"It's deeper than that": Manifestations of Schleiermacher in Martin Crimp's writing and translation for theatre

Geraldine Brodie

University College London

Introduction: leaving the audience 'in peace'?

In his study of the theatre of Martin Crimp, Aleks Sierz declares, "Crimp has confronted the problems of translation head on: 'Either the translator brings the playwright to the audience, that is, the text is Anglicised; or alternatively, all foreign aspects of the play are left intact and the English audience is asked to travel abroad'" (*Theatre* 84). Sierz is quoting from the late Gunilla Anderman (8), but she, in turn, is paraphrasing one of the most famous dicta in translation studies, written two hundred years ago by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his 1813 essay, "On the Different Methods of Translating": "Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him'[1] (Schleiermacher, *Methods* 49). Schleiermacher's ensuing insistence that only the first method should be followed implies that the reader, or audience, should not be left 'in peace' but moved to a less comfortable position. Lawrence Venuti advocates dissidence in translation to signal the foreignising technique that epitomises Schleiermacher's approach, "using a discursive strategy that deviates from the prevailing hierarchy of domestic discourses" (Venuti, *Invisibility* 148). Such deviation resonates with Vicky Angelaki's characterisation of the "consistent presence of subtext in Crimp's theatre [which] serves the purpose of theatrical defamiliarization, or 'making strange'" (1).

This chapter scrutinises the manifestations in Crimp's theatrical writing of Schleiermacher's implication that the audience should not be left 'in peace', demonstrated in his translations and adaptations of the works of other playwrights and also in his original plays. A review of Crimp's destabilisation of the audience as effected by translational activity

[1] "Entweder der Uebersezer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen." (Schleiermacher, *Methoden* 48)

in his play *Attempts on her Life* (first performed in 1997), is followed by an investigation of the surrealities of his portrayal of the translator Clair in *The City* (2008), who is depicted negotiating the tensions between her perceived responsibilities to both the translated and the receivers of translation, and the conflicts with her own narrative instincts. This analysis suggests a further link between Crimp's approach to translation and Schleiermacher's favoured method: Venuti extends Schleiermacher's hermeneutic model to encompass "as many translations as there are interpretants" (*Jerome* 498), with the result that "another set of interpretants will always lie outside the ken of the ones that have been applied", in contrast to the invariants of the instrumental model that Venuti finds so dominant in translation past and present (*Jerome* 502). In a similar vein, Crimp incorporates textual and thematic shifts that undermine his narratives from within his compositions and confront the audience with textual and societal uncertainties. The chapter goes on to consider the manifestation of Crimp's translational attitude in two of his own translations, analysing the application of the approach implied in his plays to his translation techniques in practice. For this purpose, I will focus on two of Crimp's works at differing ends of the translation spectrum: Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, a direct translation from French (2007), and Chekhov's *The Seagull* for which Crimp created a version using a specially commissioned literal translation from Russian by Helen Rappaport (2008). My contention is that Crimp's combination of translation and theatre, both in his creative activities and in his imagined characters, not only presents a modern example of Schleiermacher's method of translation but also demonstrates the depths of hermeneutic performance.

Interlingual transfer in Crimp's plays

Martin Crimp, born in 1956, is primarily a playwright. Although his very first production was a version of Jerzy Przezdziecki's *Love Games*, co-written with Howard Curtis from the translation by Boguslaw Lawendowski and performed at the Orange Tree Theatre in 1982, it was to be another fourteen years and nine original plays before his first translation, of Molière's *The Misanthrope*, was performed at the Young Vic in 1996[2]. Crimp's initial reasons for translating are frankly stated; Sierz quotes his remark, "French is my film or TV", with the implication that translating is an activity required largely by the economic imperative of supplementing his theatrical income (*Theatre* 70). Nevertheless, a preoccupation with interlingualism, and its destabilising potential, is evident even in Crimp's

[2] For further details, see Angelaki's compilation of original stagings for Crimp's plays, adaptations, translations and versions (187-190).

earlier plays. In *Dealing with Clair* (1988), Anna, the exploited and mistreated au pair, speaks unmediated Italian on stage, foregrounding the language of the Other. The introduction of another language serves to discomfort the characters and the spectators. This effect is in keeping with Angelaki's view of the play's overall achievement: "a defamiliarization effect owing to [the] subtlety of representation and the mystification of the audience" (25). Even in the creation of a minor character and her context, Crimp manipulates multilingualism to disturb and undermine.

Whilst this first of Crimp's Annas remains untranslated, for a later Anna translation operates to underline alienation. *Attempts on Her Life*, the 1997 play that brought Crimp to wide critical attention, has been described as 'part theater production, part art installation, and part multi-media spectacle' (Bechtel 2009). This dramatic work documents through seventeen scenarios the existential plurality of Anne/Annie/Anya, who may be one or several women, or even a car. In Scenario 7, the stage directions require that "each speech is first spoken in an African or Eastern European language. An English translation immediately follows" (*Attempts* 234). The lines spoken on stage at first replicate an advertising blurb launching a car, the New Anny, but gradually deteriorate from glossy-magazine-speak to obscenity and atrocity. Interlingual transfer reinforces the indeterminacy of meaning; translation-as-gloss shifting to destabilisation. The unfamiliarity of the Other language is not made more palatable by the translation. In a scenario where the audience might prefer the shelter of unknowing, Crimp forces us to query the assistance of translation and thus undermines the act of translation itself.

Further translational references can be found in Scenario 16, which is entitled "Pornó", Crimp's text providing explicit instructions that this word should be pronounced with "a distinctive stress" (*Attempts* 271), thus crossing the interlingual boundary. Crimp's stage directions dictate that the scenario's "principal speaker is a very young woman. As she speaks her words are translated dispassionately into an African, South American or Eastern European language" (*Attempts* 269). It becomes clear that this young woman, fourteen years of age or younger, is both a victim and a perpetrator of pornography, forced to comply with the desires of her oppressors while urging feminist empowerment in turn. Crimp's directions, or "marks on the page" (Sierz 122), emphasise the absence of passion in the translation: "dispassionately", "impassive", "impassively" (*Attempts* 269, 273, 275). The disengagement between the performer and the speech mirrors the passivity of an audience forced to witness but unable to act, but also echoes the disconnection between the linguistic interpreter and the

content. By the end of the scenario, three languages are being spoken simultaneously, a reminder of the cacophony of Babel and, again, querying the function of translation. The translator's impassiveness, measured against the increasing horror of the English monologue, highlights translation's neutrality but questions its ethics. As Clara Escoda Agusti observes, this "scene of translation/interpretation is directly equalled with rape" (110), making translation itself a "form of violation [… forcing…] the cultural and linguistic intimacy of the country to which translations are sent" (112). This postcolonial/feminist perspective echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's despair, described in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak", that a woman's attempt to "speak" by "turning her body into a text of woman/writing" is destined to fail (35). Crimp's young woman is not illuminated by the accompanying translations; indeed, the impassivity of translation emphasises desensitisation and the lack of compassion. Furthermore, the indeterminacy of the scenario queries the equation of dispassionate delivery with truthfulness in translation. Although the disengagement with the translation by the characters in *Attempts on Her Life* suggests acquiescence of its accuracy, Crimp's destabilisation of the entire content of this scenario forces an assessment of the extent to which translation can in fact be relied upon. Crimp's overt references to translation in this play reflect his general textual and thematic shifts and destabilisation of societal certainties but also interrogate some of the basic tenets around the act of translation.

Translation/the translator in *The City*

Crimp targets translation with a clearer focus in his play *The City* (2008). Not only is this work centred around the activity of a translator, another Clair, but it was premiered in a German translation by the playwright Marius von Mayenburg, and directed by Thomas Ostermeier, as *Die Stadt* at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin on 21 March 2008[3], one month before its English-language opening in London on 24 April 2008 at the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Katie Mitchell. These parallel openings demonstrate the importance of translation for Crimp's oeuvre both as a topic and a mode of dissemination. It seems most likely that von Mayenburg, whose own plays have appeared in translation at the Royal Court Theatre[4], must have composed the German translation before the English-language play had been previewed in performance. This is a departure from the usual order of

[3] Shown in a double bill with *Der Schnitt* (*The Cut*) by Mark Ravenhill.
[4] *The Ugly One* (Theatre Upstairs, 2007) and *The Stone* (Theatre Downstairs, 2009), both translated by Maja Zade and directed by Ramin Gray.

events, in which a play would be expected to achieve a degree of box office success before a transfer into another language might be commissioned. The German production underlines Sierz's observation that Crimp's "neon-lit name appears in the theatre capitals of Europe" while receiving "comparative neglect" at home (*artsdesk*). A production by Katie Mitchell for the Royal Court Theatre is far from neglect: Mitchell also directs for the Schaubühne and the Royal Court is London's leading producer of new writing. Crimp's plays, libretti, translations and versions have also been staged in such prestigious venues as the Royal Opera House[5] and the Royal National Theatre[6] in London. Nevertheless, *Die Stadt* is an example both of Crimp's international status and his willingness to allow his work to assume an independent existence in translation, a phenomenon that he explores in *The City*.

Crimp portrays the life and work of Clair, and her real or imagined relationships with her family, her neighbours and her translation clients. The play exposes the tensions inherent in creativity and translation by means of the characters' narrations of (sur)real cityscapes. Perhaps personal experience prompts Crimp's exposition of the predicaments of the practising translator and interpreter, aware of her responsibilities to both the translated and the receivers of translation, along with her own narrative instincts. Certainly, Crimp's focus on Clair highlights the agency of the translator, intervening between the source material and the target audience, and, like the discipline of translation studies, queries the neutrality of mediation and the degree of originality in translation. In a passive-aggressive exchange between Clair and her husband Chris, who stands watching as she works on a translation in the second scene of the play, she is asked whether she is ever "tempted" to write something of her own (Crimp, *City* 16). She deflects the question; but the play ends with Chris reading from her diary, with the ventriloquism of translation, "I was no writer […] but the truth is I feel as I write this down nothing but relief" (Crimp, *City* 63). In a further inversion of Clair's words, the diary presents all the preceding action of the play as an imagined story. Have we been witnessing her life, or her writing? Crimp destabilises truth and writing, with translation explicitly included.

"Everything we do, in art and life, is the imperfect copy of what we intended", quotes Crimp from Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* in the opening page of the published version of

[5] Crimp wrote the libretto for George Benjamin's opera *Written on Skin*, directed by Katie Mitchell at the Royal Opera House in 2013.

[6] For further details, see Angelaki's compilation of original stagings for Crimp's plays, adaptations, translations and versions (187-199).

The City (*City* 5). Translation, an interlingual copy, can never be perfectly communicated, as Schleiermacher noted in his identification of the "irrationality" permeating the "elements of two languages" (*Methods* 46). In *The City*, the translator and her activity are identified with duplicity, omission and, above all, unoriginality. Sierz describes this play as "a meditation on playwriting itself" (*Theatre* 60); however, it is also a vehicle for deconstructing the indeterminacies conjoining writing and translation and an examination of the struggles of giving renewed life to a being already in existence, without setting it entirely free. Clair's image of her reported/invented/translated characters illustrates the disappointments and circumscriptions of translation: "They lived a little - but only the way a sick bird tortured by a cat lives in a shoebox" (Crimp, *City* 62). Is this cat the translator, torturing and imprisoning the characters? Crimp has distinguished the writing of translations from what he calls "normal writing", as being "like jobs. You sit down and you have got a page to translate here and the text that you produce here" (Laera 217). This apparently describes a mechanical activity. And yet Crimp simultaneously sets out the significance of his own voice in translation: "we can talk endlessly about how we as translators might have arrived at a particular phrase, but ultimately it is because we all have a sense of pitch or rhythm, I think, that we believe in" (Laera 222). This echoes Schleiermacher's hermeneutical exploration of both the system and the emotion of language, understanding "speech both as a work of language and an expression of its spirit" which may be individually manifested by one man's "living grasp on the richness of the language, his keen sense of rhythm and euphony" (*Methods* 47). Language and translation are thus simultaneously collective and individual, mechanical and creative.

The City depicts Clair's working life as a translator: the computer and the book on the shared family table; the boredom: "even interesting writing […] can be dull to translate' (*City* 16); the irritations of the unqualified opinions of others: she accuses her husband of standing behind her, "criticising [her] choice of words" (*City* 37); the clubbishness and exclusivity of the translation conference and the "in" jokes, which she describes at length but then insists that "it wasn't like that at all […] not that kind of a joke", epitomising the elusiveness of translation (*City* 49); the spilling-over of work into private life: bumping into a writer in the middle of Waterloo Station and "of course that was completely fascinating" (*City* 10). Crimp charts the frustrations of writing/translating, but also its rewards. Clair's dedication to her profession is reminiscent of David Johnston's view that

> translators of drama are impelled by a passion that is partly unconditional love for a work distant through time and place, but – crucially – whose vision connects most intimately with their own experience of the world, and partly a sense of grandeur […] of their role as mediators […] between [the original authors] and their public today (8).

Clair exhibits a passion for her work, and yet her acknowledgement, as the play draws to a close, of her failure as a writer, and her earlier refusal to act as mediator for "her" writer, demonstrate the impossibilities of the perfect copy. The characters accept that they are all invented, but end on variations of the refrain, "much better like that" (*City* 64), reverberating in the repeated attempts of Clair's daughter to get past the fourth bar of the Schubert movement she is playing on the piano. The artist/translator/writer continues to search for perfection, in the full knowledge that it cannot be achieved but that the search itself has a function. As Schleiermacher acknowledges when he writes "many experiments and exercises will still have to pave the way before a few excellent works are achieved" (*Methods* 62), translation is an arduous but rewarding path.

Crimp as creator/translator

Although, as discussed above, Crimp distinguishes between "normal writing" and "the job" of translating, I contend that any attempt to divide his output between "authored" and "translated" merely foregrounds the presence of Crimp's voice and the variations in the writing and translating processes, rather than complying with a neat categorisation between original and translation. André Lefevere coined the term "refraction" to represent "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" but he widened the term to include not only the "obvious form of translation" but also "less obvious forms" including commentary, historiography, teaching, anthologies and the production of plays (205). Lefevere considers the production of refractions to be "extremely influential in establishing the reputation" of the source language writer (205), but an examination of the process and context of Crimp's refractions of the work of other writers highlights the mutual influences between Crimp and the writers he refracts. The textual and thematic links between Crimp's original and refracted writing also demonstrate the hazy borders between creative and translational activities.

The intertextuality linking Crimp's own plays and his other work may explain his reference to Pessoa's "imperfect copy" in *The City* (City 5). As Margherita Laera establishes, Crimp's

definition of "three kinds of writing 'from existing texts', first, adaptation of an existing play; second, translation of a play from a language known by the writer; and third, adaptation from a literal version of a play in a language not spoken by the writer", provides a usefully broad definition of translation which includes adaptation and version (215). Such a definition places within the field of translation both Crimp's version of *The Seagull* (2006) by Anton Chekhov and his direct translation of Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (2007). Crimp makes no claims to understand Russian, and explicitly lays bare the process by which he created his version of *The Seagull*, setting out on the title page that it is "based on a literal translation and critical commentary by Helen Rappaport" (Chekhov np). My comparison elsewhere of direct and indirect translation methods on the London stage stresses the "strategic importance of non-textual factors in directing the textual form of a translation" (Brodie 77). These factors may include the commissioning procedure, the theatrical site, the linguistic competence of the appointed writer and the variety of contributions from the artistic team gathered around the production. Such complexities beyond the text, if taken into account when evaluating the translation process, prevent simple definitions of translation.

Rhinoceros and *The Seagull*, are two of many instances among Crimp's rewritings, of the difficulties in categorisation between original play, translation, adaptation, version and other refractions (for example, Crimp's work on Botho Strauss's play *Gross und Klein*, described in the theatre programme as "English text by Martin Crimp" (Barbican Theatre 2)). In my view, such divisions are arbitrary, inconsistent and, crucially, unhelpful in assessing the relevance of translation to Crimp's oeuvre as a whole. As Lorna Hardwick has pointed out: "It is not always helpful to try to distinguish too rigidly between theoretical models for analysing 'translations' and 'versions'. The processes of arriving at an acting script and then realising this in performance show how porous the boundaries are" (195). This porosity is demonstrated by the online catalogue of Crimp's publishers, Faber and Faber (*Crimp*). On Crimp's page, his *Rhinoceros* translation is styled "Ionesco's Rhinoceros", in contrast to his translation of *The Chairs,* which retains the English title, but is shown as co-authored by Ionesco and Crimp. The entry for *The Seagull*, on the other hand, only mentions Chekhov in the text below the headings, implicitly reserving authorial position for Crimp. Crimp's translation of *The Misanthrope*, also published by Faber and Faber, is not to be found on Crimp's page, but is the sole entry on Molière's page, where Crimp is named below the headings (Faber and Faber, *Moliere*). There does not seem to be a discernable trend in the classification of these works alone, or in comparison with Crimp's other publications. This

treatment can be seen as evidence of the lack of definition around the theatrical translation process: a reminder, as I have noted elsewhere, "that translation is a site of negotiation rather than providing an indication of the detailed processes involved in creation" (Brodie, *Multiple Names* 124).

Angelaki's scholarly listing of Crimp's "plays, adaptations, translations and versions" is more successful in imposing systematic order on Crimp's theatrical output, but avoids defining these different modes of refraction. In Angelaki's appendix, *The Misanthrope* is "translated and adapted"; *The Seagull* is described thus: "Translated by Helen Rappaport. Version by Martin Crimp"; *Rhinoceros* is listed as a translation (190,195,196). However, Angelaki identifies a further category in her discussion of Crimp's translations: the "radical adaptation", such as *The Misanthrope* and *Cruel and Tender*, which she considers "depart substantially from the early versions of the texts that inspire them and as such belong to a discussion of Crimp's playwriting canon, rather than of his translations or versions" (154). It should be noted that, whereas the former text has a French original, the latter is based on Ancient Greek, for which it is assumed that Crimp used an intermediary translation. The classification of the performance text therefore is dependent on the nature of the resulting text, and not the process of translation. Crimp's translations thus offer a contextual example of the shifting and complex practices of translation.

Even though the linguistic transfer differed in Crimp's construction of *The Seagull* and *Rhinoceros*, his identity as a playwright is evident at all levels of the creations. Contextually, the matching of Crimp with both of these plays confirms the commissioning vision for the productions. Crimp's knowledge of French literature in general and Ionesco in particular, his previous experience in translating an earlier Ionesco play *The Chairs*, and his reputation for writing experimental, iconoclastic and surreal plays, creates a synergy with this Romanian-French modernist playwright of the mid-twentieth century, known as the "Shakespeare of the Absurd". Furthermore, it seems particularly fitting that Crimp should be commissioned to create a new translation of *Rhinoceros* for the Royal Court, a theatre which has not only premiered many of Crimp's works, but also the first English production of *Rhinoceros* (in 1960)[7]. The play itself depicts the metamorphosis of the inhabitants of a stereotypical French village, one-by-one, into rhinoceroses, and how their initial horror of these infectious

[7] David Bradby, however, takes the view that Crimp shows "less linguistic daring" in Ionesco's *The Chairs* than did the original translator, Donald Watson, and that "Martin's gift fails him a bit when he tackles the big modernist classics" (Sierz, *Theatre* 210).

transformations gradually turns to acceptance until only one character remains defiantly resistant. Although absurd, the political parallels with collective totalitarianism are inescapable, feeding into Crimp's own work, especially his most recent play *In the Republic of Happiness* (2012) which critiques the jargon-laden escapism of contemporary mass-individualism. Even the briefest details demonstrate Crimp's approach to translation and the incorporation of his personal narrative into the English text: not only a textual updating which modernises gendered terms (the Grocer's Wife of Derek Prouse's first English translation (Ionesco, 1960 4) becomes Crimp's Grocer Woman (Ionesco 2007 7), for example); the stronger and more arresting exclamations of "Christ! A rhinoceros!" (Ionesco 2007 13), as opposed to "Oh, a rhinoceros" (Ionesco 1960 8); but also an undermining of appearances even in the stage directions, such as "this must be where the two grocers live" (Ionesco 2007 7), contrasted with "The two windows on the first floor are the living quarters of the grocer and his wife" (Ionesco 1960 4). Crimp's version of *Rhinoceros* destabilises and queries an already disturbing source text, magnifying the intended alienation from the familiar and removing the audience from their domestic comfort: a manifestation of Schleiermacher's foreignisation.

While translations of Ionesco's theatre of the absurd sit well within Crimp's oeuvre, he may seem like a less obvious choice as the translator of Chekhov's canonic Russian play *The Seagull*. An examination of the output of this pairing, however, reveals a similar alienating approach. Commissioned by his regular collaborator, theatre director Katie Mitchell, Crimp fashioned a pared-down reading, aiming, he claimed, to make the production "fully connect with a contemporary audience". This was attempted by limiting the "exotic" effect of Russian names, reducing textual exposition and cutting asides and soliloquies (Chekhov 67). The production included anachronous tango dancing, much door-slamming and, most notably, the rotation of the opening onstage play-within-a-play so that only the performer's back was visible to the theatre audience, who instead observed the reactions of the stage "audience". Crimp's surreal interpretation of Chekhov's play popularly considered to be a beacon of theatrical naturalism was controversial, but that very controversy served as a reminder of the theatrical innovation introduced by Chekhov when *The Seagull* was first staged. Paradoxically, Crimp's de-exoticising of *The Seagull*, far from domesticating the play for a British audience, reintroduces its humour, excitement and strangeness. Paradoxically, the distance set up between Crimp's version and the original was in keeping with Schleiermacher's exhortation to take the audience to the play, creating a production that

defied expectations while simultaneously injecting a freshness into both this translation of *The Seagull* and the more general reception of Chekhov in London. In this way, *The Seagull* fits very well within Crimp's work as a whole, and provides a further corroboration of the impossibilities of neat categorisation. Translation and creativity are inextricably linked in Crimp's theatrical writing.

Conclusion: the depths of hermeneutic performance

In *The City*, Crimp's translator Clair reveals that she "invented" characters, and not just in her diary: the characters in her life are also her inventions, as is she herself (Crimp, *City* 62-3). Reflecting on his translation practice, Clair's inventor, Martin Crimp, reveals that he too "invented" himself: "I started to read and reread and invented myself as a translator" (Aragay and Zozaya 63). Crimp's articulation addresses the process of translation beyond theatre: the creativity of the inventor applied to the production of a copy. Translation can be a shifted, personalised mimesis of a previous utterance; a copy that coexists or even supersedes the original, and in doing so makes a claim to exist in its own right. Imperfections, perhaps better termed deviations from the source, serve as traces of the origin, fulfilling Schleiermacher's recommendation that the reader of a translation be constantly reminded of the Otherness of its source. Crimp's translations invent images of their sources which ask the contemporary audience to participate in the invention and to displace the reality, just as Clair asks of us in *The City*. This approach represents the complexity that makes translation simultaneously derivative and creative. It may at one level be a copy but, as Crimp's character Uncle Bob inwardly observes in his play *In the Republic of Happiness*, "it's deeper than that, it's deeper than that, it goes much deeper than that" (*Republic* 88). All Crimp's writing is his own: when code-shifting, he applies his personal code, a code identifiably present in all his writing which constitutes an exploration of the depths of hermeneutical performance.

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