Translation Theories Explained

Translation Theories Explained is a series designed to respond to the profound plurality of contemporary translation studies. There are many problems to be solved, many possible approaches that can be drawn from neighbouring disciplines, and several strong language-bound traditions plagued by the paradoxical fact that some of the key theoretical texts have yet to be translated.

Recognizing this plurality as both a strength and a potential shortcoming, the series provides a format where different approaches can be compared, their virtues assessed, and mutual blind spots overcome. Students and scholars may thus gain comprehensive awareness of the work being done beyond local or endemic frames.

Most volumes in the series place a general approach within its historical context, giving examples to illustrate the main ideas, summarizing the most significant debates and opening perspectives for future work. The authors have been selected not only because of their command of a particular approach but also in view of their openness to alternatives and their willingness to discuss criticisms. In every respect the emphasis is on explaining the essential points as clearly and as concisely as possible, using numerous examples and providing glossaries of the main technical terms.

The series should prove particularly useful to students dealing with translation theories for the first time, to teachers seeking to stimulate critical reflection, and to scholars looking for a succinct overview of the field's present and future.

Anthony Pym
Series Editor

Deconstruction and Translation

Kathleen Davis

St. Jerome Publishing
Manchester, UK & Northampton, MA

to my father

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

The title *Deconstruction and Translation* promises too much, yet I have been unable to narrow it, or even to qualify it with a subtitle. This difficulty ensues not so much from the breadth of these fields as from the thorough implication of deconstruction and translation in each other. Deconstruction cannot be said to apply only to particular issues of translation, such as the intractable problems of wordplay or ambiguity, any more than translation can be designated as just one of many discrete topics addressed by deconstruction. One argument of this book is that deconstruction and translation share the same stakes.

I have had to find ways, of course, to manage this unwieldy topic. One decision I have made in this regard is to focus mainly on the work of Jacques Derrida. Over the past four decades deconstruction has had many proponents, particularly in Europe and the United States, and their arguments have taken various, sometimes conflicting forms. These arguments are themselves interesting and it would even be worthwhile to examine them as a network of translations. However, I could not focus on the many facets of 'deconstruction and translation' and at the same time trace the relations between these various trajectories. The reader should thus bear in mind that this book discusses deconstruction primarily through close readings of texts by Derrida, who coined the term 'deconstruction' and who produced (and continues to produce) most of what have become its primary texts.

I have also narrowed my material by relying heavily, particularly in Section I, on Derrida's early texts, which consistently address issues of signification. They do so, fortunately for this book, by working with texts already familiar to scholars of translation, such as Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1959), J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), and Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' (1955/1969). The labels 'early' and 'recent' as applied to Derrida's texts are only partially useful, however, and could even be misleading if taken to imply two homogeneous, static groups. As I use the term here, 'early' texts range from *De la Grammatologie* (1967) to the 'Afterword' of *Limited Inc.* (1988), and register the unfolding of Derrida's thinking as well as his response to the reception of his work. This dynamic occurs, for instance, in the form of interviews, such as *Positions* (1972), invited lectures on particular topics, such as 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985), and reply to criticism, such as the exchange with John Searle in regard to speech act theory in *Limited Inc.* (1988). In his more 'recent' work, Derrida has turned to topics that engage questions of ethics, justice and responsibility. In Section II, and particularly in my last chapter, I draw increasingly upon these texts.

My third tactic for narrowing the scope of this book has been to curtail discussion of its implications for fields that are complexly related to both

deconstruction and translation, such as feminist theory and postcolonial theory. Obviously there can be no clear-cut boundaries between these fields of inquiry, and I do occasionally address the ways that the intersections of deconstruction and translation have been important to gender/sexuality studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, etc. However, a full examination of the complex interrelations of deconstruction, translation, and these many already intertwined endeavors would be a project of incalculable scope.

Consideration for my primary audience has of course been a determining factor of this book's scope and methodology. I have tried to keep the discussion accessible to those who have had minimal exposure to deconstruction, without implying that deconstruction is a 'theory' or an 'approach' that can be neatly explained. Derrida consistently works to expose the impossibility of separating theory from practice, or text from context. Readers will therefore find that they must work through the issues important to the topic of deconstruction and translation by working through readings of other texts – readings that are not, and do not claim to be, complete or exhaustive. Whenever possible, I include among these readings the work of translation scholars, both to help situate my discussion of deconstruction in the context of this field and to clarify the similarities and differences between deconstruction and ways of thinking about translation that are more familiar to this audience. Even though deconstruction engages and has influenced many disciplines, its philosophical orientation often leads to misunderstandings by scholars accustomed to a different framework and a different use of terms. To the degree that this difference poses a problem for translation studies, I hope this book serves as a 'translation'. Because the topic of deconstruction and translation also appeals to those with an interest in the broader field of literary criticism, and because there has not, to my knowledge, been a book-length treatment of it in English, I have kept this more general audience in mind as well. If occasional references to unfamiliar approaches to translation seem estranging to readers more accustomed to literary criticism, they should be aware that deconstruction itself is strange territory to many translation scholars. If this mutual estrangement could lead to more mutual interest I would be well pleased.

It is customary for books in this 'Translation Theories Explained' series to address the criticisms of the theory in question. Deconstruction, of course, cannot be considered a translation theory, but I have nonetheless attempted to honour the purpose of this practice by using the comparative method explained above. One often repeated criticism that should be addressed here, however, is that deconstruction is ahistorical: i.e., that it does not heed the specificities of historical context, but rather claims a suprahistorical status for its discussion of language and texts. I hope this book will make clear that such a claim runs contrary to every argument of deconstruction, which never lets go of the point that specificity of context is essential to the very existence

of meaning. For this reason, as I note in the introduction to my first section, Derrida's writings do not generalize, but work within the context of particular texts, taking into consideration the text's historical context – whether in regard to Plato's *Phaedrus* (in 'Plato's Pharmacy', Derrida 1972c/1982), Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (in Derrida 1967/1974), or Freud's 'Note on the Mystic Writing Pad' (in Derrida 1967/78). 'Plato's Pharmacy', for instance, investigates Plato's use of the word *pharmakon* in the minutely detailed context of sophistic argument, ancient scapegoating rituals, and Greek and Egyptian mythology. Rousseau's work is taken up precisely because of its historical position between Descartes and Hegel, when eighteenth-century Europe undertook the threatening project of deciphering non-European scripts, ultimately producing a general science of language and writing. Freud's essay is considered in the context of his letters to his colleague Fleiss and within the historical development of his psychological theories and the science of psychology itself. Indeed, crucial to Derrida's interrogation are the implications of historical connections, such as Freud's tapping the textual stores of "Greek culture, language, tragedy, philosophy, etc." (Derrida 1972a/1981:131).

In interviews, when he cannot guard against the dangers of generalizing by taking up threads of particular texts, Derrida warns against attempts to sever meaning from context, and persistently emphasizes the importance of history to deconstruction. For example, in an interview sponsored by Oxford Amnesty Lectures, Derrida was asked whether deconstruction would deny the very existence of the 'subject' that Amnesty International seeks everywhere to defend in the name of 'human rights'. Given that the liberal tradition has taken the human being to be the subject of his or her own experience, life, actions, responsibilities, etc., what are the ethical and political problems posed by the dissolution and deconstruction of the subject? After cautioning that deconstruction in no case amounts to the dissolution or canceling of the subject, Derrida goes on to say:

> Deconstructing the subject, if there is such a thing, would mean first to analyze historically, in a genealogical way, the formation and the different layers which have built, so to speak, the concept. Every concept has its own history, and the concept of the subject has a very, very long, heavy, and complex history. First, for instance, in the English tradition – the philosophical tradition – the word 'subject' is not used the same way, or sometimes it is not used as a canonical concept—the way it is used in continental philosophy, in German philosophy, in French philosophy. So, we have to translate these words into, first a different idiom, and finally into all the possible idioms. Since we are supposed to address here the problem of human rights, we face first the problem of language. If there are human rights, which means universally valid human rights, they should be accessible, understandable to everyone,

whatever language they understand or they speak. Now, if you try to make the word 'subject' understandable in a culture in which the philosophical Greek, German, Latin tradition is not familiar, then the word doesn't mean anything. So, the first thing you have to do is a universal translation of what the 'subject' is. So, deconstruction of the subject is first, among other things, the genealogical analysis of the trajectory through which the concept has been built, used, legitimized, and so on and so forth. (1996b: videotape)

Deconstruction, then, argues for the inescapable importance of attending to history. It is true that for Derrida a particular historical structure can never be fully closed or have an absolute meaning. Indeed, the meaning of any event is never fully, finally determinable – it can always be translated. The possibility of translation guarantees the impossibility of there being only one, hegemonic version of history or what it means to be human. Thus, as the quotation above suggests, translation ensures the possibility of an ethical relation between different cultures and languages, and between differently positioned subjects. It can also, of course, become a hegemonic tool.

Just as meaning does not exist outside context, so too authors do not function as ahistorical, isolated identities. Derrida repeatedly invokes this limit, unraveling his and others' authorship by tracing the labyrinthine filiations of their lives and texts. Any selection of details for the purpose of giving background about an author or a theory can only be partial and positioned, and with that caveat in place I offer a few details about the early context of Derrida and deconstruction.

Issues of language and identity arose for Derrida, who sometimes describes himself as Franco-Maghrebian, when he was a schoolchild in Algeria. In 1940, France withdrew French citizenship from indigenous Jews in Algeria, and in 1942 Derrida, because he was a Jew, was expelled from the *lycée* in which he was enrolled. In his headteacher's words, "French culture is not made for little Jews" (for accounts of these events, see Bennington and Derrida 1993: 325-36; and Derrida 1996/1998: 28-69). In Algeria at that time, however, there were no legitimate alternatives to studying French language and culture, since in the French *lycées* Arabic (which had been replaced by French as the official language) could be studied only as a 'foreign language'. Powerful social, racial and political barriers minimalized the desirability of studying Arabic, and thus further facilitated its marginalization. While certainly too young to comprehend them at the time, Derrida has since returned to these events and similar events around the world in order to examine their implications for language and identity. In what sense, for instance, is French, as his first language and the language of his mother, his 'mother tongue'?

These words do not come to my mouth; they do not come out of my mouth. I leave to others the words 'my mother tongue'.

> That is my culture; it taught me the disasters toward which incanta-
> tory invocations of the mother tongue will have pushed humans headlong.
> My culture was right away a political culture. (Derrida 1996/1998: 34)

Derrida returned to school when permitted and passed the *baccalauréat* in 1948, then left Algeria to study in Paris. There he soon became involved in the active philosophical-political scene, studying with Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Michel Foucault. His major philosophical innovations, which respond above all to phenomenology and structuralism, took shape in the 1950s, beginning in 1954 with his MA dissertation, *Le Problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*. This was followed by the paper 'Genèse et structure' delivered in 1959, and the translation and introduction of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* in 1962 (for a thorough discussion of the relation of Derrida's work to phenomenology and structuralism see Howells 1998).

In the mid-1960s Derrida became involved with the journal and intellectual group *Tel Quel*, an innovative literary, theoretical, political and publishing endeavour that in its early years attracted the participation of leading French intellectuals, including Robbe-Grillet, Ponge, Foucault, Barthes, Sollers (one of its founders), Bataille, Blanchot and Kristeva. Derrida was never a member of its committee, but was active in and exerted a strong influence on the group, with which he published from 1965 to 1972. A number of his essays appeared in the journal, and two of his books, *Writing and Difference* (1967/ 1978) and *Dissemination* (1972a/1981) were published in the 'Collection Tel Quel'. Increasingly at odds with its dogmatic Marxism, he would break definitively with *Tel Quel* in 1972.

During the same period, Derrida's international reputation was established. In 1966 he participated in a now famous colloquium at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, which precipitated heightened attention to continental theory in the United States. He maintained a link with Johns Hopkins, then in 1975 began teaching several weeks a year at Yale, with Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. This affiliation began what has been called the 'Yale School' – Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller – around whom were waged debates about deconstruction in America. Ever since the late 1960s, Derrida has combined international teaching, seminars and lectures with efforts to improve the institutional place of philosophy in France.

One of the topics that Derrida has explored during these years, with particular reference to translation, is the relation between language and national hegemony. This topic has, of course, become a pressing interest for translation scholars, who recognize the performative role of translation at the intersections of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities in a globalizing world. Translators today are called upon to make hard decisions about translating minority texts, which can on the one hand survive, and on the other hand be

subsumed, through translation into a majority language. In discussing the necessary but self-contradictory project of reaffirming cultural differences without slipping into potentially violent nationalisms, Derrida makes a comment that I, as an American author, find a suitable watchword for this book. It is difficult to avoid potentially violent identity politics if, at the same time,

> one doesn't want to simply dissolve the idioms or the differences, the singularities within a universal, empty, formal language – which, as we know, is always pretending to be universal, always under the authority of a hegemonic state, language, or group of states. For instance, the English language is today hegemonic [...]. Today the English language is not simply replacing all the languages on earth, but becoming the second universal language. Everyone has to speak his own language plus English [...]. We have to be conscious of the fact that this universal translator, which is the English language, imports or conveys with it some national hegemony, not England's hegemony, as you know, but mainly American hegemony [...]. We don't have to be simply against that, because it has very positive aspects, but we have to be careful, to be vigilant. It's a task that has to be redefined [...]. (Derrida 1996b: videotape)

Translation scholars obviously appreciate the positive aspects of being able to discuss deconstruction and translation, or any of the topics in this translation series, in English with an international audience. Translating Derrida has for similar reasons become both popular and profitable. Likewise, I have for the most part used English translations of Derrida, providing the French only when his use of language is the issue at hand. I readily admit, however, that what this or any such discussion of translation cannot take into account is its own inscription in English. That task has yet to be redefined.

SECTION I
TRANSLATABILITY AND UNTRANSLATABILITY

Introduction

Derrida's most famous (or infamous) phrase is perhaps *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, which is usually translated as "there is nothing outside the text" or "there is no outside-text" (1967a/1974: 158). He has since further explained it as "there is nothing outside context" (1988: 136). The relation of text and context will be discussed at length in chapter two, but for now we can say that at its simplest, this statement makes the point that meaning – not only the meaning of what we speak, read and write, but any meaning at all – is a contextual event; meaning cannot be extracted from, and cannot exist before or outside of a specific context. The format of Derrida's own texts acknowledges this necessity. Just as deconstruction does not theorize by claiming to stand aside from phenomena it has defined, so Derrida's writings do not pretend to stand outside of and pronounce upon language, literature, or philosophy. Rather, they proceed by minutely analyzing the structure, implications, and limits of complex writings by well-known thinkers such as Plato, de Saussure, Freud, Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger. This dense contextualization is one reason why Derrida is so notoriously difficult to read. The following three chapters on 'Translatability and Untranslatability' aim for maximum readability, but they will not attempt to explain deconstruction by extracting the main points of Derrida's work and delivering them as generalities. Instead, they will – to a degree, at least – guide the reader through some of the texts most pertinent to translation. I have chosen one essay, Derrida's 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985), as the main text, or context, for this process.

'Des Tours de Babel' was written for a conference on translation held in Binghamton, New York, in 1980. It was published, with an English translation by Joseph F. Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, an edited collection of papers from the conference. I have chosen this essay as the primary text for these chapters for several reasons. First, its sustained discussion of translation raises nearly all the issues that I wish to touch upon here, and so by following its various threads I can weave my own discussion. Second, the two texts that Derrida's essay takes as its context – the biblical story of Babel and Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' (1955/1969) – are likely to be familiar to readers involved in translation studies. Third, this essay has, unfortunately, already been misunderstood in the field of translation studies, and therefore calls for further discussion. The reader should not suppose, however, that 'Des Tours de Babel' is in any way a privileged text, or that it provides the key to Derrida's thinking about translation. All of Derrida's texts concern translation in various ways, and I have chosen this essay for specific reasons related to the context of this book, one in a series on translation theories.

1. Différance

Difference at the Origin

Derrida begins 'Des Tours de Babel' by noting that the myth of the Tower of Babel joins the story of the inevitable multiplicity of tongues with that of a failed architectural structure; it thereby calls attention to the relation between language and structure. The myth tells of the Shemites' attempt to 'make a name' for themselves by building a tower that would reach the heavens, and thus give them access to transcendence. "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower", they say, "Its head: in the heavens. / Let us make ourselves a name, / that we not be scattered over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:4; as trans. by Graham in Derrida 1985: 169). Through a totalized architectural structure, they attempt to construct a unity – *one* place, people and language – which, if it were to succeed, would 'make a name' in the sense that it would achieve a closed system of reference. Such a closed structure would dominate meaning, imposing an unequivocal relation between signifier and signified. For instance *Shem*, the name of this tribe, means 'name' in this ancient Hebrew dialect. Derrida's reading traces the logic of this story's demonstration that no structure, linguistic or otherwise, can achieve such full closure and isolated self-identity, and thus guarantee a fully determined meaning.

    'Des Tours de Babel' focuses particularly on the proper name, which is the most explicit example of the assumption that language names things – that words or signs can have a one-to-one correspondence with a referent that exists, as a 'real' presence, before and outside of language. The proper name 'Babel' deconstructs that assumption. When the Shemites attempt to complete the tower and thus make their name, God intervenes. As he does so, God imposes confusion and division within their language but also within his own name. After he disperses the Shemites, "They cease to build the city. / Over which he proclaims his name: Bavel, Confusion" (Genesis 11:8-9; cited in Derrida 1985: 170). 'Babel', Derrida observes, is at this point *both* a proper name (of the city and of God) which does not, as a proper name, belong exclusively to the Shemites' language, *and* it becomes confused with a common noun meaning 'confusion' in their language. Thus, the destruction of the tower enacts the structural limitation of language, and it defines this limit as an interior division that is also an opening to its outside.

    Derrida's reading shows that not even God's name can possess a pure, self-identical status in language, but to follow that argument we need to examine both his work with the translation of Genesis and Graham's translation of this work. If you check a copy of Genesis 11:9, it will probably not say that God proclaims *his* name as 'Babel/Confusion' over the city, as I have cited it

above from Graham's translation. My Douay version reads: "And therefore the name thereof was called Babel". The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* has: "Therefore it was called Babel". Derrida cites the French translation by Chouraqui, who attempted to be literal. This version renders: "Sur quoi [la ville] il clame son nom: Bavel, Confusion" (Derrida 1985: 214) ("Over which [the city] he proclaims *his/its* name: Bavel, Confusion"; my translation and emphasis). Derrida's reading exploits the ambiguity of Chouraqui's *son*, which modifies the masculine noun *nom* (and in this context could refer to either God or the city and therefore mean either 'his' or 'its'). Derrida thereby develops a connection – which he has already found in Voltaire and implied throughout the biblical story – between 'Babel' and God's name. He goes on to interpret the passage: "il impose son nom, son nom de père […] C'est depuis un nom propre de Dieu, venu de Dieu […] et marqué par lui que les langues se dispersent, se confondent ou se multiplient" (ibid: 214) ("he imposes his name, his name of the father […] It is from a proper name of God, come from God […] and by him that tongues are scattered, confounded or multiplied", trans. Graham, ibid: 170). Following Derrida's interpretation, Graham understandably reduces the polysemy of Chouraqui's *son*, as well as the first *son* in Derrida's passage, to 'his'. This reduction, however reasonable, obscures the process of the strong reading that Derrida gives the Babel story, which keeps the plurivocality of 'Babel' as the name of both the city and of God in play, and thus demonstrates the impossibility of language naming an identity that exists before or outside context.

The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* provides a series of notes to these verses of Genesis 11 that may help to explain Derrida's reading. I cite them according to verse number:

> 4: In the eyes of nomads Mesopotamian city culture was characterized by the ziggurat, a pyramidal temple tower whose summit was believed to be the gateway to heaven, the realm of the gods.
> 8: Motivated by a Promethean desire for unity, fame, and security (v. 4), the enterprise ended in misunderstanding and thus arose the various language groups.
> 9: *Babel*, meaning "Gate of God," is here interpreted by the Hebrew verb "confuse" (see note *d*)…
>   [note] *d* Heb *balal*, meaning *to confuse*.

The Shemites have attempted to make a transcendent name for themselves "in order to assure themselves, by themselves, a unique and universal genealogy" (Derrida 1985:169). Their attempt to 'make a name' for themselves usurps the power of giving names – or making language – which belongs to God. God responds by giving a name of *his* choice, proclaiming their city

Babel: *his* name as the gateway to God they had wanted; *his* and *its* name by divine proclamation; and, simultaneously, 'confusion' in their language. His response "opens the deconstruction of the tower, as of the universal language" (ibid: 170). That is, it deconstructs the concept that a universal language could ever exist, by demonstrating the limit of language: the Shemites cannot attempt linguistic transcendence, without bringing 'confusion' into their language. Moreover, in imposing his name, God deconstructs himself. As Peggy Kamuf explains:

> But at the same time as God gives his name to the sons of Shem, He loses it as a properly proper name. The Shemites are dispersed among many tongues, but so is God's name that can impose itself only by deposing or deconstructing its own unity. In order to reach men's ears and constrain them to hear His name above all others, God must go outside Himself and risk the confusion of that name with a common noun, its generalization in the other's language, its difference from itself. Hence, the deconstruction of God will have been, from the origin, a movement of difference within which a unity of the proper tries and fails to impose itself as absolutely proper. (Kamuf 1991: xxiv-xxv)

A proper name, which cannot signify without inscription in a language system, must function in a relation of difference with other signifiers. (Derrida also gives the example of *Pierre/pierre* in French, to which we will return.) The story of Babel exemplifies the necessity of this differential relation: God, as giver of names, is "at the origin of language" (Derrida 1985: 167), but by imposing his name God enters this name into language, where it immediately differs from itself and thus signals the inevitably of linguistic 'confusion'. Thus understood, this biblical story does not narrate a fall from some mythical, universal language; rather, it demonstrates that language has no pure origin and no transcendent reference point outside itself. As Barbara Johnson notes, "the starting point is thus not a *point* but a difference" (1981: xi).

The relation of the proper name to difference in language, and to translation, will become clearer if we look at Derrida's work on Saussure's description of language as a system of differences.

Saussure and Differences

In the essay 'Différance', Derrida cites the following passage from Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*:

> The conceptual side of value is made up solely of relations and differences with respect to the other terms of language, and the same can be said of its material side [...] Everything that has been said up to this

point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it. (Saussure 1959: 117-18, 120; cited in Derrida 1972c/1982: 10-11)

Consequently, Derrida observes, the signified concept is never present, or a presence, in and of itself; rather, "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (ibid: 11). This play of differences through which language makes meaning is spatio-temporal. The sign is usually understood to be put in the *place* of the thing itself (ibid: 9). However, if language has only differences *without positive terms*, then the sign marks the place not of some positive spatial presence, but of a differential relation to other signs in the language system. Moreover, the gesture of signification cannot refer directly to the *present*: it must rely upon already constituted relations even as it moves to instate a not-yet fulfilled meaning. "The sign, in this sense, is deferred [spatio-temporal] presence" (ibid: 9). This play of differences is what commentators on Derrida have in mind when they speak of deconstruction's argument that signification proceeds through infinite regress, or an endless process of signs differing/deferring to other signs (see for instance, Gentzler 1993: 147, 159; Florentsen 1994: 230). In this sense, there are only signifiers, since each signifier refers not to a signified presence outside of language, but to other signifiers.

In order to make this differential structure more understandable, we can take an example from Mona Baker's (1992) *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, written from a linguistic stance. Baker presents her example in terms of Saussure's theory, but we can easily extrapolate to see the play of differences as described by Derrida. (A point of clarification: I am not suggesting that Baker employs a deconstructive method; because her discussion is thorough and clear, I am using it as a linguistic illustration.) In discussing translation strategies on the word level, Baker points out the usefulness of semantic fields and lexical sets. They are helpful firstly in "appreciating the 'value' that a word has in a given system" (1992:19):

Understanding the difference in the structure of semantic fields in the source and target languages allows a translator to assess the value of a given item in a lexical set. If you know what other items are available in a lexical set and how they contrast with the item chosen by a writer or speaker, you can appreciate the significance of the writer's or speaker's

choice. You can understand not only what something is, but also what it
is not. (ibid: 19)

Baker gives the example of terms from the field of temperature in English
and Modern Arabic. While English has four main divisions, *cold, cool, hot*
and *warm*, Modern Arabic has "four different divisions: *baarid* ('cold/cool'),
haar ('hot: of the weather'), *saakhin* ('hot: of objects'), and *daafi*' ('warm')"
(ibid: 19). This example clearly shows that *cold*, for instance, is not an es-
sence in and of itself, but that the sense of *cold* in any language is constituted
through its relations to other elements of the language system. Moreover, as
Baker's discussion indicates, translation requires an appreciation not only of
a concept's differential relations in at least two languages, but also of the
difference between the languages *as* systems of difference. A person who is
exposed only to one language system might go a lifetime believing in a uni-
versal essence of 'coldness' that exists outside language and is perhaps even
measurable on a centigrade scale. The need for and process of translation
immediately effaces such essentialism, and demonstrates that the 'value' of
any item in a lexical set – what it 'is' and what it 'is not' – only emerges as an
effect of its relations in a larger system. This effacement of essentialism is
one reason why translation is so important to Derrida, who as a philosopher
continually questions the 'metaphysics of presence' upon which Western
philosophy has traditionally relied.

Meaning, then, is an *effect* of language, not a prior presence merely ex-
pressed in language. It therefore cannot be simply extracted from language
and transferred. This is not to say, however, that deconstruction insists upon
absolute untranslatability, as will become clear.

The Difference of **Différance**

In order to express the spatio-temporal differential movement of language
succinctly, Derrida has coined the neologism (or, more precisely, the
neographism) *différance*. Derrida notes that while the French verb *différer*
has two meanings, roughly corresponding to the English 'to defer' and 'to
differ', the common word *différence* retains the sense of 'difference' but lacks
a temporal aspect. Spelling *différance* with an *a* evokes the formation in
French of a gerund from the present participle of the verb (*différant*), so that
it recalls the temporal and active kernel of *différer*. The *-ance* ending in French
also "remains undecided *between* the active and the passive", so that *différance*
"is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling
something like the middle voice" (1972c/1982: 6-7; see also the translator's
notes to those pages). But *différance*, Derrida cautions, is not a concept or
even a word in the usual sense; we cannot assign it a 'meaning', since it is the
condition of possibility for meanings, which are effects of its movement, or

'play'. Derrida's use of the word 'play' in this context is often misunder-stood, most grievously when taken as an argument for complete 'freeplay' in language: that is, the suggestion that a signifier can ultimately mean just anything at all. As he has explained, the French *jeu* ('play', 'give') recalls not simply the sense of the ludic, but also "the sense of that which, by the spacing between the pieces of an apparatus, allows for movement and articulation" (1987a/1992:64). If we think of Derrida's extension of Saussure's formulation – that in the chain or system of signification each concept refers to the other "by means of the systematic play of differences" (for instance, the play among various terms for temperature and the circum-stances of their context) – then we can see that this play of differences is the requirement for meaning. It is perhaps important to repeat here that this "play of differences" does not merely refer to obvious ambiguities or to wordplay (although wordplay, which calls attention to the self-reference of language, superbly illustrates this differential play). *All language*, in order to be lan-guage, generates meaning through this systemic movement, or play of differences. Since meaning cannot precede *différance*, there can be no *pure*, totally unified origin of meaning, as the story of Babel reminds us.

Closely aligned with *différance* in Derrida's discussion of signification is the *trace*. In the interpretation of meaning, any signifying element that seems 'present' (both in the spatial and the temporal sense) "is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element" (1972c/1982: 13). These relations to past and future are often called retentive and protentive characteristics, and the *trace* is where the retentive/protentive relationship with the other is marked (1967a/1974: 47). Derrida usually speaks of the trace, rather than the signifier, partly to recall its sense of a 'track' or even a 'spoor' (for further discussion of this point, see Spivak 1974: xvii). Pursuing meaning is not a matter of 'revealing' some hidden presence that is already 'there'; rather, it is relentless tracking through an always moving play of differences. When we speak of the trace as a place 'where', we must keep in mind, as I noted above, that this is not a positive spatial *presence*; rather, the trace carries within itself the mark of other ele-ments that are, technically, absent. For instance, if I say that I am *cold*, the concept of coldness to which I refer is not an essence in and of itself, but signifies only through its relation to concepts of *cool*, *warm*, *hot*, etc., which are absent from my statement, and are not, of course, presences in their own right. The same holds true for aspects of context: I could say that I am *cold* as I come out of the ocean on a cloudy summer day, and I could say that I am *cold* as I trudge through a mid-winter Canadian snowstorm. Your un-derstanding of these statements in their contexts would partly depend upon your previous experience with the term *cold* in various other (absent) con-texts. In fact, the referential function of language depends upon the possibility of the absence of a referent.

The trace is difficult to think because it seems somewhat paradoxical: it is where the relation to other signifying elements is marked, but it is not a 'real' place and the other is always absent from it. Neither pure presence nor pure absence, the trace marks the weave, or textile, of differences:

> Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" – phoneme or grapheme – being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida 1972b/1981: 26)

The workings of the trace may be clearer if we recall the statement made above that the 'value' of any item in a lexical set only emerges as an effect of its relations in a larger system. These relations can only be retentive (retained from past usages) or protentive (the future possibilities of usage); they can never be immediately *present*. No element of language, then, let alone an entire sentence or text, is ever fully 'original'. In order to exist as meaningful events, texts must carry within themselves traces of previous texts, and are, therefore, acts of citation. The source text for a translation is already a site of multiple meanings and intertextual crossings, and is only accessible through an act of reading that is in itself a translation. The division between 'original' and 'translation', then – as important and necessary as it is to translators and scholars today – is not something pre-existing that can be discovered or proven, but must be constructed and institutionalized. It is therefore always subject to revision.

Conclusion

The proper name delineates precisely what it is about language that, on the one hand, makes perfect translation impossible, and on the other hand, makes translation not only possible but necessary. In order to make proper reference to a person, place, or thing without confusion, a proper name would need to stand outside and above language, clear of the muddle of common nouns. Derrida sometimes plays on the French sense of *propre* as 'clean' in this context – we could approximate in English by saying that the proper name attempts a 'clean-cut' reference. Of course such reference, cut clean away from language, cannot happen: Pierre cannot be disassociated from 'rock', nor Babel from 'confusion'. Meaning, then, cannot precede *différance*, and the proper name possesses value only when inscribed within a language's

system of differences. But, as a proper name enters a language, its set of relations in that language becomes unique. When God imposes his/its name, Babel, upon the city, 'Babel' becomes confused with *balal*, 'confusion', only in the language of Genesis – a conjunction that can never be perfectly translatable. This relation of a proper name to language not only illustrates the impossibility of reference outside or before the differential structure of language, but also stands as a paradigm of untranslatable linguistic uniqueness. Derrida therefore remarks that in imposing his name, God "*at the same time* imposes and forbids translation" (1985: 170). The *différance* that forbids translation, however, is also the opening that makes translation possible at all.

I will address the issue of translatability in several stages below, but I first want to return to the important relation between Derrida's approach to translation and his questioning of traditional philosophical assumptions and concepts. Derrida has often been misunderstood as claiming absolute untranslatability, which, as I will demonstrate, is far from the case. However, even though he insists that translation is not an all-or-nothing proposition, and even though a major part of his work entails the demonstration that oppositions such as translatable/untranslatable cannot withstand scrutiny, Derrida continues to work with the terms *translatability* and *untranslatability* in their traditional sense. As I have noted elsewhere (Davis 1997: 35), Derrida observes that the language we speak is already structured by the conceptual field of oppositions manifested in Western metaphysics. Because meaning is not prior to language but is an effect of language, 'Derrida' cannot – as though he were some transcendent proper name – theorize *upon* oppositions from a position *outside* their system of operation (as the story of Babel shows, even the God of Genesis is tangled in language!). Rather, he "uses the strengths of the field to turn its own stratagems against it, producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting* it" (Derrida 1967b/1978: 20; see also translator's note). So, Derrida – positioned in language and context as we all must be – proceeds by demonstrating the productive, non-dichotomous interrelation of 'oppositions' in language through close readings of exemplary texts.

With that in mind, it would be useful to consider the 'classical' sense of translation that Derrida discusses, as he has described it:

> What does philosophy say? Let's imagine that it's possible to ask such a question: What does philosophy say? What does the philosopher say when he is being a philosopher? He says: What matters is truth or meaning, and since meaning is before or beyond language, it follows that it is translatable. Meaning has the commanding role, and consequently one must be able to fix its univocality or, in any case, to master its plurivocality. If this plurivocality can be mastered, then translation, understood as the transport of a semantic content into another signifying form, is

possible. There is no philosophy unless translation in this latter sense is possible. Therefore the thesis of philosophy is translatability in this common sense, that is, as the transfer of a meaning or a truth from one language to another without any essential harm being done […] The origin of philosophy is translation or the thesis of translatability, so that wherever translation in this sense has failed, it is nothing less than philosophy that finds itself defeated. (1982/1985:120)

By the 'classical sense' of translation, then, Derrida refers to the concept of "the transfer of meaning or a truth from one language to another without any essential harm being done" (ibid: 120). This concept of transferability, which has historically dominated discussions of translation theory, also undergirds the metaphysics of presence. There are exceptions, of course, particularly in the translation theories of the Middle Ages (for a discussion of such difference in Old English translation theory, and in that of St. Augustine, see Davis 2000; for the Middle Ages generally and St. Augustine particularly, see Vance 1986; Copeland 1991). Nonetheless, such medieval theory, which accepted the arbitrary nature of 'fallen' human language, also rested upon the notion of an ultimate, divine truth, existent even if not fully knowable. Like the philosophy of Plato, it subscribed to a metaphysics of presence. Unlike these traditional conceptions, deconstruction, like many translation theories today, rejects the idea that meaning is before or beyond language, and can thus be safely, or cleanly ('properly') transferred from one linguistic system to another.

    Deconstruction emphasizes that the failure of translation in this traditional sense demonstrates the failure of the philosophical thesis of meaning and the purity of its oppositions. It also demonstrates that this issue is not, and never was, merely a question of philosophy in the narrow, disciplinary sense. A metaphysical system produces the assumptions and hierarchies that structure not only 'philosophy', but also those things we call language, society, politics, economics, culture… In discussing the unfortunate implications of the word 'translation', Theo Hermans writes, "If the etymology of the word 'translation' had suggested, say, the image of responding to an existing utterance instead of transference, the whole idea of a transfer postulate would probably never have arisen" (Hermans 1999: 52). Undoubtedly so. But the development of that different etymological suggestion could only have taken place in a system very different from the metaphysics of presence that is our legacy. The institutionalized position of deconstruction in the historically constructed, institutionalized discipline 'philosophy' does not limit it to that discipline. Indeed, deconstruction is always undermining just such constructed borders.

    Derrida does not turn from observing the failure of the theory of mean-

ing transfer to providing a new set of recommendations on how to translate. Rather, he asks: just how *do* we produce meaning, and what is it about this process that *at the same time* imposes the limit and the possibility of translation? I will approach this question in the next two chapters.

2. The Limit

If we stay with the paradigm of the proper name for the moment, we can see that it demonstrates that no language can be a clean-cut entity with clearly decidable and absolute limits. Even though the proper name cannot escape dissemination in a language system, it nonetheless does not belong to a language in the same way as a common noun. Using the example of *pierre/ Pierre*, Derrida turns to Roman Jakobson's well-known essay 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (1959), and observes that the proper name confounds Jakobson's tripartite division between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation. Intralingual translation, which interprets linguistic signs by means of other signs in the *same* language, presupposes that we can know "how to determine rigorously the unity and identity of a language, the decidable form of its limits" (Derrida 1985:173). When we encounter *Pierre* in a French text (or *Babel* in the Hebrew Genesis), it is not immediately decidable whether it does or does not belong to the language of the text. On the one hand, we cannot say that *Pierre* belongs to French in the sense that a rendering by 'rock' would suffice in a translation; on the other hand, simply retaining *Pierre* as though it exists completely outside of French effaces its complex relations in that language system. In translating 'Bavel' from the Hebrew Genesis, for instance, Chouraqui renders "Bavel: Confusion", attempting with the expansion and the upper case 'c' to mark both the common meaning and yet the uniqueness of the word. Neither fully inside nor fully outside, the proper name complicates the edge of a language system, and marks its *limit*.

The *limit*, as Derrida uses it, does not indicate a clean-cut boundary between entities. The idea that a language or any structure can have such a clean-cut edge is precisely what deconstruction calls into question. As an example, we can consider the borders of a nation, which, on the one hand, mark the nation's identity and thus its political possibility; on the other hand, borders mark the nation's relation (of difference) to other nations, without which it could not be recognized as a nation. By marking the relation to the other, borders indicate that the nation carries within itself the trace of what it has differed/deferred in its emergence. Moreover, borders themselves become divided even in their own tracing: "This tracing can only institute the line by dividing it intrinsically into two sides. There is a *problem* as soon as this intrinsic division divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything" (Derrida 1993/1993: 11). This intrinsic division marks the *limit* of an identity – the structural impossibility of its ever being a fully closed *self*-identity. The limit of a language, then, is not 'decidable' or absolute (which would cleanly cut languages off from each other), but both a boundary and a structural opening between languages, contexts.

Even though we cannot rigorously determine the identity of a language, we speak (as I have been doing here) of languages and language 'systems' for good reason: languages do have standardized rules of grammar and usage (whether academically formalized or not), and their lexicons function according to ingrained codes normalized by repetition. But these systems can never be fully contained or made permanent, as every linguist and every grammar teacher knows. Languages constantly borrow and mutate elements from other languages, and every generation and dialect will 'break' and reshape the rules of standardized grammar (if they did not, a language would not have a 'history'). We can always repeat differently, and the play of traces, within and between languages is always open-ended (for further discussion on this point, see Caputo 1997: 100-101). Moreover, the very rules and boundaries used to make distinctions within and between languages do not exist prior to any system of difference, but are themselves effects – most obviously, for instance, of socio-political codes. As an example we may take the ongoing furore in the United States surrounding 'Black English' and 'Ebonics', which has included debates not only on whether Ebonics *is* a language and how it relates linguistically and historically to English, but also on its social acceptability, the legal responsibilities of schools, and even the political loyalty of citizens. Such debates serve as reminders that deciding precisely when we are manoeuvering within one language and when we are translating between languages is a political act. Deconstruction's exposure of the 'border' as a constructed zone has had far-reaching effects in areas such as cultural studies and post-colonial studies (see Derrida 1996/1998: 24-25). It is important to note, however, that deconstruction does not point to a way out of this socio-political situatedness. One cannot act or speak without (at least provisionally and contingently) delimiting a context and inscribing borders. Deconstruction does not cling to some higher, neutral ground that would reinscribe the concept of a transcendent presence (that is, a presence existing above or outside of language). Rather, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, deconstruction recognizes the necessity "of provisional and intractable starting points in any investigative effort […] its insistence that in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique" (Spivak 1987: 180).

Singularity and Generality

The limit exemplified by the proper name applies to an aspect of meaning especially important to translation: the structural relation of singularity and generality. A proper name stands apart from language, but at the same time cannot signify without inscription in a general code. So too, any language event is an irreducibly singular performance with a meaning that effectuates from a systematic play of differences in a specific context. Its signification *is* that differential play of traces, and cannot, therefore, be extracted from the

event. In this sense, the event is singular (and thus resists philosophical attempts to make general, transcendent truth claims). But, like a proper name, if an event were *absolutely* singular, it would also be absolutely incomprehensible: any event – in order to be interpretable and therefore meaningful at all – must repeat structures already recognizable in a general code. The meaning of a late sixteenth-century performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, would occur as its signifiers (linguistic or otherwise) came into play with other signifying elements – linguistic, social, economic, etc. – of its context at that historical moment. (Context, it should be noted here, is never homogeneous, but always heterogeneous and hierarchized. So, for instance, a 'groundling' in the theatre pit would be positioned quite differently than a noble in a private box, a man differently from a woman, etc. Even in the 'same' context, then, the performance would be plural.) On the other hand, *Romeo and Juliet* repeats recognizable structures – linguistic, familial, sexual, gestural, etc. – that have been encoded and preserved for centuries through repetition and tradition. The importance of the structural interdependence of singularity and generality cannot be overemphasized: *every* event, or 'mark', is both irreducibly singular – it is a new and unrepeatable performance in a particular context – *and* it is a repetition conforming to already established codes, or laws. This relation enacts the limit of translatability (and thus untranslatability). In the essay 'Living On'/*Borderlines*, Derrida observes:

> A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable […] Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. (1979:102)

If a text were totally translatable, it would simply and purely repeat what already exists: it would have no singularity and thus no identity. (Such a text is an impossibility, of course, since even verbatim repetition must occur within a new context and is therefore different.) Totally untranslatable, a text would bear no relation to any meaningful system: fully self-contained, it dies immediately. (Again, such a text cannot exist, in the sense that it could never be recognized as a text.) The object of translation theory, paradoxically perhaps, is the untranslatable – the singularity of a text – signalled by the elements most inextricable from context, syntax, or lexicon.

The importance of the singular/general relation to the process of translation will become clearer if we consider it in terms of the distinction between signifier and signified. As noted in chapter 1, deconstruction demonstrates the non-existence of a transcendental signified – that is, a meaning that exists outside of language. Meaning is an effect of language, of a singular play of

difference in a chain of signifiers – and in this sense "every signified is also in the position of a signifier" (Derrida 1972b/1981: 20). Derrida notes with care, however, that to problematize the signifier/signified distinction is not to erase it absolutely. This problematizing is not a question

> of confusing at every level, and in all simplicity, the signifier and the signified. That this opposition or difference cannot be radical or absolute does not prevent it from functioning, and even from being indispensable within certain limits – very wide limits. For example, no translation would be possible without it. In effect, the theme of a transcendental signified took shape within the horizon of an absolutely pure, transparent, and unequivocal translatability. In the limits to which it is possible, or at least *appears* possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. (ibid:20)

The difference between the signifier and signified is not made possible because a signifier can point to some meaning that has a reality outside of language, but because language accrues, through fairly regulated repetition of signifiers in a general code, certain *instituted* meaning effects. The process of institutionalization, however, has a way of covering its tracks, so that distinctions instituted through repetition seem 'real'. The next several sections will discuss Derrida's excavation of several of these distinctions.

Text

In discussing Roman Jakobson's translation divisions, Derrida questions the clean-cut divisions between intralingual, interlingual, and 'intersemiotic' translation, which imply not only clear delimitations between languages, but also between the linguistic and non-linguistic. Derrida recognizes that language performs as part of an open weave with the social, cultural, political, sexual, familial, economic, etc., and suggests that *everything* meaningful to us, not just the language that we speak and write, participates in a systematic play of differences. No sign – whether a body part that indicates gender, a skin colour that indicates ethnicity, or a title that indicates institutional status – gives access to a 'real' presence that can be experienced outside an instituted system of differences. Likewise, the boundaries between categories, whether between ethnic groups, genders, or 'natural' languages, do not precede but emerge with conventional systems. What we call language, then, participates inextricably in a much larger weave, or 'text', of differential movement. In response to accusations that he reduces all experience to language, or books, Derrida explains that the 'text', or interweave of traces,

> is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological

sphere. What I call "text" implies all the structures called "real," "eco-
nomic," "historical," socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents.
Another way of recalling once again that "there is nothing outside the
text" [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]. That does not mean that all referents
are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed,
or have been naive enough to believe and to have accused me of believ-
ing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of
a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this "real" except in an
interpretive experience. (1988: 148)

Every strand of every text in the narrow sense – source or target text, for
instance – produces meaning as a process of differing not only from other
elements of 'language', but from all elements in this open, inexhaustible weave.
The movement of difference in the chain of signifiers, therefore, is not re-
stricted to linguistic signifiers, but always includes the 'real', 'economic',
'historical', 'socio-institutional', etc. This openness does not erase the irre-
ducible singularity of each event, but demonstrates that its exhaustive, final
interpretation is not possible, for two reasons. First, a 'text', in the traditional
sense, cannot be cleanly delineated from 'context'. Demarcations of a text's
inside/outside can only be contingent, and the assumptions underlying any
such demarcation will mark its own limit. How and to what extent, for ex-
ample, can a particular performance (including a reading) of one of
Shakespeare's plays be separated from the circumstances of its production?
Second – and perhaps most frustrating – elements of 'context' are not di-
rectly accessible, transparent facts. No matter how much historical research
we do (on Elizabethan theatre, for instance), the social, economic and liter-
ary conditions that we wish to pin down will always disseminate through the
general text, forcing us to admit that any interpretation necessarily cuts off
other, equally valid meanings.

The implications of this inexhaustible textuality have been delightfully
illustrated by Paul de Man, who, in an essay on Walter Benjamin's 'Task of
the Translator', comments upon Benjamin's observation that languages each
have a different manner of meaning. Benjamin gives the example of *Brot* and
pain, which, he says, mean something different to a German and a French-
man, respectively (Benjamin 1955/1969: 74). De Man elaborates:

To mean 'bread', when I need to name bread, I have the word *Brot*, so
that the way in which I mean is by using the word *Brot*. The translation
will reveal a fundamental discrepancy between the intent to name *Brot*
and the word *Brot* itself in its materiality, as a device of meaning. If you
hear *Brot* in this context of Hölderlin, who is so often mentioned in this
text, I hear *Brot und Wein* necessarily, which is the great Hölderlin text
that is very much present in this – which in French becomes *Pain et vin*.
'Pain et vin' is what you get for free in a restaurant, in a cheap restau-
rant where it is still included, so *pain et vin* has very different connotations

> from *Brot und Wein*. It brings to mind the *pain français, baguette, ficelle,*
> *bâtard*, all those things – I now hear in *Brot* 'bastard'. This upsets the
> stability of the quotidian. (de Man 1986: 87)

De Man's excursion goes on, copiously illustrating not only how each lan-
guage's manner of meaning reverberates through its chain of signifiers, but
also how every signifier functions in relation to countless associations and
specific contexts – the context of Hölderlin, of a cheap restaurant, a bakery
and daily bread.

   This demonstration that meaning cannot be fully determined has led
many poststructuralist critics (to the dismay of some translation scholars)
to use terms traditionally applied to translation in the conventional sense –
particularly the term 'translation' itself – in order to discuss topics such as
gender, ethnicity and sexuality. For instance, they investigate identities not as
given, a priori facts, but as effects of interpretation or translation. Homi Bhabha
(1994: 32-38) argues that colonized peoples can take advantage of ambiva-
lence within a dominating culture to translate and negotiate their identities.
Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991) suggests that women are not only
bilingual and always translating, but *are* translations, since they must exist
within male-made language that mutes the feminine. Rather than harming
translation studies, such usage serves as a salutary caution that the textual/
contextual borders drawn for the sake of studying translation are contingent
and that neither the translator nor the translation is ever neutral. It therefore
challenges translation scholars to recognize and continually to re-examine
the ways that they produce the objects of their own analysis. (Some transla-
tion scholars have been arguing for such recognition and re-examination.
See, for example, Hermans 1999; and Arrojo's argument in Chesterman and
Arrojo 2000.) In discussing the problem of text and limit, Derrida remarks:
"One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort
to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest
attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recon-
textualization" (1988: 136). Deconstruction does not offer a method for
establishing a final, authoritative interpretation, but rather practices an
ongoing, integrated analysis of texts (in the narrow sense) *and not* our meth-
ods for identifying texts. The importance of contextualizing and continually
recontextualizing translations is well recognized by many translation schol-
ars, as I will discuss below.

Writing

Since we cannot draw a clean-cut, non-contingent line between text and con-
text, or between the linguistic and non-linguistic, it is not accurate, obviously,

to discuss textual meaning strictly in terms of language. Derrida instead applies the term 'writing', in a reworked and expanded sense, to the general structure of differential traces, for reasons that return us to his reading of Saussure.

Saussure's demonstration that language is a system of differences with *no positive terms* goes a long way toward undermining the metaphysics of presence, or what Derrida calls 'logocentrism' – the belief in a transcendent self-presence founded on the *logos* ('speech', 'logic', 'discourse' and 'reason' in Greek, and, in biblical terms, 'the Word of God'). Logocentrism is also a phonocentrism, which presumes that the voice, often associated with breath and spirit, "has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind" (Derrida 1967a/1974: 11). It suggests that the speaker's consciousness is a fully isolable self-presence, an independent self-identity. Speech has thus been understood as the direct expression of this presence and the truth of its meaning. Conversely, logocentrism also understands writing as a derived system that simply represents speech. Because it functions in the absence of the speaker/writer, and thus breaks the unity of consciousness and expression, writing poses a threat to the conveyance of truth.

In spite of his observations regarding difference, Saussure reinscribes logocentrism when he insists that speech, to the exclusion of writing, is the true object of linguistics, and that writing exists for the sole purpose of representing speech (Saussure 1959: 23-24). Saussure posits a typical logocentric relation between speech and writing: while speech is 'natural', writing is 'artificial'; speech forms the 'true bond' of unity in language, while the bond of writing is 'fictitious' and 'superficial'; speech presents language directly, but writing obscures and disguises language (ibid: 32, 25, 30). Speech, then, becomes the essence of language, the thing-in-itself that could be revealed, or grasped directly, if only the graphic form could be stripped away completely. Saussure not only complains that writing usurps speech as the proper object of linguistics, but that writing continually (and improperly) affects language by changing speech: such mistakes are "pathological", caused by the "tyranny of writing" over speech, and result in "orthographic monstrosities" (ibid: 30-32).

Derrida points out that the usurpation Saussure laments could not be just an "unhappy accident", but must suppose, on the contrary, "a common root" for speech and writing (1967a/1974: 52). Saussure himself delineates this common root when he observes that language is "comparable to writing" and other systems of signs (1959: 52), and when he appeals to writing as the clearest example of the principle of phonic difference. The linguistic signifier, Saussure explains, "is not phonic but incorporeal – constituted not by its material substance but by the differences that separate its sound-image from all others" (ibid:118-19). We can understand this principle, he suggests, through comparison with the written letter *t*, which a person can write in

different ways, since "[t]he only requirement is that the sign for *t* not be con-fused in his script with the signs used for *l, d,* etc." (ibid: 119-20). As Derrida notes, these observations contradict Saussure's earlier claims that sound forms the "natural bond" of language, and that writing is merely fictitious and su-perficial. Since by definition "difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude", Saussure must ultimately exclude the "naturally phonic essence of language", which was the very thing that had allowed him to exclude writing from lan-guage proper (Derrida 1967a/1974: 52-53). This self-contradiction disrupts what Saussure had posited as a natural speech/writing hierarchy, and points to the similarity of speech and writing in the field of signification. Derrida suggests that the structure of signification in general depends upon charac-teristics typically associated with writing:

> If "writing" signifies inscription and especially the durable institu-tion of a sign (and that is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs. In that field a certain sort of instituted signifiers may then appear, "graphic" in the narrow and derivative sense of the word, ordered by a certain relationship with other instituted – hence "written," even if they are "phonic" – signifiers. (ibid: 44)

This rethinking of the speech/writing relation is necessary to the project of rethinking the postulate that meaning precedes language and that translation is therefore derivative.

In summary, writing, as Saussure's work suggests, is often considered as a recording mechanism for speech, which it inscribes in a 'durable' (repeated and repeatable), institutionally encoded system. Because it functions in the absence of the subject (the consciousness of the speaker/writer) and the referent, writing appears as a secondary, external, and dangerous represen-tation of the living presence available in speech. By contrast, speech has been understood as the direct expression of this living presence, of the pres-ence of consciousness to itself, which yields immediate access to the truth of the speaker's meaning. Deconstruction suggests that all signs – spoken or written – must repeat 'durable', already recognizable structures in a differen-tial network, and their ability to function in the absence of the subject and referent is necessary to the process of signification. Thus, signifiers are 'writ-ten' even if they are 'phonic'. Moreover, since meaning depends upon the play of differences, consciousness (which entails thought) can also never be fully present to itself: the subject – speaking or written – is constituted in signification and therefore divided from the beginning. The 'self' is not a self-identity. This condition is not a *fallen* state as compared to some anterior, pure state. Even though signifiers are 'instituted' – in the sense that, as Saussure suggests, they are arbitrary but not capricious, conventional rather

than natural – the instituted signifier (or, more precisely for Derrida, the *instituted trace*) does not stand in opposition to anything 'natural'. Rather, the conceptual opposition natural/artificial has itself been instituted through the logocentric system of Western metaphysics. Signifiers are always and can only be instituted, and thus the phonic signifier, like the graphic, is repeatable – or *iterable* – differently, beyond the context of its 'original' speaker. In this sense, then, speech participates in a certain order of 'writing', which Derrida calls writing-in-general or arche-writing. (Many commentators prefer the French term, *écriture*, to the translation 'writing in general' or arche-writing.)

It cannot be overemphasized that Derrida is *not* simply reversing the classic speech/writing hierarchy and placing writing on top. Writing in the narrow sense, like speech, is generally conceived as a substance that, through a process of substitution, stands in for a 'real' referent that exists before and outside of signification. To claim a privilege for this writing would simply reestablish the same logocentric assumptions as the privileging of speech. But if meaning emerges as a relation of differences, then speech and writing in the narrow sense, along with all other forms of signification, participate in a movement of differences ('general' or arche-writing), rather than in a system of pure oppositions such as natural/artificial, in which one term allows direct, transparent access to the 'real'. Derrida suggests that the allegation of writing's derivativeness and artificiality was possible only because 'natural' language never existed, and the desire for self-presence spawned historical constructs such as 'natural speech'/'artificial writing'. This point may be clearer if we consider the reputation of the pun, historically dismissed as low, unnatural, improper use of language – see Culler (1988) and Delabastita (1997) for further discussion and citations. As Derek Attridge puts it, "The pun is seen in this light because it undermines the basis on which our assumptions about the communicative efficacy of language rest: in Saussure's terms, that for each signifier there is an inseparable signified, the two existing in mutual interdependence like two sides of a sheet of paper" (Attridge 1988: 140). Condemnation of the pun dissimulates this threat by banishing it, as deviant, outside of language proper, which can then be deemed serious, natural, and univocal. Polysemy, like writing, is distanced as a dangerous 'monstrosity'.

Conclusion

Such oppositions and exclusions, which attempt to divide and to hierarchize modes of signification, return us to Jakobson's essay and its tripartite division. Jakobson privileges interlingual translation as 'translation proper', which relegates intralingual and intersemiotic transposition to figural status. This move invokes another play of the 'proper' – *le sens propre*, 'proper' or *literal* sense – that Derrida circulates through 'Des Tours de Babel'. This tactic of

delineating the literal and the figural, the 'proper' and the 'non-proper', illustrates the methodology of classical philosophy, which constructs essences and determines absolute limits through a series of exclusions and oppositions. In resisting these exclusive categories, the proper name demonstrates – as deconstruction is always taking pains to do – that the oppositions upon which Western philosophy relies (inside/outside, proper/improper, natural/artificial, literal/figurative, content/form, original/translation, etc.) always break down.

The breakdown of oppositions does not, obviously, translate into untranslatability, but forces us to think about translation *otherwise* than through a translatable/untranslatable dichotomy, or even as a 'relative' possibility between these two poles. An investigation of the limits of translatability requires further discussion of iterability, as well as the issue of stability and instability in language. This discussion will also bring us to a consideration of one of the most common and nonsensical misunderstandings of Derrida: the suggestion that he says 'anything goes'.

3. Iterability

Stability and Instability

As his discussion of the (non-absolute) difference between signifier and signified indicates, Derrida does not claim that there can be no stability of meaning; in fact, he is always studying the elements of structural stability and their role in producing meaning. For example, in answer to a question about the issues he faced when writing a short essay on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, he discusses this stability in a broad historical context. (That essay, 'Aphorism Countertime' (1987a/1992), by the way, focuses largely on the proper name – for instance, Montague, Capulet – , its power and its limit.) Why is it that, even though he was incapable of reading *Romeo and Juliet* as a sixteenth-century text, he could still read it meaningfully – still have access to it? Derrida raises and considers this question in an interview that touches upon his earlier study:

> This brings us back to the question of the structure of a text in relation to history. Here the example of Shakespeare is magnificent. Who demonstrates better that texts fully conditioned by their history, loaded with history, and on historical themes, offer themselves so well for reading in historical contexts very distant from their time and place of origin, not only in the European twentieth century, but also in lending themselves to Japanese or Chinese productions and transpositions?
>
> This has to do with the structure of a text, with what I will call, to cut corners, its iterability, which both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualization. All this is historical through and through. The iterability of the trace (unicity, identification, and alteration in repetition) is the condition of historicity… (Derrida 1992a: 63)

Shakespeare is accessible to us, even if we know little about his historical period, because traces (which are not inherently meaningful, but evoke meaning 'effects' through the play of differences) are always repeatable or iterable. Through repetition within conventional codes (linguistic, literary, political, cultural, etc.), traces, or 'marks', as Derrida often calls them in this context, accumulate and condense stable sets of relations and meaning effects that make them readable or interpretable. Derrida consistently emphasizes the necessity of stable structures, traditions, conventions and codes for the intelligibility of a text or of anything at all. Texts *are* intelligible, precisely *because* their traces are coded repetitions. Still speaking of *Romeo and Juliet*, he comments,

> We have available contextual elements of great stability (not natural,
> universal and immutable but fairly stable, and thus also destabilizable)
> which, through linguistic competence, through the experience of the
> proper name, of family structures which are still analogous ones, etc.,
> allow reading, transformation, transposition, etc. (ibid: 64)

Readers familiar with the commonplace criticism that Derrida claims com-
plete freeplay and undecidability in language may be surprised by this
statement. I hope that by now it is clear that if Derrida were to argue for *com-
plete* freeplay – i.e. *no* textual stability – he would be privileging the trace as
freely operating, outside of and unconstrained by either context or conven-
tion. As demonstrated in the above discussions of singular contexts, general
codes, and the *instituted trace*, that is precisely what he is *not* arguing.

In a recent discussion of wordplay and translation, the translation scholar
Dirk Delabastita considers poststructuralist arguments for semantic plurality
and concludes:

> The idea of a perfectly stable and controllable language – according to
> which semantic plurality is limited to the small and clearly demarcated
> subset of utterances that we call puns – is only a myth, one which we
> know to be far from being innocent ideologically (Culler 1988). My
> claim would be that the opposite notion of total free play or unregulated
> semantic anarchy, too, is basically a fiction, obviously inspired by a
> different ideological agenda. (Delabastita 1997: 7)

Derrida would certainly agree. Compare his statement from an interview in
which he discusses responses to his work that raise this precise issue:

> First of all, I never proposed "a kind of 'all or nothing' choice between
> pure realization of self-presence and complete freeplay or undeci-
> dability." I never believed in this and I never spoke of 'complete freeplay
> or undecidability'[…] There can be no 'completeness' where freeplay
> is concerned. (Derrida 1988: 115)

Later in this interview, in discussing his work with Rousseau's *Essay on the
Origin of Languages*, he confirms the need to balance meticulous attention to
conventional reading strategies (which would "grant access to what Rousseau
thought he meant" and to what his contemporary readers would probably
understand) with an analysis of the play "or relative indetermination" that
always allows for different, valid interpretations:

> On the one side, things are the same, a solid tradition assures us of this.
> But on the other, they are profoundly different. To evaluate the two
> sides and to get one's bearings, one must be armed, one must understand
> and write, even translate French as well as possible, know the corpus of

Rousseau as well as possible, including all the contexts that determine it (the literary, philosophical, rhetorical traditions, the history of the French language, society, history, which is to say, so many other things as well). Otherwise, one could indeed say just anything at all and I have never accepted saying, or encouraging others to say, just anything at all, nor have I argued for indeterminacy as such. (ibid: 145)

It is important to remember that 'things are the same' to a degree, not because any expression has some essential core of meaning, but because tradition and institutionalization conserve dominant patterns of meaning effects. More-over, Derrida is not positing stability and instability as opposite poles between which one can find compromise; rather, stability and instability (and determinacy and indeterminacy) are mutually constitutive necessities. Just as the structural interdependence of singularity and generality allows for mean-ing and *at the same time* prevents both total translatability and total untranslatability, the stable elements in language – which are effects of his-torical repetition, codification, institutionalization, etc. – allow access to, but can never completely exhaust, or shut down, the text. "The very iterability which constitutes" identity never permits "a unity of self identity" (1972c/1982: 318). Consider, for instance, how de Man, by maneuvering through a dense set of institutionalized associations, got from *Brot* to 'bastard'.

So, while stability gives us access to texts, it is also limited, for several reasons. First, there is always difference at the origin. The 'meaning' of any word or phrase in *Romeo and Juliet* as it flowed from Shakespeare's pen or from an actor's mouth – its 'original' meaning in this play – was itself already self-differentiated, shot through by *différance*. The word 'remedy', for instance, as offered by Friar Lawrence ("And if thou dar'st, I'll give thee remedy" IV, i, 76), would have taken its meaning not only from its differen-tial relation to other elements in the language system, but also from the history of its own repetition. Prior to its use in *Romeo and Juliet*, its reiteration would have steadily condensed a fairly stable meaning for 'remedy', but each of its repetitions would also have been *different* from all the others, since each occurred in a new context and therefore produced its effect within a different set of systemic relations. The same repetition that builds stability, then, also builds up a history of differences, so that the 'original' use of 'remedy' in *Romeo and Juliet* is already polysemous – or, to put it more strongly, it is already disseminated through the signifying system. For example, it would suggest, at the very least, a 'solution', but also a medical 'cure', and ulti-mately intersects with both Juliet's apparently innocent potion and Romeo's deadly poison. We'll return to this problematic 'remedy'.

Stability is also limited because neither a text's author nor its enact-ment in one context can fully determine its repetition in another context (without this openness, of course, there would be no possibility of transla-

tion). Shakespeare's plays, although conditioned by and invested in history, offer themselves for reading in other historical contexts and even to Japanese or Chinese productions and transpositions because their iterability "both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualization" (Derrida 1992a: 63). One striking example is the recent Bazmark film production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1996), in which the characters (including Mercutio in drag and dreadlocks and Tibalt in black leather and chains) speak Shakespeare's lines verbatim as they wield handguns, explode a gas station, and dance to hard rock. The 'meaning' of this production draws upon but is certainly not exhausted by the meaning effects of Shakespeare's language and culture that have remained stable enough to be accessible today. This non-saturability of context raises some of the more complicated aspects of iterability, which Derrida addresses in the essay 'Signature Event Context'. I want to consider the following, very dense comment from that essay, which begins with a reference to iterability in 'writing':

> Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. (1972c/1982: 320)

As a striking example of this iterability, we could take a line from the late Janice Joplin's song 'Mercedes Benz': "oh lord, won't ya buy me a Mercedes Benz". Joplin was an extremely popular singer among American youth of the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when the values of the dominant culture were under heavy challenge. It would be an understatement to say that for most of Joplin's audience this line would not have been a favourable comment on the Mercedes Benz status symbol. Today, this line is used – excerpted from the vocal recording and so still sung by Joplin – in a television commercial advertising the luxury and status of Mercedes Benz automobiles. Whether we like it or not, 'marks' can be cited – differently.

The non-saturability of context is well recognized in other contemporary discussions of translation. In his discussion of wordplay, for instance, Dirk Delabastita observes that puns "do not simply either exist or fail to exist, but have a *history*", which is a function of context:

> Certain generations or groups of readers are more responsive to semantic slippage or doubleness than others, and will rediscover, discover or (should one say) invent puns by endowing potential double readings

and verbal associations with a semantic substance, a communicative value, and a form of intentionality they did not possess before, perhaps not even in the minds of the text's author or most immediate audience. (Delabastita 1997: 7)

The 'meaning' and even the 'intention' of any sign – Delabastita gives the example of Hamlet's controversial "get thee to a nunnery" – has no absolute anchoring in an 'original' context. Every sign is repeatable, or iterable, but since it can only be repeated in a different context the possibilities for its meaning remain open. This point also has some things in common with the tenet of Descriptive Translation Studies, rigorously pursued by Gideon Toury, for instance, that "translations are facts of target cultures" (1995: 29). Toury's insistence that understanding any translation requires detailed, continuously negotiated study of its contextualization, as well as an approach bound not to *a priori* definitions but sensitive to "*difference* across cultures, *variation* within a culture and *change* over time" (ibid: 31; emphasis in original), corresponds to a degree with Derrida's point that every sign "can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion" (Derrida 1972c/1982: 320).

The fact that a sign can never be fully determined is made especially obvious by – but is certainly not restricted to – cases of adaptative translation and wordplay. The possibility that *any* sign may break with its context, or transgress the boundaries of any 'intended' meaning, is a structural necessity of its inception, as the story of Friar Laurence's 'remedy' will help to illustrate. This remedy entails not only a potion but a letter, for which Friar Laurence presumes a fully determined destination and effect. We traditionally read the mischance that befalls the letter intended for Romeo, which results in his death by poison, as a tragic accident, but Derrida points out that this "anachronous accident comes to illustrate an essential possibility" (1987a/1992: 420). In order for the letter to be written and addressed, it must *already* be implicated in a differential system full of detours, so that it always may not arrive. In other words, the letter must be routed in a process of dissemination, which Derrida has elsewhere likened to a postal system, whose circulation can never be perfectly regulated. This may seem an obvious point: we all know that our letters may not arrive, just as our 'intended meanings' may be misunderstood. Conventional wisdom labels such events as errors or exceptions that somehow escape or break the rules of the system. Derrida reverses this process, positing that detours and multiple pathways *constitute* any system that enables meaning; they are not 'accidents' belonging to its outside, but are the conditions of possibility for signification. Indeed, 'the system' only becomes a rigidly defined identity by excommunicating such 'errors' to its outside, as we have already seen in the examples of Saussure's treatment of writing and the denigration of the pun.

In an anecdote about his translation of Gerrit Achterberg's 'Glazen-wasser', James S Holmes (1988) describes a 'mistake' that poignantly illustrates this systemic process. Holmes was pleased with the linguistic matching he had managed in that translation, which included a rendering of the phrase 'Handen-en voetenval' by 'Footfall and hand-fall'. But his translation only pleased him until – as he says,

> That is, until I discovered some time later (I had worked on the translation from a typed-over text of the original) that the fifth line in the Dutch does not read 'Handen- en voeten*val*' (as my typescript had had it) [and which he had translated 'Footfall and hand-fall'] but 'handen- en voeten*tal*'. I still see no way of fitting that -*tal* (number) into a formally counterparted translation. But I like the translation as it is, a rendering with a flaw, like the grain of sand in a cultured pearl, but for all that not a bad English poem (to my taste, at any rate). (Holmes (1988: 60)

Holmes's example illustrates the workings of systems of difference, such as the phonic and graphic, 'writing in general'. He had mainly been concerned in his translation with phonic matchings such as rhyme, cadence, assonance and alliteration, which he distances in his discussion from the mechanical version of the graphic system – the typewriter keyboard – through which the poem was altered. However, this graphic system intersects with the many differential systems that also made this change possible. Keystrokes, the alphabet, the sounds and spellings of the Dutch language, and even the rhyme scheme and the narrative of Achterberg's poem, all allow for 'voetenval' as well as 'voetental'. Without the multiple, limitless intersections that made Holmes's 'mistake' possible, poetic composition would not be possible. The closing metaphor of this anecdote is telling: the translation is a 'cultured' pearl, and its flaw the artificially inserted grain of sand. By contrast, the original would be a 'natural' pearl, without such an artificial flaw. But *all* pearls must begin with a grain of sand, or at least some substance foreign to the oyster: 'nature' cannot proceed without a grain of difference – or *différance.* It is no surprise that Holmes can find his translation "not a bad English poem".

We must take our chances, then, if we are to produce meaning: a letter may always be miscopied, or it may not arrive; a meaning may always be mistranslated, and a remedy may always somehow turn to poison.

The Supplement

The demonstration that a system – whether moral, political, linguistic, cultural, etc. – achieves the appearance of closure and totalized self-presence only by defining itself against elements that it has banished to its 'outside' (where they are labeled as secondary or non-essential, mistakes, derivative

supplements, 'monstrosities', etc.) has been one of deconstruction's most important interventions. Its far-reaching implications have altered fields such as literary studies, historiography, and cultural studies, and have been indispensable to feminist and post-colonial studies. It also has applicability to translation, not least because translation is routinely designated as outside of and supplementary to fields that it 'serves', such as literature.

In the second part of 'Des Tours de Babel' (1995) Derrida addresses the issue of translation's supplementary and secondary status through a reading of Walter Benjamin's 'Task of the Translator' (1955/1969). Even though Benjamin upholds the traditional dichotomy of original/translation, his meditation on the relation of the original and translation does much to disturb this dichotomy, which is inextricably linked to other hierarchized oppositions such as content/form, text/context, and speech/writing. Derrida pursues the disruptive implications of Benjamin's complex essay, and applies them to an interrogation of the status of translations in copyright law and in traditional concepts of transcendental 'law'. Before examining this discussion, however, I want to detail Derrida's work on the *supplement* by considering another text, which explores the philosophical history of the speech/writing dichotomy through a translation study of a word that can mean both 'remedy' and 'poison'.

'Plato's Pharmacy', a long essay included in *Dissemination* (Derrida 1972a/1981), deconstructs Plato's evaluation of writing in the *Phaedrus*. Through a Socratic dialogue, Plato tells the story of the origin of writing by recounting a myth. The deity Theuth, inventor of writing, presents his art to the high god Thamus, King of all Egypt, and declares that it should be imparted to other Egyptians because of its value as a *pharmakon* for memory and wisdom. *Pharmakon* can mean, among other things, 'remedy', 'drug', 'medicine' and 'poison', but the prominent translation that Derrida examines silences the ambivalence of this word by choosing *la remède,* 'remedy' – its most positive and fully beneficent connotation. (In her translator's notes, Barbara Johnson (1981) observes that the English translation history of *pharmakon* corresponds to the French. We'll return to this issue of translating the *pharmakon*.) Through the reply of Thamus to Theuth, Plato, like Saussure, attempts to reject writing by declaring it an unnatural, dangerous supplement to true memory and wisdom – it is not a *pharmakon* for memory but for reminding, not a source of truth that results in men of wisdom, but only a semblance of truth that results in men filled with the conceit of wisdom (Derrida 1972a/1981: 102). Thamus repeats Theuth's application of the term *pharmakon* to writing, but asserts that it produces the 'opposite' effect from what one might expect; thus 'writing', as *pharmakon*, ambiguously signifies both 'remedy' (according to Theuth) and 'poison' (according to Thamus). "It is precisely this ambiguity", Derrida notes, "that Plato, through the myth of the King, attempts to master, to dominate by inserting

its definition into simple, clear-cut oppositions: good and evil, inside and
outside, true and false, essence and appearance" (ibid: 103). The *pharmakon*
of writing is dangerous to Thamus because it is not bound to the speaking
presence of the god-king, father of *logos*; his casting it outside the realm of
true wisdom and memory enacts the establishment of this truth as presence,
defined against writing as a marker of absence.

This is the story, then, of the metaphysical "transference of a nonphilo-
sopheme into a philosopheme" (ibid: 72) – that is, of a marker of ambivalence
into a concept that claims the status of a true and unambiguous presence,
defined against an opposite that is fully external to it. The structure of Plato's
story, however, betrays his construction of this philosopheme. Even though
Plato thinks of writing and tries to dominate it on the basis of opposition as
such, his structure of oppositions occurs within the ambivalent signifier *phar-
makon*, so that the *difference* of the *pharmakon* (or writing) precedes and
makes possible the establishment of the concepts and oppositions that osten-
sibly govern it. (The reader should be reminded here of *différance* as the
necessary condition of meaning, and of arche-writing as the movement of
differences.) Derrida notes the implications of this structural paradox:

> In order for these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appear-
> ance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be
> simply *external* to the other, which means that one of these oppositions
> (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited
> as the matrix of all possible opposition. And one of the elements of the
> system (or of the series) must also stand as the very possibility of
> systematicity or seriality in general. And if one got to thinking that some-
> thing like the *pharmakon* – or writing – far from being governed by
> these oppositions, opens up their very possibility without letting itself
> be comprehended by them; if one got to thinking that it can only be out
> of something like writing – or the *pharmakon* – that the strange differ-
> ence between inside and outside can spring; if consequently, one got to
> thinking that writing as a *pharmakon* cannot simply be assigned a site
> within what it situates […] one would then have to *bend* into strange
> contortions what could no longer even simply be called logic or dis-
> course. (ibid: 103).

The order of logic or discourse – of the *logos* – which is based on a system of
presences, becomes paradoxical because the element that it defines as out-
side or supplementary to itself is also the condition of its possibility. Since it
is never purely external to whatever ostensible plenitude – such as 'nature' or
'speech' – that it both serves and threatens, the *supplement* can never be
completely ejected from its logic. Just as Saussure must rely upon writing as
the clearest example of the phonic system of differences, Plato must appeal
to the figure of "writing in the soul" to explain the "self-present Truth that

speech – *not* writing – is designed to convey" (Johnson 1981: xxvi). As we will see in the discussion of Benjamin below, this a-logic of the *supplement* applies to translations as well.

The complexities and paradoxes of Plato's attempt to set forth a philosophical system based on signified, unambiguous truths extend through the web of *pharmakon*'s etymological relatives, which further demonstrate its movement of difference. Most notable is *pharmakos*, 'scapegoat', one who is evicted from the city as representative of and a cure for an external evil that afflicts it. But, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "to play his role as representative of the evil to be cast out, the *pharmakos* must be chosen from *within* the city. The possibility of using the *pharmakos* to establish the distinction between a pure inside and a corrupt outside depends on its already being inside, just as the expulsion of writing can have a purificatory function only if writing is already within speech" (Culler 1982: 143). Derrida follows the intersections of *pharmakon*'s etymological relatives in the life of Socrates, mouthpiece of Plato's discourse (i.e. *logos*). Not only did Socrates' death by *pharmakon* (given to him as a poison, but accepted by him as a remedy) make him a *pharmakos* for Athens, but in the dialogues he "often has the face of a *pharmakeus*" – a 'magician' or sorcerer – whom Plato elsewhere condemns as dangerous to the city and to true knowledge. In Plato's discourse, however, Socrates' philosophical argument is not separate from sorcery, but is itself a kind of sorcery set against the sorcery of sophism, a mimicry of knowledge practiced by those who use writing.

It may seem that we have wandered a long way from translation, but the contradictory logic of the *pharmakon* is indissociable from the problem of translation. The *pharmakon*, as Plato demonstrates in spite of himself, is not a substance, but a marker of ambivalence – of a difference that "constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed" (Derrida 1972a/1981: 127). In the attempt to still this ambivalence, the polysemy of the *pharmakon*, to evict it from logic, Plato enacts "the inaugural gesture of 'logic' itself, of good 'sense' insofar as it accords with the self-identity of *that which is*: being is what it is, the outside is outside and the inside inside" (ibid: 128). Philosophy *requires* that ambivalence be stilled, that the sign be reduced to a univocal signified truth, that even within Greek *pharmakon* have only one translation, and so function as a philosopheme. The difficulty of translating Plato's *pharmakon*, then, strikes at "the very passage into philosophy". This phrase comes from what is probably Derrida's most famous comment on the relation of translation and philosophy. By studying translations of Plato, he says,

> we hope to display in the most striking manner the regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by 'remedy,' 'recipe,' 'poison,' 'drug,' 'philter,' etc. It will also

be seen to what extent the malleable unity of this concept, or rather its rules and the strange logic that links it with its signifier, has been dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable not only by the imprudence or empiricism of the translators, but first and foremost by the redoubtable, irreducible difficulty of translation. It is a difficulty inherent in its very principle, situated less in the passage from one language to another, from one philosophical language to another, than already, as we shall see, in the tradition between Greek and Greek; a violent difficulty in the transference of a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme. With this problem of translation we will thus be dealing with nothing less than the problem of the very passage into philosophy. (ibid: 71-72)

There are two major points about translation being made here. The first recalls a point I noted earlier in this chapter: that 'the thesis of philosophy is translatability' in the sense of translatability as the 'transport of a semantic content into another signifying form'. The irreducible plurivocality of *pharmakon* defies this pure translatability, and thus disrupts (from the start and from within) Plato's inaugural move. Second – and precisely *because* the plurivocal sign is open to interpretation and therefore to translation – translations can and necessarily do supplant their sources and perform historically. In this case, translation, both within Greek and between Greek and other languages, participates in transferring a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme. Throughout its history translation, like writing, has been castigated as a supplement, as derivative, and as a deceptive semblance of the truth. Derrida's (under)mining of Plato's 'pharmacy' demonstrates that these assumptions rest on a contradictory logic, and that the *difference* of translation constitutes the very possibility of the opposition original/translation.

Why then, would Derrida cite the imprudence and the empiricism of Plato's translators, who have made his text "almost unreadable" by skewing its polysemy and masking its strange logic? He is not, as Jane Gallop (1994) suggests, enacting "the most traditional understanding of translation". His process, she complains, "does not seem a very deconstructive notion of translation: Derrida bemoans what has been 'obliterated' by translators and takes us back to what is in the original text" (Gallop 1994: 52-53). To give Gallop credit, Derrida does state that the translation of *pharmakon* by 'remedy', although not inaccurate, erases its ambiguity and thus the poles of the exchange between Theuth and Thamus. It thus neutralizes the 'textuality' of the 'citational play' (repetitions of the same word differently) and decides what remains an important undecidable in Plato's work. This is just the sort of univocal shutting down of textuality that deconstruction resists, and Derrida criticizes it. (Such reduction of polysemy follows from the classical concept of translation as re-presentation of a unified work, and its implications for

translation theory will be addressed in Section II of this book.) The point
in 'Plato's Pharmacy', however, is not to bemoan or to chastise. Derrida is
here tracking the course of Western metaphysics, which proceeds not only
as an effect of Plato's texts, but from translations that enact 'Platonism'.
While Plato worked to repress difference, his translators have helped to
destroy the evidence:

> All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositories of
> Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of
> analysis* that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple ele-
> ments by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in light of the ulterior
> developments it itself has made possible. Such an interpretative transla-
> tion is thus as violent as it is impotent: it destroys the *pharmakon* but
> at the same time forbids itself access to it, leaving it untouched in its
> reserve. (Derrida 1972a/1981: 99)

Calling attention to this translative violence is not a matter of blame. By
analyzing the procedures of Western disciplines, which have been not just
transmitted, but *constituted* by translation, as Antoine Berman eloquently
points out (1992: 183-85), Derrida traces logocentrism's erasure of differ-
ence and attempts to recuperate access to its reserve. Such recuperation
would mean, among other things, a revisioning of translation, which could
no longer be relegated to the position of a dangerous supplement – a relega-
tion that is an act of metaphysics covering its tracks.

Sur-vival

It is no wonder, then, that in 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985) Derrida turns to
Benjamin's 'Task of the Translator' (1955/1969), which is perhaps the
best-known revision of the original/translation relation. Benjamin maintains,
as Derrida notes, the duality of original and translation, but shifts their rela-
tion: the translation is not dependent upon the original for its existence; rather,
the original depends upon the translation for its survival. Benjamin's notion
of survival here refers to his idea that a text has 'life', but despite his use of
organic terminology – life, seed, germination, ripening – Benjamin does not
suggest that a translation bears an essential, organic relation to its source.
As Carol Jacobs notes in her careful work on Benjamin's essay, "at no
point does translation relate organically to the text that precedes it […]
Translation denies the linear law of nature in order to practice the rule of
textuality" (1975: 757). On this point Derrida comments, "There is life at the
moment when 'sur-vival' (spirit, history, works) exceeds biological life and
death" (1985: 179). Elsewhere he notes that to understand a text as an origi-
nal in Benjamin's sense "is to understand it independently of its living

conditions – the conditions, obviously of its author's life – and to understand it instead in its surviving structure" (Derrida 1982/1985: 122). Because survival in translation exceeds the biological life and death of its author, it illustrates the structure of death, or absence, in textuality: translation, like 'writing' (just as Thamus had feared!) can live on, take on life and meaning in the absence of its author. By emphasizing the necessary possibility of a text's reiteration beyond the meaningful conditions of its author's life, Derrida is not rejecting the importance of a work's historical context (as noted in the section above on iterability). Indeed, it is precisely *because* the meaning or force of the 'original' is not extractable from, but singularly inherent within its syntactic and contextual web, that it requires translation for survival.

Since this translation can only be transformative, translation "modifies the original even as it modifies the translating language" (Derrida 1982/1985: 122). In 'Living On: *Border Lines*', a double-stranded text written for translation and first published in English, Derrida predicts that 'Living On' would force its translator "to transform the language into which he is translating" (1979: 88). These statements have sometimes been misunderstood as indication that Derrida's "theory is highly prescriptive" (Van den Broeck 1990: 47), and that Derrida "advocates an 'abusive' translational strategy" (ibid: 50). This is not the case. The complex issue of 'abusive' translation will be addressed more comprehensively in chapter 5, but for now I will note that deconstruction never attempts to stand 'outside' and pronounce upon texts, and so does not prescribe. As various translation scholars have observed, translation transforms the receiving language as well as the original because through it different, incommensurate signifying systems interact, and because the translated foreign text necessarily *performs* new meanings in the target system. Gideon Toury similarly notes that a translation's "introduction into a target culture always entails some change, however, slight, of the latter" (1995: 27). He explains:

> The likelihood of causing changes in the receiving system beyond the mere introduction of the target text itself stems from the fact that, while translations are indeed intended to cater for the needs of a target culture, they also tend to *deviate* from its sanctioned patterns, on one level or another, not least because of the postulate of retaining invariant at least some features of the source text – which seems to be part of any culture-internal notion of translation. (ibid: 28)

However reductive and univocal a translation, its performance in the target language must, however slightly – to put it in Benjamin's terms – make language 'grow'.

Growth, indeed survival, through translation comes of necessity. The original calls for a complement "because at the origin it was not there without

fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself" (Derrida 1985: 188). Derrida's deconstruction of pure 'origin' has proceeded through the necessary re-reading of texts, such as the Babel myth, that thread together Western metaphysics' tradition of presence. This re-reading of traditional texts sometimes leads to the conflation of his work with the very arguments that it critiques. In discussing treatments of the Babel myth, for instance, Luise von Flotow places Derrida in the same context as George Steiner, and then suggests that their continued references to the story of Babel imply "a belief in some originary language, a state of grace in which people understood one another because they spoke only one language, a pre-Babelian 'Adamic tongue'" (von Flotow 1997: 45). She goes on to state that "references to Babel also suggest a certain nostalgia for a mythic time when it was not necessary to distinguish between an original and a translation" (ibid: 46). Clearly, there is no such belief or nostalgia in deconstruction. On the contrary, the disruption of such nostalgia through a demonstration that there was no 'origin', along with a rethinking and revisioning of philosophy and thus translation in terms of difference, has been the project of deconstruction.

Both translators and philosophers have found Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' stimulating because it situates its commentary on original and translation within a meditation on the nature of language. Benjamin stipulates that translation has nothing to do with communicating content or information. (The concept of communication is a problem that will be addressed in the next chapter.) Rather, he claims, it "ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages" (Benjamin 1955/1969: 72). Even though a single translation cannot itself reveal this hidden relationship, each aims toward linguistic growth and toward an enigmatic 'pure language'. Derrida suggests that for Benjamin this aim is not toward something transcendent to languages, not "a reality which they would besiege from all sides", but language itself as a Babelian event –

> "a language that is not the universal language in the Leibnizian sense, a language which is not the natural language that each remains on its own either […] [but] language *as such*, that unity without any self-identity, which makes for the fact that there are languages and that they are languages" (Derrida 1985: 201; for further discussion of Benjamin's idea of 'pure language', see Andrew Benjamin 1989: 100-108; Blanchot 1971/1990).

For Benjamin, this pure language is not possible without the thought of God, and translation, as a holy growth of languages, announces the messianic end. For Derrida, the point at which Benjamin's theory of language turns toward a religious code marks the *limit* of language, the structural interrelation of translatability and untranslatability, the necessity and impossibility of translation: the 'double bind'.

Placing difference at the origin (which is then not an 'origin' in the traditional sense) reconfigures the position of translation. The instability of the signifier, the multiplicity of textual interpretations, and the incommensurability of languages, long considered a threat to the legitimacy, even the possibility of translation, are precisely what disrupts the original/translation hierarchy. All signifiers, all texts, in order to exist as such, must be multiple, and are accessible only 'in translation'. Some translation scholars have turned to the implications, both promising and daunting, of this irreducible multiplicity and its call, paradoxical as it may seem, for an ethics of translation. Lawrence Venuti has noted that both source and translation "are derivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilize the work of signification, making meaning plural and differential, exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the foreign writer and the translator" (Venuti 1992: 7). Much of his work has focused on the implications of domesticating translation strategies, the tendency to efface 'textuality' and cultural difference by promoting the illusion of transparency in translation (Venuti 1995; 1998). He has recently turned to an exploration of ways translation can promote community between domestic and foreign cultures (Venuti 2000).

Barbara Godard pursues the parallel implications that the non-fixity of meaning holds for feminist theory and for translation. Just as no one translation can claim complete, authoritative re-presentation of a source, so too the constructions of patriarchal language cannot claim re-presentation of the 'real'. Godard works with feminist theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray in order to expose the production of sexual difference as a binary relation used to ground linguistic and social constructs, and she excavates the significance of an ethics of translation for feminism and feminist translation (see especially Godard 1990, 1991). Also concerned with non-essentialist approaches and an ethics of translation is Rosemary Arrojo, who astutely points out that the impossibility of absolutes in translation theory is precisely what opens translation to theorization and to ethics (Arrojo 1998). The work of these and other translation scholars concerned with translation ethics will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this book.

Conclusion: Institutions, Kingdoms and Property

If the discussion of pure language and textual survival circulating through Benjamin's essay and Derrida's reading of it seems particularly suited to literary translation, it is with good reason. Benjamin specifies that he is addressing literary and sacred texts, and Derrida seems to accept those parameters. But how does one identify a literary or sacred text? As you might suspect, Derrida would be the last to define essential characteristics or strict boundaries for the literary and the sacred. Instead, he returns the question to

the process of translation, and reverses the expected order of things. The literary and the sacred do not, as self-defined presences, precede translation; rather, a text *becomes* literary when it appears 'untranslatable', when it seems as impossible to translate as a proper name. At that point, it 'gets sacralized':

> If there is any literature, it is sacred; it entails sacralization. This is surely the relation we have to literature, in spite of all our denegations in this regard. The process of sacralization is underway whenever one says to oneself in dealing with a text: Basically, I can't transpose this text such as it is into another language; there is an idiom here; it is a work; all the efforts at translation that I might make, that it itself calls forth and demands, will remain, in a certain way and at a given moment, vain or limited. This text, then, is a sacred text. (Derrida 1982/1985: 148)

This is why Derrida says that even though for Benjamin the theory of translation does not depend on a theory of reception, it could inversely contribute to the elaboration of such a theory (1985: 179).

Another way to think about the becoming literary of literature is to remember that it is an institution, brought into being, as Derek Attridge puts it, "by processes that are social, legal, and political, and that can be mapped historically and geographically" (1992: 23). The inseparability of translation from the becoming literary of literature reemphasizes that translation too exists within institutionalized relations of power – codified, most obviously, in copyright law. In 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985), Derrida notes that Benjamin – despite his revision of the original/translation relation – understands translation as a *form* (as opposed to substance), and maintains a strict original/translation opposition. He thus "repeats the foundation of the law" (i.e. the metaphysical, logocentric 'law' of presences and oppositions), which supplies the very possibility of 'actual' copyright law. This law relies not only upon a clear-cut original/translation opposition, but also upon those of form/substance and expression/expressed, which rely in turn on the assumption of the transparent signifier and extractable meaning. Derrida illustrates that French copyright law routinely designates translations as derived and secondary – artisan labour rather than artistic performance – and that (unsurprisingly) this law becomes self-contradictory when it attempts to define (in order to control and protect) the originality of the translation.

Lawrence Venuti finds the same set of contradictions in British and American law, where a translation is a 'derivative work' based on an 'original work of authorship', yet the translator is legally bound to produce an 'original' work. "In copyright law", he observes of these codes, "the translator is and is not an author", and the translation is and is not an original (1995: 8-10; see also 165). Venuti advocates sweeping reforms to publishing contracts and copyright law, such as: contractual definition of the translation as an 'original

work of authorship' instead of a 'work-for-hire'; placement of the copyright of the translation in the translator's name; financial terms that treat translators on par with 'authors'; and restriction of the foreign author's control over the translation (ibid: 311). Argument for such reforms cannot be based on the system of oppositions that support most current copyright law, but could be advanced through recognition of the 'author' and the 'translator' as mutually participating in a textual system of citations and traces without 'originals'. As Karin Littau notes, "the translated text flaunts and re-emphasizes the intertextual basis upon the exclusion of which the myth of textual, or authorial, autonomy is founded" (1997: 81). The challenge in renegotiating such copyright laws would be in remembering that *any* system of ownership – including one that grants ownership to a translator – is not natural but instituted, and would inevitably set up its own web of exclusions.

Circulating with the proper name (*le nom propre*) and its many associations that we have been following through 'Des Tours de Babel' is the concept of *le propre*, what is one's own, or 'property'. The Shemites' attempt to 'make a name' for themselves, Derrida suggests, signifies simultaneously a "colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of the human community" (1985: 174). Any such claim for purity, wholeness, or universality – whether for a fully bounded text, a univocal signifier, or a pure language – produces hegemonic boundaries that repress difference. It cannot be overemphasized that Derrida is critiquing the concept of 'pure language'. Deconstruction demonstrates the necessarily plural nature of language, and insists that the notion of a pure tongue or universal language is ultimately totalitarian. While the concept of a signified 'presence' underwrites an ideal translation that would promise a kingdom, "there is no kingdom of *différance*":

> *Différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* with wishing to reign. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 22)

Différance is not a concept, and cannot be used to ground or to found a towering, totalizing truth-theory. Language as Derrida discusses it is not, as Venuti suggests, "assigned a suprahistorical status" (Venuti 1992: 9). Language can never be suprahistorical: there are only contexts (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*). If language could achieve suprahistorical status – that is, if it could supersede context – then the tower of Babel could be completed, the signified could be transcendental, and language could become singular and thus *totalitarian,* in all senses of that word. To the contrary, Derrida emphasizes that meaning is always context-specific and always requires translation. Because translation,

as Blanchot puts it, is founded on the difference between languages (1971/1990: 83), it assures the survival of languages and the correlative impossibility of fully determined, totalitarian meaning. Deconstruction does not impose its own 'truth' nor does it erase all sense of truth. As Gayatri Spivak puts it:

> Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced. That's why deconstruction doesn't say logocentrism is a pathology, or metaphysical enclosures are something you can escape. Deconstruction, if one wants a formula, is among other things, a persistent critique of what one cannot not want. (Spivak 1994: 285)

The desire for total translatability, which has always been the desire of Western metaphysics, is a desire to reign, or dominate. The impositions of truth-systems (establishing 'kingdoms' of presence) upon others has structured the violence of human history. In subverting the very ground of such systems, deconstruction is deeply political.

SECTION II
IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION THEORY

Introduction

The previous section was designed to provide the reader with a basis for understanding some of Derrida's most important points regarding language and meaning, particularly as they pertain to translation. Hopefully, that discussion will also serve as a basis for reading this section, which addresses some of the intersections between deconstruction and other approaches to language and translation. Chapter 4 takes up the concepts of decision, intention, and communication, each of which has played a significant role in recent thinking about translation. Through close examination of these concepts and their implications, I attempt to show how their deconstruction opens onto a much expanded significance for translation.

Chapter 5 provides extensive, minutely detailed examples of Derrida's translators at work. The purpose of this chapter is *not* to demonstrate what a deconstructive translation process is. As will quickly become apparent, Derrida's translators adopt a variety of methods that are not always compatible with each other. These examples provide forceful proof that deconstruction is not a method. As will also become apparent, however, these translators are consistent in the way they think about language, the problem and the process of translation, and the implications of their own performances as they manoeuvre in the paradoxical non-space between the 'critical' and the deconstructive. In the course of discussing these translators, I will take up topics, such as Derrida's work with 'restricted' and 'general' economy, that are of particular importance to translation theory.

Finally, chapter 6 addresses the pressing issues of responsibility and ethics. Building upon the earlier discussions of singularity/generality in chapter 2, 'decision' in chapter 4, and 'economy' in chapter 5, this chapter examines the aporia of responsibility in translation: the need, and yet the impossibility, of an ethical approach to translation. To say that there is an impossible aspect to ethics is not to suggest that translation cannot be ethical. Rather, it suggests that ethical translation cannot follow a pre-formulated code of ethics, which – I hope to persuade the reader – would ultimately be unethical.

4. Unloading Terms

Because deconstruction challenges and reworks traditional ways of thinking, it has reworked traditional language use as well. This reworking is as inevitable as it is necessary: if meaning is an effect of language, then a challenge to prevailing conceptualizations of meaning *must* perform its differences through language. The differences enacted by deconstruction take various forms, such as neologism (we have already covered *différance* and *arche-writing*, for instance) or the specialized use of an available word (*trace, iterability*) in a way that exploits and develops its history. Often, however, terms whose meaning has long been taken for granted are 'shaken up' by deconstruction, which questions their assumptions and pursues their implications. (For this 'shaking up', Derrida uses the word 'solicit' in its radical sense.) These 'terms' may seem 'loaded' in confusing ways to those unaccustomed to this sort of theoretical discussion, and to make matters worse, they are often the most ordinary of words and concepts. We may take, for example, the word 'concept' itself, which may seem simple enough, but which, throughout Western history, has referred to an idea or scheme based on a grounding premise and ultimately entailing a logic of opposition.

'Translatability', for example, is a concept, which is based on the assumption of meaning as a presence (as discussed in the previous section) and which has been locked for centuries in a theoretical duel with 'untranslatability'. Within the system of logic based on such concepts, it does not work to suggest 'relative translatability' and 'relative untranslatability', any more than it works to suggest 'relative presence' or 'relative absence', 'relative good' or 'relative evil' – all of which leave the conceptual poles, as well as their assumptions and problems, intact. We cannot simply jettison concepts, since they have produced our histories and structure our languages, but we can deconstruct them in order to access the potential of the difference excluded or repressed by them. That is why deconstruction tries to think translation *differently*, not based on meaning as presence but through *différance* (which is not a concept or a presence). Derrida speaks of concepts all the time, but always to question them.

Deconstruction, then, does not 'load' words with new and strange meanings. Rather, it 'unloads' – or deconstructs – them through an analysis that shows what they have been doing all along. The title of this chapter, therefore, is not a promise to reveal occult vocabulary concocted by deconstruction. Rather, this chapter will work through deconstruction's 'unloading' of some of the terms most important to translation.

Decision

In an essay in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida comments that *différance*

"must be conceived of in other terms than those of a calculus or mechanics of decision" (1967/1978: 203). In a translator's note Alan Bass explains: "Decision in Greek is *krinein*, whence comes our 'critic.' The critic always *decides* on a meaning, which can be conceived only in terms of presence. Since *différance* subverts meaning and presence, it does not *decide*" (Bass 1978: 329 n.6). Now, if your impulse is to say, 'oh, terrific – no decisions, so nothing will ever get done!' then you are thinking in terms of the opposition decidable/undecidable. Derrida pursues the implications of the concept 'decision' to show that it depends upon 'undecidability' – which does *not* mean that there is *only* undecidability, but that the opposition does not hold up. John Caputo, addressing the confusion surrounding Derrida's work with 'undecidability', puts it well:

> Undecidability is taken, or mistaken, to mean a pathetic state of apathy, the inability to act, paralyzed by the play of signifiers that dance before our eyes, like a deer caught in a headlight. But rather than an inability to act, undecidability is the condition of possibility of acting and deciding. For whenever a decision is really a decision, whenever it is more than a programmable, deducible, calculable, computable result of a logarithm, that is because it has passed through 'the ordeal of undecidability.' One way to keep this straight is to see that the opposite of 'undecidability' is not 'decisiveness' but programmability, calculability, computerizability, or formalizability. Decision-making, judgment, on the other hand, positively *depends upon* undecidability, which gives us something to decide. (Caputo 1997: 137)

A decision in this sense is never simply an attempt to make the 'right' (and therefore already decided) choice from predetermined or 'presented' options. It necessarily entails responsibility because it "can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes" (Derrida 1988: 116). Only when faced with an impossible decision – one for which a pre-existing 'right' choice is not 'presented' – do we decide.

For translation studies, which has for some time been focusing on the decision-making process of the translator, the implications are enormous. The meaning of any text is undecidable, since it is an effect of language and not something that can be extracted and reconstituted. Translators must therefore make decisions in this strong sense. The decision-making process is one of the reasons that translations are performative events, rather than replays of events that have already happened. These implications cut two ways: they support the arguments, advanced by Venuti, for instance, that translators should receive treatment and recognition comparable to that of authors; on the other hand, they destroy the ruse that one can ever 'simply' translate – translations are ethical-political acts.

Treating translation decision-making as a 'Hobson's choice' (i.e. a situation when one must select between equally unsatisfactory choices), inevitably brings translation scholars into self-contradiction. I will take an example from James Holmes, not because I do not respect his work, but because his stimulating, revisionary thinking on translation brought him into sharp conflict with the oppositional model upon which he relied. In his 'On Matching and Making Maps: From a Translator's Notebook' (in Holmes 1998), Holmes begins by invalidating the concept of 'equivalence' in translation. He uses a mathematical example to demonstrate that a true equivalence relationship is only possible in cases of pure calculation, but for translation, "[t]he languages and cultures to be bridged […] are too far apart and too disparately structured for true equivalence to be possible" (Holmes 1988: 53-54). The translator, he suggests, is not searching for a calculable answer that pre-exists, and does not even strive to do so. Rather, the translator works through the text, seeking 'counterparts' or 'matchings', and is "constantly faced by choices, choices he can make only on the basis of his individual grasp (knowledge, sensibility, experience…) of the two languages and cultures involved, and with the aid of his personal tastes and preferences" (ibid: 54; ellipsis in Holmes). Even though Holmes describes this process in terms of 'choices' that apparently pre-exist, it seems that his translator is making decisions by facing 'undecidables'.

The example Holmes gives of his own translation process confirms this performativity. In translating the 1943 sonnet 'De grot' by Martinus Nijhoff, whose verse he admired, he was unable to produce a satisfactory iambic pentameter version. He then decided that by dropping the metrical matching and concentrating on other aspects, he "could produce a poem that might be effective in a quite different manner" (ibid: 57). The result ('The Cave', 1965), he says, is in a way "not Nijhoff – he would have been taken aback by it" (ibid: 57). But:

> in another, very real way it is him: a kind of younger, latter-generation Nijhoff liberated from the shackles of received forms, paradoxically applying the free-verse techniques of the post-war Dutch poets to give expression to the dark predicament of caged and fettered man in the midst of the war. (ibid: 57)

This latter-generation Nijhoff is a *different* Nijhoff, produced in a post-war context by Holmes, who has been doing a lot of deciding. His 'The Cave' is an excellent example of the 'survival' of the original in Benjamin's sense, and he is clearly pleased with it. Even when a poem contains a 'mistake' based on a transcription error (as we saw in the previous chapter), Holmes stands by its validity and value. Nonetheless, he feels compelled, paradoxically, to disparage and qualify his work. If another translator succeeds in producing a version of 'De grot' that does justice to its formal structure without "inflicting greater damage" to its other aspects, he suggests, then that

version should "supplant" his. Later he states that "translating poetry is largely a matter of making choices between less-than-perfect possibilities" (ibid: 60) – a description that falls back on the idea of pre-existing choices, and is certainly not a fair assessment of his own work as he has described it.

The contradictions in Holmes's discussion of translation can be traced to the central metaphor of his essay: the map. In another essay, Holmes explains his idea of a translation 'map' as the translator's 'mental conception'. Translation involves two maps, he suggests, one abstracted from the source text, and the other projected for the target text (ibid: 83-84). In 'On Matching and Making Maps', Holmes makes explicit the assumption behind this metaphor: "all translations are maps, the territories are the originals" (ibid: 58). The concept of the original as 'territory' or 'ground' – the ideal signified that is *really* there as a unified self-presence if we could only re-present it – is logocentrism *par excellence*. Holmes describes his decisions as Hobson's choices because he understands translation as an always flawed attempt to reproduce a territory that paradoxically "remains, though it must not remain *terra incognita*" (ibid: 64). Holmes is surely right in observing a paradox, but this paradox results not from the inaccessibility of some 'real' existent in the original, but from its originary non-identity, and hence from the double bind of translation. Holmes's formulation that what is inaccessible in the original is that which 'remains' comes quite close to Derrida's point that the unassimilability of *différance* always remains – and that this remainder resists all attempts at absolute knowledge. If we consider that "all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretive experience" (Derrida 1988: 148), then Holmes's choices must be decisions, and his translations poems. There are only maps.

Intention

Deconstruction – as you probably expect by now – problematizes the concept of intention, for several reasons. First, if we say that a person *intends* to convey a certain meaning and then formulates this meaning in speech or writing, we have presumed that the meaning precedes the language event. In this model, language merely provides the vehicle for a transferred thought content. But meaning, as we have seen time and again, is the *effect* of language, and therefore cannot precede it any more than it can be extracted from it. Writing – in the general sense – is inaugural; its meaning *presences* forth even as it differs from itself through the play of traces in context, or 'text' in the broadest sense. This is not to say that we do not have thoughts and intentions, of course, but that meaning "must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning" (Derrida 1967/1978: 11). Analyzing its structure as a concept, Derrida points out that intention assumes the *telos* (end or goal) of 'plenitude': that is, intention is understood as aiming toward (whether successful or not) the accurate and

complete deliverance of a meaning to a receiver.

Derrida's most extended discussion of intention comes in 'Signature Event Context' (in Derrida 1972c/1982), an essay that engages J. L. Austin's speech act theory. Derrida much admires Austin's bold revisioning of traditional assumptions about language, particularly his suggestion that language is performative and that its meaning is context-dependent. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), Austin first distinguishes two types of utterances: constative, which describe or report, and performative, which do something as they are spoken, such as marrying, promising, betting and so forth. Whereas a constative utterance (traditionally considered the norm in language) is assessed according to its truth value as a proposition, a performative is felicitous or infelicitous – its success in performing depends upon the correct convergence of contextual elements and conventions. For the 'I do' of a marriage ceremony to perform felicitously, for example, the bride and groom must be legally eligible to marry, the minister must be eligible to perform the ceremony, appropriate witnesses must be present, etc. As Austin pursued his study of constative and performative utterances, however, he came to the conclusion that the distinction breaks down, and that all utterances are actually performances: "Once we realize that what we have to study is *not* the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act" (Austin 1975: 139). The statement 'The cat is on the mat', for instance, has the force of 'I declare that the cat is on the mat'. Austin's speech act theory, then, provides a valuable deconstruction of a truth-value system that had supported a traditional metaphysics of presence. As Culler puts it, "Austin's investigation of the qualities of the marginal case leads to a deconstruction and inversion of the hierarchy: the performative is not a flawed constative; rather, the constative is a special case of the performative" (Culler 1982: 113). So far, then, Austin's theory locates meaning not in the speaker's intention, but in systems of conventional rules and conditions of context.

The concept of intention is, nevertheless, an important and problematic aspect of speech act theory. Austin at first disqualifies a speaker's intention as a criterion of meaning for a speech act, which is not merely "an outward and visible sign […] of an inward and spiritual act". If someone says "I promise…" under the appropriate circumstances, even without any intention of fulfilling that promise, "he *does* promise: the promise here is not even void, though it is given in bad faith" (Austin 1975: 9-11). The appropriate *circumstances* – in other words, the context – of the utterance determine the efficacy of the speech act. Austin thus emphasizes that meaning is context-bound and dependent on coded repetition – the conditions, that is, of *iterability*. Derrida observes, however, that Austin reintroduces intention in a move that also reintroduces norms and exclusions, similar in structure to those he had so effectively overturned in his discussion of constative and performative utterances. Austin first notes certain features that "would normally come un-

der the heading of 'extenuating circumstances'":

> I mean that actions in general (not all) are liable, for example, to be done under duress, or by accident, or owing to this or that variety of mistake, say, or otherwise unintentionally. (Austin 1975: 21)

Austin then stipulates that he is also excluding certain utterances:

> I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (ibid: 22)

Thus intention is reintroduced. As Culler notes, Austin's notion of the non-serious is not explicitly defined but "clearly would involve reference to intention: a 'serious' speech act is one in which the speaker consciously assents to the act he appears to be performing" (Culler 1982: 122). Austin's exclusion of extenuating circumstances and non-serious utterances, both of which involve intention, serves to control the endless possibilities of the context upon which the meaning of a performative depends. Without a fully determined or specified context, the meaning or effect of a performative can always elude definition. Contexts, however, are neither saturable nor limitable: utterances can always be re-framed, quoted, or cited. Derrida points out that this citationality is precisely what makes a 'serious performative' possible, since a performative succeeds through repetition, or citation, of conventional, institutionalized signs. The dramatic enactment of this citation (such as the marriage of Romeo and Juliet on stage) is "the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative" (Derrida 1988: 325).

Austin retroactively excludes mistakes, accidents, or 'parasitic' language from the category of 'performative utterances' in order to define a closed system that can be controlled and predicted. This move to limit context, Derrida observes, requires a return to

> the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject for the totality of his locutory act. Thereby, performative communication once more becomes the communication of an intentional meaning, even if this meaning has no referent in the form of a prior or exterior thing or state of things. This conscious presence of the speakers or receivers

who participate in the effecting of a performative, their conscious and
intentional presence in the totality of the operation, implies teleologically
that no *remainder* escapes the present totalization. No remainder, whether
in the definition of the requisite conventions, or the internal and linguis-
tic context, or the grammatical form or semantic determination of the
words used; no irreducible polysemia, that is no 'dissemination' escap-
ing the horizon of the unity of meaning. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 322)

In summary, as much as Derrida admires and appreciates Austin's formula-
tion of the performative, he notes the reinsertion of intention at the moment
when Austin draws boundaries in order to call a halt to the disseminative play
of language – the endless possibilities of the iterability upon which the per-
formative relies. The reinsertion of conscious presence (one must be serious,
uncoerced) assures the possibility of a fully described context with no 're-
mainder', no disseminated meanings in excess of the 'horizon of the unity of
meaning'. In considering the way that open citationality prevents the total
determination of meaning, Derrida points out: "the category of intention will
not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be
able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances" (ibid:
326). The *telos* of intention, therefore, needs to be rethought.

    One example of the relation of meaning and intention is the history of
the word *déconstruction*, as Derrida explains it in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend'
(1987c/1988). Derrida says that he chose this word in order to translate and
adapt the Heideggerian word *Destruktion*, or *Abbau*, which signified in
Heidegger's context "an operation bearing on the structure or traditional
architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western meta-
physics" (ibid: 1). Fully aware that the fortunes of a word largely depend on
what it repeats, he avoided the French 'destruction', with its negative conno-
tations of annihilation or demolition, and instead chose 'deconstruction', a
nearly obsolete word meaning (as defined in the *Littré*), "to disassemble the
parts of a whole". It had an advantageous history of grammatical application,
as well as a reflexive form "to deconstruct itself […] to lose its construction"
(ibid: 1). It also signified an ambiguous affinity with structuralism, desirable
since deconstruction was both a structuralist gesture, in that it "assumed a
certain need for the structuralist problematic", but also an anti-structuralist
gesture that would undo, decompose and desediment structures (ibid: 2).
Despite his careful selection and his attempt to give 'deconstruction' a par-
ticular use value in the context of his work, this word, as well as its application
to an interpretation of his work, quickly exceeded Derrida's intentions (which
did not surprise him, of course). While he had thought of it as one of many
words, such as *trace, différance*, and *pharmakon*, which had similar at-
tributes, 'deconstruction' has taken a central role in reference to his discourse,
and has assumed meanings beyond his own ideas. Moreover, Derrida's de-

velopment of his ideas has in part proceeded from engagement with the many reactions and challenges to 'deconstruction'. 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' draws attention to this dissemination of meaning as a problem of translation. In discussing the difficulty of translating this word, Derrida notes that:

> one should not begin by naively believing that the word 'deconstruction' corresponds in French to some clear and univocal signification. There is already in 'my' language a serious [*sombre*] problem of translation between what here or there can be envisaged for the word and the usage itself, the reserves of the word. And it is already clear that even in French, things change from one context to another. More so in the German, English, and especially American contexts, where the *same* word is already attached to very different connotations, inflections, and emotional or affective values. (ibid: 1)

Careful as we may be, then, we can neither fully exhaust the reserves of our words nor fully determine the passage of their repetition. The very properties that allowed Derrida to cite the word 'deconstruction' for a specific purpose also allowed its use to exceed his designs. This structural relation – that is, the relation of stability and instability in language – is, of course, both the plague and the possibility of translation. Once again the caveat: this instability does not give license for an 'anything goes' approach. To the contrary, the intrinsic possibility that a message always may not arrive intensifies the need to read as carefully as possible. Ultimately, however, the translator can never simply re-present an intended meaning, but must make performative decisions.

The concept of intention is also problematic because the intending subject is not a self-identical presence: "The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata" (Derrida 1967/1978: 226-27). The suggestion that the 'subject' – an actor or what we think of as the 'self' – is a system of relations rather than a discrete entity may seem shocking if it is new to you. This approach to subjectivity has a long philosophical history, and has recently been articulated in various ways in psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the many different strands of poststructuralism. It might be easiest to think of this dispersed identity of the subject in terms of what was said in chapter 2 above regarding the 'text'. *Everything* meaningful – not just the language that we speak and write, but everything that holds significance – participates in a system in which each signifier refers to the others by means of the systematic play of differences. No sign gives access to a 'real' presence that can be experienced outside an instituted system of differences. Things that we reflect upon as the most intimate markers of our*selves* – character, personality, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, physique, etc. – are only

thinkable as they exist in a system of meaning; they are, therefore, relations of difference in complex, mobile systems of signification. In its very constitution, then, the subject is divided, and, like meaning, is never fully present (even in speech) but also never fully determined. The very idea of a totalized *self*-identity results from a system of binary oppositions such as inside/outside. Likewise, the subject's intentions are, in their becoming, already implicated in systems of difference. The subject's dispersed identity implicates the translator, of course. The translating subject is constituted in a complex, heterogeneous system – economic, social, sexual, racial, cultural – and full awareness of this constitutive effect necessarily eludes the translator's consciousness, as, for instance, he or she interprets a source text and formulates a translation.

One of the most explicit instances of the contradictory logic of intention is the signature. What could be more indicative of our actual presence as individuals, our true intent in the form of presence in consciousness, than a signature? Signatures are used every day not only to declare just such a presence and intent, but also to bind us, legally, to that declared intent. The signature invokes all the referential powers normally attributed to the proper name, and, as Derrida points out, it encounters the same limits:

> In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal. (1972c/1982: 328-29)

Signing may seem a singular event, but a signature must repeat an already recognizable and verifiable (as well as forgeable) form, and it must function in the absence of (and can therefore detach from) the signatory. Signatories have intentions, but those intentions are implicated in complex (usually legal) codes that define the situation in which one intends, and often a signature cannot legally take effect until countersigned by someone other than the signatory. Indeed, signatures in general do not function as such unless they are recognized by another as a signature. There are innumerable ways that our signatures can deter, exceed, or subvert our intentions: they may be forged; we may be tricked into signing a document with which we would not agree; mechanically reproduced signatures may be used indiscriminately or illicitly; we may sign without full knowledge of the legal or economic repercussions and responsibilities; our signatures can be used as evidence against us in a legal proceeding; they can function after our deaths in ways we would not have imagined and may not have approved. These possibilities are not aberrations of an otherwise pure system, but, as Derek Attridge puts it,

the conditions that allow for smooth functioning are exactly the same conditions that allow for breakdowns; breakdowns are therefore, Derrida argues, not accidents that befall the signature and the proper name, but a necessary precondition of their very existence, both making them possible and preventing them from achieving the pure authenticity they claim to possess. (1992: 345)

Because they must cite marks in a codified system, signatures are detachable from signatories and therefore open to new contexts.

The signature, then, like the proper name, divides in its very becoming. In this, it adumbrates the textual role of intention, which can no more govern meaning and achieve its *telos* of plenitude than a signature can seal the possibilities for its use or achieve a unique performance. Rather than being a prior determinant of textual meaning, intention emerges as a textual effect. Just as a signature performs as it is countersigned, intention performs as it is delineated in a text or scene through a particular reading or interpretive strategy (for further discussion see Culler 1982: 218). Recall, for example, the point made by Dirk Delabastita regarding the function of wordplay in context:

Certain generations or groups of readers are more responsive to semantic slippage or doubleness than others, and will rediscover, discover or (should one say) invent puns by endowing potential double readings and verbal associations with a semantic substance, a communicative value, and a form of intentionality they did not possess before, perhaps not even in the minds of the text's author or most immediate audience. (Delabastita 1997: 7)

The example of wordplay is especially apt here. Since wordplay calls attention to a linguistic relation specific (or proper) to a particular language system, it functions as a linguistic self-reference that can be considered the 'signature' of a language (see Davis 1997: 24). The signature of the pun, as Delabastita's commentary implies, emerges as it is 'countersigned' by its readers. The intention of a text, likewise, emerges as it is read or translated.

Communication

Such an understanding of intention has obvious implications for the concept of communication, defined by the linguist John Lyons, for instance, as "the intentional transmission of information by means of some established signalling-system" (1977: vol.1, 32). In the many fields for which it is a fundamental notion, including linguistics, communication is understood as an imperfect and highly complex procedure. Nonetheless, it is still treated as an ideal concept. Consider, for example, the following description in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*:

> Communication refers to the transmission and reception of information (a 'message') between a source and receiver using a signalling system: in linguistic contexts, source and receiver are interpreted in human terms, the system involved is a language, and the notion of response to (or acknowledgement of) the message becomes of crucial importance. In theory, communication is said to have taken place if the information received is the same as that sent: in practice, one has to allow for all kinds of interfering factors, or 'noise', which reduce the efficiency of the transmission (e.g. unintelligibility of articulation, idiosyncratic associations of words). One has also to allow for different levels of control in the transmission of the message: speakers' purposive selection of signals will be accompanied by signals which communicate 'despite themselves', as when voice quality signals the fact that a person has a cold, is tired/old/male, etc. (Crystal 1997: 72)

This description recognizes the limits of intention and the inescapability of non-saturable context and associative play. It defines these, however, as problems interfering with the reception of a message ideally (or 'in theory') transmitted through a purposive (or intended) selection of signals. In contrast to intended speech, these interfering factors are the non-speech, or 'noise' that disrupts idealized transmission. This concept of communication, Derrida suggests,

> implies a *transmission charged with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity of a signified* object, of a *meaning* or of a *concept* rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation. Communication presupposes subjects (whose identity and presence are constituted before the signifying operation) and objects (signified concepts, a thought meaning that the passage of communication will have neither to constitute, nor, by all rights, to transform). (Derrida 1972b/1981: 23)

The idealized concept of communication acknowledges that the passage of language does participate in the constitution of meaning. However, this concept depends upon the exclusion of that participation (which it defines as illegitimate 'noise') in order to posit the existence of an intending subject and intended object fully separable from the signifying operation. The binary opposition of this definition is apparent, for instance, in its theory/practice split. Deconstruction turns things around by pointing out that the ability of signifiers to "communicate 'despite themselves'" – that is, to do their own talking – is the condition of possibility of meaning in the first place. Even 'in theory', therefore, communication as defined above cannot happen.

A significant and influential attempt to explain the expression and interpretation of intended meanings by accounting for the way signifiers do their

own talking as effects of convention and context is the work of H.P. Grice, particularly his landmark essay 'Logic and Conversation' (1975). Convinced that language, particularly conversation, is logical, Grice sets out to identify the conditions that govern conversation, and that allow hearers to disambiguate speaker's utterances. As Douglas Robinson puts it, "Grice poses the question: how is it possible for us to imply things, to convey intended meanings that we do not make explicit?" (Robinson, unpublished manuscript). Grice labels what is implied, rather than directly 'said', as 'implicature', and argues that conversation is basically a cooperative effort. Conversants, unless signalled otherwise, assume and operate under the 'Cooperative Principle': "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975: 45). A series of maxims – Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner (ibid: 45) – fall under the cooperative principle. Even though Grice treats these maxims as methods of speaker implication (i.e. conveying the intended message), they are clearly interpretive, or inferential strategies, and they have been taken as the basis of an inferential process, or model, of communication (Malmkjær 1991; Sperber and Wilson 1986; Akmajian *et al.* 1995). If, for instance, I am standing by my immobilized car and say, 'I'm out of petrol', and you reply, 'There is a garage round the corner', I would infer that you are following the 'be relevant' maxim, and are therefore implying that the garage is open and has petrol. The Cooperative Principle also helps hearers to discern implications when particular maxims are deliberately 'flouted' by the speaker. If you were to ask my age, and I replied with a comment about the weather, you would infer that I am still cooperating and therefore must be 'exploiting' the 'be relevant' maxim in order to imply that you should not ask. In a similar way, irony (and most figures of speech) exploit the maxim requiring truthfulness. The intentions discerned through such strategies, as I have noted above, emerge as *textual effects* (I use 'textual' in the general sense here); they are not prior, 'real' determinants of meaning. No doubt interpretive strategies such as those described by Grice frequently guide conversation when it is cooperative (for discussion of non-cooperative conversation, see Lecercle 1990; Venuti 1998), as well as readers' efforts to glean authorial intent from a text.

As noted in chapter 3 above, deconstruction does not seek to eliminate all reading for authorial intention. For instance, in an interview that addressed issues of intentionality, Derrida was asked about his statement in *Of Grammatology* "that the 'moment of doubling commentary [i.e. an interpretation of what an author 'meant to say'] should no doubt have its place in a critical reading', and that without 'this indispensable guardrail' 'critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything'" (Derrida 1988: 142, citing the written question of Gerald Graff, who cites 1967/1974: 158). In answer, Derrida stresses that such a

'doubling commentary' is first of all always an interpretation: <mark>meaning, never directly accessible, must be inferred</mark> (just as Grice's strategies must be inferential). Such a reading for intent must base itself upon *conventions*:

> Simply, this *quasi*-paraphrastic interpretation bases itself upon that which in a text (for instance, that of Rousseau, of which I was then speaking) constitutes a very profound and very solid zone of implicit "conventions" or "contracts". Not of semantic structures that are absolutely anchored, ahistorical or transtextual, monolithic or self-identical – which moreover would render the most paraphrastic commentary either impossible or useless – but of stratifications that are already differential and of a very great stability with regard to the relations of forces and all the hierarchies or hegemonies they suppose or put into practice: for example, the French language (its grammar and vocabulary), the rhetorical uses of this language in the society and in the literary code of the epoch, etc., but also a whole set of assurances that grant a minimum of intelligibility to whatever we can tell ourselves about these things today or to whatever part of them I can render intelligible, for example in *Of Grammatology*, with whatever limited success. (1988: 144)

In order to attempt a 'doubling', this reading must – to use Grice's term – 'cooperate' with the linguistic, cultural, social, etc. conventions dominant in the text: those stratifications that are already differential and of very great stability with regard to the relations of forces and all the hierarchies or hegemonies they suppose or put into practice. No matter how natural or immutable these meaning conventions may seem at a particular historical conjuncture, they are not absolute but "the momentary result of a whole history of relations of force" (ibid: 145). The meaning of a textual event is not restricted to that produced through cooperation with these relations of force. (And I do not think Grice, who limits the applicability of the Cooperative Principle to situations centered on the goals of "conversation/communication" (Grice 1975: 49) suggests that it is. Adoption of the Cooperative Principle and the theory of implicature as an interpretation/translation strategy would, however, impose such limits, as will be discussed below.) For example, we may read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and after much study of language and context, propose what either author 'meant to say' regarding the issue of good and evil and its relation to colonization, gender, class, etc. We may also, however, analyze the relations of force that support the logic of such a meaning: how, for instance, these texts expose their own production of a certain version of the colonized, or of 'woman'. This, too, is a meaning of the text, one that is structurally related to a 'doubling', or 'cooperative' reading. To refuse such other meanings is to insist upon the totalizing effect of authorial intent. Such totalization is not possible, even at the moment of thinking or writing, because <mark>an author's intent relies</mark>

for its very conception and expression upon the conventions, assumptions, hegemonies and hierarchies structured in language and culture.

In his discussion of why Gricean constraints should not be applied to literary translation, Kwame Anthony Appiah remarks:

> the reason why we cannot speak of the perfect translation here is not that there is a definite set of desiderata and we know they cannot all be met; it is rather that there is no definite set of desiderata. A translation aims to produce a new text that matters to one community the way another text matters to another: but it is part of our understanding of why texts matter that this is not a question that convention settles; indeed, it is part of our understanding of literary judgement, that there can always be new readings, new things that matter about a text, new reasons for caring about new properties. (Appiah 1993: 816)

This point need not be restricted to literary translation (itself an instituted concept). For instance, an exchange between a customer and a clerk in a store may go smoothly enough – the customer inquires about an item; the clerk understands the request and locates the item. However, one party may interpret from the exchange that the other is racist, or sexist – the conversation may, in other words, *perform* institutionalized racism or sexism, an unintended effect that one might consider its most significant meaning.

Quite aside from the problem that Grice's maxims may themselves be culturally specific and therefore hegemonic (for a discussion and further citations on these maxims as culture-bound, see Baker 1992; Venuti 1998), their application to translation excludes or reduces potential meanings through an inferential strategy that, in its effort to disambiguate, presupposes what might be intended: "to calculate a conversational implicature is to calculate what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle is being observed" (Grice 1975: 58). For instance, in one of his examples Grice examines a clever translation wordplay by "the British General who captured the town of Sind and sent back the message *Peccavi*" (Latin: 'I have sinned') (ibid: 54-55). Grice concludes that the "non-straightforward interpretant", 'I have Sind', is necessarily conveyed, but states that the "straightforward interpretant", 'I have sinned', is not necessarily conveyed, "so far as communication was concerned". This model of communication, in other words, may cancel out 'I have sinned' – even though the reader must first render it as the translation of *peccavi* in order to read 'I have Sind' – if the conversational game requires it:

> Whether the straightforward interpretant is also being conveyed seems to depend on whether such a supposition would conflict with other conversational requirements, for example, would it be relevant, would it be

something the speaker could be supposed to accept, and so on. If such
requirements are not satisfied, then the straightforward interpretant is
not being conveyed. If they are, it is. (ibid: 55)

Based upon intention, this strategy forecloses, as Derrida observed in rela-
tion to Austin's reintroduction of intention, any '*remainder*' that "escapes
the present totalization" (in this case a totalizing reading strategy) (1972c/
1982: 322). The 'remainder' is that which, out of structural necessity, re-
mains excessive to any totalizing system of meaning. It is never *a priori* the
non-essential, irrelevant left-over, but *becomes* the remainder through a read-
ing strategy that excludes it by opposing it to a 'real' or 'true' meaning.

    In his discussion of this issue, Jean-Jacques Lecercle has developed a
linguistic approach that includes an emphasis on the remainder: "The details
that any grammatical map necessarily leaves out constitute what I call the
remainder" (Lecercle 1990: 19). Lecercle theorizes the relation between the
remainder and the inherent violence of social and discursive antagonisms
and stratifications, arguing that the "proper object of linguistics is *a* language,
a specific conjunction of remainder and *langue*" (ibid: 239):

> For not only is a language composed of a multiplicity of dialects, regis-
> ters, and styles, but even *within* a dialect the major or grammatical aspect
> is always being subverted by the minor, or remainder-like aspect. This
> is how we can go from the consideration of a linguistic formation, con-
> ceived as an unstable collection of dialects, to the equally unstable
> conjunction of *langue* and the remainder. (ibid: 242).

Lawrence Venuti has worked with Lecercle's theory of the remainder to sug-
gest a minoritizing translation that cultivates "a heterogeneous discourse,
opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to
themselves, to the substandard and the marginal" (Venuti 1998: 11). He
argues against theorizing translation on the model of Gricean conversation,
"in which the translator communicates the foreign text by cooperating with
the domestic reader [and hence reinforcing the dominant standard] accord-
ing to [Grice's] four maxims" (ibid: 21). Discussing Venuti's approach,
Douglas Robinson agrees that translation theorists who have applied Grice
to the study of translation advocate a conservative strategy seeking to repli-
cate (through equivalence) foreign implicature through domesticating
translation (Robinson cites as examples Hatim 1997; Hatim and Mason
1997, 1990; Baker 1992; Neubert and Shreve 1992; Fawcett 1997).
Robinson finds room to criticize Venuti's understanding of Grice, but he
overstates his case that Grice's conversational implicature, which requires
flouting or exploiting maxims, moves into the area of the remainder. Grice
focuses on rational, cooperative rule-breaking – playing the rules, so to

speak. As Robinson concedes, "Grice says that disruptiveness – read 'deviation from these ideological norms' – makes conversation impossible" (Robinson, unpublished manuscript). Robinson's suggestion that translators can use Grice's insights in order to act as "ethical agents actually *implicating* things in their translations, flouting maxims and being strategically uncooperative, in the service of a translational ethics larger and more politically aware and responsible than merely that of representational accuracy" (ibid) is far more kin to transgressive strategies developed in feminist and postcolonial studies than it is to Grice. Despite a difference in approach, Robinson's goal accords with Venuti's: "Our aim should be research and training that produces readers of translations and translators who are critically aware, not predisposed toward norms that exclude the heterogeneity of language" (Venuti 1998: 30). Likewise, Rosemary Arrojo argues: "Instead of trying to make predictions, a theory of translation should attempt to empower translators-to-be and raise their conscience as writers concerning the responsibility they will face in the seminal role they will play in the establishment of all sorts of relationships between cultures" (Chesterman and Arrojo 2000: 159)

Conclusion

The problem of ethics will be a major focus of chapter 6 below, but for now I will observe that Derrida has argued for a rethinking of 'communication' that recognizes language not as transmission of information sent, but as performance or event, and that this rethinking has important implications for translation:

> As writing [in the general sense], communication, if one insists upon maintaining the word, is not the means of transport of sense, the exchange of intentions and meanings, the discourse and 'communication of consciousnesses' […] The semantic horizon which habitually governs the notion of communication is exceeded or punctured by the intervention of writing, that is of a *dissemination* which cannot be reduced to a *polysemia*. Writing is read, and 'in the last analysis' does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 329)

Communication in this sense is more like a tremor disseminating through signifiers that do their own talking than a conveyance of existing intentions. The most frightful yet promising aspect of this revised sense of communication is that, unlike an "epistemology in which the work has already a meaning that is waiting for us to find" (Appiah 1993: 817), it returns responsibility to the translator, who needs to be aware of the cultural risks involved. Without extractable, transcendent meaning or a neutral reading strategy that

somehow exists without implication in institutional, political, social, and economic forces, the translator must take on the impossible but necessary task of decision. This is not to say that the translator is a 'sovereign subject' whose decisions become isolable objects. Rather, these decisions perform in the signifying field of already instituted traces and relations of force, which they may reify, resist, question, transform, support, subvert … but which they can never leave untouched.

5. Translating Derrida

Derrida's texts do not simply argue that the univocity of the sign is a myth, that language plays across an always mobile chain of signifiers, or that meaning emerges from contextual performance. They perform, of course. They provide a stage where "the unrepresentable [the movement of *différance*] is in full force" (Derrida 1979: 90). Such a performance of irreducible polysemy, of linguistic play, of the multivalency of syntax – in other words, a performance that sets out to demonstrate that a translator's worst nightmares are the *modus operandi* of language in general – will, to say the least, challenge the translator. Derrida at once recognizes this difficulty and yet, defying 'untranslatability', gives his texts over to translation, sometimes to be 'originally' published in translation. Such is the case, for instance, of the double-banded text 'Living On'/*Borderlines* (1979), which seeks to 'present' the problems of translation "*practically*, and in a sense *performatively*, in accordance with a notion of the performative that I feel must be dissociated, by an act of deconstruction, from the notion of presence with which it is generally linked" (Derrida 1979: 90). We do not, then, have a performance by some *thing* or presence such as an essential meaning, but a performance of the dissemination that precludes any such fully determinable presence. This is not to say that Derrida's texts do not have meaning – that his translators can say anything at all as long as their signifiers dance – but that this (like any) meaning is an effect of difference, and therefore open to linguistic extension, reformulation, and translation; indeed, without translation, it will not 'survive'.

In elaborating the double bind of translation, Derrida discerns the relation of "two translations": one that practices the "difference between the signifier and the signified", insofar as that difference exists through the repetition of meaning effects (as discussed above, pages 21-23); and another that follows and releases, so far as possible, the disseminative plurivocality of language. 'Living On'/*Borderlines* foregrounds this relation: its idiomatic upper band ('Living On') requires maximum translative play, while the lower band (*Borderlines*) caters to maximal translatability:

> The line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations, one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemia, and the other, which goes over into dissemination – this line also passes between the critical and the deconstructive. (ibid: 93)

The 'critical' (in the sense of that which 'decides') and the deconstructive come into contact in translation. These are not, of course, ever separate or opposed, but hinge on the paradox instituted by repetition: repetition

> institutes translatability, makes possible what we call 'language', trans-
> forms an absolute idiom into a limit which is always already transgressed:
> a pure idiom is not a language; it becomes so only through repetition;
> repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time
> (Derrida 1967b/1978: 213).

All of Derrida's texts call attention to this paradox, which becomes doubly
problematic since, in his challenge to the long tradition of Western philoso-
phy, he not only invokes and deconstructs terms dense with philosophical
history, but does so by deliberately staging the double bind of translation.

This chapter offers examples of some of the ways that Derrida's transla-
tors into English have responded to the challenge of his texts. These translators
are all concerned with the dilemma of providing accuracy even as they recog-
nize that these texts perform the very impossibility of complete accuracy.
Nevertheless, they do not espouse a unified 'translation theory', nor do their
practices form a composite that amounts to such a theory. In an attempt to
stave off such an interpretation, I have avoided organizing this chapter ac-
cording to generalized translation problems or approaches, and have instead
given space to different translators and their discussions (in introductions
and/or notes) of their particular translation problems, along with examples of
their practice. My use of English examples for the purpose of illustration is a
function of my own limitations, and should not be read as a privileging of
English, or American, deconstruction. (For a brief contextualization of
Derrida's English translations with those in Portuguese, see Arrojo 1996.)
Like any translators, the translators I discuss come with their own histories,
institutional positions, etc., but they all share a sensitivity to the complexity
of Derrida's work and an awareness of their own part in deconstruction.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Spivak's *Of Grammatology* was one of the first book-length English trans-
lations of Derrida, and was an important factor in his reception in the
English-speaking world. She provides a long (79 page) 'Translator's Pref-
ace', which introduces not just *Of Grammatology*, but Derrida's writings up
to that point. Such a preface, which becomes part of the context of the trans-
lation, must of course be considered part of the translator's strategy as well as
part of the translation itself. Spivak is well aware of her role as author of this
text (i.e. *Of Grammatology*):

> If there are no unique words, if, as soon as a privileged concept-word
> emerges, it must be given over to the chain of substitutions and to the
> 'common language', why should that act of substitution that is transla-
> tion be suspect? If the proper name or sovereign status of the author is

as much a barrier as a right of way, why should the translator's position be secondary? It must now be evident that, desiring to conserve the 'original' (*De la grammatologie*) and seduced by the freedom of the absence of a sovereign text (not only is there no *Of Grammatology* before mine, but there have been as many translations of the text as readings, the text is infinitely translatable), translation itself is in a double bind. (Spivak 1974: lxxxvi)

Spivak cites Derrida's own reading of Heidegger's lament over the fate of philosophy when the many nuanced Greek words for 'presence' were reduced through translation into 'inadequate' Latin. Heidegger rues this loss, but Derrida reads translations – and mistranslations – as the history of philosophy. Besides, she asks, since she and Derrida are of similar bilingual status – his English being a cut above her French – where does French end and English begin?

Spivak offers very few notes on her translation decisions, although her preface discusses many terms and issues that have obvious importance for her translation. She notes, for instance, that she translates Derrida's *trace* with the English 'trace', although the reader should keep in mind the track, even the spoor, contained within the French word (ibid: xvii). Her preface does, however, explain her approach to one difficult word:

Derrida's text certainly offers its share of 'untranslatable' words. I have had my battles with 'exergue' and 'propre'. My special worry is 'entamer'. As we have seen, it is an important word in Derrida's vocabulary. It means both to break into and to begin. I have made do with 'broach' or 'breach', with the somewhat fanciful confidence that the shadow-word 'breach' or 'broach' will declare itself through it. With 'entamer' as well as with other words and expressions, I have included the original in parenthesis whenever the wording and syntax of the French seemed to carry a special charge. To an extent, this particular problem informs the entire text. Denying the uniqueness of words, their substantiality, their transferability, their repeatability, *Of Grammatology* denies the possibility of translation. Not so paradoxically perhaps, each twist of phrase becomes at the same time 'significant' and playful when language is manipulated for the purpose of putting signification into question, for deconstructing the binary opposition 'signifier-signified'. That playfulness I fear I have not been able remotely to capture. (ibid: lxxxvi)

The use of *entamer* to convey the sense of a beginning that is also a breaking into (and thus not a pure beginning) appears in Derrida's discussion of the relation of general writing (or 'arche-writing') to the 'vulgar concept of writing'. This concept could only have imposed itself through the desire for a

living speech, or presence, that displaced writing as the 'other of speech' and as the threatening site of difference. 'Writing' therefore "menaçait le désir de la parole vive, ce qui du dedans et dès son commencement, l'*entamait*" (Derrida 1967a/1974: 83). Spivak translates: 'threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning' (ibid: 56-57).

The example below, in which Spivak translates *entame* three times, is from Derrida's section titled 'Articulation', which discusses Rousseau's 'Essay on the Origin of Languages'. Rousseau distinguishes speech (*parole*) as universally human, and language (*langue*) as diverse and as that which differentiates nations from each other. Both, he insists, must have entirely natural origins. Derrida's discussion examines Rousseau's self-contradictions as, pursuing these natural origins, he associates speech with passion, and gestures or writing with reason and need – a division that leads to his describing them as supplements of each other. Rousseau's logic ultimately demonstrates (despite itself) that the faculty of substituting sight and voice for one another, of articulating space and time – that is, the faculty of supplementarity – is the true 'origin', or non-origin, of language. Rather than having a pure, undivided origin, language begins with difference – with the jointed breaks of articulation (Latin: *articulare*, to divide into joints). After citing a long passage in which Rousseau describes animal language as natural (possessed at birth) and unchanging, rather than acquired and developing, Derrida comments:

> La langue animale – et l'animalité en général – représentent ici le mythe encore vivace de la fixité, de l'incapacité symbolique, de la non-supplémentarité. Si nous considérons le *concept* d'animalité non pas dans son contenu de connaissance ou de méconnaissance mais dans la *fonction* qui lui est réservée, nous voyons qu'il doit repérer un moment de la *vie* qui ignore encore tout ce dont on veut décrire ici l'apparition et le jeu: le symbole, la substitution, le manque et l'addition supplémentaire, etc. Une vie qui n'ait pas encore entamé le jeu de la supplémentarité et qui du même coup ne se soit pas encore laissée entamer par lui: une vie sans différance et sans articulation.
>
> *L'inscription de l'origine.*
>
> Ce détour était nécessaire pour reassaisir la fonction du concept d'*articulation*. Celle-ci entame le langage: elle ouvre la parole comme institution née de la passion mais elle menace le chant comme parole originelle. Elle le tire du côté du besoin et de la raison – qui sont complices – et par conséquent se prête mieux à l'écriture. Plus une langue est articulée, moins elle est accentuée, plus elle est rationnelle, moins elle est musicale, moins elle perd dès lors à être écrite, mieux elle exprime le besoin. (Derrida 1967a/1974: 344)

Animal language – and animality in general – represents here the still living myth of fixity, of symbolic incapacity, of nonsupplementarity. If we consider the *concept* of animality not in its content of understanding or misunderstanding but in its specific *function*, we shall see that it must locate a moment of *life* which knows nothing of symbol, substitution, lack and supplementary addition, etc. – everything, in fact, whose appearance and play I wish to describe here. A life that has not yet broached the play of supplementarity and which at the same time has not yet let itself be violated by it: a life without differance and without articulation.

The Inscription of the origin. This detour was necessary for recapturing the function of the concept of *articulation.* It broaches language: it opens speech as institution born of passion but it threatens song as original speech. It pulls language toward need and reason – accomplices – and therefore lends itself to writing more easily. The more articulated a language is, the less accentuated it is, the more rational it is, the less musical it is, and the less it loses by being written, the better it expresses need. (Derrida 1967a/1974: 242)

The two occurrences of *entamer* in the first paragraph above could have been translated with the 'broach/breach' combination that Spivak discusses in her preface, and would then render: "A life that has not yet broached the play of supplementarity and … has not yet let itself be breached by it". The image of the breach would then have been in place for the combination of 'articulation' and 'broach' in the following sentence. So why does Spivak render the second occurrence of *entamer* with 'violated'? I suggest that 'violated' is valuable here for its sexual connotations. Throughout his writings Derrida deconstructs what Spivak calls in her preface the "sexual fable of the production of meaning" – a fable that tropes meaning production as the sowing/insemination of seed, and the phallus as the "master signifier […] signifying all desires for all absences" (Spivak 1974: lxv). These metaphors have been commonplace throughout Western history, of course (for a discussion of the text as woman in translation theory, see Chamberlain 1992; Evans 1998). Derrida traces their foundational position in the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, demonstrates their essential importance to the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan, and in *of Grammatology* rigorously pursues the connections of writing, sexuality and violence in the work of Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau. In contrast to this tradition, Spivak notes, Derrida "offers us a hymeneal fable" (ibid: lxvi). Derrida frequently exploits the paradoxical logic of the hymen (sign of both virginity and consummated marriage) to demonstrate the inherent paradox of the metaphysical desire for a pure presence. This demonstration is at work, for instance, in his comment in *Positions* (cited by Spivak in her preface) that translation is never pure, that "we will

never have, and in fact have never had, to do with some 'transport' of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched" (Derrida 1972b/1981: 20). Spivak also cites a later statement in *Positions* in which Derrida discusses both *hymen* and *entame* as among the 'nicknames' for the paradox of *différance*:

> the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc. [...] the *entame* is neither the [marred] integrity of a beginning or of a simple cut nor simply the secondary state. (Spivak's translation, ibid: lxxii; the translation of *Positions* by Bass renders *entame* here as *incision*, Derrida 1972b/1981: 43.)

In the *Of Grammatology* passage above, the suggestion of Spivak's translation that Rousseau's concept of 'animal language' signifies a pure, as yet (sexually) unviolated state before 'difference' is thus important to Derrida's texts, and to Spivak's interpretation of and appreciation for the dense intertextuality of his writings.

This sexual connotation also holds an important place in Spivak's commentary on Derrida. She ends this commentary by observing that Derrida closes *Of Grammatology* by saying of Rousseau's dream (which she terms "a philosophical wet dream"): "Rousseau's dream consisted of making the supplement enter metaphysics by force". Then she asks: "But is not that force precisely the energy of Derrida's own project? Is this not precisely the trick of writing, that dream-cum-truth, that breaches the metaphysical closure with an intrinsic yet supplementary violence?" (ibid: lxxxv). With her own use of 'breach', which not only invokes the connections of sexuality, writing, and violence embedded in metaphysics, but also comments upon their position in Derrida's project, Spivak contextualizes these conjunctions as they appear in her translation – her *Of Grammatology*.

Spivak's text, like many translations of Derrida, is sometimes noted for its mannered or strained English (Rée 1996; Gallop 1994). Her unusual rendering of the *De la grammatologie* with *Of Grammatology*, "suggesting 'a piece of' as well as 'about'" (Spivak 74: lxxxvi), and which she retained against "expert counsel", offers just one obvious example. This atypical English calls attention to its own performance, so that – even if Spivak has not fully captured Derrida's playful signifying of the question of signification – her language attends both to its own disseminative textuality and its own susceptibility to questioning. Spivak ends her discussion of translation by recounting Derrida's use of 'mistranslations' in 'Plato's Pharmacy' (in Derrida 1972a/1981) as a deconstructive lever of his own, and comments:

And all said and done, that is the sort of reader I would hope for. A reader who would fasten upon my mistranslations, and with that leverage deconstruct Derrida's text beyond what Derrida as controlling subject has directed in it. (ibid: lxxxvii)

Alan Bass

Alan Bass has translated some of Derrida's most influential texts, including *L'écriture et la différence*, *Marges de la philosophie, Positions* and *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*. His 1978 *Writing and Difference*, another early translation of Derrida, provides a 12-page 'Translator's Introduction', by far his lengthiest. Bass is always meticulous about providing bibliographical context and philosophical background for Derrida's texts, and much of his introduction explains some of the pertinent philosophical terms used by Derrida, Heidegger, Husserl and Hegel. The rest attends to the formidable problems of translation. "The question arises", he notes, "and it is a serious one – whether these essays can be read in a language other than French" (Bass 1978: xiv). He provides a heavily annotated translation of a note that Derrida appended to the bibliography of *L'écriture et la différence* in order to illustrate what a thorough translation of this text would require. Here is the note and the translation, with Bass's commentary in brackets:

Par la date de ces textes, nous voudrions marquer qu'à l'instant, pour les relier, de les relire, nous ne pouvons nous tenir à égale distance de chacun d'eux. Ce qui reste ici le *déplacement d'une question* forme certes un *système*. Par quelque *couture* interprétative, nous aurions su après coup le dessiner. Nous n'en avons rien laissé paraître que le pointillé, y ménageant ou y abandonnant ces blancs sans lesquels aucun texte jamais ne se propose comme tel. Si *texte* veut dire *tissu*, tous ces essais en ont obstinément défini la couture comme *faufilure*. (Décembre 1966.) (Derrida 1967b/1978: 438)

By means of the dates of these texts, we would like to indicate [*marquer*: to mark] that in order to bind them together [*relier*: to put between covers the pages forming a work, originally by sewing], in rereading them [*relire*: *relier* and *relire* are anagrams], we cannot maintain an equal distance from each of them. What remains here the *displacement of a question* certainly forms a *system*. With some interpretive *sewing* [*couture*] we could have sketched this system afterward [*après-coup*; in German *nachträglich*. Cf. 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' for the analysis of this notion.] We have only permitted isolated points [*le pointillé*: originally a means of engraving by points] of the system to appear, deploying or abandoning in it those blank spaces [*blancs*: Derrida's analysis of Mallarmé, which was to be written in 1969,

focuses on the role of the *blanc* in the text; see also the epigraph to this volume which refers to Mallarmé's notion of *espacement*: 'the whole without novelty except a spacing of reading'. For the analysis of the *blanc* and *espacement* see 'La double séance' in *La dissémination*, Paris: Seuil, 1972] without which no text is proposed a such. If *text* [*texte*] means *cloth* [*tissu*: the word *texte* is derived from the Latin *textus*, meaning cloth (*tissu*), and from *texere*, to weave (*tisser*); in English we have *text* and *textile*. Derrida comments on this derivation at the outset of *La pharmacie de Platon* also in *La dissémination*], all these essays have obstinately defined sewing [*couture*] as *basting* [*faufilure*: the *faux*, 'false', in *fau-filure*, or 'false stringing', is actually an alteration of the earlier form of the word, *farfiler* or *fourfiler*, from the Latin *fors*, meaning outside. Thus basting is sewing on the outside which does not bind the textile tightly.] (December 1966.) (Bass 1978: xiii)

As you can see, Bass's concerns, like Spivak's, are the polysemy of Derrida's writing and the intertextual weave of his many essays, which accumulate their own dense history. Yet he handles these challenges quite differently from Spivak. Bass does not provide a translation like that of the note above for all of *Writing and Difference*, of course, but he supplies more translator's notes with just this sort of commentary than any of Derrida's other translators. In expressing his concerns in translating Derrida's allusions and wordplay, he makes a clear statement about his own method:

Derrida always writes with close attention to the resonances and punning humor of etymology. Occasionally, when the Greek and Latin inheritances of English and French coincide, this aspect of Derrida's style can be captured; more often it requires the kind of laborious annotation (impossible in a volume of this size) provided [in the note] above. The translator, constantly aware of what he is sacrificing, is often tempted to use a language that is a compromise between English as we know it and English as he would like it to be in order to capture as much of the original text as possible. This compromise English, however, is usually comprehensible only to those who read the translation along with the original. Moreover, despite Derrida's often dense and elliptical style, he certainly does not write a compromise French. It has been my experience that however syntactically complex or lexically rich, there is no sentence in this book that is not perfectly comprehensible in French – with patience. Therefore, I have chosen to try to translate into English as we know it. (ibid: xiv)

Bass goes on to cite the same well-known passage from *Positions* (Derrida 1972b/1981) that Spivak cites in her introduction, but while she had focused on the phrase "from one language to another or within one and the same

language" in order to emphasize the confluence of English and French, he focuses on the notion of translation as "a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another", and observes that the "translator then, must be sure that he has understood the syntax and lexicon of the original text in order to let his own language carry out the work of transformation" (ibid: xv).

I have selected a passage from Bass's translation in which he applies 'breach' as a specialized term, in order to demonstrate both the different methods of Derrida's translators and the inevitable *dissemination* of Derrida's language in translation. In this selection from 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', Derrida is discussing Freud's attempt to describe the psychical apparatus and his ultimate demonstration (perhaps despite himself) that signification occurs not as presence, but as repetition and difference of the trace:

> De l'*Esquisse* (1895) à la *Note sur le bloc magique* (1925), étrange progression: un problématique du frayage s'élabore pour se conformer de plus en plus à une métaphorique de la trace écrite…
>
>   […] La trace comme mémoire n'est pas un frayage pur qu'on pourrait toujours récupérer comme présence simple, c'est la différence insaississable et invisible entre les frayages. On sait donc déjà que la vie psychique n'est ni la transparence du sens ni l'opacité de la force mais la différence dans le travail des forces. (Derrida 1967b/1978: 298-99)

> From the *Project* to the 'Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad' (1925), a strange progression: a problematic of breaching[2] is elaborated only to conform increasingly to a metaphorics of the written trace…
>
>   […] Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches. We thus already know that psychic life is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference within the exertion of forces.
>
>   [2] [Translator's Note] 'Breaching' is the translation we have adopted for the German word *Bahnung. Bahnung* is derived from *Bahn*, road, and literally means pathbreaking. Derrida's translation of *Bahnung* is *frayage*, which has an idiomatic connection to pathbreaking in the expression, *se frayer un chemin*. 'Breaching' is clumsy, but it is crucial to maintain the sense of the *force* that breaks open a pathway, and the *space* opened by this force; thus, 'breaching' must be understood here as a shorthand for these meanings. In the Standard Edition [of Freud] *Bahnung* has been translated as 'facilitation', and we have, of course, maintained this in all citations from the Standard Edition. (Derrida 1967b/1978: 200-01, 329)

In departing from the translation in the authoritative Standard Edition of Freud's work (an unusual move), Bass signals the necessity of rethinking the

implications of technical vocabulary in the wake of deconstruction. His tech-
nical application of 'breaching' in this passage has similar motives but a
slightly different function from Spivak's 'breach/broach', which, as *entame*,
is already split, a non-presence: *différance*. 'Breaching', as *frayage/Bahnung*
must be explained by Derrida as a relation of difference rather than a simple
presence. Elsewhere, Bass does use 'breach' to translate *entame* as Spivak
does. In the following passage, for instance, Derrida is discussing the ques-
tion of the question of philosophy as an undecidable:

> C'est peu – ce n'est presque rien – mais là se réfugient et se résument
> aujourd'hui une dignité et un devoir inentamables de décision. Une
> inentamable responsabilité.
>   Pourquoi inentamable? Parce que l'impossible a *déjà* eu lieu.
> (ibid: 118)

> This is very little – almost nothing – but within it, today, is sheltered and
> encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision. An
> unbreachable responsibility. Why unbreachable? Because the impossi-
> ble has *already* occurred. (ibid: 80)

Overall, Bass attends to the necessity of signalling lexical performance,
and consistently notifies his readers of the history and complexity of Derrida's
French and of his own translation decisions through a series of notes. These
notes, which also contextualize Derrida's texts within the writings of other
philosophers, as well as within Bass's text, enact the point – consistently
emphasized by Derrida – that texts are never closed unities, but always take
up their 'beginnings' and conduct their arguments from positions within a
mobile general 'text'. Both the discussion and the sheer volume of Bass's
notes disrupt any notion of Derrida's texts as freestanding. In contrast,
Spivak contextualizes Derrida in her own lengthy interpretive preface
(which itself addresses the problem that a 'preface' seems to assume the ex-
istence of a unified, complete work), then forges on with her translation, giving
only brief bibliographic notes. While Spivak's preface devotes careful atten-
tion to the deconstruction of the 'sexual fable' of metaphysics, neither Bass's
copious notes nor his introduction emphasizes the examination of violence
and sexuality running through Derrida's discussion of 'writing'. It is not in-
consequential that Spivak is a well-known feminist and post-colonial 'critic'
and that Bass is a practicing psychoanalyst. I say this not to return the dis-
cussion to 'authorial intent' (or to judge one as better than the other – I cannot
imagine doing without either), but to point out that these authors are posi-
tioned, and so too are their translations. 'Derrida's' English lexicon, style,
and textuality varies with his translators.
    These differences sometimes result from translators' domesticating

practices, which may be easiest to appreciate by looking at two translations of the same passage. By the time Bass translated the collection *Margins of Philosophy* (Derrida 1972c/1982), many of its essays had already been translated. The important essay 'Différance' (discussed at length in Section I above) had been translated by David Allison in *Speech and Phenomena* (Derrida 1973), the first book-length English translation of Derrida. In the following passage, Derrida discusses why the difference of *différance* (in that it is spelled with an 'a' rather than an 'e'), which seems visible but not audible, is actually neither visible nor audible. Both phonemes and graphemes function according to the (silent and invisible) differences between each other ('d' and 't', for instance, function not because they have pure, discrete sounds, but because they can be distinguished from each other). The first translation is by Allison, the second by Bass. The French is from the text as published in *Marges de la philosophie*:

> On objectera que, pour les mêmes raisons, la différence graphique s'enfonce elle-même dans la nuit, ne fait jamais le plein d'un terme sensible mais étire un rapport invisible, le trait d'une relation inapparente entre deux spectacles. Sans doute. Mais que, de ce point de vue, la différence marquée dans la "différ( )nce entre le *e* et le *a* se dérobe au regard et à l'écoute, cela suggère peut-être heureusement qu'il faut ici se laisser renvoyer à un ordre qui n'appartient plus à la sensibilité. Mais non davantage à l'intelligibilité, à une idéalité qui n'est pas fortuitement affiliée à l'objectivité du *theorein* ou de l'entendement; il faut ici se laisser renvoyer à un ordre, donc, qui résiste à l'opposition, fondatrice de la philosophie, entre le sensible et l'intelligible. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 5)

> It will perhaps be objected that, for the same reasons, the graphic difference itself sinks into darkness, that it never constitutes the fullness of a sensible term, but draws out an invisible connection, the mark of an inapparent relation between two spectacles. That is no doubt true. Indeed, since from this point of view the difference between the *e* and the *a* marked in 'differance' eludes vision and hearing, this happily suggests that we must here let ourselves be referred to an order that no longer refers to sensibility. But we are not referred to intelligibility either, to an ideality not fortuitously associated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding. We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy's founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. (Derrida 1968/1973: 133)

> It will be objected, for the same reasons, that graphic difference itself vanishes into the night, can never be sensed as a full term, but rather extends an invisible relationship, the mark of an inapparent relationship between two spectacles. Doubtless. But, from this point of view, that

the difference marked in the 'differ( )nce' between the *e* and the *a* eludes both vision and hearing perhaps happily suggests that there we must be permitted to refer to an order which no longer belongs to sensibility. But neither can it belong to intelligibility, to the ideality which is not fortuitously affiliated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding.[3] Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible.

[3] [Translator's Note] '... not fortuitously affiliated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding'. A play on words has been lost in translation here, a loss that makes this sentence difficult to understand. In the previous sentence Derrida says that the difference between the *e* and the *a* of *différence/différance* can neither be seen nor heard. It is not a sensible – that is, relating to the senses – difference. But, he goes on to explain, neither is this an intelligible difference, for the very names by which we conceive of objective intelligibility are already in complicity with sensibility. *Theorein* – the Greek origin of 'theory' – literally means 'to look at', to *see*; and the word Derrida uses for 'understanding' here is *entendement*, the noun form of *entendre*, to *hear*. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 5)

Allison domesticates Derrida more than Bass, smoothing his syntax by neatly subordinating clauses. Bass does use "English as we know it", but also pushes the reader to follow his accumulating clauses, performing the 'breaches' of Derrida's argument. More importantly, however, Allison chooses to eliminate the unusual graphics of 'differ( )nce', even though the blank between the parentheses visually (yet paradoxically) re-marks the imperceptibility of the difference in question here, and thus graphically captures the point at issue. Throughout his translation, Allison renders *différance* as 'differance' (which is a silent misspelling in English, but does not accomplish the temporal grammatical effect implicit in the French), while Bass leaves *différance* untranslated (but explained in his notes). Bass' characteristic note in this passage marks his own way of reading Derrida – continually taking detours (to use one of Derrida's favourite words) in order to track down some of the disseminating play of Derrida's sentences.

The more significant differences between Allison and Bass are less a matter of style than of history. Derrida's translators give us many 'Derridas' partly because his English translations have accumulated a dense intertextuality that has also contributed to shaping 'deconstruction'. While Allison's was one of the first English translations of Derrida, and the first of 'Différance', by the time Bass translated 'Différance' he had already translated *Writing and Difference* and *Positions*, and had a stack of other translations and commentaries, as well as Derrida's continuing production and refinements of his texts to consider. We can observe this historical effect by looking at Allison's

handling of Derrida's discussion of 'economy', a (deconstructed) metaphor of continuing importance for Derrida, as well as to translation theory. Early in this essay, referring to the history of *différance*, Derrida comments that he will not be concerned

> de décrire une histoire, d'en raconter les étapes, texte par texte, contexte par contexte, montrant chaque fois quelle économie a pu imposer ce dérèglement graphique; mais bien du *système général de cette économie*. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 3-4)

Allison avoids the word 'economy' in his translation, despite its importance in this text and the emphasis here on *éconimie* by Derrida. He renders:

> it is not a matter of describing a history, of recounting the steps, text by text, context by context, each time showing which scheme has been able to impose this graphic disorder, although this could have been done as well; rather we are concerned with the *general system of all these schemata*. (Derrida 1968/1973: 131-32)

Bass, who was particularly familiar with Derrida's work with 'economy', and who had translated the essay 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve' in *Writing and Difference* (Derrida 1967b/ 1978), handles it this way:

> I will not be concerned, as I might have been, with describing a history and narrating its stages, text by text, context by context, demonstrating the economy that each time imposed this graphic disorder; rather, I will be concerned with the *general system of this economy*. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 3)

Later in the essay, when Derrida quite explicitly discusses 'restricted economy' and 'general economy' in relation to his reading of Hegelian metaphysics, Allison alternates between 'economy' and 'system', while Bass highlights the economic terms at play. It is important to note that in the time between the first publication in 1968 of 'Différance' (the text used by Allison) and its reprinting in the 1972 collection *Marges de la Philosophie* (used by Bass), Derrida had made slight changes, including the addition of several important sentences at the end of the paragraph in question, which tie this essay to the earlier 'From Restricted to General Economy'. After noting that through the relation of a restricted and a general economy the very project of philosophy will be displaced and reinscribed, Derrida adds:

> On plie l'*Aufhebung* – la relève – à s'écrire autrement. Peut-être, tout
> simplement, à s'écrire. Mieux, à tenir compte de sa consommation
> d'écriture. (ibid: 21)

Bass translates:

> The *Aufhebung* – *la reléve* – is constrained into writing itself otherwise.
> Or perhaps simply into writing itself. Or, better, into taking account of
> its consumption by writing. (ibid: 19)

To this Bass adds a very long note providing invaluable commentary on
the forces at work at this point in the text. I will cite just a short section
that has special pertinence to translation theory. Bass observes that Derrida
here refers to his previous reading of Hegel in 'From Restricted to Gen-
eral Economy':

> In that essay Derrida began his consideration of Hegel as the great philo-
> sophical *speculator*; thus all the economic metaphors of the previous
> sentences. For Derrida the deconstruction of metaphysics implies an
> endless confrontation with Hegelian concepts, and the move from a re-
> stricted, 'speculative' philosophical economy – in which there is nothing
> that cannot be made to make sense, in which there is nothing *other* than
> meaning – to a 'general' economy – which affirms that which exceeds
> meaning, the excess of meaning from which there can be no speculative
> profit – involves a reinterpretation of the central Hegelian concept: the
> *Aufhebung*. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 19-20 n.23)

Derrida's critique of 'restrictive economy' has obvious implications for
translation theory: it demonstrates that an interpretation (or translation) that
reduces all signification to its relevance for a certain meaning *makes* sense,
quite literally. It pre-determines methods for automatically eliminating or re-
solving multiple and competing significations disseminated in writing. No
text, least of all Derrida's, as I hope this discussion of their translations dem-
onstrates, circulates in a 'restricted economy', in which one translator or critic
can 'cash in', claiming a fully resolved meaning.

   We will return to the implications of this economy for translation, but we
should first look at *Aufhebung/la relève*, which is one of Derrida's most fa-
mous translations. *Aufhebung*, literally 'lifting up', can have the double
meaning of both conserving and negating, and is often translated as 'subla-
tion'. For Hegel, as Bass notes, "every concept is to be negated and lifted up
to a higher sphere in which it is thereby conserved. In this way, there is noth-
ing from which the *Aufhebung* cannot profit" (ibid; see also Spivak 1974: xi).
Derrida suggests that what the *Aufhebung* can never annul and absorb is
the self-difference in its own contradictory meaning, an effect of 'writing'

which always exceeds it. Thus he wishes it to write itself otherwise, or take account of its being written. He translates *Aufhebung* with *la relève*, which also means 'to lift' as well as to relay or to relieve. Thereby, as Bass notes, "the conserving-and-negating lift has become *la relève*, a 'lift' in which is inscribed an effect of substitution and difference" (ibid). *La relève* is one more example, then, of Derrida's use of translation as a lever to pry open the would-be monolith of Western metaphysics. Derrida has returned to the relation of economy and *Aufhebung/la relève* in his most recent discussion of translation and responsibility, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod

In a brief 'Translators' Preface' to their *The Truth in Painting*, a translation of *La vérité en peinture* (Derrida 1978b/1987), Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod announce an approach both similar to and different from that described by Bass. Noting that any attempt simply to give over Derrida's meaning would result in leaving the text in French and thus be the death of translation, they make the now familiar points that Derrida's work calls for translation as transformation and "that transformation affects both languages at work – our English is transformed as is Derrida's French" (Bennington and McLeod 1987: xiii). Continuing with Derrida's point that translation is a *regulated* transformation, they state that "no *single* rule is sufficient for that regulation", least of all "the rule that our aim should be to reproduce in the English or American reader the same 'effect' that Derrida's French produces on the French. Any such rule would be a radical refusal of the trace of translation, and is in fact the fantasy of logocentrism itself" (ibid: xiii-xiv). They advocate flexible strategies, including those of supplying some of the French text, adding some explanatory footnotes, and sometimes being guided almost exclusively by the signifier. Since *La vérité en peinture* takes the *idiom* (in painting) as its topic, and sets idiomaticity to the task of overtly performing dissemination – of undoing borders, frames and edges of all sorts – this text ultimately stages the undoing of its own identity. Bennington and McLeod respond to the paradoxes of the text this way:

> It may seem paradoxical that in this situation we should claim the need for accuracy and rigor: but rigor here needs to be rethought in terms of flexibility and compromise, just as, in 'Restitutions' [an essay in this collection], stricture has also to be thought in terms of destricturation. The 'compromise English' in which this translation is written is inevitable and should stand in no need of excuse, if only because the supplement is never simply a substitute. 'Compromise English' also recognizes that the supplement is never final or definitive: this version is therefore also a call for retranslation and modification. (ibid: xiv)

Bennington and McLeod's approach obviously contrasts with Bass's declared strategy to avoid 'compromise English', and I will not try to reconcile them. It is worth noting, however, that the early texts translated by Bass are more conventional than this later French text. By 1978, Derrida could be fairly assured of a French audience who, paradoxically enough, had a basis for reading him, and by 1987 Bennington and McLeod could assume the same for an English-speaking audience.

We can consider Bennington and McLeod's strategy in terms of the re-stricted and general economy discussed above. Derrida's texts resist speculative endeavours that would fully resolve them to a 'sensible' prop-erty; they foil any proprietary attempt that would claim for them a proper meaning with no remainder. Since these texts stage the impossibility of their own resolution, a translation that attempts such a resolution, "in which there is nothing that cannot be made to make sense", would actually contradict the very argument that it translates. Paradoxically, however, translating this ir-resolution nonetheless requires a critical act. The complexities involved in grappling with this challenge are amply illustrated in the following excerpt from *The Truth in Painting*. Here, Derrida discusses the 'trait' – a feature that identifies something, a painting or a novel for instance, as such, and thus operates as a generic marker. The 'trait' is similar to the 'mark', which is necessary to identification but must, in order to be recognizable, always be a *re*mark. The *re-* (or repetition) of this mark, however, must be made to disap-pear or to cover its tracks, so that it will not compromise originality and thus destroy the very 'identity' to which it refers. This identifying feature is there-fore not a palpable presence but a difference, and cannot 'appear'. Derrida questions the boundaries defined by these traits, and often asks how, in their classificatory system, they would account for themselves, for their own be-coming. (For instance, how would a 'defining' feature of translation account for its own definition as a defining feature?) In the essay 'The *Retrait* of Metaphor', Derrida discusses this issue in terms of the irreducibility of meta-phor in language. He notes that: "there is nothing that does not happen with metaphor and by metaphor. Any statement concerning anything that happens, metaphor included, will be produced *not without* metaphor" (Derrida 1978a/ 1978: 8). That which appears as literal or 'true' meaning emerges only through effacement of metaphoricity. The continuation of this discussion in *The Truth in Painting* makes it clear that the question of the 'truth' (in painting) is twined in the question of the 'trait':

> La question ne serait plus alors: 'Qu'est-ce qu'un trait?' ou 'Que devient un trait?', ou 'Qu'est-ce qui a trait à un tel trait?'. Mais 'Comment le trait se traite-t-il? Et se contracte-t-il en son retrait?'. Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, puisqu'il marque la différence entre les formes ou les contenus de l'apparaître. Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais lui-

> même, jamais une première fois. Il commence par se retirer. Je suis ici la conséquence de ce que j'avais appelé il y a longtemps, avant d'en venir au tour de la peinture, l'*entame* de l'origine: ce qui s'ouvre, d'une trace, sans initier. (Derrida 1978b/1987: 16)

> So the question would no longer be 'What is a trait?' or 'What does a trait become?' or 'What pertains to such a trait?' but 'How does the trait treat itself? Does it contract in its retreat?' A trait never appears, never itself, because it marks the difference between the forms or the contents of the appearing. A trait never appears, never itself, never for a first time. It begins by retrac(t)ing [*se retirer*]. I follow here the logical succession of what I long ago called, before getting around to the turn of painting, the *broaching* [*entame*] of the origin: that which opens, with a trace, without initiating anything. (Derrida 1978b/1987: 11)

The plays here on *trait/treat/retreat*, as well as on *contract* and *retrac(t)ing* may 'compromise' standard English a bit, but they do achieve the linguistic dispersal that challenges, even as it discusses, logic. Here, if we consider *retreat* as both 'treat again' and 'withdraw', and *contract* as both 'make an agreement' and 'shrink/draw up', we have a linguistic juncture that performs the paradox of the identity process. Like a signature, the 'trait' *con*tracts, or 'strikes a bargain' in language, marking a singular event; but at the same time, it must also be a repetition or retracing, and thus withdraws (con*tracts*) as it disperses into language. This passage also offers an interesting example of repetition in translation history. In the last sentence Derrida alludes to his work in *Of Grammatology*, an allusion that becomes especially recognizable through the inclusion of *entame* and its translation by 'broaching', highlighted by Spivak in her translation and preface to that text.

We may ask how this translation responds to Bennington and McLeod's point that Derrida's work calls for translation as transformation, a transformation that affects "both languages at work" – their English as well as Derrida's French. I'd like to approach this question by first looking at an essay that has received some notice as a deconstructive commentary on translation.

'The Measure of Translation Effects'

Philip E. Lewis's essay, 'The Measure of Translation Effects' appears in *Difference in Translation*, the volume that includes the text and translation of Derrida's 'Des Tours de Babel'. It is an expansion of an earlier essay in French, 'Vers la traduction abusive', and in it Lewis works out a theory of 'abusive' (which he sometimes calls 'strong') translation. Abuse, as Lewis considers it, would not be a matter of simply distorting the source text or target language for the purpose of estrangement; rather, abusive 'fidelity' to a source text

"values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyva-
lencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing
its own" (Lewis 1985: 41). It seeks, in other words, to avoid the reductive
resolutions of a 'restricted economy'. Such an approach would value the dis-
seminative, syntactic performance of language stressed in deconstruction and
evinced in Derrida's texts. This performance is precisely what tends to get
erased in translation, which traditionally leans toward an approach that would
'substitute' semantic content and respect the standard usage practice of the
target language and culture. Following Derrida's discussion in 'The *Retrait*
of Metaphor', Lewis terms this standard the *us*-system, that is:

> the chain of values linking the *us*ual, the *us*eful, and common linguistic
> *us*age. To accredit the use-values is inevitably to opt for what domesti-
> cates or familiarizes a message at the expense of whatever might upset
> or force or abuse language and thought, might seek after the unthought
> or unthinkable in the unsaid or unsayable. (ibid: 40-41)

Lewis cites a comparative linguistic study by Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher
(1981), which shows that "English calls for more explicit, precise, concrete
determinations, for fuller, more cohesive delineations than does French".
Therefore, "[w]hen English rearticulates a French utterance, it puts an inter-
pretation on that utterance that is built into English; it simply cannot let the
original say what it says in French" (ibid: 36). This is not news to most trans-
lators, of course, but Lewis tries to work out a method for redressing the
problem.

Lewis takes care to point out that this strategy would not allow for "just
any abuse"; rather, it would "bear upon a key operator or a decisive textual
knot that will be recognized by dint of its own abusive features" (ibid: 42-
43). He gives the example of Derrida's translation of Heidegger's *Entsiehung*
by *retrait*: "The *retrait* will occasion a kind of controlled textual disruption:
insofar as it is *abusive*, it exerts an unpacking and disseminating effect, and
precisely that effect of the *retrait* as a textual operator makes it a 'good'
translation, justifies the translator's work on the original" (ibid: 43). A trans-
lation strategy that attends to releasing or disseminating the play of such textual
operators will necessarily challenge the target language and comment upon
the source text. The nature of this commentary in Lewis's theory is contro-
versial, and I will return to that point after looking at one of his examples.

To make his point regarding translation of Derrida, Lewis turns to a trans-
lation of the important essay 'La mythologie blanche', in which Derrida undoes
the assumptions underlying the concepts of metaphor and representation,
and thus of the idea that language can re-present reality (including the 'real-
ity' of a source text). This essay was translated by F. C. T. Moore as 'White
Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' (Derrida 1971/1974). Lewis

critiques Moore, not so much to blame him for poor translation as to show how he has fallen prey to the pressures of traditional translation and to the exigencies of the target language. Lewis also wishes to assess the sacrifices entailed in such a method. Moore explains in his introductory note that he gives intelligible English renderings rather than direct transfers of Derrida's suggestive exploitation of nuances in French – a strategy, he concedes, that results in a loss of force. In contrast, Lewis advocates the use of a 'double-edged writing' that exploits the capacity of language "to say and do many things at once and to make some of the relations among those things said and done indeterminate" (Lewis 1985: 44). If it is necessary for Derrida to employ such a double-edged writing in his commentary on the problematics of representation, he suggests, then it would also be necessary in the translation of that commentary. In carrying out his comparative analysis between Derrida's French and Moore's translation, Lewis treats the difference between the source and translation in six categories: punctuation and markers; translation of translation; suffixes; words; phrases; and discourse (which receives by far the most attention). Under the category of discourse he gives as an extended example the translation of a passage in which Derrida examines the relation of metaphor and philosophy. Here Derrida shows that metaphor is a metaphysical concept, or philosopheme, and is therefore already involved in the field that a 'metaphorology' of philosophy would seek to dominate. Philosophy attempts in vain to rule a totality because, at the very least, one metaphor – the metaphor without which the concept of metaphor could not be constructed (briefly put, the 'metaphor of metaphor') – remains outside the field:

> Cette métaphor en plus, restant hors du champ qu'elle permet de circonscrire, s'extrait ou s'abstrait encore ce champ, s'y soustrait donc comme métaphore en moins. En raison de ce que nous pourrions intituler, par économie, la supplementarité tropique, le tour de plus devenant le tour de moins, la taxinomie ou l'histoire des métaphores philosophiques n'y retrouverait jamais son compte. A l'interminable *déhiscence* du supplément (s'il est permis de jardiner encore un peu cette métaphore botanique) sera toujours refusé l'état ou le statut du complément. Le champ n'est jamais saturé. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 261)

Here is Moore's translation:

> This extra metaphor, remaining outside the field which it enables us to circumscribe, also extracts or abstracts this field for itself, and therefore removes itself from that field as one metaphor the less. Because of what we might for convenience call metaphorical supplementation (the extra metaphor being at the same time a metaphor the less), no classification or account of philosophical metaphor can ever prosper. The supplement

is always unfolding, but it can never attain the status of a complement. The field is never saturated. (Derrida 1971/1974: 18)

Lewis notes Moore's omission of Derrida's parenthetical note regarding his own botanical metaphor, as well as the loose rendering of "la taxinomie ou l'histoire des métaphores n'y retrouverait jamais son compte", but chooses to focus on Moore's bracketing of "le tour de plus devenant le tour de moins" in parentheses and translating it as "the extra metaphor being at the same time a metaphor the less". He observes that this translation explains the main point well enough, but contends that the translation of *le tour* by "metaphor", and of *devenant* (becoming) by "being at the same time" constitutes a critical distortion. Derrida not only re-marks the term *tour* by italicizing it, but distinguishes it from metaphor in the overture of the next section of the essay and continually plays with its various resonances, as well as its connections with *retour* and *détour*, throughout his writing. Moreover, in this passage, as Lewis points out, the sense of circular turning is even more telling:

> because the present participle *devenant* is an active form pointing to the very process of turning, the circular movement of perpetual shifting that the phrase attributes to tropical supplementarity. In this connection, moreover, the use of the term 'tropical', rather than 'metaphorical', to modify supplementarity also becomes significant because 'trope' (from the Greek *tropos*) also means 'turn' or 'change'. *Tour* instantiates the tropical. (Lewis 1985: 55)

By eliminating the performative dimension of the French, the translation allows the contested values "to prevail unshaken in the fabric of the very discourse that purports to contest them" (ibid: 58). Lewis continues this process of close reading to demonstrate ways that Moore's translation of this phrase reduces and suppresses the performance of Derrida's text, and he clearly advocates an abusive fidelity that would allow "the most insistent and decisive effects of that [the text's] performance to resurface in the translated text and to assume an importance sufficient to suggest the vital status of stratified or contrapuntal writing in the original" (ibid: 59).

In 1982, Alan Bass re-translated 'White Mythology' in *Margins of Philosophy*. His version of this passage seems to render with care and rigour the aspects Lewis finds distorted by Moore:

> This extra metaphor, remaining outside the field that it allows to be circumscribed, extracts or abstracts itself from this field, thus subtracting itself as a metaphor less. By virtue of what we might entitle, for economical reasons, tropic supplementarity, since the extra turn of speech becomes the missing turn of speech, the taxonomy or history of philosophical metaphors will never make a profit. The state or status of the comple-

ment will always be denied to the interminable *dehiscence* of the supplement (if we may be permitted to continue to garden this botanical metaphor). The field is never saturated. (Derrida 1972c/1982: 220)

Bass sustains the play on *tour*, keeping its difference from 'metaphor' apparent, and maintains Derrida's botanical metaphor and the figure of 'economy' throughout the passage. His lexical twists, such as 'a metaphor less', and his unmistakable wordplay in English point to his own performative work on Derrida's French.

This performance returns us to Lewis's discussion of the translation's work on the source, which has stirred some controversy. Lewis puts it this way:

> No doubt the project we are envisaging here is ultimately impossible: the translator's aim is to rearticulate analogically the abuse that occurs in the original text, thus to take on the force, the resistance, the densification, that this abuse occasions in its own habitat, yet, at the same time, also to displace, remobilize, and extend this abuse in another milieu where, once again, it will have a dual function – on the one hand, that of forcing the linguistic and conceptual system of which it is a dependent, and on the other hand, of directing a critical thrust back toward the text that it translates and in relation to which it becomes a kind of unsettling aftermath… (Lewis 1985: 43)

This passage has been interpreted as a prescription for translations that inhibit readability (Van den Broeck 1990) and as an argument for 'creative' translation (Levine 1991). Jane Gallop takes it as a recommendation that a translation should deconstruct its source (she seems to align deconstruction with a very negative critique) and finds that as Lewis turns to examining texts, this aspect of his theory "just drops out of his argument" (Gallop 1994: 49). It is important to remember here that deconstruction is not a method or an approach. Texts deconstruct themselves, in that they are always inhabited by difference, and it is respect for the movement of difference that concerns Lewis.

Because he makes such strong statements about translation, Lewis's essay has been used as a springboard, particularly by those who wish to find a prescriptive translation strategy or political agenda in deconstruction. The disparity between deconstruction and such prescriptive agendas can be exemplified by an argument in Sherry Simon's *Gender in Translation* (1996). Here, Simon contrasts Lewis's essay with an essay published in the same volume, Barbara Johnson's 'Taking Fidelity Philosophically' (1985). Stating incorrectly that Lewis is the translator of the English version of 'White Mythology' that appeared in *New Literary History*, and that his essay "offers a

surprisingly negative assessment of his own initial efforts of translation",
Simon goes on to conclude that the contrast between the "elegiac tone" of
Lewis's self-critique and the "manifesto-like tone" of his discussion of abusive
translation corresponds to a "chasm between writing on – and performing –
translation" (Simon 1996: 93-94). Building upon her own error of attribu-
tion, she then generalizes this chasm by asking: "Can it be that Derrida's
writing on translation uses a dynamic exactly contrary to that of the practice
of translation, opening frontiers of meaning where translation is obliged to
shut them off?" (ibid.: 94).

Simon goes on to argue for a divide between Lewis (who is "negative"
about "his" translation) and Barbara Johnson (translator of *Dissemination*,
Derrida 1972a/1981, which includes 'Plato's Pharmacy') who, she says, adopts
a "more positive attitude". Simon contrives this divide by distorting Johnson
through partial quotation. Here is what Simon says about Johnson:

> Barbara Johnson's reference to her own translation of an "untranslatable"
> passage of Derrida shows little frustration. What she has done is to trans-
> pose a reference to the French language into English, "thus fictively
> usurping the status of original author" (Simon 1996: 94)).

Here is what Johnson says:

> It is thus precisely the way in which the original text is always already
> an impossible translation that renders translation impossible. Interest-
> ingly, the passage I have just quoted [Derrida's discussion of the
> translations of *pharmakon*], in making explicit the problem of transla-
> tion, presents an insoluble dilemma to the English translator. Since its
> point hangs on a French translation to which the English no longer di-
> rectly refers, the translator must either transpose the point onto English
> translations – which, incidentally, bear it out equally well – thus fictively
> usurping the status of original author, or retain the reference to French,
> thus fictively returning to the original language. This difficulty, indeed,
> perfectly illustrates the point it conveys: the more a text is worked
> through by the problem of translation, the more untranslatable it be-
> comes. (Johnson 1985: 146)

Johnson is clearly not the usurper that Simon describes, nor does she claim to
be. Her point is that the translator is caught in a bind between two equally
fictive solutions. She had to make a decision in translating the passage in
question, of course, and does use English translations of the French terms
under discussion. However, she includes a translator's note indicating that
the English translation history of *pharmakon* corresponds to the French, and
she retains Derrida's statement that he is considering an authoritative French
translation; her translation therefore calls attention to its own translation

problem. Johnson, like Lewis, is discussing the double bind of translation, and presents an argument similar to his against erasing the tensions within the source text:

> Yet the violence implied by classical faithfulness to the spirit at the expense of the letter cannot be avoided by simple faithfulness to the letter of any text. For it is necessary to be faithful to the violent love-hate relation *between* letter and spirit, which is already a problem of translation within the *original* text. If the original text is already a translatory battle in which what is being translated is ultimately the very impossibility of translation, then peacemaking gestures such as scrupulous adherence to the signifier are just as unfaithful to the energy of the conflict as the tyranny of the swell-footed signifier. The translator must fight just as hard against the desire to be innocent as against what we today consider the guilty desire to master the text's message. (ibid: 147)

Simon ultimately bases her discussion of deconstruction and feminist translation on the premises that Johnson advocates the reductive "positive" (as opposed to Lewis's "negative"), "usurping" strategy imposed upon her: "In adopting this more positive attitude toward translation, in unapologetically and even triumphantly 'usurping' the position of the original author, Johnson serves as our point of juncture between Derridean and feminist translation" (Simon 1996: 94). However, Johnson's argument, like Lewis's, cannot be reduced to either 'positive' or 'negative', to claims of advocating either 'faithfulness' or 'usurpation'. Derrida's translators actively struggle with the double bind; with the critical decisions entailed in simultaneously producing and following a line between the critical and the deconstructive.

Conclusion

In an essay that has stirred controversy of a different sort, 'Fidelity and the Gendered Translation', Rosemary Arrojo (1994) points out the irony in attempting to base prescriptive programmes in deconstruction. Arrojo is troubled, quite justifiably, by the suggestion that Derrida's work endows the translator "'with the right, even the duty to 'abuse' the source text'" (Arrojo 1994: 156, quoting von Flotow 1991: 80). Arrojo makes the invaluable point that the idea of prescribing rights and duties, which would mean setting up its own positivistic set of laws, could hardly be more contrary to deconstruction. Citing Derrida's 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' (1987c/1988), she observes that,

> As Derrida's 'letter' suggests, not even the 'original' author herself could produce a totally faithful, non-abusive translation of any of her texts precisely because there is nothing definite or stable that one can be

faithful to once and for all […] In this sense, translation is truly sub-
jected to what we could call, via Derrida, a 'double bind', that is, it is, at
the same time and in some level, both possible and impossible, both
protective and abusive, both faithful and unfaithful, both a production
and a re-production of meaning. (ibid: 158)

Since translations can never perfectly transport an 'original' (there being no
fully determined original in the first place), they require decisions, in the
strong sense of that word. To a degree Arrojo's essay, I believe, unfairly ho-
mogenizes the work of the many women she discusses. Nonetheless, this
essay quite usefully suggests a turn from the issue of fidelity/infidelity to the
"notion of ethics" (ibid: 160) that is already implied in the deconstructive
sense of decision. This issue of ethics – or more precisely, responsibility – is
the topic of my final chapter.

6. Response and Responsibility

The past few decades have seen increased attention to semantic instability and to the inevitable positioning of every language act. This, along with appreciation of the cultural and political power of translation, has heightened attention to the responsibility of the translator and the need to think about an ethics of translation. A number of translation scholars, including and perhaps most notably those sensitive to deconstruction, such as Rosemary Arrojo (1994, 1998, 1999, 2000), Gillian Lane-Mercier (1997), Kaisa Koskinen (1995, 1996), and Lawrence Venuti (1995, 1998, 2000), have recently called for a focus on responsibility rather than on ideal-oriented strategies in translation theory and translator training. The need for this focus arises precisely because, as Lane-Mercier puts it, the inevitable positioning (aesthetic, political, ideological) of the translator "enables us to go beyond dualist conceptions of translation in order to bring to the fore the ethical stance which translation both entails and implies" (1997: 63). The need both to rethink theory as critical practice and to confront the complications of an 'ethical stance' will be my topic here.

The question of responsibility was indeed always implied in deconstruction, and became a major focus for Derrida in the early 1980s. As Gayatri Spivak describes it, for instance, this period marked a turn in Derrida's work from "'guarding the question' – insisting on the priority of an unanswerable question, the question of *différance* – to a 'call to the wholly other' – that which must be differed-deferred so that we can posit ourselves, as it were" (Spivak 1999: 425). In other words, while the early Derrida continually scrutinized the movement of *différance*, 'guarding the question' in the sense of insisting upon difference – and thus a question – at the origin, the later Derrida shifted emphasis to that which is excluded and effaced (the 'wholly other') in the 'differantial' positing of an identity or origin. One way of thinking about the issue of responsibility, difference, and identity with respect to translation is to ask the question 'Who translates?' As noted in chapter 4 (p.57-58), the 'subject' of writing (such as a translator or author) does not exist as a sovereign solitude, a pure singularity that deals with others or with texts fully separate from him or herself. Rather, this 'subject' *becomes* as a relation to systems of difference, which make thinking meaning and 'self' possible in the first place. The 'subject', then, participates in generality. In order to think of ourselve*s* as discrete and singular, we must draw boundaries that exclude what we are *not*. That which is excluded in the constitution of the 'self' is, of necessity, both 'wholly other' to the self and the condition of the self's identity. Responsibility is not a matter of a translator-subject behaving responsibly toward an unrelated 'other'; rather, it is a tie or obligation constituted in their emergence as 'subject' and 'other'. As Derrida puts it in considering the requirement of responsibility:

The singularity of the 'who' is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering 'no' (Derrida 1989/1991: 100-01).

The 'who' in 'Who translates?' comes together as some*one* identifiable as 'the translator' only in response to the call for translation.

It is important to emphasize that the deconstructive turn I've been describing does not entail a 'change' in the sense of a retraction or alteration of what had been said in Derrida's earlier works, but rather a directional shift that traces certain undeveloped implications of what had been said earlier. 'Guarding the question' emphasizes in part that every statement and concept – not to mention every claim to identity, every rule, every law – carries within itself a presupposed, hierarchized, historically constituted set of relations. Thus, as Rosemary Arrojo suggests, translators must recognize their indebtedness and ultimate 'faithfulness' to their own circumstances and perceptions (1994: 160). However, a 'call to the wholly other', or what Derrida has also termed affirmative deconstruction, confronts and resists precisely this cycle of indebtedness. It focuses on the problem of responding to alterity *without* fully subsuming it to one's own code – that is, without reducing what is 'other' to the 'same' by interpreting it according to the structures and assumptions supporting one's own identity, rule, law, community, etc. 'Responsibility' in this sense poses a dilemma because it entails the problem of responding or answering to another in a way that affirms otherness rather than merely repeating oneself. At the very least, such responsibility requires keeping the critical process open through a vigilant questioning of dominant critical strategies and unexamined, institutionalized assumptions. An arrival at theoretical closure would preclude response to the otherness necessarily posited in the establishment of the theory's own categories, and would by definition preclude responsibility. For instance, a claim to define the unique characteristics of translation (or even of language) forms a concept of 'translation' – its essence and its boundaries – through the exclusion of that which is other to this essence or is outside those boundaries. An ethics of translation theorized according to such a definition would be irresponsible to that which it excluded in order to define itself. For this reason, deconstruction remains wary of 'ethics', which in many contexts implies the application or establishment of an ideal code.

The structural problems of responsibility operate precisely like those of translation. Just as absolute translation would require perfect identification between two languages, which would therefore mean that they were the *same* language, so a complete response to the other would require that no differ-

ence, and therefore no otherness, exist. Such total identification is of course neither possible nor desirable, which is to say that despite the systems and general laws that render foreign texts meaningful and interpretable, they maintain an irreducible otherness. A translation is a responsible response only if it answers *both* to the general laws guiding and safeguarding interpretation of the text *and* to that which is singularly other within it. This respect for singularity *vis à vis* the imposition of general rules is also at issue in the very conceptualization of ethics and justice, as I will discuss below. A *just* response is, like translation, both possible and impossible. Translation entails the ethical and the juridical not only because the translation of texts is often important to the everyday functioning of these fields, but because every translation performs the singular/general relation at stake in the question of justice. To raise the question of 'ethical translation' is in a certain sense redundant. Translation enacts the ethical relation, both despite and because of its own im/possibility – the enabling double bind.

Aporias

In order to think about the im/possibility of justice and responsibility we must go back to what was said in chapter 4 about a *decision*, which "can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes" (Derrida 1988: 116). The possibility of a decision depends upon its undecidability, for if a problem is settled through the application of a formula or a pre-specified program, then nothing is decided. Only in the face of undecidability do we actually make a decision and therefore take responsibility. Derrida discusses the self-contradictory 'space' in which such a decision comes to pass in terms of *aporias* – non-passages or impossible passages. If a decision were to take an established route, or passage, it would be following a pre-determined programme and would be indebted to a 'restricted economy'. It would therefore not *be* a decision. A restricted economy, one that is already fully invested in a certain truth or value system, a certain way of making sense of the world, calculates outcomes in its own interests and thus pre-empts decision making. Decisions, then, press upon us an aporetic duty. They obviously cannot take place fully outside the rules and norms of a specific context (for example, we cannot translate at all without relying on particular language systems and rhetorical conventions), but they nonetheless must go beyond, rather than owe themselves fully to the limits of an already established order.

For translation, the im/possibility of aporias has to do with the problem that languages, like all identities, are already self-divided and therefore self-conflicted. Indeed, in Derrida's text *Aporias* a translation problem provides both the context and the example for introducing the word *aporia*. "Il y va

d'un certain pas" Derrida points out (with emphasis on the double meaning of *pas*) can be translated as "It involves a certain step/not", or as "he goes along at a certain pace" (1993/1993: 6). Untranslatable in its multiplicity, this phrase testifies to the identity, the singularity of French, in that no other language can gather precisely these multiple effects in just such a way, in just so many words. But this singular identity emerges only with a division *within* French, with the border that "*already* passes between the several versions or interpretations of the same sentence in French". Thus, "the identity of a language can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself" (ibid: 9-10). The many untranslatables faced in translation, those unique conjunctions in a language that prohibit clear passage across the border to another language, result not from the clear delimitation of one language from another but from the border inside 'one' language. The "border of translation does not pass among various languages. It separates translation from itself, it separates translatability within one and the same language" (ibid: 10). There is no passage (thus the emphasis on *pas*: 'step/not'), and so the translator must decide the undecidable, arrive at a translation without having passed through an open, already determined passage.

To this traversal without clear passage Derrida assigns the term *experience*, which "also means passage, traversal, endurance, and rite of passage, but can be a traversal without line and without indivisible border" (ibid: 14-15). Experience in this sense is called for in all the self-conflicted domains of decision and responsibility, such as ethics, law and politics. Ethics is self-conflicted for instance, when it must decide, in the face of inevitable death(s), who lives and who dies; law, when the rights of various citizens come into conflict; democratic politics, when the 'common good' is self-divided (when the regulation of industry, for instance, cannot protect both the environment and the welfare of union workers). But, as Derrida puts it:

> The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is of obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. (Derrida 1990: 24)

Clearly, a decision in the face of competing interests cannot respond to *all* involved. Thus a responsible decision is paradoxically condemned to act irresponsibly toward *some*: "I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the

other others" (Derrida 1992b/1995: 68). What could demonstrate this sacrifice more clearly than translation, which, in the face of inexhaustible textual nuances, must respond to some while sacrificing others? If the problem, the *aporia*, in any of these cases is resolved not through *experience*, through the 'ordeal of the undecidable', but through recourse only to calculation or a formula – which must always be *somebody's* formula – then it will have been a sellout, a set-up by and for one economy, 'fixed' from the start. "Justice is an experience of the impossible" (Derrida 1990: 16).

An instructive example of such a question of justice faces medical ethicists and the parents of 'micro-preemies' (extremely premature babies) today. While medical technology is now capable, as it was not a few years ago, of 'saving' these babies through extraordinary, aggressive medical intervention, this 'saving' often results in children with serious mental disabilities and/or extreme, sometimes constantly painful, physical ailments. The decision whether to attempt to keep a micro-preemie alive – whether it is *just* to keep him or her alive – must be made without the ability to predict the outcome: each case is so singular, each tiny body so specific in its make-up, that medicine cannot determine which babies will go on to live 'relatively healthy lives', and which will suffer interminably (as will their families, emotionally and economically). The decision must be made, virtually without guidelines, by parents, doctors, and medical ethicists (usually in conversation with each other), but it must be made without ever being able to determine fully what is 'just' for the child and for the family. This example may seem anomalous, a bizarre result of medicine not keeping up with itself, or of ethics and law not keeping up with medicine, so that there are no secure guidelines in place. But to the contrary, this situation exemplifies every case that calls for justice. The situation of micro-preemies makes the im/possibility of justice particularly visible because it has not yet undergone the sedimentation of institutional regulations, guidelines and opinions, all with their own interests (promulgated, for instance, by lawyers, doctors, politicians, church officials, drug companies, health insurance companies...). Ten years from now, with data and official positions accumulating from all directions, these decisions will be made not in the face of sheer im/possibility, but in the face of general rules and norms, whose historicity and indebtedness to particular power structures will be obscured. That is why Derrida points out that there is first of all a responsibility to memory: "to the task of recalling the history, the origin and subsequent direction, thus the limits, of concepts of justice, the law and right, of values, norms, prescriptions that have been imposed and sedimented there, from then on remaining more or less readable or presupposed" (Derrida 1990: 19). It is necessary to de-construct law, or 'right', which prescribes calculations, in order to begin thinking of a just decision.

Various traditions of translation theory have for centuries been sedimenting values, norms, assumptions, expectations, etc. about language

(standard language versus dialect, for instance), textual hierarchies, the relationship of the source and target texts, the relationship of the translator to the source and target cultures, and even about what constitutes a culture and a translation. Translation theorists are now deconstructing some of these concepts (most notably 'translation' itself) and thinking about the implications of their historicity. For instance, if dominant notions of 'translation' have been developed in the context of discussing upper class literature, or literature immediately available only to a literate upper class, then a recognition of this class inflection must precede any attempt to rethink translation. These historically constituted assumptions arise in many translation situations. A person who speaks a 'dialect' (social or regional, for instance) of his or her national language will often not be offered the services of a courtroom translator, while someone who speaks a different 'language' will. As translators struggle to make ethical decisions, they need to consider the historicity of the concepts upon which they base their thinking.

One roadblock to decision (if we keep in mind the non-passage of the *aporia*) is the problem of singularity. Just as each language and utterance can never be perfectly, exhaustively translated into another language and context, so too no individual or unique situation can be perfectly matched by a general rule or norm, the application of which would always therefore entail a degree of violence. Can we legislate, regulate and establish fixed guidelines for decisions about micro-preemies? Or is there an obligation to each child or case, as unique – or 'other' – to make a *responsible* decision, i.e., one that *responds* to its singularity by passing through the ordeal of undecidability? One cannot fully know the nature of an obligation, or 'tie' to an other. Such total knowledge would collapse the difference between self and other, reducing them to the 'same'. As Simon Critchley puts it, "Ethics would begin with the recognition that the other is not an object of cognition or comprehension, but precisely that which exceeds my grasp and powers" (Critchley 1999: 14). Because a complete grasp of that to which we must respond would annihilate the very possibility of response – by annihilating anything to respond *to* – one must decide without absolute assurance that the 'right' decision will have been made, which, paradoxically perhaps, is what makes the decision just and responsible.

The problem of justice and singularity is bound to language, not only because language is integral to identity as well as to relations between nations, citizens, foreigners, etc., but also because law and judgment perform *in* language – in a particular idiom. Application of the law to those who do not understand its idiom would be unjust, or irresponsible, in the sense that it applies a general code that clearly does not respond to a particular case. Such violent exercise of law, which occurs routinely and sometimes makes headlines, may seem a dramatic exception to the everyday functioning of legal codes. But to the contrary, such cases merely dramatize the structure of law,

which by definition operates according to general codes designed to supersede singularity. The problem of justice is the problem of language, since

> however slight or subtle the difference of competence in the mastery of the idiom is here, the violence of an injustice has begun when all the members of a community do not share the same idiom throughout. Since in all rigor this ideal situation is never possible, we can perhaps already draw some inferences about... 'the possibility of justice' (Derrida 1990: 18).

Law, or any such general code, can never be applied to singular cases so as to achieve perfect justice. As John Caputo puts it, citing a well-used metaphor that likewise applies to translation, "A perfect set of laws would have to be cut to fit; it would have to mention everybody by name [...]. A perfect set of laws would be like a map so perfect that it would match in size the region of which it is the map" (Caputo 1993: 88; cf. Arrojo 1998: 38, citing Borges 1964: 46). Obviously, such an exhaustive set of laws – like a perfect translation – is impossible, the job of producing it interminable. This challenge resonates doubly for translation, which not only faces the same structural double bind as does justice, but also plays a crucial role in mediating languages and cultures in many contexts that are immediately, or ultimately, juridical.

All this is not to say that we are paralyzed, that decisions cannot be made, or that all rules and guidelines must be thrown out. Quite to the contrary, justice *requires* decision, and is obliged, as noted above, "to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules" (Derrida 1990: 24). One must take law, rules, and as much else as possible into account (for translation, obviously, this includes grammar, linguistic and cultural conventions, genre, historical context, etc.), for these act as 'the guardrails of responsibility'. But such guardrails "remain radically heterogeneous" to the call of responsibility (Derrida 1993/1993: 19), which must exceed calculation and codes, must take the risk of 'giving' – giving to the other, and giving itself over to the unknown. Traversing aporia, somehow exceeding the known, would seem a divine act. Recognizing this resemblance, Derrida sometimes refers to justice as quasi-divine: it is 'quasi' divine not only because it is not, obviously, actually divine, but because it never claims the status of truth. Rather, it operates 'under erasure', enacting justice but at the same time canceling itself and thus avoiding a claim to permanence.

This discussion of justice as quasi-divine may seem far removed from practical issues of translation. But, translators always face decisions in their translation process (no matter how technical the text may be), as well as in the larger context of their work. They must decide, for instance, what jobs to accept and what projects to initiate; what businesses, institutions, individuals, governments or presses to work for, to patronize, or to boycott; and what

political stance to take in regard to the support or repression of certain projects. For most of these situations there already exist well developed protocols, ideological assumptions, and moral or political positions, all of which can tend to seem logical or 'right' rather than historical, institutionalized effects. Each decision, if it is to be just, must go beyond protocols and already formu-lated positions by responding to the irreducible singularity of the event.

It is important to note that deconstruction's insistence upon the limits of established ethical codes does not deny or obstruct just intervention in con-temporary moral or political affairs. To the contrary, our relation to the 'wholly other' is a *tie* that obliges us [as the Latin root *ligare*, 'to bind' implies] to respond through decision. Moreover, failure to decide leaves the 'giving' or incalculable idea of justice open for perverse reappropriation:

> That justice exceeds law and calculation, that the unpresentable exceeds the determinable, cannot and should not serve as an alibi for staying out of juridico-political battles, within an institution or a state or between institutions or states and others. Left to itself, the incalculable and giv-ing (*donatrice*) idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse cal-culation. It's always possible. And so incalculable justice *requires* us to calculate. (Derrida 1990: 28)

Institutions and states, especially at their most hegemonic or tyrannical mo-ments, often claim a special purchase on transcendence – whether through the 'divine right of kings' or a particular version of 'the rights of man'. Through their claim to mediate unequivocally that which is beyond human calcula-tion, they reappropriate the 'incalculable idea of justice' in their own interests, even as they mystify the act of reappropriation. In a recent talk that explores the structural relationship of translation and justice, Derrida gives an extended example of just such a 'perverse calculation' that looks quite like the 'giving' idea of justice.

'Relevant' Translation

'Qu'est-ce qu' une traduction 'relevante'?' (Derrida 1999/2001), a lecture given at the 1998 seminar of the Assises de la Traduction Littéraire à Arles (ATLAS), addresses the structural relationship of justice, law and 'relevant' translation through a discussion of 'mercy' in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The essay begins with a focus on the term relevant/relevante, cho-sen because of its importance to defining translation, its multi-lingual irreducibility, and its history in relation to Derrida's work. It addresses relevance as it is often understood in translation studies, points out a funda-mental contradiction in the concept, and ultimately suggests a revised sense

of relevance that respects the 'incalculable idea of justice'.

In the first case, Derrida observes, a relevant translation is taken to be one that does its job "while inscribing in the receiving language the most *relevant* equivalent for an original, the language that is *the most* right, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, opportune, pointed, univocal, idiomatic, and so on" (1999/2001: 177). In this sense, the word 'relevant' is entrusted in any given context with "the task of defining – nothing less – the essence of translation" (ibid: 182). This formulation coincides with the claims of contemporary relevance theory as it has been applied to translation. Ernst-August Gutt, for example, refers to the following principle of relevance: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Gutt 2000: 32; citing Sperber and Wilson 1986: 158). The sending and interpreting of information operates on the assumption that communication resources are being optimized, that is, they are the *most relevant* possible. Moreover, the expectation of 'optimal relevance' means that an "attempt at interpretation will yield *adequate contextual effects* at *minimal processing cost*" (ibid: 32). Rather than attempting to describe or prescribe a specific definition of translation, Gutt suggests that "issues of translation are shown to be at heart issues of communication" (ibid: 198), and that in any given context "the principles, rules and guidelines of translation are applications of the principle of relevance" (ibid). Therefore, as Chesterman and Arrojo note in a different context, "the question 'What is a translation?' is closely linked to the question 'What is a good translation?'" (2000: 154). According to this common notion of translation and relevance, as Derrida points out, "the question 'What is a relevant translation?' would return to the question 'What is translation?'" (Derrida 1999/2001: 182). Nonetheless, Derrida keeps the term 'relevant' in his title because "it serves, through a supplementary fold [*pli*], to qualify translation, as well as what a translation might be *obliged* to be, namely *relevant*" (ibid: 177).

Derrida focuses on the contradictions of this relation. If a relevant translation presumes, as Derrida puts it, the 'most relevant' equivalent, the 'most right' language (or, in Gutt's terms 'optimal relevance'), then this translation would necessarily deploy the terms of a certain economy, which would guide decisions as to what is *most* relevant. The economy of translation, however, must always be double and contradictory because it "signifies two things, *property* and *quantity*" (Derrida 1999/2001: 178). According to the rule of 'property' translation is an "attempt at appropriation which aims to transport home, in its language, in the most appropriate way possible, in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text" (ibid: 179). Translation in this sense would fully, exhaustively, explain the meanings, connotations, denotations, etc. of everything in the source text, like a detailed translator's notebook. Such translation, however, would defy the rule of 'quantity', which requires that the translation "be *quantitatively* equivalent to the

original, apart from any paraphrase, explication, explicitation, analysis, and
the like" (ibid: 179). A translation that is the *most* right in terms of property
must be different from one *most right* in terms of quantity. For instance, when
translators add phrases, explanations or notes in order to compensate for lin-
guistic and cultural differences, they attend to the translation's relevance in
terms of 'property' but distort it in terms of 'quantity'. Likewise, when trans-
lators choose to sacrifice certain nuances of the source text for the sake of
readability, they attend to the translation's relevance in terms of 'quantity'
but distort it in terms of 'property'. (For instance, Alan Bass's exhaustive
translation of a footnote, discussed above (pages 73-74), is nearly unread-
able, and many of its nuances would in most circumstances be sacrificed.)
We can see the concern for both property and quantity in the expectation that
'optimal relevance' "will yield *adequate contextual effects* at *minimal
processing cost*" (Gutt 2000: 32). While rendering adequate contextual ef-
fects requires attention to the rule of 'property', doing so at minimal processing
cost follows the rule of 'quantity'.

   'Relevant' translation, then, aspires to two laws that defy each other. It is
aporetic, and therefore requires decision in the strong sense of that term. If
translators were to codify and institutionalize rules or procedures for produc-
ing 'relevant' translations, this institutionalization would begin to obscure
the im/possibility of 'relevant' translation, replacing the need for decision
with calculation. One might be tempted to claim that relevance in any par-
ticular situation emerges from the expectations or needs of the target culture
itself. But such a claim would inevitably privilege a select group within the
target culture, as well as that group's assumptions about the relationship
between the source text/culture and the target text/culture. Moreover,
priviliging target culture expectations often has a devastating impact on the
source culture, as Tejaswini Niranjana points out in her discussion of British
translation – and application – of Indian law (Niranjana 1992). Derrida does
not point out the self-contradiction of 'relevant' translation in order to dis-
miss the idea of relevance, but to foreground its relationship to an ethics of
translation, and to the translatability/untranslatability problem that I have
been tracing throughout this book. A relevant translation cannot precede de-
cision, but must emerge through it. The decisions made in an effort to negotiate
the inherent contradiction of optimal relevance perform an ethical relation.

   Looking at the term in another way, Derrida suggests that 'relevant' is
also a word 'in translation', for several reasons. First of all, "this word of
Latin origin is now rather English (*relevant/irrelevant*) in its current usage, in
its use value, in its circulation or its *currency*, even though it is also in the
process of Frenchification" (Derrida 1999/2001: 177). Not strictly a transla-
tion, the word is rather *in* translation, travelling across borders and thus
disrupting the unity of one word and one language. Moreover, as with any
term, speaking of 'relevant' translation in English is not the same as speaking

of 'une traduction relevante' in French. In French, for example, the term operates in the context of *relève*, *relevé* and *relever*, whose interrelated meanings of 'relief', 'statement', spicy', 'raise', 'enhance', 'season', 'relieve' etc. allowed Derrida to coin *la relève* as a translation of Hegel's *Aufhebung*. The popularity of this translation, in certain circles at least, also performs as part of the French context for 'relevant' translation. As noted in the previous chapter, Hegelian dialectics is a process of *Aufhebung*, through which every concept is negated and lifted up to a higher sphere in which (according to Hegel) it is conserved, without excess or remainder: it can maintain within itself its own contradiction. This dialectical movement is similar to the concept of ideal translation, which would purport to lift the essence of a source text into another code without excess or remainder. Derrida's translation of *Aufhebung* by *la relève* emphasizes that the 'lift' of signification from one level to another or one code to another must traverse an aporia: that is, it cannot occur without exceeding already established laws, or without making a decision that is also a sacrifice. *La relève* both translates and deconstructs *Aufhebung*. Derrida's essay focuses on what is at stake when the (always contingent) traversal of *aporia* is reappropriated through a perverse calculation that – unlike the 'giving' idea of justice – would claim the power to mediate the incalculable. The point made by Derrida's translation/deconstruction of Hegel's *Aufhebung* is important to the manner in which his essay investigates, through a close reading of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the price paid when one group claims for itself the power of this mediation – the power, in other words, to solve the problem of translation.

'Mercy Seasons Justice'

Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* investigates the relation of law and justice through a narrative of conversion that foregrounds the issues of economy and translation. The question of conversion, first of all, is set out in economic terms – most notably in regard to the debt to Shylock, articulated as the translative relation of a literal body (a pound of flesh) and a fiduciary sign. This economic conversion (an impossible translation in that the debt is unpayable) is related to the forced conversion of Shylock to Christianity. Shakespeare's representation of this conversion deploys, on the one hand, the traditional (particularly Pauline) figure of the Jew as situated on the side of the body, the letter, and literal exteriority (as in bodily circumcision). On the other hand, the Christian is situated on the side of "the spirit or sense, of interiority, or spiritual circumcision" (Derrida 1999/2001: 184). The process of conversion from the literal body to the spiritual sense – whether of a pound of flesh to a monetary equivalent, of a Jewish body to the Christian faith, or of the letter of a bond to a merciful judgment – constitutes the *passage* of translation, the traversal of aporia: "This relation of the letter to the spirit, of

the body of literalness to the ideal interiority of sense is also the site of the passage of translation, of this conversion that is called translation" (ibid: 184). Shakespeare's text foregrounds the stakes involved when the rite (or right) of passage between letter and spirit is claimed as the purview of a particular group (religious/political, etc.). These stakes also pertain to the discussion of ethics in translation. If on the one hand we recognize that translation can never be a matter of simply revealing a pre-existing meaning, yet on the other hand we claim an ethical privilege for a particular translative relation, then someone's economy is served at the expense of someone else. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the character Portia makes such a move by first claiming that the translative power of mercy transcends human agency, then reappropriating the passage of this translation as a virtue of the Christian state. It is the structure of her move that Derrida wishes to examine.

The divisions of Jew/Christian, letter/spirit correlate in Shakespeare's play with conditions that mark translation as both impossible and possible. On the one hand, Shylock insists that the oath he swore in making the bond with the merchant Antonio cannot be changed, undone, translated. The act of swearing is transcendence itself, and thus, even though the oath passes through language, it passes beyond human language. So for Shylock, meaning inheres entirely in the literal bond, which demands absolute fidelity to the original and thus precludes translation. On the other hand, Portia's argument against Shylock appeals to the divine in a different way, and while Derrida has no sympathy for Shylock's insistence upon the literalness of the bond, he focuses mainly on the logic of Portia's discourse on 'mercy' and its structural relationship to economy and translation. After Antonio confesses to the veracity of the bond, Portia argues against strict application of justice as defined through codified law, and in a response that 'falls like a verdict', declares: "Then must the Jew be merciful" (IV.i.178). In consonance with recent observations that *The Merchant of Venice* stages the logic and power of anti-Semitism, Derrida notes that:

> This short sentence simultaneously signs both the economy and the incomparable genius of Shakespeare. It deserves to rise above this text as an immense allegory; it perhaps recapitulates the entire history of forgiveness, the entire history between the Jew and the Christian, the entire history of economics (*merces*, market, merchandise, *merci*, mercenary, wage, reward, literal or sublime) as a history of translation: 'Then must the Jew be merciful'. (Derrida 1999/2001: 186)

Shylock *must* be merciful, forgive the debt – and he recognizes that he is being *obliged* to forgive the debt, as his response confirms: "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that" (IV.i.179). In contrast to Shylock's insistence on the ultimate power of the literal bond, Portia defines 'mercy' as the su-

preme power, as a divine attribute that rises above temporal might and the law; yet she ultimately locates this power in the human, as the greatest attribute of the Christian monarch. The discourses of Shylock and Portia mirror one another: "Both place something (the oath, forgiveness) above human language *in* human language, beyond the human order *in* the human order, beyond human rights and duties *in* human law" (ibid: 188).

Portia's explanation of *why* the Jew must be merciful returns us to the point that introduced my discussion of this essay on 'relevant' translation: "Left to itself, the incalculable and giving (*donatrice*) idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation. It's always possible" (Derrida 1990: 28). Portia's discourse on mercy enacts such a reappropriation.

Mercy, according to Portia, is beyond human calculation and functions as a transparent relation between giver and taker:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes,
>
> (IV.i.180-83)

Not strained, not forced by expediency, mercy simply comes – it drops from heaven. This idea of mercy resembles the deconstructive idea of justice, in that Portia suggests going beyond the automatic application of codified law, and giving to or forgiving the other in a movement that exceeds a personal economy. But the metaphorical basis of this passage betrays its alleged transparency: "There is a hierarchy, and this is why the metaphor of rain is not only that of a phenomenon that is not ordered up, but also that of a vertical descending movement: forgiveness is given from above to below" (Derrida 1999/2001: 192). Ultimately, Portia will turn this hierarchy to her own advantage.

The implications of Portia's metaphor become more evident as she continues her argument:

> 'Tis the mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
> The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
> It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself;
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice [...]
>
> (IV.i.184-93)

As 'the mightiest in the mightiest', an attribute to God, beyond the crown or apex of temporal power, mercy is impossible in the sense that it goes beyond the humanly possible. It becomes possible only by existing in a different order from the humanly possible. Thus for justice seasoned by mercy, as for 'relevant' translation as Derrida will define it, "there is no longer any possible contradiction between possible and impossible since they belong to two heterogeneous orders" (1999/2001: 193, n.5). Because Portia insists that the spiritual power of mercy is not earthly or political, but is interior, spiritual and ideal, she locates it in the hearts of kings rather than in their exterior, political attributes. By transferring divine power into the hearts of kings, her speech translates the theological into the political, and negotiates their relation through a "trajectory of an interiorization that passes from the visible to the invisible by becoming a thing of the heart" (ibid: 193). Portia's speech makes the leap from law to justice, but simultaneously reappropriates the incalculable and giving idea of justice for – or *into* – a particular temporal order.

Of course, Portia speaks *as* a Christian *for* a Christian political order, against Shylock and the Jewish literality that he has been made to signify. Despite her demand that 'the Jew be merciful', Shylock stands outside the relation of mercy and justice. According to "the historical and allegorical cards that have been dealt in this situation and all the discursive, logical, theological, political and economic resources of the concept of mercy" (Derrida 1999/2001: 198) as it has come down through a Christian European legacy that has also been a discourse on translation, it will not be Shylock but the Christian doge who bestows mercy. His mercy will rain down upon the Jew, simultaneously dispossessing him of his bodily goods and forcing his conversion to Christianity. Through a 'perverse calculation' this discourse reappropriates the incalculable and giving idea of justice for a political-theological order that subsumes within its hyphen "the entire history of forgiveness, the entire history between the Jew and the Christian, the entire history of economics […] as a history of translation" (ibid: 186). Even though Portia claims that 'mercy' lies beyond human agency (it drops from heaven), she nonetheless defines it as the essence of Christian kings. In so doing she simultaneously reifies and mystifies Christian royalty's 'divine right', affording it the power to mediate the incalculable and to impose its translation solution upon the bodies of others.

Derrida connects Portia's reappropriative move to the problem of 'relevant' translation by focusing on her statement 'mercy seasons justice'. 'Justice' as Portia uses the term refers to codified law. She argues, however, as does Derrida, for a different kind of justice, an incalculable and giving justice that responds to the other and to a singular situation. According to her argument, 'mercy' acts as the leavening agent, like the seasoning that enhances the taste, lifting it above itself so that "justice is even more just, it

transcends itself, it is spiritualized by rising and thus lifting itself [*se relevant*] above itself" (ibid: 196). For these reasons, Derrida proposes 'relève' as a translation for Portia's 'seasons'. The verb 'relèver' carries both the gustatory and the elevating connotations of 'to season' as Portia uses it, and it is also, of course, the word that Derrida long ago used to translate Hegel's *Aufhebung*, the negating and conserving movement that would, like Portia's reappropriated 'mercy' and like 'ideal' translation, ensure a totalizing system. Derrida brings the same deconstructive move to bear upon Portia's 'mercy' as he did upon Hegel's *Aufhebung*. Just as *la relève* both translates *Aufhebung* and stages its limit, so 'relèver' translates 'seasons' and lifts it beyond Portia's reappropriation. For Derrida, mercy will accordingly 'lift' justice above itself, take all the rules and laws into account but go beyond them – not as divine but as quasi-divine. Not seated like Portia's mercy in the heart of an existing political-theological order, but given over to that which exceeds one's 'grasp and powers'.

Conclusion: Relevance and Obligation

At this point we can go back to Derrida's title and ask once again: 'What is a 'relevant' translation?'. A 'relevant' translation, in Derrida's sense, would perform translation in the way that 'mercy seasons justice', lifting it beyond human calculation, beyond already established possibilities. Such a relevant translation would not set out simply to flaunt existing conventions, such as linguistic norms, established translation strategies, and rhetorical patterns. These conventions form the general system through which texts make meaning, and they constitute the history of the languages and cultures in question; any valid reading must begin with painstaking attention to this system and this history. Thus Derrida calls such laws, rules, and conventions the 'guardrails of responsibility'. A translation that *only* proceeded on the basis of history, convention, and even the fine subtleties of linguistic usage would, however, be programmatic. In its best sense such translation may be the goal of the software industry, but it can never achieve relevance or responsibility as I have been using those terms here. A relevant translation would respond to that which is irreducibly singular in the translation event: to that which exceeds the limit of calculation and thus requires decision.

Obviously, deconstruction cannot offer a method for achieving such relevant translation, since following a prescribed method or code would foreclose the very possibility of relevance. This relevance is not as mysterious as it may seem, however. Once again we can look to the example of James Holmes's discussion of his translation of Nijhoff's 'De grot' (see chapter 4, above). After stating that translation cannot proceed by calculation, and after recognizing his reliance upon his own grasp of the two languages and cultures involved, Holmes explains that he decided to alter Nijhoff's metrical

scheme and to "produce a poem that might be effective in a quite different manner" (Holmes 1988: 57). We can glean from his language that Holmes's sense of applying his 'grasp' of the two languages and cultures does not merely superimpose received assumptions upon the translation. He is everywhere unsure, always experimenting: the poem *might* be effective; Nijhoff, writing during the war, would have been 'taken aback' by the translation's post-war free-verse techniques; *perhaps* another translator could better render the poem and its formal structure. Holmes' uncertainty indicates the degree to which he takes chances, goes beyond the safe space of the predictable. His uncertainty is inevitable, since his decisions are not based upon anything he views as logical certainties or to which he can appeal for validation. These decisions have not proceeded through an already established route, but have passed through the non-passage of an aporia. They therefore must remain uncertain, and Holmes, unlike Portia, does not attempt to reappropriate the passage of translation – the im/possible traversal of aporia – as anyone's 'right'. Indeed, his own adherence to the concept of a pure original leads him to judge translation as inadequate to its source. Nonetheless, by 'lifting' translation beyond the calculus of solving for a restricted economy, Holmes produces a relevant translation. The inadequacy he senses springs from the absence of any undivided original, and from the impossibility of responding to all of its competing requests and his obligations to it.

The nature of obligation is perhaps the most important and the most im/possible aspect of relevance and responsibility in translation. This obligation does not exist simply before or outside the translator and the translating situation – in the sense that a translator might identify, for instance, the unfair treatment of a culture or the neglect of a great work, and then feel obliged to rectify the situation. These things are important, certainly, but the obligation most pertinent to relevant translation is the tie between the translator-subject and the 'wholly other', both of which emerge with the initiating gesture of translation. When a translator, or translating culture, reaches to translate a 'foreign' text, both the translator and the foreign become co-defined; they do not, as such, pre-exist this gesture. Each initiating gesture, specific of course to its historical moment, designates identities (i.e., the text, the translator, language, culture, etc.) that emerge through exclusions. That which is excluded in order for these identities to emerge is the 'wholly other'. The irreducibly foreign, then, does not lie waiting in the source text, but *becomes* with the conception of the translation. Only relevant translation in the deconstructive sense that I have discussed above can respond – be responsible to – this 'other', which by definition lies outside the translator's system of logic. The more translation reaches toward its obligation to the 'other', the more it resists totalizing forces that aspire to the annihilation of difference. It is in this sense that deconstruction and translation share the same stakes.

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