

# Scattered Speculations on Translation Studies

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*What follows is the edited transcript of remarks made at the Translation Studies Research Symposium of the Nida School of Translation Studies in New York on September 14, 2011. I had a prepared speech for the occasion as well. The beginning of the speech is embedded toward the end of the remarks. I have taken the liberty of adding the rest of the speech at the end.*

**I**t is a great pleasure to be here. I like talking in the City. I live here. I am a New Yorker. Nobody is weird in New York. I am at home. It is here in my place of employment, a great university, that I am engaged in the losing battle of real (as opposed to sellable) institutional change. Like Anthony Pym, I too am against boycott politics as a substitute for activism. I have repeatedly taken a stand against boycott politics. I think what we have to recognize is that there is a double bind at work here. Like in most things, if you want not to be a follower of boycott politics, nothing changes. But at the same time you have to acknowledge that the idea that there are no national boundaries within scholarship is simply false.

The history of the difficulty with which scholars from the West Bank travel or sometimes do not travel to conferences is well known. I am a green card holder. My green card was stolen in Kosovo on the 20th of May, 2011. I am traveling now on a little stamp given to me by the Homeland Security Office. This little stamp is valid until June 12th, 2012.<sup>1</sup> This is not really something that one can just ignore. When it is said that boycott politics is the only politics for academics today I write internationally to say, 'Sorry, I can't be there.' But at the same time I think it is necessary not to simply declare that it does not put you in a minority of one. It puts you in a collectivity which ignores the double bind, transforms it into a binary opposition and goes either on this side or that.

We cannot simply say that boycotts are denying the freedom of scholars. That is to blame the victim. It is the usual way of breaking strikes: 'If nurses strike the patients are hurt. If teachers strike the students are hurt.' The real question—why is there a strike, or a boycott?—is not asked.

I gave a talk in Pecs, Hungary, which called itself borderless. On the way, I lost my passport for a few hours. Denmark couldn't give me anything. The Hungarian Consulate couldn't

<sup>1</sup> I have now received a new green card.

give me anything. The Indians couldn't give me anything because I hadn't the passport. I was reminded of Phil Ochs's fantastic song—"I Declare the War Is Over"—composed during the anti-Vietnam war movement. When he sang it the first time, this Texas boy, Phil Ochs, said: I'm now going to sing a futuristic song. And many years later, when Derrida started talking of politics in the mode of 'to come' I thought about that half-educated boy from Texas, Phil Ochs, that it was his way of saying 'to come'—it's a futuristic song.

This, then, is how one copes with double binds. Even as you say there are no borders; even as you say 'I declare the war is over,' the declarative is only in the mode of 'to come.' I would suggest that within the working of translation studies this is something that we might keep in mind. We are not in fact on a level playing field, first of all. Secondly, we are working with translation studies as a discipline. The first pages of Lawrence Venuti's influential anthology tell us that translation studies is now becoming a discipline. That's where critical scholars like me come in: on the question of disciplinarization.

I believe in disciplines. I think disciplines construct you epistemologically. Your sustained disciplinary production shows you how to construct an object for knowledge. I am not, therefore, simply against disciplines although, of course, I attend to Foucault's spectacular warnings. And I take the challenge of interdisciplinarity seriously. It's an easy word, but in fact it's hardly ever done successfully. The moment, however, you disciplinarize something, the laws that start to work are not the substantive laws of the action that is the content of the discipline—but the abstract laws of disciplinarization, which are institutional and old.

I was in Kosovo because I used to run a little group that looked into the disciplinarization of preservation. I dissolved it because the seductions of personal or group accomplishment were too great. Disciplinarization is a problem. I am not really in translation studies, women's studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies—those newish subdisciplines. I'm not a translator. I happen to have translated stuff and written on translation when friends have requested me to do so. I'm not really a player in translation studies.

A philosopher only ever develops one idea. I'm not a philosopher, but if there is one

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idea that has always occupied me it's the idea of the necessity of vanguards. In the beginning I unfortunately mentioned the other end of vanguardism (the subaltern), and, unfortunately, since every upwardly mobile sector of a dominated group wanted to claim subalternity, I've never been able to shake that one off. But in fact what I was thinking about when I was younger was supplementing the vanguard, although I did not quite know it. This has in fact been my main thing right from the start. Therefore what I am looking at is how the translation vanguard legitimizes its powerful position by reversal.

I have earned the right to see how American theory operates, from the inside. I've lived here over fifty years, I've taught here fulltime for forty-seven years. Yet my passport and my active participation in the civil society of my citizenship make me try at least to speak from that other side as well. More or less three semesters worth of teaching work is done every year by me in India. I'm part of an eighty-six percent majority there that is often violent in deed and/or spirit.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore hard for me to be treated only as a minority other culture when the benevolent translators are speaking. Yet to be a native informant is also not a good idea. Just on May 19 (2012)—a detail I offer at the time of revision—the moderator for my lecture in Croatia chastised me because I did not offer a socialist analysis of why, in spite of many parliamentary left parties, there was so much illiteracy and poverty in India; since Croatians knew nothing about India! Once again, I was being asked to be a native informant! The occasion was called 'Subversive Festival'. But the subversion was local to the Balkans—in Europe.

In the early 80s I left my passport in London and entered JFK without papers. The immigration officer sent me to her boss, who immediately gave me a temporary green card. I poured myself a glass of whiskey and called my mother. I said, 'Ma, the entire crowd of passengers is still waiting out there and I got in first without papers.' I used a Bengali proverb: 'Ma, the lord of thought provides for the one who expects it' (*je khay chini takey jogay chintamoni*). My mother, a philosophical and ecumenical Hindu, a plain living, high thinking intellectual, quoted Psalm 23 back at me: 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.' She said, to be precise, *shadaprobhu amar palok amar obhab hoibey na*.

*Shadaprobhu* is a word absent from old or modern Bengali except as a translation of 'Lord' in the King James Bible. Readers of this essay will know that in the Hebrew Bible there is a tradition of substituting *adonai* for *Yahweh*. Sitting here in Bangladesh, I can't consult with my usual source if I am to make the deadline. It is unlikely that the missionaries translating the Bible into Bengali were aware of this. *Shoda* is a Sanskrit origin prefix roughly meaning 'always'. I believe it is an attempt to catch the sense of 'almighty'. And now the word recedes into a marked enclave as Christianity becomes a largely ignored minority religion in Bengal. In some parts of India, there is murderous violence against Christians.

<sup>2</sup> In a rich field of documentation, see at least Tapan Basu, et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of The Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993); Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin Global, 2002).

I believe West Bengal remains largely clear of this. I do not know what the equivalent of *shodaprobhu* would be in the other Indian languages. For my mother the word remained real and affectionately cumbersome, belonging to her childhood rather than her 1937 MA in Bengali literature. And, as I entered the US ahead of the line without papers, she said to me: *shodaprobhu amar palok amar obhab hoibey na*. My mother went the first few years to Christ Church School. The Indian Hindus were a tough nut to crack for the missionaries, especially the upper-caste Hindus, the collaborative Bengalis whom the East India Company encountered first when they became territorial.

My parents were smart planners in putting us sisters in St. John's Diocesan Girls' High School. Diocesan made me, undoubtedly. It was not a convent school, where the teachers were mostly white nuns. We were not taught by upper-caste Hindus, upper-class Muslims. We were taught by Christian converts from the so-called low castes and aboriginals, who were supposedly in India from before the arrival of the Indo-European speakers between five and eight thousand years ago.

The church dealt well with these people, whom we caste-Hindus had treated like dogs. They were our teachers, and as such they were teaching upper-caste Hindus and upper-class Muslims. It was an altogether passionate kind of teaching. My role model was Miss Dass, a low caste surname, our principal. As the years go by, she becomes, more and more, my role model.

I managed to forget all this in the first flush of PoCo in the 80s. I did write irresponsibly about the Christianization of the Indians, not recognizing how complicated the situation was. I have just given you an example of how the caste-Hindus in my region have taken it in without really losing anything. I should also have thought of the pre-colonial 'Syrian' Christians in the South. It is like an invagination, the part becoming bigger than the whole. The situation determines which is which.

Let me give you another example of the resources of my schooling. Because Miss Dass was much more interested in general ethics than in indoctrination (I think), she used 'secular' prayers at morning assembly. One of them was 'Be Thou, oh Lord, above us to draw us up, beneath us to sustain us, before us to lead us, behind us to restrain us, round about us to protect us'. I was able last year to explain English conjunctions (in Bengali, of course) to one of the teachers in my rural schools through this prayer, surreptitiously adding a word for the Christians. This is not, strictly speaking, an example of gender and translation, the topic I had agreed to speak on. I include it to indicate a gendered exchange between what would now be called Dalit Christianity and a lapsed Brahmin girl, as also an act of subaltern translation.

The vanguard must, of course, do its work of institutionalizing translation studies. The discipline must do its work. We are in a double bind with this necessary work. After all, something will have happened whatever you plan institutionally. That that future will never be identical with what you're planning—and one hopes that it won't be identical with our limits—impels some of us to work seemingly against the grain. We're not against the grain. This is auto-critical from within. We are not to be seen in the binary opposition model. There are a few of us persistently to remind the vanguard that we cannot simply plan the short haul with unassailable concepts. We have to look toward a future remembering that the one who wins loses. We must continue to invoke the Braudelien texture of translation

events—events that not only escape the institutional performative in the nature of things, but must deliberately be excluded from the system, at best allowed in as politically correct anecdotal support.

*From here I began to read from my prepared paper, ad-libbing freely. The paper title was 'Gender and Translation in the Global Utopia'. My sense of utopia comes from the root meaning of the word—that it is a 'no place', a good place that we try to approximate, not achieve. The utopia proposed by globalization—and that's why I spoke critically about the borderless, nationless, stateless place where liberal humanists hang out—is a level playing field. I think it is generally understood that this is a false promise, especially since the impossibility inherent in all utopian thought is ignored by it; the world is run on the aim however to achieve it more or less disingenuously.*

I spoke recently to British students who had taken a stand against budget cuts—"Think locally, act locally," said I to them, "that's all we can do. But you have to realize that the local is defined differently today. There is no difference between the local local and the glocal, and the global local and the local global and so on. Just act locally, but ask yourself again and again, 'Is this generalizable?' Who are you confronting? Remember you're talking about the British state when you say budget cuts. Who are you confronting? The state is in hock to a world trade defined in terms of finance capital. So, see if your demands are generalizable following the vulgarized Spinozan model of singularity, always universalizable but never quite universal." The students were distressed. And now they follow the Occupy Wall Streeters who have made an inchoate attempt to generalize, unable to make the opposite kinds of connections, with labor power in Wisconsin, for example, when developments beckon. There I spoke as member of a vanguard that can only be placed within a binary opposition by those who do not have ears developed by slow teaching to hear.

The idea of cultural exchange and translation is also an ideological support for the false promise of globalization: a level playing field across which equal exchange can take place. In order to make this false promise the sponsors of globalization emphasize that access to capital brings in and creates social productivity. Hence fundraising. They do not emphasize the fact that such productivity must be humanly mediated by decision-makers who are deeply trained in unconditional ethics. With the decline and fall in education in the humanities this group is extinct. I had written to the President of the University of Toronto when they were about to close the Comparative Literature department: "Think of [education in the humanities] as epistemological and ethical health care for the society at large." In the absence of philosopher kings directing the global utopia, what is also and necessarily ignored is that for capital to work in a capitalist way there must be what used to be called proletarianization and what today has been revised to subalternization.

I am just back from rural southern China. The one-room, one-teacher schools I know, where there was an ethical connection between the teachers and students, are being closed down as partially corporate-funded central schools are being established. Families are disrupted. The number of students is significantly down. The rural teachers with whom I work there were openly talking about the death of socialism to me this time. Of course, we were speaking in my halting Chinese so they couldn't speak very complicatedly. But the

ethical impulse that can be nurtured with students who are in these primary schools with local teachers has been killed at the central schools, where all is speedy statisticalizable rational choice, value-adding that is globally recognized.

Please remember that what used to be called proletarianization and has been revised to subalternization must work for capital to work in a capitalist way. In order to establish the same system of exchange all over the world the barriers between individual national economies and international capital have to be removed—the bottom line of globalization. This has an analogy with translation. We must look at what language we are translating into. I was recently at a European Cultural Congress in Wroclaw, Poland, where there were possibilities of translation into all kinds of languages, but of course not my mother tongue. It doesn't count. Only 270 million people speak it. That's not enough. It came into being from Sanskrit Creoles in the eleventh century. That's not enough. There's a great deal of literature there. That's not enough. It's my mother tongue. That's not enough. So think about how you decide. You cannot have all the languages of the world. Your principle has to be practical and political. And, what we, the in-house autocritical contrarians, say is impractical, in view of the future anterior.

In order, then, to establish the same system of exchange all over the world—the bottom line of globalization—the barriers between individual national economies and international capital have to be removed. When this happens states lose their individual and idiosyncratic constitutional particularities in history and become recoded as agents for managing the interests of global capital. This is also why translation flourishes within these nation states in different ways. In such a situation, when demand and supply begin to become the organizing principles of running a state we come to realize that items such as clean water or HIV/AIDS research do not necessarily come up in terms of the demands of the global economy. These kinds of needs then begin to be supervised by a global collection of agencies that are separate from nation states. This group is often called the 'international civil society,' a more palliative description of what is also and still called non-governmental organizations supported by the United Nations. Thus we can say that the structure of the utopianism of globalization brings forth restructured states aided by an international civil society and other instruments of world governance. In order to be realistic about this we should also speak of geopolitical interests and geomilitary interests, international criminal courts, where translation is necessary in rather a different protocol. But that would take us too far afield for the moment.

Let me now say something about today's Bible of humanism, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The translation of that thing—it's been translated into many, many languages—is useless for those who do not know the imperial languages. The way in which it is translated is inaccessible to the people whom the international civil society teaches self-interest. They cannot understand a word of the document. What is actually happening is the creolization of English with which the topdown do-gooders are out of touch. Attending to creolization is a way of teaching on the ground translation which is different from what we teach at school where disciplinarization is obliged to follow the very tight rules of disciplinarization as such in systems that go back, in most 'democratic' countries, to a post-medieval European structure.

It is well known that the management of gender provides alibis for all kinds of activi-

ties—from military intervention to various kinds of platforms of action—where experience deeply embedded in cultural difference is translated into general equivalence. Often this happens because women are perceived to be a more malleable and fungible sector of society—especially women below a certain income line. If in a global utopia, it is also imagined that sexual preference would be translated into the language of general affective equivalence, this exists on a separate plane.

Already we can see that in order to establish the same system of exchange all over the globe, we are also obliged to establish the same system of gendering globally. How does translation enter here?

To gather singularities into a system of equivalence is also called 'abstraction.' I have often argued that gender, or what many of us have been calling gender for the last forty years or so, is humankind's, or perhaps the most intelligent primates' first instrument of abstraction, as follows.

Let us think of culture as a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions, loosely held by a loosely outlined group of people, mapping negotiations between the sacred and the profane, and the relationship between the sexes. To theorize in the abstract, as well as to translate, of course, we need a difference. However we philosophize sensible and intelligible, abstract and concrete etc., the first difference we perceive materially is sexual difference. It becomes our tool for abstraction, in many forms and shapes. On the level of the loosely held assumptions and presuppositions which English-speaking peoples have been calling 'culture' for two hundred years, change is incessant. But, as they change, these unwitting *pre*-suppositions become belief systems, organized suppositions. Rituals coalesce to match, support, and advance beliefs and suppositions. But these presuppositions also give us the wherewithal to change our world, to innovate and create. Most people believe, even (or perhaps particularly) when they are being cultural relativists, that creation and innovation is their own cultural secret, whereas 'others' are only determined by their cultures. This is the basis of translation theories in general. This habit is unavoidable and computed with the help of sexual difference sustained into 'gender.' But if we aspire to a global utopia, we must not only fight the habit of thinking creation and innovation are our own cultural secret, we must also shake the habit of thinking that our version of computing gender is the world's, and in fact, must even ignore our own sense of gender unless we are specifically speaking of women and queers.

Thought of as an instrument of abstraction, gender is in fact a position without identity (an insight coming to us via queer studies from David Halperin) (Halperin 1995, 62). Because, however it is sexualized in cultural practice, we can never think the abstracting instrumentality of gender fully.

This broad discussion of gender in the general sense invites us to realize that gender is not just another word for women and that the (non-)place of the queer in the social division of labor is also contained within it. And yet, because gender, through the apparent immediacy to sexuality, is also thought to be the concrete as such (with commonly shared problems by women), the international civil society finds it easiest to enter the supplementing of globalization through gender. This is where translating becomes a word that loses its sense of transferring meanings or significations. A certain human-to-human unmediated affect-transfer is assumed as history is denied.

Yet it is possible that gender(ing)-in-the-concrete is inaccessible to agential probing, mediated or unmediated.

I am assuming a distinction between agent (intention institutionally validated, most basically by the institution of reproductive heteronormativity) and subject (the mental world shored up by the metapsychological, beyond the grasp of mere reason). I should add that I use 'mere reason' in Kant's sense, which I cannot elaborate here in the interest of time (Kant [1793] 1996, 39-215). (A rule of thumb: 'mere reason' is the version of reason that substitutes 'accountability' for responsibility; the connection with globalization and certain dominant translation theories are obvious.)

Let me, then, repeat: it is possible that gender(ing)-in-the-concrete is inaccessible to agential probing, mediated or unmediated, as follows.

As I have argued elsewhere, the human infant grabs on to some one thing and then things (Spivak 1999, 17-30). This grabbing of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped. One can certainly call this crude coding a 'translation', but it is taking place (if there is a place for such virtuality) in infancy, between world and self (those two great Kantian 'as if'-s), as part of the formation of a 'self'. In this never-ending weaving, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. From birth to death this 'natural' machine, programming the mind perhaps as genetic instructions program the body (where does body stop and mind begin?) is partly metapsychological and therefore outside the grasp of the mind. In other words, where parental sexual difference helps the infant constitute a world to self the self in, the work that we are calling 'translating' is not even accessible to the infant's mind. So it is not much use for the kind of cultural interference that NGO gender work engages in. For all of us 'nature' passes and repasses into 'culture', in this work or shuttling site of violence: the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility. To plot this weave, the worker, translating the incessant translating shuttle into that which is read, must have the most intimate knowledge of the rules of representation and permissible narratives which make up the substance of a culture, and must also become responsible and accountable to the writing/translating presupposed original. That is the space of language-learning, not the space of speedy gender-training in the interest of achieving utopia in globalization. This is why books such as *Why Translation Studies Matters*, published through the European Institute for Translation Studies, are of interest to me, and I hope my words resonate with their sense of mission (Gile et al 2010).

I have given above an account of how the 'self' is formed, through sexual difference. Let us move just a bit further in the infant's chronology and look at the infant acquiring language. There is a language we learn first, mixed with the pre-phenomenal, which stamps the metapsychological circuits of 'lingual memory' (Becker 1995, 12). The child invents a language, beginning by bestowing signification upon gendered parts of the parental bodies. The parents 'learn' this language. Because they speak a named language, the child's language gets inserted into the named language with a history before the child's birth, which will continue after its death. As the child begins to navigate this language it is beginning to access the entire interior network of the language, all its possibility of articulations, for which the best metaphor that can be found is—especially in the age of computers—'memory'. By comparison, 'cultural memory' is a crude concept of narrative re-memorization that at-



tempts to privatize the historical record.

Translation studies must imagine that each language may be activated in this special way and make an effort to produce a simulacrum through the reflexivity of language as habit. Walter Benjamin, like all male theorists, ignoring the play of gender in the constitution of language except through its use in the Adamic narrative, ignores therefore this aspect of the task of the translator (Benjamin [1923] 1996, 253-63). Here we translate, not the content, but the very moves of languaging. We can provisionally locate this peculiar form of originary translation before translation on the way, finally, to institutionally recognizable translation, which often takes refuge in the reduction to equivalence of a quantifiable sort. Mere reason.

This is not to make an opposition between the natural spontaneity of the emergence of 'my languaged place' and the artificial effortfulness of learning foreign languages. Rather is it to emphasize the metapsychological and telecommunicative nature of the subject's being encountered by the languaging of place. If we entertain the spontaneous/artificial opposition, we will possibly value our own place over all others and thus defeat the ethical impulse so often ignored in competitive translation studies. Embracing another place as my creolized space may be a legitimation by reversal. We know now that the hybrid is not an issue here. If, on the other hand, we recall the helplessness before history—our own and of the languaged place—in our acquisition of our first dwelling in language, we just may sense the challenge of producing a simulacrum, always recalling that this language too, depending on the subject's history, can inscribe lingual memory. In other words, a sense of metapsychological equivalence among languages, at the other end from quantification, rather than a comparison of historico-civilizational content alone. Étienne Balibar has suggested that equivalence blurs difference, whereas equality requires them (Balibar 2010, 55-89). Precisely because civil war may be the allegoric name for an extreme form of untranslatability, it is that 'blurring' that we need.

There are two theories of literary translation: you add yourself to the original or, you efface yourself and let the text shine. I subscribe to the second. But I have said again and again that translation is also the most intimate act of reading. And to read is to pray to be haunted. A translator may be a ventriloquist, performing the contradiction, the counter-resistance, which is at the heart of love. Does this promote cultural exchange? This for me is the site of a double bind, contradictory instructions coming at the same time: love the original/share the original; culture cannot/must be exchanged.

How intimate is this 'intimate act of reading'? Long ago in Taiwan, my dear friend Ackbar Abbas had said that my take on reading was a 'critical intimacy' rather than a 'critical distance'. And now, another perceptive reader, Professor Deborah Madsen, has found in my idea of 'suture (as translation)' a way into Derrida's sense that translation is an intimate embrace, an embrace that is also something like a physical combat (Madsen forthcoming).

One prays to be haunted, Derrida asserts, because 'I cannot be in the other's place, in the head of the other'. In all reading, but more so in translation, we are dealing with ghosts, because 'to translate is to lose the body. The most faithful translation is violent: one loses the body of the poem, which exists only in [the 'original' language and once only] ... translation is desired by the poet... but...,' and here we enter the place of violence in love, 'love and violence'. And the language of the 'original', is itself 'a bloody struggle with [that very] language, which

[it] deforms, transforms, which [it] assaults, and which [it] incises'. We have to inhabit the 'original' language against its own grain in order to translate (Derrida 2005, 164-9).

Following these thinkers, then, I come to the conclusion that the double bind of translation can best be welcomed in the world by teaching translation as an activism rather than merely a convenience. In other words, while the translated work will of course make material somewhat imperfectly accessible to the general reading public, we, in the academy, should primarily produce translators rather than translations. We can expand this analogy to the necessarily imperfect translations of the images of utopia. The translations, in a classroom, at the Center—are lovely byproducts. We produce critically annotated and introduced translations, fighting the publishers some. In other words, we have to have the courage of our convictions as we enter and continue in the translation trade. Our international students' practical step of declaring a native language as 'foreign' cannot dictate our teaching of translating from or into a learned language.

At the end of Benjamin's essay on 'The Task of the Translator', there is the mention of a meaning-less speech, 'pure speech', which makes translation possible. There is a famous scandal about the accepted English and French translation translating this as 'makes translation impossible'. In closing, I would like to invoke this intuition, which in Benjamin, to me unfortunately, takes on the guise of the sacred. But this idea—that the possibility of the production of meaning is a system without meaning but with values that can be filled with meaning—is in today's informatics—which is rather far from the language of the Scripture. We will recall that the distinction between meaning and value is already there in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*.<sup>3</sup>

In this understanding, signification means to turn something into a sign—rather than to produce meaning—and make it possible for there to be meaning within established conventions. This originary condition of possibility is what makes translation possible—that there can be meaning, not necessarily tied to singular systems. About sixty years ago, Jacques Lacan suggested that the unconscious is constituted like a conveyor belt, rolling out objects susceptible to meaningfulness—for use in building the history of a subject, with imperfect reference to whatever one could call the real world (Lacan 2007, 671-702). In these mysterious thickets the possibility of translation emerges, but only if, institutionally, the so-called foreign languages are taught with such care that, when the student is producing in it, s/he has forgotten the language which was rooted in the soul—roots which, Saussure, Lacan, information theory, and in his own way Benjamin, see as themselves produced, dare I say, as rhizomes without specific ground? (Marx 1973, 147). It gives me pleasure to recall that Saussure was a student of Sanskrit who may have arrived at this sort of intuition through his reading of the fifth century B.C.E. Indian grammarian Bhartrihari's notion of *sphota* (Matilal 1990).

I have often said that globalization is like an island of signs in a sea of traces. A trace is not a sign. A sign-system promises meaning, a trace promises nothing, rather it simply

<sup>3</sup> In this connection, Derrida also invokes the intuition of the transcendental but distances himself in the end: 'every poem says, 'this is my body,'... and you know what comes next: passions, crucifixions, executions. Others would also say—mark these words—'resurrections...' For meaning and value, see Ferdinand de Saussure (1959, 111-122).

seems to suggest that there was something here. In this connection one inevitably thinks of the established patriarchal convention, still honored by most legal systems, that I, especially if I am recognizable as a man, am my father's sign and my mother's trace. What is important for us within my argument is that, rather than theorize globalization as a general field of translation which in spite of all the empiricization of apparently impersonal mechanical translation, in fact privileges host or target, ceaselessly and indefinitely, we should learn to think that the human subject in globalization is an island of languaging—unevenly understanding some languages and idioms with the 'first' language as monitor—within an entire field of traces, where 'understanding' follows no guarantee, but where there is just a feeling that these words are meaningful, not just noise; an undoing of the *barbaros*. This may produce a new call for a different 'non-expressional' art, a different 'simultaneous translation'.

Global translating in the achievable utopia, on the other hand, ceaselessly transforms trace to sign, sign to data, undoing the placelessness of utopias. This arrogance is checked and situated, if we learn, with humility, to celebrate the possibility of meaning in a grounding medium that is meaning-less.

In the interview from which I have already quoted, given a few months before his death, Derrida puts it in a lovely, empirical way: 'there may be an allusion to a referent from [the author's] life that is hidden or encrypted through numerous layers of hidden literary references. ... in a word, there will always be an excess that is not of the order of meaning, that is not just another meaning'.

If we claim a successful translation, a successful recoding into a general system of equivalence, we forget the ghostliness of utopias, we betray gendering, our first instrument of translation. All attempts at fundraising are foiled by this, as Socrates knew. He could not 'dumb himself down' for the city fathers, the social engineers.

The global contemporaneity that we now empirically supposedly have exists because the silicon chip allows us to travel on the web, and because other kinds of empirical travel are also possible. Actually this contemporaneity has always been a fact. Now that it is seemingly empirically available to many, we have to change ourselves into thinking that whatever is synchronic is modern. The different diachronies make it historically and politically uneven—this is the field within which translation must think itself. All of the different diachronies make this synchrony a relief map. Within this difference, translation begins to work. We cannot just talk about others. We must persistently change ourselves.

In 1982 in Essex I had said that the conference 'Europe and Its Others' should have as its title, 'Europe as an Other'. It was deemed inappropriate then. Thirty years went by, and then it was possible to give me a twenty-minute slot on a panel called 'Alien Europe: Europe as an Other' in Wroclaw, Poland. What was the history that happened? Translation is deeply involved in this history and you have to thank the world. But you must listen to us when we, the in-house auto-critical contrarians, haltingly make our instructive mistakes. The practical short haul can be evaluated. But if one wants this not to be identical with the other side, then one does not just put a plus in the place of the minus.

What we say—impractical as it may sound, impossible as the tasks are—should be attended to so that you, the disciplinarians, know that what you are doing has to be based on a grounding error: that translation studies as a discipline is possible. You should inhabit that grounding error because if you don't—since everything is a double bind—you cannot

begin. If you're living, you have to make that into a single bind so that you can make decisions. But the difference between the real people (the real activists, the real parents) and the unreal people is that the former know that the decision is going to have to be changed because it was too dependent on the circumstances given. Whereas the latter think that they were going to go forward but come instead to a moment of racism, as in the Millennium Goals: 'Hey we gave all these things to the African villagers and they don't know how to use them.' That unacknowledged racism then begins to fester until there's a situation worse than the one being originally corrected and human rights come to depend on enforcement. This is all very deeply connected with the impulse to translate. It's a good impulse to create European institutions moving towards 'Europe's Others', and to create US institutions moving towards 'US's Others'. It's a fantastic thing and I certainly talk to deans and vice presidents in favor of these things. At the same time, when you choose the others—we are talking now about the area studies disciplines that came in just after the Cold War because of national defense—there's also hierarchy. I am therefore not in translation studies, I teach reading, how to read in the most robust sense. And I repeat: translation is the most intimate act of reading. I remain a literalist, not because I think literalism is good, but because literalism is impossible. If you try to be literal, dynamic equivalence, which is a wonderful phrase, will come in anyway because no one is capable of being completely literal. Literalism between two languages is impossible and as I say, 'Translation begins with the violent act of killing the sound.' And yet, I'm a translator and root for translation.

A postscript on proletarian and subaltern. The distinction was first made by Antonio Gramsci. As Frank Rosengarten, Gramsci's translator, pointed out in conversation, in the army, the definition of subaltern is 'those who take orders'. As soon as we look at this category, rather than those who are trashed within and by the logic of capital, we think gender, we think the paperless, we think of those outside the system of equivalences, we think of those with no social mobility who don't know that the welfare structures of the state are for the use of the citizen. I should tell you in closing that this final definition of the subaltern I wrote recently for a second cousin, deeply involved in global capitalism, who happened to see a video where women workers gently and with affection mocked me for my fixation on the subaltern. My cousin the capitalist didn't know what the word meant, as Lawrence Eagleburger, the 62nd US Secretary of State and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Forum for International Policy, did not, in 1998, know what was meant by 'New Social Movements', just as they were being co-opted into 'the international civil society'.<sup>4</sup>

Let us not permit our sanctioned ignorance, our unacknowledged ignor-ings, keep translation quarantined within the confines of an empiricized utopia.

<sup>4</sup> The UN initiated the move in 1994, by opening an 'NGO Forum' for the first time at the International Conference on Population and Development. Eagleburger, when questioned about new social movements at a conference on 'Does America Have A Democratic Mission' at the University of Virginia on March 19-21, 1998, turned to the moderator (who happened to be Fareed Zakaria) and asked what was meant by the phrase.

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