The Translated City

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> Progress itself is not something that unfolds in a single line. Along with the natural weakening an idea suffers as it becomes diffuse, there is also the criss–crossing of influences from new sources of ideas. The innermost core of the life of every age, an inchoate, swelling mass, is poured into moulds forged by much earlier times. Every present period is simultaneously now and yet millennia old. This millipede moves on political, economic, cultural, biological and countless other legs, each of which has a different tempo and rhythm. One can see this as a unified picture and elaborate it in terms of a single cause by always keeping to a central perspective…but one can also find satisfaction in the exact opposite. There is no plan in this, no reason: fine. Does this really make it any uglier than if there were a plan?
> Robert Musil 'Mind and Experience: Notes for Readers Who Have Eluded the Decline of the West' (1921)

To think of the modern city—Cairo, London, Istanbul, Lagos, or Buenos Aires—is to experience a perpetual translating machine. Economical, cultural, and historical forces are here locally configured and acquire form, substance, and sense. These days much attention is given to how global flows become local realities in the multiple realisations of 'globalisation', but the archive that the city proposes actually represents an altogether deeper set of sedimentations. Cities as the sites of cultural encounters—from fifth century Athens with its Greeks, Persians, and Egyptians, to present-day, multi-cultured Los Angeles— are precisely where the outside world pushes into our interiors to propose immediate proximities. In this context, differences may

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also be accentuated: think of the ghettoes, ethnic areas, and communities of many modern Euro-American cities. Cultural and historical overspills, most immediately registered in culinary, musical, and cultural taste, do not automatically lead to physical convivialities and friendship. Nevertheless, even if we cling to familiar accents, the grammar of the city undergoes transformation. This occurs without our consent. We inevitably find ourselves speaking in the vicinity of other histories and cultures, in the vicinity of others who may refuse our terms of translation, who insist on opacity, and who refuse to be represented in our reason. As a translating and translated space, the language of the city is never merely a linguistic matter. For what is being 'spoken' in a mixture of asymmetrical powers is precisely the intricate accumulation of historical encounters established in the conjunctural syntax of a particular urban cultural formation. As the concentrated locality of such processes, and their augmented velocity, the city continually proposes the urgency of considering life, both ours, and that of others, in the transit proposed by translation.

What precisely might all of this mean? Beyond the obvious threshold of translation inaugurated by the arrival of the other, the stranger invariably called upon to transform his history and her culture into our language and understanding, there emerges the disquieting insistence that we too, are somehow being translated by complex processes occurring in the very city that we consider our own. The city becomes increasing problematic, and we grow accustomed to walking on troubled ground. The foundations of our history and culture, of our lives and sense of belonging, are disturbed. The assurance of a domestic place is exposed to unauthorised questions, unplanned procedures, and unhomely practices. We are literally transported elsewhere and are ourselves translated. For what is rendered explicit in translation is not merely the contingency of language and the manner in which it sustains our movement, but also a persistent interrogation. Seeded in ambiguity, uncertainty, mis-understanding, re-formulations, semantic contestation, and the uncontrolled passage of language elsewhere, there emerges the insistence on an irreducible opacity. Not all will be revealed to our eyes and reason. This, of course, is the complex challenge of the post-colonial city. It is here, where the colonial ghosts who haunt the making of modernity are housed and accommodated, that we encounter the most acute site of translation, deferred representations, and opacity.

The forces of translation can be traced in multiple forms and formations: in the phenomenology of everyday life; in musical, pictorial, and literary aesthetics; in clothing and culinary practices; in debating questions of faith; and in renewing the lexicon of philosophical and critical discourse. Among the many ways of thinking of such processes, processes that are intrinsic to the making of the modern city and the modernity it is presumed to represent, is that provoked by critical considerations of contemporary architecture and urban planning.

Architecture, as the material and technical appropriation of ground, history, and memory proposes a problematic site of power and politics, of technics, technology, and aesthetics. All of this is unconsciously secreted in the seemingly neutral grid lines of the survey, the plan, and the project. If architecture provides us with a habitat, a home, it also contributes to the language in which ideas of home, belonging, and domesticity, and the supposed opposites of the unhomely, the non-identical, and the foreign, are conceived and received. This renders space both agonist and partisan: no longer an empty, 'neutral' con-

tainer, waiting to be filled by the abstract protocols of 'progress', but rather the site of a complex and troubled inheritance that questions all desires to render it transparent to a conclusive logic. Architecture, even if it chooses to ignore it, is about the translation of this troubled inheritance. So, opening up the languages of building, urban planning, and civic projection, seeding them with doubt, and crisscrossing their concerns with lives lived, living, and yet to come, is to render the 'laws' of cultural codification vulnerable to what they seek to contain and control. Every act of representation is simultaneously an act of repression. Every excluded trace becomes the site of a potential transformation, the point of departure for unsuspected meanings.

For, despite the presumption of the explorer's map and the architectural drawing board, space is never empty. It is has already been inhabited, nominated, and produced by some body. Abstract coordinates are themselves the purified signals of an altogether more turbulent and terrestrial transit. In this stark affirmation lies a profound challenge to an eye/I that has historically been accustomed to colonising a space considered 'empty' prior to its occupation by occidental 'progress'. Against a grade zero of history inaugurated by the West, its languages, disciplines, technologies, and political economy, it is ethically and aesthetically possible to pose the historical heterogeneity of what persistently precedes and exceeds such a singular and unilateral framing of time and space. In translating abstract coordinates into worldly concerns they become both multiple and mutable. In the situated realisation of symbolic artefacts—the 'house', the 'square', the 'building', the 'street'—a complex historical provenance is pronounced in the shifting syntagms of an ultimately planetary frame.

The interruption posed by the other and the elsewhere encourages the interrogation released in a sidereal, oblique glance that cuts across the site and crumples the map with other times. Set free from the assumptions of disciplinary protocols secured in the institutional authority of architecture, civil engineering, and public administration, the plan, the project, is here exposed to questions and queries that were previously silenced and unheard. The desire for the totalising translation of transparency, and hence control, is de-territorialised and re-territorialised by what insists and resists the architectural and administrative will (to power).

All of this crosses and contaminates aesthetics with ethics. A closed, idealist, and metaphysical imperative—the idea of 'beauty', the 'order' of reason, the 'rationality' of the plan, the stable 'meaning' of the discourse—is transferred into the turbulent, open-ended, syntactical turmoil of a quotidian event. We are invited to look and think again; to touch and feel the experience of the everyday and the ordinary rendered extra-ordinary. In this transitory exposure (Heidegger's aletheia or revealing), a breach in the predictable tissues of a cultural and critical discourse is temporarily achieved. Here the solution proposed is neither permanent nor conclusive; it is precisely in 'solution', in the chemical and physical sense of the term: a liquid state in which diverse forces, languages, and histories are suspended and culturally configured in the shifting currents of a worldly unfolding. This architecture and aesthetics shadows, occasionally spilling over the borders of more permanent pretensions. As a border discourse, this translating perspective proposes tactical interruptions of a hegemonic strategy seeking to realise its unilateral plan (often under the label of 'progress', 'modernity', and 'democracy'). It is in the borders, in a social and historical 'no-man's-land', where both civil rights, and frequently the very concept of the 'human', are suspended or yet to come, that it becomes necessary to elaborate another architecture of sense, another

geometry of meaning: a poetics whose trajectory and potential translations literally leave the political speechless.

This suggests that there is no one project, no single perspective that is able to subordinate, discipline, edify, and translate space. The project, still dreaming of totalities and finitude, gives way to the critical passage that is always in elaboration. While the former is forever seeking home and the certitude of completing the plan, the journey, the latter is always underway beneath a sky too vast to possess. Here space, rather than passively received as an anonymous container, becomes a social and historical provocation. The space-time continuum is cut up and redistributed in a disturbing semiotics: signs drift into other accounts, semantics are contaminated, deviated, and subverted; ignored details and debris betray a history yet to be told. Space is re-articulated, transformed from a singular structure into a multilateral palimpsest that can be 'written' up and over, again and again. Freed from their supposedly objective status, space and temporality are deviated from the unilateralism of 'progress'; both are redistributed in a narrative yet to be told.

In this critical exposure, tradition—historical, cultural, and architectural—becomes the site of translation and transit. Here the tradition evoked is not the narrow history of occidental architecture, but rather one that is articulated in the disturbing and interrogative tradition of dwelling on the earth beneath the sky, ultimately a de-possessed place that is never simply 'ours' to manage and define. Here questions of freedom and action exist in proximity to the world, rather than in debt to the abstract humanism of occidental subjectivism (and its metaphysical culmination in the objectivism of technological rationalism and the transparent translation of naked 'information'). This suggests a precise move away from architecture involved in the design of buildings to an architecture engaged in the care and construction of places. At this point, architects might come to be considered as mediators between the order, the discipline they embody, and the disorder or extra-disciplinary world they seek to house and accommodate.

The knowing and omnipotent eye of the architect (this was the preferred metaphor for God adopted by both Isaac Newton and William Blake), together with the very premises of occidental humanism and its ocular hegemony, could perhaps here be replaced by the altogether more humble and immediate figure of the Disk Jockey. The DJ does not pretend to create from nothing, does not believe that language commences with his or her presence, but rather listens to, and takes in hand, existing languages, seeking to extract from them a new rhythm, a diverse style, a more satisfying configuration. Beyond the geometry of space, exists an architecture, a manner of edifying and constructing places composed in the rhythms, sounds, and everyday practices that exceeds the plan and the project. The city comes to be cut up, divided, and sounded out by the desires and needs of specific subjects.

Subjects in space speak through diverse histories and languages and, more directly, contest the auto-referential logic of abstract administration and architectural planning. In the space between buildings, it is possible to hear a dialogue between place and identity. Here the dreamed symmetry of the project is continually subverted by the social, interrogated by the punctuation of the everyday. Here the object of the rationalist gaze, captured in the eye of the architect and the urban planner, becomes a subject; a subject who responds in a language that exceeds the logic of the project. Abstract bodies—citizens, people, and individuals—become precise and differentiated realities. We pass from the geometric vision

of space to its social dissemination and its historical articulation. We pass from mathematics to metamorphosis, from logic to language, from the grammar of the said to the translation of historical speech that constitutes both us and the world in which we are sustained.

So, how to reply to a history that is neither homogeneous nor amenable to a unilateral will? Such a reply involve a distinctive and explicit shift in the intellectual foundations and language of architecture itself. Architecture has historically tended to identify ground in the instance of edification. Prior to that moment, space is considered literally meaningless, unconstructed, and thereby unrepresentable. What if architecture were to build without the security of this a priori that protects it from what its reason cannot contain? At this point, the abstract priority of geometry and design would come to be challenged by the historically and culturally invested ground upon which architecture, both physically and metaphysically, builds. Architecture would be sustained in acts of translation: fraught, even impossible, but necessary.

The awareness that architecture embodies something that goes beyond its calculation, something that exceeds the more obvious techniques of projection, engineering, and planning, leads to the insistence that architecture always occurs in a particular place, never an empty space. Architecture always builds on fractured, unstable ground. This is to intersect the art of rational construction—the will to construct an edifice: the metaphysics of building and the building of metaphysics—with the intercession, and protection, of the very question of our differentiated being. There are forces within the languages of our becoming, building, and thinking that interrupt, break through, and exceed the violent imposition of technical, 'scientific', 'rational', and unilateral solutions to that ancient and most present of demands: the unfolding question of how to dwell.

The contemporary critique and crisis of European architecture paradoxically stems not from its failure and the threat of extinction, but precisely, as with so many other occidental practices, from its ubiquity; from the fact that its grammar and reason has become universal. Yet if architecture is about the narration and nurturing of tradition, the material translation and transmission of time and space into place, then it can never simply assume an 'organic' relationship to what emerges from the immediate site. Each and every culture is historically the result of a hybrid and transit formation, borrowing and modifying styles and solutions that have been imposed, imported, borrowed, bricolaged, adopted, and adapted...translated.

The classical sense of the city is consistently connected to the immediate history of a defined territory, the expression of an autochthonous culture. Nevertheless, in every city roots invariably turn out to be routes, historical and cultural passages that crisscross urban space offering entry into, and exit from, the immediate procedures of the locality. Hence, the question becomes how to think of both a city and its buildings as the crossroads between roots and routes; further, how to conceptualise a city constructed and constituted by mutable migratory flows and diversified cultural traffic. In other words, how do we think of a city no longer in terms of an apparently homogeneous historical-cultural text, but as a permeable site suspended in the challenge of translating and being translated through the accommodation of cultural and historical heterogeneity?

It is no longer merely a question of extending existing urban and civic space to offer hospitality to diverse, subaltern, and hidden histories. Rather it is we who are invited to reconsider and reconfigure our histories in reply to the interrogations that emerge in the

streets of 'our' city, our 'home'. My own history, culture, and sense of the world are rendered vulnerable by such histories: histories that are clearly impossible to enframe in a unique point of view, or to translate into a transparent reason.

The unique historical and geographical name—Sao Paolo, Vienna, Lagos, London— of a specific urban space evokes multiple places that are sutured into a shared territory, producing the diverse configurations that cultural, historical, and social bodies perform across their multiple planes. Within the ongoing cultural and historical hybridisation of cities that we increasingly speak of today, the same urban space and time comes to be re-signified, re-worked, and re-written under the impact of diverse prospects, needs, and desires. The same territory is rendered flexible—de-territorialised and re-territorialised—as it continually migrates from one set of coordinates to another.

A location is always the site of cultural appropriation and historical transformation, the site of a particular manner and economy of building, dwelling, and thinking. What emerges in the specific contours of each and every place is the subject who introduces agonism into the agora, confuting the regulated transparency of the plan with the unsuspected translation and opacities of the unplanned event. This is not simply a response that is restricted to a precise sociocultural and historical site; for it simultaneously also represents a response to a wider series of questions that invest contemporary modernity. What is proposed is an unfolding engagement with what falls off the planning table and is generally excluded from the project, what is in time and yet is excluded from the temporalities of rationalism: a presence that threatens and challenges the authority of the planner. As Walter Benjamin has taught us, it is precisely from an examination of what the city casts aside, from its detritus and rubbish, that one discovers its innermost secrets and repressed logics.

In the modern rationalisations of urban space and development, such unrecognised places are for the moment literally nowhere (ou-topos). To disrupt the plan with its refuse, with its repressed matter, brings us to confront the fundamental critical question: whether simply to synthesise and endorse an existing urban grammar, or to render it vulnerable to diverse horizons of sense that will modify, reconfigure, and perhaps even lead to abandonment of the language such a grammar proposes? In this vein, Western, or First World, architecture and planning could come to be connected to the more agile abodes that constitute housing, haven, and recreation for the vast majority of the world's population, who have neither the means nor daily stability to permit occidental edifices.

Architecture as the site of critical work is not only where buildings and cities are visualised, planned, and projected, it is also where it becomes possible to listen to what the architectural practice and profession tends to silence or repress in its political economy of rationalising and representing space. Can architecture respond to this other side? To those who do not fit into the abstract rigour of the plan? To those whose presence disturbs and contests its logics and rewrite the terms of accommodation according to another cultural design? To those who translate the city into unauthorised meanings? Perhaps architecture might respond to such conditions, which are intrinsically among the structural conditions of what was once occidental, but are now clearly a differentiated, planetary, modernity, less by seeking to 'solve' such 'problems' and more by seeking to present them. This, I would suggest, is what a critical understanding of the translated (and translating) city ultimately exposes.

Translation-Transdiscipline?

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Part one

The note, 'Translation: a new paradigm', circulated by the editorial board of this journal as an introduction to the inaugural issue has been profoundly thought-provoking. Along with the bird's-eye view of the terrain, it agonizes about an 'epistemological crisis' confronting the discipline of translation studies, laments the impasse within, and looks towards 'startlingly new' ways of defining translation. It candidly confesses to articulating the anxiety of scholars and practitioners of the discipline in 'single nation states and linguistic limits'. This qualification is both timely and appropriate and may be among the factors that lie at the root of the crisis. One is therefore, also tempted to add—*and scholarship which has been conditioned by the cultures of teleology and linearity within Judeo-Christian world-views.* As praxis, the very definition of translation has been cast in the monotheistic vocabulary of Source (Original) and Target

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(Derivative) and this has functioned as the normative, *only way* of defining translation, instead of being one way to define it. Thus, anxieties may also be linked to those about 'authenticity' of the translation, with the Bible as the paradigmatic 'original text'. Hector Avalos, in his insightful and informative work, *The End of Biblical Studies* (2007), has demonstrated how the Judeo-Christian notions of the Bible, both as an original text and its so-called equivalent in translations, are built upon fallacious notions and self perceptions which are exercises in concealment and erasures, undertaken with the end of manipulation for the retention and reproductions of power and control by insistence on the relevance of the Bible to our times. Even if we were to lay aside this indictment, the fact remains that

translation activity organized around the Bible ironically, is almost always extra-textual, and often layered with the motive of translating both ontology and epistemes of large sections of the world's peoples. Yet translation theory generated around this activity has precluded ways of considering the act of translation as a creative, transformative, or interpretative act, along with the attendant trauma, anguish and violence, the internal turmoil and churnings that are associated with them.

The print-centricity of translation within the critical canons of translation studies has led to translation being conceptualized as a linearized activity. This has remained the dominant discourse of translation, its universal given and has been accepted as such. There has been little reflection in translation studies on how pre-literacy, pre-print cultural crossovers may have taken place, especially within geographical areas of great linguistic diversity. Nor has there been any real challenge to the centrality of the printed text in translation studies and its assumption of literacy as a prerequisite for the activity of translation, setting aside historical and empirical evidence of other modes of communication practiced for centuries across the globe. The worlds lying outside the Judeo-Christian cultures no longer consent to be contained by a monotheistic framework. Cultural transactions there are heterogeneous, and worldviews disparate and non-normative. The notion of 'original' in translation studies is inextricably linked to the idea of ownership and this creates particular problems in cultures of memory where ownership is indeterminate and texts are produced in their articulation. The text then belongs to the entire community and once articulated is set free by the owner to be reiterated across various media. Here the formation of cultural memory is a function of multiple "free-flowing" texts and not of a single text bound and contained by its covers. Formulating translation as a *transdiscipline* may liberate the discipline from its practitioners. The idea of translation as a linear operation needs to be interrogated. Even the word 'translation' must be reviewed to consider that interlingual translation may just be one of several translational practices. Its dominance in defining all acts of translation must be examined and challenged.

Eurocentric paradigms in translation studies have privileged the written text, till in an ironical reversal, the fixity of such written texts has come to be questioned by its most perceptive intellectuals. The infantilization of both sound (speech) and gesture, primordial and persistent acts of communication, have been relegated to a primitive stage of development within the dominant teleological narratives. Surrounded by preliterate cultural forms that have textured our lives, marvelling at the enormous circulation of cultural capital of unlettered masses, we from South Asia have to remind ourselves that literacy may not be the cultural universal for contemplation, reflection, and articulation. It is however not enough merely to state this. Co-opted as we are by that dominant narrative, we have to begin to rethink ourselves—epistemologically, philosophically, and culturally. It is the text in cultural memory or the cultural narrative that undermines the notion of linearity for us. The inter-text here becomes fundamental and forces us to acknowledge that the validity of adaptation of oral narratives of indeterminate origin cannot be subject to notions of equivalence.

In any case, it is difficult for us in South Asia to find ourselves in an intellectual cul-de-sac just yet with translation. In India, there are 22 officially recognized languages, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 2011 lists 438 living ones. The linguistic diversity and cultural geography make for a potent combination that impacts the process of creation and the

preservation of knowledge and its narration. However, languages are also dying with each generation resulting in epistemological losses. Asymmetrical education across generations and the primacy of the English language have resulted in a situation where in most language communities, the generation that speaks, reads, and writes the native language is rarely proficient in English and the generation that is so, is lamentably ignorant of the former, often as a result of historical, social and economic, and educational compulsions. This is true of most of India's regions. It remains to be seen whether the Indian diaspora, under threat to its minority status has preserved its mother tongue among its new generation. However, even if it were to be so, the dissemination of cultural knowledge across translation in print, requires a disciplinary rigour and academic interest which may not be available in those who may have bridged the linguistic divide. The crisis of the humanities has hit language learning particularly hard. The advantage that an education in English accords the average Indian has also increasingly privileged learning in the Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses and interest and engagement with languages and their literatures as such is rare. For it to be combined with translation or cultural studies is even rarer. Translation and translation studies comprise a special interest group often limited to academia and disciplines like social anthropology, history, and of course, literature. It is in this scenario that we have to view and review these. The massive effort of translating scientific texts that Europe undertook to disseminate scientific knowledge and education has no parallel in India. English, like German and French elsewhere, has been the key to all higher education in India, which translates into lucrative or reasonably remunerative careers, even within the country, now more than ever. The national educational agenda factors in translation as a tool to open up the world of knowledge of a specialized kind to native vernacular speakers. A National Translation Mission was recommended by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) and was ambitiously designed to meet specific educational objectives. Universities with departments specializing in translation were invited to make the roadmap. The NKC also recommended and mapped the project to recuperate indigenous knowledge systems. Enormous potential remains to be tapped there, and translation's role will be pivotal in codifying these systems. Translation is also a political and economic compulsion today for India. With the formation of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), translation is also on the regional agenda as countries grappling with languages and cultures of the region strive to promote cultural understanding and economic co-operation. With so many permutations and combinations of the communicative contexts, the potential of translation studies is far from exhausted.

Translation as we will see is a vigorous activity in the region. In a rapidly globalizing world, large swathes of geographical and mental landscapes in India stay cocooned in a time warp while others translate and are translated, transformed, and transmitted. In a nation/region of storytellers, oral and written narratives are recovered by scholars, scribes, and performers to be translated. However, gaps have to be bridged between dialects and standard languages, and those languages which are spoken but do not have a script. Then there is the presence, since ancient times, of vigorous oral traditions as well as rigorous traditions of writing for dissemination of knowledge and these continue to be recuperated and translated by native and foreign scholars. For the Indian subcontinent, the world has always been intercultural and cultural exchange has long been a mode of being. Five definitive moments can

be identified for our purposes. The first is the translation of Buddhist texts and their travel to the Far East. The second is the encounter with Islam and the great cultural energy that encounter produced. The third is the colonial experience, which culminated in the organization of the nation state along linguistic lines. The fourth, in the post-independence era of nation-building which marked a spurt in regional translation activity, was promoted by state patronage. The latest in this trajectory is the contemporary conditions of globalisation in which the pragmatics of globalisation, translation, and interpretation hold the key to information, economics, and commerce on a global scale. Predating these identifiable epochs is a continuum stretching back into the era of maritime and overland activity of trade and commerce, a 'globalisation' with its own set of markers. For a region of such linguistic diversity where since ancient times translation has been axiomatic, a given of the great commercial and social networks of trade routes and vast movements of populations, it seems an activity so innocuous and unselfconscious that there is no reflection on it till we come to the translation activity undertaken with the advent of Buddhism. In the encounter with the world of Islam, we also see the operation of translation as metaphor, as two world views come into contact. Different historical epochs have thrown up their particular problematic. Scholars of the region are still negotiating these epochs in translation and translation studies.

In this, I would like to draw attention to two interesting projects around translation, which throw up methodologies whose analysis may produce fresh insights into the activity of translation. The first of these is a recent development in the attempt to bring in narratives from the margins into the mainstream. Here, the disempowered, even illiterate narratives are codified into translated texts and printed or performed for further dissemination by mediators, usually ethnographers and storytellers. This raises complex questions of motives and linguistic negotiations, and also involves obvious issues of power and privilege. However, these texts importantly contribute to the inclusion of those voices, silenced and unheard for centuries, in the narrative of the nation. The second one involves showcasing literature from diverse regions of India, for the non-English speaking world. The dearth of requisite linguistic competencies here can only be resolved through collaborative translation, wherein it is expected that the move would be from the original source text directly into the target language by native speakers as translators working with language pairs. However, that rarely happens. Only texts that have been translated into English are chosen for translation by publishing houses, as these are already accessible to publishers who would want to evaluate the translations in order to assess their marketability. The mediating role of the English language in determining the selection of texts for translation, and in the context of the methodologies that evolve around the task of translating from the original into the target language along with the political configurations that are generated in these linguistic/communicative contexts as translation events, would be an interesting area for translation studies to examine.

Part two

What people are doing with texts and why, should continue to be a central concern in translation studies. In my ongoing research on translation in the cultural milieu of pre-colonial Bengal (1204–1756), I confront the problem of recon-

ciling the massive cultural knowledge in circulation with the fact of mass illiteracy. Literacy is displaced as the cultural universal for creative and intellectual articulation and reflection by the primacy of the oral tradition. Yet the culture of orality does not presuppose either the absence of the written or the lack of a literate tradition. The strategies of dispersion of a text across orality and memory are not arbitrary but thought through, and actually enter the domain of the performative, in their emphasis on phonology rather than semantics, in their kinship with music and rhythm, and in their adaptability for visual display. They intersect with clearly defined audiences. Indeed, the arena of performance is an overlap, an encounter, of the oral and the written text. It is also the space that produces a new text. This new text is a translation. Both the medium and the entry of a text in different systems of signs, that is, in extra-textual communicative modes, are fundamental to the study of the ways in which both oral and written texts travel, how they are circulated, disseminated, received, reiterated, and reinvented. The absence of the notion of authorial control liberates the text, to be interpreted both medially and intersemiotically. Michael Cronin (2002) has demonstrated how interpretation is embedded in culture, location, and subjectivity and how translation studies as a discipline governed by Eurocentric principles of domination, national literatures, pure languages, the chirographic, the typographic, racial, and cultural subordination have underestimated the business of interpretation as a cultural practice.

As a cultural practice, then, translation needs to be viewed in the specific contexts of what people are doing with texts. My findings in Bengal suggest that cultural articulation in pre-colonial times, both erudite and folk, is oriented towards performance and mediated by an acute sense of an audience: through ritual, recitation, song, dance, puppets, paintings, and other modes of folk expression. Performance and its dynamics in the social space, especially in pre-literacy, pre-print mass cultures constitute and produce legitimate and viable texts as well as methodologies of translation. Further, these methodologies constitute a paradigm shift from the Eurocentric modes of regarding translation within the parameters of source texts and target languages, in terms of the 'original' and its equivalent in the 'translated'. It is possible to redefine the notion of 'original text' in specific cultural milieus, though the larger question of whether there is one at all often remains unanswered. Can we retrieve translational strategies in oral cultures? May 'adaptation' for performance function as a translational strategy? Further explorations are required.

The performative involves 'staging' the text even if not always as theatre. An episode from the Ramayana—like Rama's renunciation of his claim to the throne and readiness to be exiled for fourteen years, the insistence of Sita his wife and his brother Lakshmana to accompany him, and the journey of the young trio into the forest—is not only the stuff of drama, cast into plaintive songs of parting, set to predetermined melodies suited to the mood of separation, but is transferred on to the canvas as a pictorial story, worked into the stilted movements of puppets to be performed by puppeteers by vocation, woven into the sarees that drape the women of Bengal, or into backdrops of stage settings as props to be carried around by the *nautankis* or travelling performers. It is possible to think of translation in the region of medieval Bengal both historically and synchronously. There is the presence of languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Bangla, Mythil, Oriya, Persian, Urdu, their creoles, and a host of local dialects, always an exasperating business for translators and language chauvinists. There is also translation within single language pairs, for instance,

Sanskrit and Bangla or Persian and Bangla, an erudite activity. Interestingly, we also find not just the linearity of textual transference but also the polyphony of intermedial transference, interpretations, and intersemiotic transpositions, rewritings whose significance can be comprehended in the total communicative context, including those who are involved in the encoding of the message and choosing the medium. In pre-modern Bengal, we find the same text in different media and discourses. Seriation in these orally transmitted texts is manifest in the fact that the same source text, often just the kernel of a story and not a written one at all—in fact probably not a written one more often than not—can be seen to underlie its various translations in a polyphonic rather than in a linearized schema.

It is premature I think, to pronounce Jakobson's formulations (1971) as too reductive as the 'Translation: a new paradigm' discussed above does. Jakobson elaborated the process of translation through the concept of transposition, intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic. Eco (2001) extended it to include the interpretative. These models provide entry points to study how translation operates as cultural practice in pre-literacy environments dominated by sound, speech, gesture, colour, and so on. Intersemiotic translation is complex to evaluate, and layered, because it involves not only interpretation of a text across a different sign system but also its insertion into the tradition and material practices of the sign system it enters or that which appropriates it. This also invests it with a political dimension where we may see the play of the dynamics of power relations.

Part three

Ethnographic studies might just hold the key to opening new vistas and thinking about translation in new/different ways. In India, the caste structure of society, the division into *jatis* and *upajatis*, largely occupational groups and subgroups, and their encounter with texts, both oral and written, is fundamental to the understanding of translation as cultural practice. The existing social stratification has been crucial to the development of cultural practices that are linked to occupation and economic conditions, more often than erudition and literacy, a situation in which impoverished and illiterate peoples actually produce the text by providing the supporting infrastructure and human resources to realize it in the performative. The material conditions within which the passage, interpretation, and reception of texts take place must be examined to arrive at translational strategies. In this regard, the communicative context is also important, because strict social sanctions apply to determine the texts which may be handled, by whom, for whom, and for what purpose. Built into the communicative context is thus an instinctive and cultural sense of an audience. Also built into it is the possibility of the disempowered to subvert the meanings of texts by interpreting them according to their location and worldviews.

Even written texts are subjected to orality and its corollary, aurality. Who receives the text determines how it is to be uttered. It must be understood that there are dedicated social castes engaged in writing-centred activities and who occupy the top end of the caste hierarchy. This 'division of labour' enables two traditions of translation activity: one which deals with identified written texts and negotiates with a world of expanding borders with multiple languages and cultural texts. I call this, unexceptionally, the erudite tradition and

the other, the folk or popular tradition, which is largely intralingual, extra-textual, and intersemiotic. Canonical texts were meant to be performed, through recitation, song, dance, puppets, and other modes of folk practices which clustered around caste occupations, particularly of the 'nimnakoti', or the lower castes. The *Namasudras*, a lower caste of Bengal include the castes of *Gope* (writers), *Sutradhar* (storytellers), *Gayans* (singers), *Bayen* (percussionists), the caste of *Teli* who cure leather and also make musical instruments, *Patua* (painters and pictorial storytellers), and *Nat* (magicians/actors), practically constituting the production team of a performance. These occupation groups may be Hindus or Muslims and draw upon a common heritage of the oral tradition and shared cultural codes. The occupational diversity and division of labour, the presence of many *jatis*, and within them of religious groupings means that a text could find diverse articulations within its locale, as well as travel with itinerant performing troupes across discrete linguistic and cultural regions. A text in pre-modern Bengal therefore, may be thought of as translated and retranslated as many times as the number of performances, and edited/adapted for its audience and for the occasion on which it was performed. This permitted the text the cultural crossovers that translation allows, and it also reinvented itself in various languages. This process produced dynamism within the act of translation that carried the text through the many linguistic and cultural regions it travelled in this trajectory. And texts did travel, from the deserts of Arabia to the forests of Bengal and back.

One keeps coming back to the question of the definition of translation. Can it be limited by the consideration only of the printed word, written texts, and the transaction between the two language systems employed? Oral traditions challenge this delimiting. Practice refutes this notion. Words and texts have always interplayed with music, dance, painting, pottery, textile, and so on, with an entire range of media in various modes to produce signifying systems, another language, resulting in transfer of texts. It seems that the biggest challenge facing the discipline today is to find ways to reduce the gap between translation theory and practice. It is to place translation where it truly belongs, in the world of communication, of entertainment, of knowledge and information, deployed for a variety of purposes, targeting specific audiences. Translation studies as a discipline should be reckoning with that and accounting for it.

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