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Translation and the artist

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Abstract
This article reflects on the idea and role of translation in relation to artistic practice. In its trajectory around the subject it aims to bring out some of the issues at stake for artists and writers within this process of translation such as: loss, boundary, threshold, discipline, fidelity, infidelity, accuracy and error. Its disjunctive structure is intentional, since it is a meditation on the subject, which alludes or touches on aspects of theory as they might be encountered in and through practice – stumbled upon in an unsystematic, sometimes haphazard and equivocal, non-linear or tangential way – rather than provides an exposition of it.

For a few years I worked in prison. In prisons views are blocked by barriers within barriers and beyond them and fastened by locks on every door. The old Victorian one's are bleak constructions of brick walls and concrete floors. Cells line the walls surrounding a central staircase leading to iron landings and walkways. Windows are narrow, so light is sliced or artificial. It is odd and uncomfortable to work with a jailer's keys hanging from ones waist. To be able to open a door, which is locked to others and to enclose them behind it, feels dubious. It is a hard place to be locked up unless you are a political activist with an agenda, a philosopher or mystic in which case, the cell can be a place of infinite freedom. But I think that is unusual.

Populations in remand prisons change frequently, so on Monday mornings, after walking past rows of excrement wrapped in old newsprint, I would collect a print out of the updated prison roll. I sought out and visited all the people with foreign names wherever they were being held. It was quite a crude system because not everybody with a 'foreign' name is 'foreign'. But aspects of prison are quite crude and reductive and it was the only way I could find out if any of the people needed help to communicate in English. Some coped picking up the functional grammar and sparse vocabulary of prison pidgin through its routine and systems, but others would be isolated and mute, unable to ask or respond.

For a while, Ulíses, an itinerant, Chilean pickpocket came to pick up some English. He was illiterate, but like his wily namesake managed to live from his wits and criss-cross the Atlantic from the streets of Santiago to the rich pickings of Green Park and South Kensington Tube stations. Words written meant almost nothing to him. He could not see or remember letters, so to try to assemble them into words made no sense. Formal, academic methods of language teaching were redundant and language could not be abstracted, but had to be concrete and rooted within a situation. We began by re-enacting a process of pointing and naming from the restricted selection of objects around us in the cell. Then we used pictures to expand our horizons. I would name it in English and Ulíses would say it first in Spanish and then repeat it in heavily accented English. It was slow and laborious. When someone older is beginning to learn a language, they seem to chew on words, like tough, old meat while the muscles in their mouths struggle with the foreign sounds and their minds try to follow the logic of a foreign grammar.

Teaching language in a remand prison is problematic. The population is transient, because they are holding places for people on the way to elsewhere. You are restricted by location and by the requirements of a particular regime and its systems. It would have been much nicer for me and for Ulíses if we had been able just to converse. He was only biding time till deportation home. I had lived in Chile, I knew his city and his language, we could have talked of outside and of elsewhere, we could have found a point of view. But I was being paid to help people function in a prison system, so we talked about phone cards and food, Canteen and privileges for good behaviour, lawyers and courts, innocence and guilt, numbers and dates, to be, to want and to have, I was and I am, I have and I have not.

Systems, the environment we inhabit and the languages they form create diverse ways of viewing the world. Within these dichotomies – binaries created by positives and negatives – can polarize thinking and the complex structure of a grammatical system orders existence into a form that the mind both structures and is structured by. In this respect then, language creates edges, boundaries or frontiers to our cognitive world. Like the fictional language of a dystopia the prison environment only displays these tendencies in a more concentrated version than those that prevail, diffuse but equally present, on the outside. Translation as an itinerant, liminal form of artistic

practice (or an illiterate pickpocket) working in between and feeding off diverse languages, can introduce doubt in the form of different sets of perceptions, which question the premise that the world is the same for everybody. That the world as constructed through English, for example, is not the final answer to what the world might be.

Translation involves an act of transportation or carrying across. While often confused and conflated with it, translation operates differently to interpretation and brings about a subtle shift in emphasis in terms of the way art is read. Apart from ekphrastic poetry, art is rarely thought of as being translated. I think that most people would say that critics, and institutions such as the auction house, gallery and museum interpret art for those that do not understand the language of it. The probable etymological root of 'interpret' is 'between prices' and its origin comes from the concept of trade, where goods are exchanged. This places the interpreter between prices or values, and their role is to ensure that there is adequate equivalence, or equal value. This etymology thus stresses the mediating role of the interpreter within a market. Translation, however, is an inherently unstable concept. It is itself constantly translated and as such it is more dynamic. It is a horizontal movement across from one state or medium of expression into another, which negotiates and exposes hierarchical structures in the process. As such loss or aporia (i.e. that which fails to pass through or across) is the focus of its discourse, thus foregrounding the relationship of aporia to method.

Translation is often invisible and historically translators have often occupied a lowly status. Commonly held to be a secondary practice, whose origin lies elsewhere, a chronic symptom of an original loss, which took place when things were first named and words came to replace the thing; translation as a practice – as Walter Benjamin recognized – is in fact privileged in that it constantly re-engages with or touches upon a primary event of creation. It exhibits rather than conceals the symptoms of the conflict between word and image, subject and object and the battle for status or supremacy of one over the other. This often-gendered conflict, which is manifest in ekphrasis, and is central to translation, is perhaps a reason why it has been used repeatedly to challenge assumptions of originality and authorship and to undermine a dominant political, theoretical or philosophical discourse.

In my experience as an artist and a researcher, I find that a form of translation between visible, verbal and conceptual worlds and the borderlands where they touch seems integral to artistic practice. In this sense, translation seems to operate as a potent form of prophylactic doubt or subversive, creative flux that has been used by artists and writers to articulate issues of loss and distance, gaps and fissures, as a resistance to finitude or completion. In view of this, and given that translation is increasingly used as a 'crucial trope, idea, concept, metaphor and mode of interpretation within discussions of international visual and cultural practices' (Bal and Morra 2007: 1), I think it is important to revisit and question some of the assumptions about translation and what it means to be a translator operating between languages and media. Moreover, in the artistic

sphere, increasingly geared to a market-led perspective, when the aura[1] of an artwork seems to reside in the brand or name of the creator, the notion of the artist as translator and use of translation as the closest form of reading can provide another focus or point of view.

A text

***Translato**r* [**ORIGIN** In sense 1 orig. from Old French *translator, -our* (mod, *-eur*) or late Latin *translator*, from Latin *translat-;* later directly from **TRANSLATE** verb; see –OR]
1. (a) A person who translates from one language into another; the author of a translation. **ME. (b)** A person who transfers something from one medium into another, as a painting by engraving, etc. **M19. (c) COMPUTING.** A program that translates from one (especially programming) language into another. **M20.**
V Nabokov: There are countless other stumbling blocks that have tripped up the translator.
2. A person who transfers or transports something.
3. (a) A person who transforms, changes or alters something: *spec.* A cobbler who renovates old shoes. **(b)** A transducer.
4. (a) Telegraphy. An automatic repeater, **(b)** a relay set or station that receives television signals and retransmits them without demodulating them.[2]

Most people accept that a text, like a painting or a sculpture can have numerous readings, the one that follows is a partial one, of many possible interpretations. The latest edition of the *Shorter Oxford*, one of 'the world's most trusted' English dictionaries based on historical principles, does not appear to present the translator in a particularly flattering light. A noun derived from a verb, the translator ostensibly fulfils a functional role, which is not limited to language. The act of transferring or transporting things between languages, media and locations can be performed by people or by machines. It can be physical, cognitive, spatial or temporal. The use of the term in a technical sense reduces the operation to a mechanical process of automatic repetition, to reception and retransmission without demodulation. Transferring between media 'as a painting by engraving' evokes a skilled, technical process of reproduction or substitution, which requires close copying, fidelity to an original and an inherent loss.

Stumble

Assumptions concerning fidelity to the original and loss with respect to it help to foster the notion that translators are not entirely trustworthy. They are prone to error, to being *tripped up* by *stumbling blocks*. The transformations, changes or alterations wrought by them during this obstacle course are likened to those of 'a cobbler who renovates old shoes'. I find it quite a challenge to

1. Aura is a philosophical term, which Benjamin uses strategically in different ways in different contexts. It is a complex and seemingly ambivalent concept. At least three levels of aura have been described by theorists, the aura of originality, pseudo-aura and an aura without aura. Of significance for translation, aura can also decay and disappear. For Benjamin, the decay of aura is a historical process, where aura becomes *readable* on its all levels, which does not imply total disappearance.

2. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on historical principles (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2007).

think of any human activity, that does not involve transformation, change or alteration and I am ignorant of the considerations that came into play when this choice of analogy was made, but it is an interesting and possibly significant one. This example has been reproduced intact and unaltered from earlier editions so, once selected, it may have been retained and carried forward like glacial debris, embedded and incorporated into a slow, imperceptible advance towards dissolution. It may be otherwise.

I think it is generally accepted that the most usual definition of a cobbler is understood to be 'a person who mends shoes, a clumsy worker or botcher'.[3] The verb, cobble, which derives from this noun of unknown origin, is defined as: 'Mend (especially shoes); mend roughly or clumsily, patch (up)'. Given the connotations attaching themselves to this word, the choice of the verb 'renovate' is not the most obvious one. It stems from the Latin *re+novare*, which means to make new. In contemporary English we understand it to mean: 'to repair, restore by replacing lost or damaged parts; make new again, reinvigorate; refresh, or renew on a higher level'. This verb, of Latin descent, seems to belong to a loftier, more ambitious sphere of skill and scholarship than the one evoked by cobble. To 'renew on a higher level' resonates with spiritual undertones, which become more evident with its use in Christian theology as a noun to describe a spiritual rebirth or renewal effected by the Holy Spirit.

Cobble, I would suggest, occupies a baser, more mundane, humbler stratum, somewhere between street level and underfoot. It pertains to *shoes* as *renovate* pertains to *old* (*as having existed for a relatively long time*). However, there is an apparent disjunction between the two pairs of collocations, which could be indicative of an ambivalent attitude towards translators and, by extension, to translation. It could be read and argued as such, but maybe the 'old shoes' and their connotations need to be considered before a conclusion is arrived at.

'Shoes' seems a relatively straightforward, unassuming word. I think most people would agree that the type of shoe a cobbler would mend is generically a form of: 'outer foot covering of leather, plastic, fabric, etc., having a fairly stiff sole; *spec,* such a foot covering not extending above the ankle (as opposed to the boot)'. Clearly design and make of a shoe, like a qualifying adjective, will provoke different readings: Jimmy Choos, Churches brogues, orthopaedic or prosthetic footwear, trainers, clogs, hob-nailed boots and Jesus creepers all communicate differences in terms of physique, gender, background, identity, class, taste and the aspirations of the wearer. But the shoes in question are also old. They have been worn and are in need of repair. The object, like the word has been occupied and altered, stretched and distorted to suit a particular sole, worn down according to an individual gait through a specific terrain.

The difficulty and the pleasure in reading anything stem from the processes by which meaning derives from and is affected by context and association; as idiosyncratic or shared meanings and images involving shoes insinuate themselves into the word, they evoke other meanings and evolve

3. Throughout the text definitions given in italics are taken from the dictionary cited above.

into idiom. Like idioms, all words can be seen as dead metaphors, since the immediacy of their relation to the object to which they refer is progressively lost over time and fades to a palimpsest. Fragments of prior meaning can be rediscovered in etymologies given in dictionaries as can their history of shifting signification as they are translated into the cultures of different ages. But, like the archive, the dictionary and the word can be another form of burial. The role of the artist (and translator) within this process is to restore the magic of metaphor.[4]

Shoes, as metaphor, are commonly used in English to discuss difference or misfit occasioned by comparison and the attempt to compensate for this empathetically as in: 'to be or put yourself in another person's shoes' or 'to step into or fill somebody else's shoes'. Considered in isolation and taken out of the context of everyday parlance, this idiom remains a powerful evocation of the physical sensation of placing both feet into the space occupied by the concentrated weight of another being and the sense of inadequacy or constraint felt by the misfit. By extension there are connotations of absence, loss and death evoked by images of empty, vacated, dead people's shoes recalling apocalyptic, systematic, mass extermination or a personal, more intimate and solitary loss.

If you accept my reading or decoding of this text then the 'renovation of old shoes' could be a suitable analogy for the process of translation. It sites the discipline within an historical, spatial and cultural context describing the problematic notion of loss created by demands of fidelity to a previous incumbent (original) and the freedom needed to recreate or renew on a higher level. The notion of making new again and replacing lost or damaged parts alludes to incompleteness and the way translation is used within a form of cultural recycling to accommodate visual and literary texts to the demands of different ages and cultures. Mundane, 'old shoes' refers to its invisible prevalence as a form of filter, fluid state or liquid phase through which texts or objects pass from one state or medium into another. The majority of texts in my bibliography and I suppose world-wide are translations of some form or another. Why then is something so vital not the task of a writer, scholar or artist but a task carried out by a cobbler, clumsy worker or botcher?

Trip

Between 1713 and 1720 the English poet, Alexander Pope, devoted seven years to the translation of Homer's *Iliad*. During this time he described himself as

> 'a professor of learning above his fellows,' as one who was 'gratify[ing] others by his studies,' or as one who could 'by using … poetical engines … fly over [others'] heads.' Pope was a professor, a scholar, or a poet – never a 'dull translator' and 'laborious drudge'.
>
> (Bannet 1993)

4. When I refer to this dissipation I am thinking of the idea voiced by Borges in his lecture series 'The Craft of Verse'.

Despite his show of disdain for the task of translation with which he was engaged, the project was a commercial and literary success, which made him the first English poet able to live solely by the sales of his work.

In a letter[5] written to a fellow member of the cultural elite while he was translating *Homer*, Pope describes a chance encounter with his publisher, Lintott, while en route to Oxford. During their reported discussion, the publisher gives his opinion of translators, how he manages them and the checks and balances he employs to ensure reliable translations. Pope's letter depicts translators as a liminal, untrustworthy set of opportunistic *rogues* operating at the fringes of the literary establishment. They are mercenaries, who abdicate responsibility of authorship, beg, borrow, steal and lie in order to claim 'ten shillings a sheet' for their 'doings'. In this environment, in its printed form, the word assumes the characteristics of a commodity with a value that can be calculated and as such is subject to unscrupulous treatment by those who traffic in it.[6]

> Sir (reply'd he) those are the saddest pack of rogues in the world: In a hungry fit, they'll swear they understand all the languages in the universe, […] By G-d I can never be sure in these fellows, for I neither understand Greek, Latin, French nor Italian my self. But this is my way: I agree with them for ten shillings per sheet, with a proviso, that I will have their doings corrected by whom I please; so by one or other they are led at last to the true sense of an author; my judgment giving the negative to all my Translators.

But how are you secure that those correctors may not impose upon you?

> Why I get any civil gentleman, (especially any Scotchman) that comes into my shop to read the original to me in English; by this I know whether my first Translator be deficient, and whether my Corrector merits his money or no?
>
> I'll tell you what happen'd to me last month: I bargain'd with S – for a new version of Lucretius to publish against Tonson's. […] I gave it to the corrector to compare with the Latin; but he went directly to Creech's translation, and found it the same word for word, all but the first page. Now, what d'ye think I did? I arrested the Translator for a cheat; nay, and I stopt the Corrector's pay too, upon this proof that he had made use of Creech instead of the original.
>
> (Bannet 1993: 577, 578)

As portrayed by Pope, whose Greek was also a little shaky, the publisher Lintott who is ignorant of Greek, Latin, French and Italian, is at the mercy of translators, correctors, critics, cribs and civil

5. Cited in Bannet (1993: 577, 578).

6. I think it is significant to note here that Pope was not immune to this kind of underhand dealing and deception. Subsequent to the financial success of his *Iliad*, Pope undertook a translation of the *Odyssey*. Finding it too onerous a task he commissioned two other poets to translate large parts of the text for him. Pope tried to pass off the work as entirely his own.

gentlemen (particularly the Scottish ones) in his quest for the elusive 'true sense' of the original. In other words he is condemned to the Sisyphean task of searching for it through translation, translations of translations and translations from translations, because even a direct reading of the original in Greek or Latin entails translation. It paints a bleak vision of cul-de-sacs in suburbia, of dead ends and of impasse within a labyrinth without issue. It is a picture of failure in a world after the fall.

Fall

1. And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech
2. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there
3. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen had they for mortar
4. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth
5. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded
6. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do
7. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech
8. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city
9. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (*Genesis*, Chapter 11, The Old Testament, King James Version, UK).[7]

It is difficult to discuss translation without referring to the 'affair at Babel' as George Steiner calls it. It is an event, or seminal text, which has been interpreted over and over again according to the demands of different ages and cultures. The literature surrounding it revolves around a dense and complex philosophy of language and I cannot pretend to discuss all the aspects of it here in great depth. On a more superficial level then, Babel could be read as deserved punishment or the gift of language diversity or as a brutal response to and frustration of a manmade attempt to forge structure and coherence. The building of the tower appears to be synonymous with an act of hubris, of self-naming. According to this reading a creative act, fabricating bricks and bitumen to construct a tower to reach up to heaven is a threat: if humankind succeed nothing they plan to do

7. I am aware that, in using the Bible as a reference I am adopting an Indo-Euro-centric approach to history and language. However, the story of the fall of the confusion of tongues and attempt to redeem its loss through the rediscovery or invention of a language common to humanity is a universal phenomenon and is to be found in every culture. Its omnipresence could lead it to be viewed as symptomatic of a sense of loss, an *aporia*, intrinsic to humankind.

will be impossible for them. So in a seemingly senseless act we are told that 'God' destroyed the tower and city, dissolving the community and denying people the ability to communicate.

Many have seen this event and the proliferation of languages as the root of misunderstanding, others, like Steiner, prefer to site it in a prior act of naming for which God served as tempter:

'Translation', properly understood, is a special case of the arc of communication, which every successful speech-act closes within a given language. On the inter-lingual level, translation will pose concentrated, visibly intractable problems; but these same problems abound, at a more covert or conventionally neglected level, intra-lingually. The model 'sender-receiver' that represents any semiological and semantic process is ontologically equivalent to the model 'source-language' to 'receptor-language' used in the theory of translation. […] *Inside or between languages human communication equals translation*.

The affair at Babel confirmed and externalized the never-ending task of the translator – it did not initiate it (Steiner 1975: 383–84).

With the translation of the world into words in Chapter 1 of *Genesis* (see Chapter 1, The Old Testament, King James Version, UK), an essential part of objects and entities ceases to be. They are identified and brought into presence by names, which in turn become words defined by other words and by context. There appears to be no viable way back to a time before words, because in the act of naming, the word assumes materiality and takes the place of the thing. As Maurice Blanchot has noted 'if words throw the things of the world into non-existence, then they move into the vacancy with an existence of their own'. However what remains are:

> Aporias (*which*) appear whenever words are confronted with things, and the attempt is made to think within the space of their difference. … What that thinking produces is, not so much a reconciliation as, an assimilation to one side or another. Either it is argued that words *are* things, partaking in their solidity and presence, or else material things are hollowed out by an awareness that they can never be seen as anything but signifiers in a psychic space.
>
> (Schwenger: 138)

Translation therefore becomes synonymous with the concept of language and an imperfect means to bridge fault lines intrinsic to acts of expression and communication.

A common response to the notional loss of Paradise and the fall of Babel has been to see it as the beginning of universal malaise symptomatic of the human condition, as the inevitability of gradual corruption and degradation of humanity through ages characterized by baser and baser metals. With this bleak preoccupation comes a desire to rediscover a lost, elusive Golden Age to fill the void in the here and now. Much like the contemporary, British longing for the 'good old days'

of World War II, it often takes the form of an unrealistic harking back to halcyon days weighted down by the burden of an historical, imperfect present continuous. It is difficult to express this problematic better than Giorgio Agamben and the link he makes between language, theology and history sites language in a catch 22, a present, looking back to the past, anticipating the future.

> Reason cannot reach the origin of names (li vocaboli) and cannot master them because, as we have seen, they reach reason only through history, *in descending*. This infinite 'descent' of names is history. Language thus always anticipates the original place of speaking beings, retreating toward the past and the future of an infinite descent, such that thinking can never find an end to it. And this incurable 'shadow' of grammar, the darkness that originally inheres in language and that – in the necessary coincidence of history and grammar – founds the historical condition of human beings. History is the cipher of the shadow that denies human beings direct access to the level of names; *history is the place of names*. The transparency of language – the ungroundedness of every act of speech – founds both theology and history. As long as human beings cannot reach the origin of language, there will be the transmission of names. And as long as there is transmission of names there will be history and destiny.
>
> (Agamben 1999: 50)

The dis-ease of un-ease, the impulse to break free from the shackles of language has often been coupled with a retrospective, Babel-like project of constructing a perfect, universal language of expression,[8] a rediscovery of the Edenic, unambiguous correspondence between words and the things they name untainted by historical and cultural accretions. However, as Jonathan Swift's parody of perfect correspondence shows these projects are as impractical and absurd as they are futile:

> Since Words are only Names for *Things*, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them, such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on … which hath only this Inconvenience attending it; that if a Man's Business be very great, and of various Kinds, he must be obliged in Proportion to carry a greater Bundle of *Things* upon his Back, unless he can afford one or two strong Servants to attend him.
>
> (Davis 1941: 169)

The effect of this perception of language for translation and other activities perceived as secondary or derived from an original activity, such as philosophy, critical theory and history, is that it

8. See Eco 1997 for an exhaustive and excellent investigation of this subject, the 'failures' of these schemes and their contributions to learning.

becomes an impossible task. Like Babel, it is an intellectual construction doomed to failure, because the original can never be equalled. Each translation, each naming is a degradation or pale imitation of the original's perfect expression. It is a disillusionment that can only be borne if, like death, 'aporia' is considered an inherent or intrinsic function of language, because then at least it's no one's fault, it is just inevitable.

> While the lost object is an element in any particular representation it can never be regained or re-presented, for it is less a particular object than the irreversible experience of loss. In the representation there always remains a drive toward something beyond what is represented, something more than mimesis. Similarly the death drive is 'the *more* than us in us that is at that moment irreducible to meaning or satisfaction'.[9]

However, if we approach the notion of loss and aporia contained within language from the perspective of Jewish mysticism, which provided some of the background for Benjamin's concept of 'Pure Language' in his writings on language and translation,[10] then the result of the translation of the world into words, is infinite possibility. The first letter of the *Torah* is the Bet, *Bereishit bara*, which in the language of humanity means *Beginnings of beginnings*. The implication of this is that what we think of as the beginning is in fact not the real beginning, because this should start with the Aleph – the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The question that arises from this is where is the Aleph? According to mystics it is already there, it is the empty, white space before the Bet. It is a language we cannot understand, which is God's language of creation. This is why there can never be an exact interpretation of *Genesis 1*, as it is written in the language of humanity it is infinitely debatable and open for wonder. For Benjamin only translation can redeem this pure language trapped within languages because it alone has the ability to transcend the confines or 'break the brittle limits of language'.

> In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages of themselves. And that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages, is that very nucleus of pure language. Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolized thing itself, whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized form. […] While that ultimate essence, pure language, in the various tongues is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain

9. Lacan links the death drive with the dynamics of the lost object, generally the absent mother and with the shortfall in representation. Quoted in Schwenger: 145.

10. In its paradisic state language is a language of names, where the linguistic being and the mental being are identical. The extreme case is revelation (*Offenbarung*), which is the word of God; it names everything. The paradisic language of names consists only of proper names. Every being has its own place in the language. The language of man is a divine gift. It, as well, is a language of names, but as such it is only a reflection of the creative word (which is the linguistic being of God). The language of man consists of words, which, instead of being creative, are receptive. They receive the languages of things. Benjamin thinks this in terms of translation: man

> pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation.
>
> (Benjamin 1999: 80)

Translation and translatability, therefore, become central to the life and after life of a work, because an original work can only survive to the extent that it is able to take leave of its self and become something else. For Benjamin, this is the quality of 'being-translatable', its 'translatability'. In *Des Tours de Babel* (2007) Jacques Derrida, *translates* Benjamin in a discussion or dissection of the significance of Babel with respect to translation. Unlike de Man, for whom translation is resistance to translation and impossibility, for Derrida it embodies the potential of incompletion:

> The 'tower of Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system, and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms comes to limit is not only a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. There is then (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the constructure.
>
> (Derrida 2007: 191)

It is this lack in the original, which the translation must 'redeem' by adding to it, by 'filling, fulfilling, completing' it. This does not imply that the translation has to ape the original or that it may not depart from it. Derrida, like Benjamin, thinks it has to share its aims, but it can do so by glancing off it, brushing against it at a few fleeting and 'infinitely small points of sense' (Benjamin 1999). What this creates is a translation, which leaves the original intact while creating another 'original' text, because it is only as originals that translation and original can complete each other and in turn demand completion. Or to put it another way, which coincides with much of Jorge Luis Borges' thinking on translation[11]:

> … there is no 'original; which is not also a translation – ad-jointed to a prior text which lives on with it, because of it; indebted for its own life to another text which returns life as a result of it: calling for a *complementarity* and *supplementarity* which it also gives. This means that 'originality' is always divided from itself – since it is only as a translator that every supposed creator originates, fails, falls, and calls for translation in his/her turn. And it is through the supplementation and completion of an original text that the translator 'extends, enlarges, makes grow'.
>
> (Bannet 1993: 578, emphasis in original)

translates the mute languages of things into the sonic language of man. In paradisic state of language, this translation is guaranteed by the magical participation of everything in the word of God. After the Fall this situation changes. The magical correspondence of all things gets disturbed. The words loose their receptiveness, and in order to communicate something, they start to imitate the creative naming. They start to represent something other than themselves. The language becomes a means of communication.
(Elo 2004)

11. Borges was bilingual and began translating and writing on translation in the 1920s. As an activity and a way of thinking it was central to his literary practice and continued to be a concern throughout his career. His

views, which were quite radical, were influenced by Novalis, 'To translate is to produce literature, just as the writing of one's own work is – and it is more difficult, more rare. In the end all literature is translation'. And: 'I show I have understood a writer only when I can act in his spirit, when I, without diminishing his individuality, can translate him and change many things' (and, to some extent, like Benjamin, by Kabbalism).

For Borges a translation is not the transfer of a text from one language to another. It is a transformation of a text into another. The appreciation of literary work for Borges can be enriched by translation provided that the reader avoids the prejudice of assuming the original is the best version of the work. Judging a translation involves the scrutiny of two or more versions of the same work on equal terms.
(Kristal 2002: 32)

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