is a multinaturalism, since a perspective is not a representation. (72)

In this context, Viveiro adds, the translator's role would no longer be to find a common referent to the same object, that is, to substitute one sign for another to designate the same object, but to understand one object through another designated by the same sign. The task of the translator-shaman, in the Ameridian context, is not to exchange referents instead of exchanging signs, but to transform the methodology of translation practice beyond the principle of equivalence altogether:

> Amerindian perspectivism's problem is thus not to find the referent common to two different representations (the Venus behind the morning star and the evening star) but instead to circumvent the equivocation that consists in imagining that a jaguar saying "manioc beer" is referring to the same thing as us simply because he means the same thing as us. In other words, perspectivism presumes an epistemology that remains constant, and variable ontologies. The same "representation" but different objects. One meaning, multiple referents. (73-74)

Far from furthering dualisms between mind and body, the interpreters and the interpreted, both indigenous scholars such as Robin Kimmerer and anthropologists such as Kohn and Castro invite us to reconsider language and communication practice in more-than-human planetary contexts as sensorial as well as linguistic practices. Such epistemologies of translation which break down the division between practice and theory de-anthropomorphise sign relations while embedding and situating humans in wider and indeed co-emergent ecologies of signification. But for indigenous writers and thinkers such as Kimmerer and Barokka, this task is accompanied by a more explicit rethinking of the political families which are nested in the exclusion of non-human animacies in our socio-linguistic constructions. Kimmerer, along with other indigenous writers and activists on behalf of indigenous rights, demand that we not only construe these differences culturally, but politically. They prompt their readers to translate beyond the Western paradigm of translation and communication to include other epistemologies of care for more-than-human kins.

In her performative lecture *Amuk*, which mixes poetry and theoretical reflection, Barokka explicitly construes the practice of de-animating both human and non-humans as a

form of mistranslation.[3] Exploring the translation history of the Indonesian word Amuk into Amok, she shows how the English, Dutch, Portuguese and English languages removed agency from the person experiencing legitimate 'amuk' by translating 'a way to treat very valid rage' into something pathological, 'criminal or inconsequential' (Barokka 2022). In English, the anger and suffering of Indonesian people is represented as 'untranslatable' and therefore inexplicable. By translating "amuk" back into the English "amok" in her poetic performance lecture, Barokka reveals the extent to which colonial discursive practices de-animate entire worlds through mistranslation. In the Q&A following her recorded lecture, Barrok describes her work further as 'planetary poetics'. She explains: 'I hope that my planetary poetics shows that there is no such thing as 'the universal' and no such thing as a single planetary consensus […] and that if we are to save this planet, we need to cherish and preserve multiplicity' (Barokka 2022). By translating the term "amok" beyond Western colonial the episteme in English, Barokka makes visible the forms of separations between thoughts and feelings, language and matter which colonial discourse operate. Casting Indonesian 'amuk' as "unenlightened" is one way among many of cutting semiotic ties with worlds and cosmologies which are beyond Western languages.

The planetary poetics and politics of Barokka's creative-critical translation practice is echoed in 'Listening to the Forest' where, Kimmerer and Grignon explore the 'Pine, Maple and Menominee Nations' interspecies relations: one community made of trees, plants, animals and humans (Grignon and Kimmerer, 2017). As Kimmerer and Grignon show, such a territorial relationship undifferentiates hierarchically between human and more-than-human actors to create, instead, a more-than-human community. It is towards such a 'democracy of species' which Kimmerer's translation practice points the way (Kimmerer 58). In a section called 'Maple Nation: A Citizenship Guide', she explains: 'the maples, our most generous of benefactors and most responsible of citizens, do not deserve our government. They deserve you and me speaking up on their behalf. (…) Political action, civic engagement—these are powerful acts of reciprocity with the land' (Kimmerer, p. 174). Rather than separating indigenous practices from scientific endeavours, Kimmerer's role as a translator is one of braiding and weaving different epsitemologies together not only to

[3] Khairani Barokka. 2022. 'AMUK: A performance', Video, last accessed 01/11/2023 < https://www.ed.ac.uk/events/lecture-series/edinburgh-futures-conversations/the-future-of-climate-justice/amuk-khairani-barokka>

advance knowledge (or move it from one language and location to another), but to advance and expand practices of care beyond humans. Her translation praxis is not a transfer for knowledge from place to place, but a co-creative practice of weaving differences into a place of mutual understanding which echoes other indigenous interpretations of translation. As Margaret Noodin explains of Ojibwe in 'Anishinaabe Translation Studies', a language closely related to Potawatomi: 'Anishinaabemowin, also called Ojibwe, uses the word 'aanikanootan' to convey the idea of translation. "Aanikanootan" is closely related to "aanikoobidoon", which is the verb for stringing things together or extending something by tying pieces together' (Noodin, p.124). Noodin continues to explain the deep connections with kinship-making practices which translation, conceived this way, holds: 'There is an echo of both in "aankikoobijigan", which is "an ancestor, great-grandparent, or great-grandchild" but nothing in the word signifies the nouns parent, person, or child' (Noodin, p.124). Instead, she explains that the connection between translation and kinship is practice-based: kinship not as a pre-existing set of relations or categories, but as a doing in the form and practice of translating others beyond the self. In that sense, Kimmerer, like Sandig, both use practice-based translation strategies to re-animate 'nature' and stretch the remit of our political communities beyond the traditional human gaze of the nation. Their experimental and epistemological translations are a world-making exercise in rewriting our mental maps into more-than-human planetary geographies.

Conclusion

In hers and Davis's essay 'On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene', Heather Davis and Zoe Todd articulate the need to contextualise and, indeed, translate the Anthropocene beyond Western epistemes and temporalities:

> the Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years. Further, the Anthropocene continues a logic of the universal which is structured to sever the relations between mind, body, and land. (Todd and Davis 2016, p.761)

In their translations, both Sandig and Kimmerer weave matter back into translational thinking by re-writing translation out of the utilitarian context of capitalist globalisation. Re-animating the colonising and universal discourse of the Anthropocene through translation as praxis, Sandig destabilises the de-animating structure of meaning constructed by

patriarchal heteronormativity. Her anagram translation reanimates representations of nature as passive and inconsequential. Kimmerer, on the other hand, translates scientific knowledge into non-Western epistemologies by animating the English grammar and Western thinking through cultural and linguistic mediation of Potawatomi cosmogonies.

By expanding translation practice beyond language to include embodied realities, both translations expand the translation imagination beyond the task of moving ideas and meanings across places in an exclusively human world, rethinking language instead from the perspective of other more-than-human material agencies. In so doing, they acknowledge a planetary context where not only human make sense, and not only humans translate. By pointing to the possibility of translating beyond our immediate national model of differences, both Kimmerer and Sandig translate translation out of heteropatriarchal national discourse revealing the sensorial ecologies and more-than-human semiotic contexts which sustain languages in the first place.

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