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Ethics and Politics of Translating

Henri Meschonnic

Translated and edited by
Pier-Pascale Boulanger

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Table of contents

A life in translation

Death

We now have *to think Meschonnic*, the same way he himself did state that one should think Hegel or Humboldt, think Descartes or Spinoza; not merely trying to grasp the nature and importance of their philosophy but thinking *with* these philosophers. Each of them represents a "mode of inventing thought" (50)[1], which is more challenging to take hold of than to adopt a historical or an exegetical approach. The effort is indubitably more demanding than *to talk Hegel* or *to talk Descartes,* seeing that cultural zoos are full of talented talking parrots.

I would not have dared to propose *that we should think Meschonnic* when he was still alive. Yet I could not have written these lines without taking into account the event of his recent passing. Each death is unique; each death carries the end of the world, Derrida said, each time unique. Each time somebody dies, everybody dies in the sense that a singular and unique bearer of the world has disappeared. To the uniqueness of the event is added its uniqueness for those who witness it, given that if each death raises again the question of inheritance, each heritage raises the question of death and informs differently the issue. One inherits the death of somebody as well as the meaning of death for that person in connection with his/her life and beliefs and, for those who left any kind of oeuvre, in the context of his/her works.

The aftermath of Henri Meschonnic's death is all the more mind-provoking because his thinking was deeply anchored in a concern for life. His work radiated like a permanent advocacy for life, against all that is deceptively taken as life through illusory and ideologically-loaded values, amounting to a defence of thinking "where thinking necessarily implies thinking language, and thinking the interaction between what it means to think language and what it means to think what we call living" (47).

In addition, is not death the supreme *discontinuum*, the absolute Otherness? Or, in other words, is not death the ultimate *translatio*, the one for which there is no back-translation? Death, which ignores borders, draws the final frontier. It is

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1. All page numbers refer to *Ethics and Politics of Translating.*

quite stirring to read today the following sentence whose importance was stressed by the use of italics: "*Sign is death*" (125) in a passage denouncing the severing of language from life. Elsewhere Meschonnic writes that the series of disjunctions (signifier/signified, form/content, oral/written, body/soul…) caused by the dominating theory of the linguistic sign leads to a "generalized discontinuum" which produces a "heaviness of spirit" (137), a very subtle translation of the original "*la mort dans l'âme*" (literally, "death in the soul"). His recurrent comparison between St. Jerome and Charon, both being ferrymen – of words and of souls – somehow loses its irony. And if, according to his thought, a subject creates him/herself as a permanently active signifier interacting with other signifiers, if a subject is so as a subject of discourse, does it follow that with the death of the subject, all that remains for the subject's signifiers is to cross over and lie in the cemetery-dictionary of signifieds?

Death is an invitation to translate. Douglas Hofstadter understood it when he wrote, after the loss of his wife, *Le Ton beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language*, one of the most important treatise on translation written in the past ten years, one of the most clever and most sensitive essays on the shelf of translation studies, alongside *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel. If, for Maurice Blanchot, literature asserts the right to death by conveying a suspension of temporality and proclaiming a denial of the present, then translation exemplifies it by textually putting to death the original, and thus promoting itself as the legatee regardless of legitimacy and chronology.

Furthermore, the legatee's responsibility resembles that of the translator with regard to the original, insofar as a legacy is not a given nor a gift but rather comes forth like an abandoned object of which the finder has to make sense. Paul de Man remarked that the usual translation of *Aufgabe* as "task" in Walter Benjamin's title, "*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*", should not dismiss another meaning, "to give up": "The translator, de Man comments, has to give up in relation to the task of refinding what was there in the original."[2] This idea of defeat, to which Benjamin was giving a positive appraisal, suggests a third interpretation, if the *Aufgabe*-condition is applied to the status of the original text: deprived of the title deed of its significance, it is, meaningwise, abandoned. This throws light on the central precept proposed by Meschonnic: "more than what a text says, it is what a text does that must be translated" (69).

Recognising and claiming Meschonnic's heritage involves protesting against every *erasing* power, to quote the term he used to condemn the common practice of translating by making the reader forget that the translated text is a translated

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2.   In "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'," *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [1986], p. 80.

one. Unfortunately marginalised or ill-known, Meschonnic's work has its rightful place in the translative turn that social sciences and humanities took, after the linguistic and the cultural turns, while accepting translation as a pivotal paradigm, a "theoretical lever," to assess human history.

Now that we inherit both his absence and his oeuvre, answers to the above questions have to be found in the latter. Thinking Meschonnic is an exercise in translating on the grounds that, as he declared, untranslatability partakes of an ideological construction used to sanctify sacred texts or poetry and that only history decides when, and if, a text becomes translatable. Untranslatability is another symptom of the schizophrenic tendencies in theories that admit a split between form and content and against whose doxa Meschonnic's plea for a "body-in-language, affect-concept continuum" (36) runs counter.

Thinking the continuum asks for a thinking-in-continuum which finds an obvious manifestation in the play of echoes between the three genres Meschonnic practised, namely essays, poetry and translation, the first category covering an impressive range of domains: grammar, lexicology, linguistics, aesthetics, philosophy, literary history and theory, *etc*. He would, of course, object to such a classification for he unremittingly castigated the regionalisation of knowledge, which prevents an inclusive theory of language from performing its critical potential. He continually insisted that theory was also a practice and that he was theorising because he was also translating and writing poetry. In one of his "From the same author" notices, he chose to present the grouping of his books in the following order: Poetry, Translations, Essays; thus stressing the natural mediatory vocation of translation.

All his writing activities focus on a philosophy of language displayed under different headings, allowing him to write about dictionaries, Heidegger or modernity, while keeping the overall orientation of an ethics which supports a process of subjectivisation which in turn posits the individual as a "being of language." The scope and diversity of his works exemplify the intrinsic pluralism of ethics: to be a subject is to be capable of a multiple being against all the conceptions of identity based on the ideas of rootedness, foundation and permanency.

To support the interweaving view of life and language, whose bond founds his definition of ethics, Meschonnic quotes four times in this book a passage from the philosopher to whom he devoted an essay[3]: "[…] a human life, defined not by mere circulation of the blood, and other qualities common to all animals, but above all by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind" (48). Spinoza's *Mentis* stands far away from the Platonic/Christian dichotomy between body and

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3. *Spinoza, poème de la pensée*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002.

spirit which has benefited from sustainable development in the very fertile field of translation theories; it should rather be valued in relation to another favourite quote of Meschonnic: "[…] it is only when life is attributed to everything that has a history, and not to that which is only a stage setting for history, that this concept comes into its own."[4]

This lifeline, which Spinoza and Benjamin locate in human culture, is strictly a reflection of history, not as played on Hegel's great pipe organ but conceived as a site for human experience. "From experience" (43), is Meschonnic's only justification when facing accusations of "arrogance or madness" and the argument invites the reader to a reading experience where he/she could be approving ("Finally somebody says it!") or irritated ("Cultural revolution! He is exaggerating!") but through which he/she cannot stay neutral. In that sense, every real experience relates to a poetic experience in Meschonnic's terms: "if there is what I call a poem, including a poem of thought, there is transformation of a form of language by a form of life and transformation of a form of life by a form of language" (88).

The wanderer

Translated as a carrying-across (translation) or a carrying-over (*Übersetzung*), translation cannot be apprehended by those whom Meschonnic calls "the established" or "the deaf." Some years ago, I thought it clever to give to an article on his oeuvre the title of *Portrait of the Translator as a Poet*, wishing this Joycean wording to illustrate the symmetry between the writing act and the translative one. Beside a certain weariness of the formula and its arbitrariness – why not *Portrait of the Poet as a Translator*? – I neglected the fact that Meschonnic himself wrote a self-portrait in a book published in 1981 entitled *Jona et le signifiant errant* (*Jonas and the Wandering Signifier*) whose analyses he resumed twenty years later in *L'utopie du Juif* (*Utopia of the Jew*).

The book consists of a translation of the biblical Book of Jonas, followed by two essays on translation, writing, language and identity. Jonas went across (the waters) and over (to Nineveh), bringing with him God's admonition, providing a perfect image of the translator, which is further corroborated by the rabbinical commentary asserting that the sailors on the ship where Jonas fell asleep when fleeing his divine mission spoke the 70 languages the world has to share by virtue of a certain Babelian tower.

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4.   "The Translator's Task" (tr. by S. Rendall) in "Walter Benjamin's Essay on Translation. Critical translations" (A. Nouss, ed.), *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 10 (2), 1997, p. 153.

Meschonnic recalls the interpretation of the Book of Jonas as a parable about life and death, but the most daring aspect of his reading consists in linking the prophetic character to the notion of signifier. Meschonnic's theory of rhythm destroys the binary organisation of language: "No more sound and sense, no more double articulation of language, only signifiers," but he cautiously adds: "And the term 'signifier' changes its meaning since it is no longer opposed to a signified."[5] The signifier, Meschonnic insists, refers to a practice, the acting of a subject which exposes its historicity. The French word "*signifiant*" (a substantivised present participle) keeps the idea more efficiently than the English word "signifier" whose ending suggests a role or a function, that is to say an action one could undertake with distance or neutrality. The signifying subject, because he/she is a subject, is always signifying, always a wanderer, hence the analogy with the Wandering Jew of which Jonas is the iconic figure. According to Meschonnic, the Jew has been obscured in Western culture in the same way that the signifier has been concealed, both reduced to a secondary or marginalised role because of their subversiveness in blurring boundaries and divisions: "The Jew is the signifier of signifiers."[6]

Beware the signifier! "Signifier – the meaning of the word is straightforward: that which signifies" (156). Meschonnic's understanding of the signifier is aligned with Levinas' definition in *Totality and Infinity*: "He who signals himself by a sign qua signifying that sign is not the signified of the sign – but delivers the sign and gives it."[7] Indeed, despite some reservations Meschonnic has expressed about Levinas' philosophy, both ethical perspectives help to counteract a fetishism of the signifier in which poststructuralism could appear as dogmatic as structuralism. Yes, cultures are constructions but where there is a building, there is a builder.

"Faithful, unfaithful, just more of the same, I thank thee O sign" (Chapter VII) or "Sourcerer, targeteer, the same thing" (Chapter VIII). It would be a gross error to describe Henri Meschonnic as a leading dialectician – the same way he presents Eugene Nida as a leading semiotician –, a crafty practitioner of resolution. In phase with the Frankfurt School's critical epistemology – Horkheimer inspired his refusal of the disciplinary fragmentation which grants autonomy to the field of translation studies – he never skips an opposition between two terms or two concepts in order to attain the level of their reconciliation. No dialectical teleology is sought to rise above the binary dogmatism induced by the theory of the sign, insomuch as the goal is not to go past but to go out. Opposing two

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5.   *Poétique du traduire*, Lagrasse: Verdier, 1999, p. 117; *my translation*.

6.   *Jona et le signifiant errant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1981, p. 111; *my translation*.

7.   *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (tr. by A. Lingis), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 92.

notions – e.g. signifier and signified – leads to a more or less overt hierarchy and maintains a structure of thought without considering its perniciousness or its sterility. In this respect, Meschonnic's criticism is not so very far from Derrida's deconstruction. The goal is to analyse a theoretical standpoint and to show its pitfalls as far as the "language-poem-ethics-politics continuum" is concerned. This is why it is ludicrous to accuse him, as is often the case, of literalism, as opposed to semanticism, when he tries to dissolve the opposition. The same goes for abstract painting versus figurative painting. Is concreteness truly lacking in Rothko's, Kandinsky's or Soulages'[8] compositions?

By handling translation like a "signifying mode" rather than tackling the "What does it mean?" question (131), the book sets itself within the general framework of Western philosophy regarding matters of language and conjointly within the narrower translation studies debates. The speculative elegance of Meschonnic integrates both viewpoints, within a continuum, and assesses the ethical and political challenges of translating as "an action on subjects" (110) à propos issues of retranslation, translation of religious texts – a third of the volume – or the role and misrepresentation of translation in the history of European culture.

Life

Is such extensiveness the reason for what Pier-Pascale Boulanger judiciously called, borrowing Meschonnic's term, the non-translation of his oeuvre in the significantly longest part of her introduction, a perfect illustration, by the way, of Antoine Berman's idea of a translator's project[9]? A non-translation effect does not only mean that certain texts are not translated, it describes a situation and discloses a selective process, "lags and leaps of translating, in this or that country, this or that text, depending on interests and trends" (110), which Meschonnic relates to the various degrees of accepting an ethical representation of language. I would like to add a remark to Boulanger's arguments.

Cultural translation, a much-debated topic nowadays in academia, concerns the academic sphere too and throws a cloud of suspicion on the supposedly universal appeal of scholarly discourses. The field of translation studies is not immune to this kind of restriction: if publishing practices demonstrate a geopolitics of translation, the same is true for translation studies which sometimes

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8. With whom Meschonnic wrote a book: *Le rythme et la lumière, avec Pierre Soulages*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000.

9. In *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

tolerates the stigmatisation of scholars on the basis of their national origins. Now, if we consider translation studies books published in English – and in French for that matter – we find that what is generally taken for theory and ethics does not match Meschonnic's definitions. The use of meta-terms to describe translative strategies belongs to methodology, not to theory, and considerations about professional behaviours belong to deontology, not to ethics. Such views are vertiginously far from Meschonnic's definitions of theory as "the search for the unknown of thought" (151) and ethics as "what one does with oneself, and with others" (45).

His refusal to treat translation as a separate issue, disconnected from a general theory of language and of society and thus impoverished, could also explain his marginalisation in a field of translation studies obsessed by its academic recognition as a discipline. The very coolness of a vague and comprehensive naming such as translation studies contrasts sharply with the militancy, misjudged as aggressiveness, of Meschonnic's writings. Moreover, other representatives of what could be dubbed the "French theory of translation" have been similarly neglected. One can also wonder why Meschonnic's contribution to Bible translating has likewise been neglected in view of its applicability to other languages?

So much for "who's afraid of Henri Meschonnic?" Yet will this translation subsequently reassure Anglophone readers? In this respect, one can estimate that instead of the book at hand, published in 2007, the 1999 *Poétique du traduire* (*Poetics of Translating*) would have been more relevant in that it could be considered to be more representative of Meschonnic's thinking on translation. Even though translation has been accorded a major role in Meschonnic's essays and articles since the beginning of his intellectual career almost half a century ago and despite several books dealing with biblical translation, *Poétique du traduire* puts forward for the first time a comprehensive presentation of all his theses with regard to the act of translation.

Indeed *Ethics and Politics of Translating* does not propose new arguments whether on translation as the "experimentation field of theories of language" (59), or on the dynamics of subjectivity and historicity, or on the impasses of binary ways of thinking or on theatre and Bible translation. The title, nonetheless, says it all. "Poetics" could still provide the lazy reader with the alibi of a supposedly innocent formalist notion borrowed from literary theory. However, a totally opposite perspective supports Meschonnic's poetics, whose span is concerned with the totality of social constructions. Since any human relation has to take place through language, a linguistic relation takes on ethical and political dimensions and, since translation links together different linguistic systems, it deepens those dimensions.

Does it really matter whether this book or another is chosen for an introductory piece? Not really. Meschonnic's work reflects one of its main concepts in being inscribed within a continuum, an internal dynamics permitting repetitions, variations and modulations, so that any book could operate as an entry door, offering an access "in the middle," as Deleuze would say, indicating that there is no more middle than beginning or end, these notions depending on an ideology promoting linearity and hierarchy. Where does a translation begin? Where does an original end?

In a related baroque vein, the 350 pages of *La rime et la vie* could be summarised by two verses from one of his poems: "Life rimes/with life [la vie rime/ avec la vie]."[10] The book examines issues of rhythm and historicity, once again. Somehow, everything was already disclosed in *Pour la poétique* et *Les cinq rouleaux*, both published in 1970.[11] Why then continue to write… and to read? Asking the question reproduces the sole concern for content and forgets Meschonnic's emphasis on the "subject-form" which points to the relation between a meaning and its historicity, fifty years of theoretical and scriptural experimentation in his case. The principle which textually and ethically authorises the not-so-obvious procedure of retranslation applies here. A thinker explores his/her thought – "to think is first to invent thought" (46) – in the same manner a musician or a painter explores his/her art. Call it rhythm, not to be confused with a specific style. The central concept of Meschonnic's poetics is to be conceived as "the organization of the movement of speech," no longer as a dull metrical measurement. Meschonnic's rhythm of thought sets a perfect example for a rhapsodic way of thinking in contrast with a synthetic rationality aiming to encompass reality in a closed totality. Translated with relevancy and audacity by Pier-Pascale Boulanger in a "rhythm-translating" mode (132), it produces an alternation of humour and gravity, of dilatation and concision, of aphorisms and listings (the six paradigms of the sign theory, the nine misinterpretations of Saussure…), of commented quotes – from friends or foes – and precise analyses which cannot leave the reader indifferent.

Rhythm contributes to processes of subjectivisation within social and historical framings. As such, the concept implies a notion of circulation operating outside the rigid rules of a system and fit for the openness of the living. The subject feels part of an unceasing circulatory motion without being able to ascribe any limit to it: the infinite of language, of history, of meaning makes "the subject infinite" (51),

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10. *Puisque je suis ce buisson*, Orbey: Éditions Arfuyen, 2001, p. 34; *my translation*.

11. *Pour la poétique* is the first of a series of five books unfolding his poetics and *Les cinq rouleaux* includes his annotated translation from Hebrew of the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Lamentations, the Ecclesiastes and the Book of Esther.

and always on the move – "because meaning depends on the movement of meaning" (120). Such was Meschonnic's thought, and thinking Meschonnic should be always on the move. He was adamant about presenting his books as works in progress. Let us hope their translation will fall into the same category.

Quoting Mandelstam, Meschonnic, affirms that "there is always war in language, there is always war in translation" (81), in the form of a conflict "between the sign and the poem" and adds: "The poem against keeping order." While Barthes warned against the fascism of all language, Meschonnic restricts the authoritarian patterns to the sign but he nevertheless designates the battlefield. Our globalised world needs and accepts subjects as long as they agree to their subjection to certain signifieds, which are not necessarily compatible with the free range signifiers of life reckoned as translation.

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Introduction

Henri Meschonnic passed away on April 8, 2009. He had made a visit to Montréal the preceding fall and had been eagerly expected at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Translation Studies the following May. He was an enthusiastic and generous man, and he was thrilled at the prospect of having one of his books translated into English. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the end result, although he did help solving some translation problems in the very early stages of the project.

In his essay *Éthique et politique du traduire* (*Ethics and Politics of Translating*), published in 2007, Meschonnic deals concisely with the core issues he had been tackling since the 1970s as a poet, translator and critical thinker. Though Meschonnic published many other essays whose subjects are tightly interwoven, the present book follows up on *Poétique du traduire,* published in 1999, but focuses more intensely on the topic of rhythm and ethics in translation.

Mapping Meschonnic's oeuvre in contemporary thought is no small feat and could be the object of a book in itself. For the new reader of Meschonnic, however, the following introduction provides essential information about the aims of Meschonnic's work, his absence from the Anglophone world, the particularities of his writing and the strategy underpinning the translation of this essay.

1.   Henri Meschonnic's point of view

Henri Meschonnic was driven to write essays advocating for poetics in the 1970s for many reasons. The main catalysts were the epistemological shortcomings of both literary criticism and linguistics. On the one hand, literature perpetuated two inoperative notions traditionally inherited from hermeneutics: the first was a romantic view of an author's work as an inscrutable object containing deep layers of meaning accessible only to a few enlightened critics and the second was the idea of a *génie de la langue* [genius of a language]. On the other hand, linguistics failed to address form and meaning together, but instead considered them opposites, and showed unconcern for the signifying value of form in language. And when linguistics did gradually begin to study meaning under the aegis of semantics in the 1960s, it annexed translation which it reduced to a mere technique for transferring semantic units across languages.

It seemed as though literature and linguistics had nothing to do with one another. Literary critics carried on an impressionistic discourse based on cultural commonplaces. Meanwhile, linguists evacuated literature and poetry from their investigations, except for Roman Jakobson, from whom Meschonnic borrowed the concept of poetics. Though Meschonnic agreed that a poetics should be the object of study and source of theorization of every discourse (1970: 18–19), he departed from Jakobson's view, which limited poetics to a typology of poetic forms. In his programmatic essay *Pour la poétique,* Meschonnic set out to link literature and linguistics and lay the foundations of poetics, which he defined neither as a science of style nor as wild subjectivism, but rather as the study of the specific features that make up a text's internal system (Meschonnic 1970: 18). Poetics entails the reader's renewed will to listen to what a text does and to understand how it works. He later extended the use of the term "poetics" to include the principles unifying the elements constitutive of an author's writing – ranging from literary devices to themes – and interacting as parts of a discursive system. Meschonnic avoided the term "style," not only because it traditionally framed auctorial originality in terms of deviation from the linguistic norm, but also because it limited its focus to formal features, thus excluding thematic analysis from its scope (Meschonnic 1970: 15). But opposing style to "ordinary language" implied that poetry, on the scale of deviations, was a freak, thus remote form of language. Poetics sought to break away from this dualistic representation of literature, inherited from an Aristotelian conception that viewed poetry as an adornment and a device used to create illusions, in contrast to prose, which served rational down-to-earth purposes. Meschonnic's numerous poems, translations of the Bible and critical essays on poetics, language, literature and translation testify to his battle against the dualistic representation of language which gained scientific impetus with the advances of structural linguistics and has predominated over Western thought.

When Ferdinand de Saussure made clear the distinction between a language system (*langue*) and language (*langage*) as the innate capacity to communicate, he assigned to linguistics the task of carefully detailing the former in order to better understand the latter. Based on these epistemological grounds, structural linguistics set out to study the phonological, morphological and semantic characteristics of language systems. However, by focusing strictly on formal aspects, structural linguistics scientifically reinforced a fragmented conception which kept form and meaning apart. Saussure never asserted that the division between meaning (the signified) and form (the signifier) was the true nature of language, as the recent findings[1] indicate:

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1.   Manuscripts were discovered in 1996 stashed away in the orangery of the Saussure family mansion in Geneva. They were edited in 2002 under the title *Écrits de linguistique générale* and translated in 2006 as *Writings in General Linguistics*.

> The profound dualism which splits language (*langage*) is not rooted in the dualism of sound and idea, of vocal phenomenon and mental phenomenon; that is a facile and a dangerous way of conceiving of it. […] There is one domain, interior, psychic, where both sign and meaning are to be found, bound indissolubly one to the other; and there is another – exterior – domain, where only the 'sign' is to be found, but in this case the sign reduced to a series of sound waves deserves in our view only the designation of vocal figure.   (Saussure 2006:6)

An unconditional critic and a keen reader, Meschonnic was a trailblazer in arguing that the Genevan linguist had been misinterpreted.

Against what he denounces as a restrictive conception of language that is nonetheless widely taken for granted and left unquestioned, Meschonnic urges us to conceive differently of language. Resistance must be exerted against what he calls "the discontinuum," or irreconcilable split between the formal, if not ornamental, signifier and the meaningful signified. Meschonnic diagnoses this critical condition as "schizophrenia," thus effectively pointing out the unbridgeable and conflictual divide between the faces of the sign which in his view should be whole. According to Meschonnic, the condition is all the more critical in that the signified always has precedence over the signifier. The political urgency of his critique is impelled by the control the semiotic model exercises over the humanities. The ethical problem Meschonnic tackles lies in the fact that this representation of language is given as the truth although it is just a point of view, as he insists on repeating.

A major part of Meschonnic's intellectual contribution resides in his theory of rhythm. Following Émile Benveniste's discourse linguistics, Meschonnic argued that language is used for living, for interacting, for signaling one's presence to the world. From this discursive angle, Meschonnic widened the scope of meaning so that it was no longer exclusively dictated by the semantic content of words, or the signified, but also originated from two things: the many physical manifestations of the signifier in a text, on the one hand, and the heed the reader pays to these, on the other. The skill with which one perceives, or listens to, the signifier in action is what Meschonnic called the sense of language. Simply put, rhythm supposes that what words do has as much value as what they say. The framing of discursive values requires the reader's close attention, since these values are dictated by the text and are not known in advance. The ability to become intensely engaged in such a meticulous activity of meaning construction corresponds to the idea of the subject.

Be it oral or written, rhythm can be produced by such elements as sounds, stressed syllables or words, repetition, parallelism, ellipsis, syntax (linking or disjoining), pauses and sentence length.[2] Rhythm then exceeds traditional definitions

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2.   All these terms are discussed and illustrated at length in the essay.

which limit it to meter, repetition and periodicity. Furthermore, Meschonnic views the traditional opposition between oral and written as a conceptual shortcoming, as he argues that the reader uses his or her sense of hearing when organizing the features of a text. However, he goes on to argue, we have not culturally developed our capacity to listen to what words do because we have been taught to focus solely on what they say, that is their semantic "stuff." In this regard, Meschonnic diagnosed a cultural deafness. Yet the study of a text's specific discursive values requires that the reader pay close attention to what texts do through and to language. Epistemologically, then, poetics entails the sensory skills of the poet as much as the knowledge of the linguist.

Meschonnic always worked in a flux – or continuum – between practice and theory. Through writing poems, translating the Bible and writing essays about translation, he developed an inclusive view of language which overrides the traditional opposition that is made between poetry and ordinary language, verse and prose as well as writing and translating. Meschonnic undertook the task of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew because he deemed that not one of the many French versions had succeeded in rendering the original's force of expression. His work led to the publication of *Les cinq rouleaux* in 1970 (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther); *Jona et le signifiant errant* in 1981 (Jonah); *Gloires* in 2001 (Psalms); *Au commencement* in 2002 (Genesis); *Les Noms* in 2003 (Exodus); *Et il a appelé* in 2005 (Leviticus); and *Dans le désert* in 2008 (Numbers).

Some may consider the work of biblical translation to be a marginal activity confined to an outdated literary era. But the Hebrew Bible was Meschonnic's poetic laboratory and translating passion because he strived to translate the expressive power of this text whose original purpose was to be read out loud to a community of listeners. As such, it lent itself to the organization of its textual features in a way that involved the body so that listeners could be reached through expressivity. Through cheironomic notations and cantillation marks, the text indicates to the reader when to gesture with the hand, which sounds to stress as well as when to pause and when to proceed. Translating these discursive elements of the Bible lead Meschonnic to discover new ways of understanding and using language, and his practical experience acted as a theoretical lever in overturning what he deemed to be mythologizing effects of commonplaces on the nature of language. Indeed, he always made it a point to ground his theory in his translating activity and poetry work.

Through his tripartite involvement with poetry, translation and theory, Meschonnic stands for a brave new epistemology of language that includes translating both as a practice borne by poetics and a powerful means to transform

fixed ideas about language, literature and writing. His lifelong project aimed at transforming the theory of language through writing and translating places him among the rare people who have succeeded in theorizing their practice and putting their theory into practice.

2.   Politics of translating – Where is Henri Meschonnic in English?

Although Meschonnic published his first essays in the 1970s and enjoyed a growing reputation in France in the late 1990s, none of his essays – totaling some thirty books – has been previously translated into English. Passages have been translated, but remain sparse: a piece on translating biblical rhythm can be found in *Modern Language Studies* (Meschonnic 1985a) and fragments have been published in journals, such as "Rhyme and Life" in *Critical Inquiry* (Meschonnic 1988) as well as "Poetics and Politics: A Round Table" (Meschonnic et al. 1988) and "Rhythm as Pure Historicity" in *New Literary History* (Meschonnic 1992a). All these texts were translated by Gabriella Bedetti, of Eastern Kentucky University, who also co-translated some 35 pages of *Modernité Modernité* with Alice Otis, published in *New Literary History* (Meschonnic 1992). Snippets of *Pour la poétique II* and *Poétique du traduire* have been translated by Anthony Pym in *Target, International Journal of Translation Studies*, and the last chapter of the present essay, *Ethics and Politics of Translating,* was rendered by Deborah Cohen under the title "The Europe of Translation," in the first issue of *Translation Studies* (2008a). While these translations contribute to the knowledge of Meschonnic's theoretical writings in the English speaking world, they do maintain his work in a fragmented state.

It is doubtful that tallying up the works of an author is sufficient proof that they have been incorporated into another cultural and linguistic context. The measurement of Meschonnic's impact would require a citation analysis using automated citation indexing or manually searching for references listed in academic essays, anthologies and, more difficultly, course outlines and university reading lists. As a preliminary inquiry, a search was done in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2009 second edition). Inasmuch as an encyclopedia is a compendium of concepts deemed fundamental to a field by a diversified group of experts, it was considered as a reliable and representative inventory of the discipline's assets. The results were striking: Meschonnic's name did not appear in the index and only one article by him, published in 1986, was listed in the bibliography. In contrast, Antoine Berman – whose work is comparable in nature – yielded four references in the index and six titles in the bibliography (of which two were key monographs), while Jacques Derrida – whose work is comparable in size –

was referenced six times, half of the references leading to passages more than two pages long (partly owing to the items "deconstruction" and "differance").[3]

The question as to why Meschonnic's work does not circulate in translation studies in English remains unanswered, but the query has become all the more pressing in that his work abounds with far-reaching concepts – such as "decentring" and "annexation," which he posited in 1973 and anticipated the well-known "foreignizing" and "domestication" – that have yet to be discovered and discussed.

This particular case of what could be considered "non-translation" is compelling, especially when it is considered against the backdrop of an entire group of French intellectuals whose writings were promptly imported to the United States during the 1970s and the 1980s. Indeed, the works of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard did not wait very long before they were translated by Americans and received under the generic banner of "French Theory" (Lotringer 2001; Cusset 2003). Though some would hesitate to include Meschonnic in the same category as the aforementioned theorists on the basis of his poems and biblical translations, he was nonetheless grappling with the same epistemological issues as his contemporaries[4] and, like them, he was strongly engaged in a critique of the metaphysical legacy of Western philosophy. His essay *Pour la poétique* in five volumes was born precisely out of the effervescent critique of tradition, today called post-structuralism.

Ideas can be thought of as goods to the extent that they are imported on a "supply and demand" basis according to François Cusset, author of *French Theory*. As former director of the Bureau du livre français in New York, Cusset explains (in Vantroys 1998) that the French essays chosen for translation for the United States were ones that filled a void in the American intellectual space by providing critical tools, such as Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, Gilles Deleuze's desire and Michel Foucault's archeology of knowledge. Moreover, the Bureau international de l'édition française (BIEF) in New York, better known as the French Publishers' Agency (created in 1983), confirms that in the 1980s and 1990s American

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3.   Interestingly a search in the earlier 2001 online edition yielded different results: the index listed two references under "Meschonnic," as opposed to ten under "Berman" and three under "Derrida." Furthermore, the bibliography listed two texts by Meschonnic (of which his book *Pour la poétique II*) against five by Berman and four by Derrida. While Meschonnic lost the little visibility he had, as well as Berman, Derrida gained considerably in the 2009 edition.

4.   In a retrospective of the first fifteen years of Université de Vincennes à Saint-Denis, now Paris-8, Meschonnic was listed among the most well-known personalities with Noam Chomsky, Michel Foucault, Serge Leclaire, Jean-François Lyotard, Judith Miller, Madeleine Rebérioux, Michel Serres, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, François Châtelet, Herbert Marcuse, Alain Badiou and Julia Kristeva (Maggiori 2009: 8).

publishers were attracted to the big names in French literature, literary theory, philosophy, history and sociology.[5] When decision-making power shifted from editorial to marketing concerns, those authors guaranteed sales in the American academic niche market (Cusset in Vantroys 1998). However, a purely economic point of view does not suffice to explain why some texts were chosen for translation while others were not. The context in which the importation of French Theory took place needs to be set out in order to outline why Meschonnic was not imported along with the bulk of his contemporaries.

It was through the French departments of American universities that the discoverers (Bourdieu 2002: 5) of French Theory set up a publishing structure in the 1970s. They created journals and used them as pipelines to feed seminal texts to the literary field. This decade certainly was fertile: Cornell and the University of Wisconsin founded *Diacritics* and *SubStance,* respectively, in 1971, and the University of Chicago launched *Critical Inquiry* in 1974, while Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson created *Social Text* in 1979 under the aegis of Duke University. In 1973, Sylvère Lotringer and Jim Fleming founded *Semiotext(e)*, in which they published translations of texts by Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. Not long after their shorter works were published in journals, these authors saw some of their book-length essays translated and their shorter writings compiled and discussed in anthologies and readers, so that, by the end of the 1980s, their texts appeared on reading lists of English courses (Cusset 2003: 87).

The general realization that propelled the American theoretical movement, first in literary criticism and eventually in other disciplines, in the 1970s was that language constructs reality rather than represent it faithfully. Consequently, the concepts of presence, origin, progress, science, coherence of the thinking subject and objectivity of knowledge were all called into question. As Lyotard argues in *La condition postmoderne,* science is no different from storytelling insofar as it knows how to narrate its facts in order to be heard and, in so doing, constructs reality. He is echoing the words of science philosophers Thomas Kuhn, Alan Chalmers and Paul Feyerabend, who scrutinize the nature, status and methods of science. They demonstrate how science is far from being as objective and orderly as it claims to be. However, it was the international conference "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," held at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, that initiated the shift in perception in the humanities. The conference hosted

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5.   The Agency subsidized the translation of core works by renowned authors such as Louis Althusser, Georges Bataille, Jean Baudrillard, René Char, Gilles Deleuze, Édouard Glissant, Pierre Klossowski, Julia Kristeva, Michel Leiris, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricœur, Michel Serres, among others (BIEF 2003).

Derrida, who delivered a paper titled the "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," ushering in deconstruction while hinting at the "end" of structuralism. Derrida's way of deconstructing philosophical texts – as he did in his essays on Husserl, the sign and grammatology – was a powerful tool largely adopted and adapted by American scholars through translation[6] in their political project to destabilize traditional concepts, categories and values, or anything given as foundational, commonsensical, consensual or natural. By the end of the 1990s, deconstruction had conferred on literary criticism an authoritative epistemological position in the humanities. As well, the domestication of French Theory spurred the expansion of the humanities through cultural studies into specialized sub-branches such as postcolonial and gender studies.

In this academic effervescence, it seems that Meschonnic's work did not meet the needs of the importers of French Theory. Instead, it appealed to American philosophers, who invited him to speak at their conferences. In an interview, Gabriella Bedetti asked Meschonnic what he thought of the reception of his work in France and elsewhere since 1970 (Bedetti 1988: 104). He answered that works were always accepted to the extent to which they agreed with dominant ideological trends. He was well aware that his texts were not chosen for translation because they did not feed the drive to politicize issues in the humanities and social sciences in the United States. Another obstacle to the importation of Meschonnic's essays may have been his writing stance and style (to be discussed below), which some of his peers described as hermetic and unforgiving. His response was always unapologetic: he is only as difficult to read as the object he is pondering. He stood uncompromisingly by his 713-page essay *Critique du rythme* (1982) when his publisher Verdier asked him to reduce it to 200 pages, firmly convinced that exploring technicalities and minutiae at length was indispensable to a thorough diachronic survey of rhythm (in Bedetti 1988: 105). The final product was an essay that strived for accuracy through countless examples of what rhythm was *not*, leaving the reader with an uncertain view of what rhythm in fact *was*. Perhaps the synthesis was impossible at that point.[7] According to Meschonnic, "[o]ne does not write to please. One does not write *for* anybody. But for what has to be written"

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6. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* was translated in 1973 by David B. Allison (Northwestern University Press), six years after the original *La voix et le phénomène*; *Of Grammatology* was translated in 1976 by Gayatri Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press), nine years after *De la grammatologie*; *Dissemination* was translated in 1981 by Barbara Johnson (Chicago University Press), nine years after *La dissémination*; and *Positions* was translated in 1981 by Alan Bass (Chicago University Press), nine years after the original.

7. Meschonnic did produce a treatise on rhythm with Gérard Dessons, but only 16 years later, in 1998.

(in Bedetti 1988: 105). What was perceived as hermetic was in reality a rigorous technical analysis, which may have had the effect of limiting the audience. In a comment on his lifework, Meschonnic noted that it took him time to develop his language, simple words not being accessible when one tries to think something new or to consider things in a new way.

Some of Meschonnic's peers have pointed out the harshness of his critique, even going as far as calling it "scathing contentiousness." The very first pages of *Ethics and Politics of Translating* are a telling example of the author's unrelenting tone and attitude. However, Meschonnic maintained that his critique was never personal: it was always the ideas he challenged, not the people. But his attitude did not afford him popularity, though he is widely known and abundantly quoted by younger generations of French scholars in the literary field today and has been a reference in French translation curricula in North American Universities since the 1980s.

Contrary to Meschonnic's discourse, Derrida's deconstruction was catchy and applicable to the new political project of rereading and reinterpreting the classics of literature, history and various fields in the humanities. The importation of Derrida's seminal essays to the United States had just begun when Meschonnic published *Le signe et le poème* (1975), an essay in which he devoted almost a hundred pages to analyzing Derrida's rhetoric. As if using a magnifying glass, he scrutinized Derrida's discourse and found it to be deeply tautological (Meschonnic 1975: 403).[8] His style seduced readers insofar as it was adaptable to all kinds of texts (Lamont 1987: 587–592). "Derrida's brilliant textual strategies fed right into literary studies, and it is there that they remained for the most part: in the margins of the text, at the center of academe" (Lotringer 2001: 131). Meanwhile, Meschonnic's essays lacked the interpretative "stretchability"[9] (Bourdieu 2002: 5) and domestication potential which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, spur the circulation of ideas:

> Very often, with foreign writers, it is not what they say that counts, but what we can make them say. It is why certain authors whose work is particularly elastic circulate very well. Great prophecies are polysemic. It is one of their virtues and the reason they travel through places, moments, ages, generations, etc. They are therefore a godsend, if I may say, for any annexationist interpretation and other strategic purposes.   (Bourdieu 2002: 5)[10]

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8.   More harshly yet, John Searle accused Derrida of interpretational indeterminism, if not outright obscurantism. Others criticized his strategic use of various rhetorical devices, such as the antimetabole, the oxymoron, the paradox, theoretical endowment of common words (*la trace, le supplément, la dissémination*) as well as harmonization of opposites (Vandendorpe 1999: 2).

9.   My translation.

10.   My translation.

Unlike Derrida, Meschonnic did not take texts as pretexts for thinking. While Derrida deconstructed by finding and discussing the contradictions enmeshed in philosophical founding texts, Meschonnic's essays exhausted the subject, reproved the use of metaphors[11] and criticized lax conceptual links. He made his epistemological position clear when he asserted that progress in the study of language would not come from new theories, but rather from greater accuracy in our observations of language (Meschonnic and Dessons 2005: 1). In his poetics, he endeavoured to think the specificity of texts and, in fact, criticized Derrida for using texts as pretexts, for taking the poem for a philosopheme. Could it be that Meschonnic's reflection, uncompromising as it was from *Pour la poétique* (1970) right up until *Dans le bois de la langue* (2008), did not hold the interpretative potential needed to make it rhetorically and theoretically appealing? The conceptual bases Meschonnic laid out in his very first essays – Roman Jakobson's poetics, Émile Benveniste's *signifiance* and Ferdinand de Saussure's value – perhaps lacked the allure and adaptability of Derridean deconstruction.

Meschonnic grasped early on the workings of the very successful "Derrida effect" (Meschonnic 1975: 492), by which he referred both to the seductive power of Derrida's writing and to the infatuation of deconstructionists. But almost 25 years later, Meschonnic was no less biting towards followers of deconstruction, those "dawdling few who believe to be deferring meaning, but who defer poetics" (Meschonnic 1999: 84).[12] One can only guess whether Meschonnic's searing criticism of deconstructionism and Derrida cost him inclusion in the importation of French Theory, inasmuch as reception depends on the degree to which theory complies with dominant ideological trends. Meschonnic's non-translation into English is a puzzling and complex case. Nonetheless, the brief discussion of the situation provides the background against which the translation of this essay was undertaken.

3.   A poetics of resistance

Many would agree that reading Meschonnic is demanding. His colleague Daniel Delas remarked that his earlier essays contained "a difficult vocabulary, handled with dexterity and virulence, long parentheses, sinuous and abrupt looking sentences, and surprising processes of lexical composition or derivation" (in Bedetti

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11. The very first pages of *Ethics and Politics of Translating* decry the metaphorical inaccuracy of the claim made by George Steiner and Paul Ricœur that to understand is to translate.

12. My translation.

1988: 105). Though Meschonnic did not disagree with this description, he insisted it was the only way to convey his "poem of thought," that is to say to conceive and speak of his object in a renewed way. His texts resist reading because they act out his will to oppose ready-made ideas, dominant modes of thought and deeply ingrained epistemological structures.

On many occasions has he stressed the importance of thinking outside of – and not against – the categories and grids imposed by conventional knowledge. In order to think language without using conventional concepts, he wrote without using conventional forms. In this regard, Meschonnic's writing is performative: his discursive activity is consistent with his reflexive activity. In short, his practice is coherent with his theory.

In the poetics of resistance that characterizes the present essay, Meschonnic fights against received ideas, which he deems to no longer be in movement, as they have settled into common knowledge and become consensually unquestioned. It is in fact knowledge that creates this inertia, since what one sees depends on what one knows. In Meschonnic's poetics, theory keeps ideas moving by formulating questions about things unthought (*l'impensé*), as opposed to finding answers to things that are known. The movement of thought requires a double effort: to grasp an object gone unnoticed (or perhaps obscured) and to discover new questions about it. In this *modus operandi,* theory runs across the borders of traditionally compartmentalized areas of knowledge when asking its questions. For instance, linguistics will query philosophy about its theory of language and, in return, philosophy will query linguistics about its epistemology. As a transdisciplinary activity, theory answers to no particular established body of knowledge, as Meschonnic explains:

> I call theory the search for and query of knowledge, not knowledge itself; the search for links between epistemology and power, between subjectivity and sociality, and historicity, in language practices. Theory is thus more a critique than a science. It is necessary to empirical work. It allows precisely to stop the confusion between the empirical and empiricism. The empirical and theory are mere illusions one without the other. (1985: 18)[13]

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13. My translation. Empiricism and the empirical are complete opposites: empiricism always corroborates predominant theories, which reduce reality to their theoretical frames and analytical grids. Whereas the empirical finds questions, empiricism finds answers reinforcing the theory from which it partakes, such as structuralism and the theory of the sign, thus maintaining its stronghold. Meschonnic persistently reminds us that power protects its position by providing answers which prevent asking questions likely to reveal its strategies.

As mentioned earlier, Meschonnic's oeuvre is characterized by the to-and-fro motion between studying what makes poems and translations work and working at making poems and translating. On the basis of these epistemological considerations, then, the paradigm of movement is a core value in Meschonnic's poetics. It is enacted through vocabulary by recurring nominal verb forms, such as *le vivre, le dire, le faire, le traduire* [living, saying, doing, translating]. Because verbs are action words, they forcefully convey the dynamic epistemology underlying Meschonnic's thought. In English, nouns formed from verbs are called gerunds, with their typical *-ing* suffix – such as in the title of the essay *Ethics and Politics of Translating* – which is not without echoing the unaccomplished mode of the present participle. Why not simply write "translation" in this particular case? Meschonnic rarely uses the term "translation" (*traduction*) to refer to the activity of translating. Rather, he limits its meaning to the material product of translation or, less often, to the institutionalized body of translation theorists. The distinction he insists on making between activity (translating) and product (translation) is important and stems from a conceptual couple borrowed from Alexander von Humboldt. The gerund expresses the infinite aspect of the activity at hand, be it living, saying, doing or translating. The activity in progress implies that a subject is engaged in an empirical process, the results of which are not yet known, and this stance is the key to understanding Meschonnic's idea of the empirical, whereby the ignorance of what one will find is the prerequisite for discovery and true intellectual adventure.

Meschonnic's writing follows a system of values from which he did not stray since 1970. The unremitting nature of his poetics of resistance operates on the basis of terminological stability, mainly through the coherent and systematic use of specific vocabulary throughout his work. Some of the key terms which deserve attention are "the continuum," "language" and "*langue*," "signifiance" and "to think." The reader will note numerous neologisms throughout the essay – to deacademicize, to dechristianize, to decurrentfrenchify, to deplatonize, to desemioticize, to detheologize, to embiblicize, to enrhythmicize, to rehebrewize and to taamicize. They are all included in the glossary accompanying the translation (see the end of the volume). From the outset of his program, in the very first page of his first essay on poetics, Meschonnic declares that "[a] terminology is an instrument for mental surveying. One cannot make a new attempt [at thinking literature and language] without a new methodology. One does not read with the words of others"[14] (1970: 11).

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14. My translation.

The continuum

Meschonnic invents existing cognates. The use of words that are orthographically similar but semantically different is typical of thinkers who insist on subtleties in order to achieve a finer grasp of their object. This device partakes of Meschonnic's epistemological stance, according to which a strong theory of language will only emerge from the refinement of its observations. But it also serves to slow down the reader, who is forced to reconsider certain words under the lens of Meschonnic's conceptual apparatus. An example of such cognates is the pair "continuum" (*le continu*) and "continuity" (*continuité*). Whereas "continuum" refers to a set of things that cannot be separated, "continuity" is the state of something that continues to happen with no great change over and over again; in poetry, continuity is repetition at short intervals. Meschonnic insists on discriminating between the terms, explaining that "neither the continuum of the body to language or the discontinuum of the sign has anything whatsoever in common with the idea of continuity and discontinuity"[15] (Meschonnic 2000: 17). He further remarks that

> it is therefore important to no longer speak of *continuity* with regard to the rhythmic *continuum* of power [in language], otherwise continuity will be reinstated with the semiotic, psychological, cultural, historical hold from which this continuum has separated itself.   (Meschonnic 2000: 17)[16]

The idea of continuum partakes of the Heraclitean definition of rhythm as continuous flow, which Meschonnic wants to rehabilitate. Epistemologically, the definition breaks away from the predominating Platonic conception of rhythm as order (*taxis*), mathematical proportion (*harmonia*) and measure (*metron*) (Meschonnic and Dessons 2005: 54). In this view, rhythm exceeds that which is quantifiable in poetry and encompasses all discursive characteristics working together to make a particular text what it is. Be it in a work of prose or poetry, rhythm confers illocutionary force on a text. From the point of view of discourse, there is as much if not more meaning in how words are said than in what the words themselves say. Based on Benveniste's view that language is used for living, the idea of continuum advocated by Meschonnic also expresses the vital flow between reading, writing[17]

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15. My translation.

16. My translation.

17. The link between reading and writing is so strong that Meschonnic has used, in other essays, "reading-writing" (*lire-écrire*), when reading brings a subject to discover the values of a text. Reading-writing is opposed to ideological reading, which occurs when the subject applies a conceptual framework to a text. Whenever a text is read through a grid, its values are predetermined and no discovery is involved.

and living. In other words, language and life are not mutually exclusive, as they are traditionally thought to be, for instance when language is said to represent life. On the contrary, to the extent that the subject organizes the values of a text on the basis of his or her individual subjectivity acquired through life, to read-write is part of living.

The definition of rhythm as continuum underlies Meschonnic's inclusive theory of language. It is inclusive in that it promotes different points of view, be they anthropological, philosophical, historical, linguistic or sociological. Graphically, inclusiveness is expressed by the use of hyphens, as in the term "language-poem-ethics-politics continuum," indicating that these objects of thought are linked and should therefore be considered together. Another example is the recurring term "body-in-language continuum" (*le continu corps-langage*), not to be confused with what is commonly known as body language. The continuum linking body and language within a reciprocal relationship is embodied in the poem, which Meschonnic persistently defines as the "transformation of a form of life by a form of language and the transformation of a form of language by a form of life" (Meschonnic 2007).

Signifiance

In Meschonnic's vocabulary, "*signifiance*" is a noun derived from "*signifiant*" [signifying], the present participle of the verb "to signify." The more common word "significance" has not been retained as the equivalent of "*signifiance*" because Meschonnic recommended coining the English term "signifiance" (in Bedetti 1988: 106). He uses the term "signifiance" to refer specifically to the organization of prosodic chains, or sound patterns, which activate words and give them power. By extension, signifiance is the act of utterance through which the signifiers of a text are actualized by the subject whose activity is historically, culturally and ideologically situated.

Language and *langue*

The English term "language" has a large semantic field, since it encompasses three things: the innate ability to communicate, specific systems of communication (idioms) and the abstract system of rules governing each idiom. In most cases, the English reader understands contextually which "language" is being referred to, and there is no risk of confusion. However, the difference between language as a faculty (*langage*) and language as a linguistic system (*langue*) underpins Meschonnic's thought, itself endorsing the Saussurean distinction. Furthermore, the two terms

are often used emblematically by Meschonnic, whereby "*langage*" implies episte-mological inclusiveness and "*langue*" connotes epistemological compartmental-ization, with specific reference to the dualistic conception of the sign.

The "*langage-langue*" problem is not new to translators working in the field of linguistics. In a thorough introduction to the translation of Saussure's *Writings in General Linguistics*, Carol Sanders (in Saussure 2006: xxvi) offers a clear solu-tion. While "*langage*" is straightforwardly translated by "language," its counter-part "*langue*" is rendered by either "language system" or the loan word "*langue*" in italics. Another solution, provided by Elizabeth Meek in her translations of Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971), consists in rendering "*lan-gage*" by "language" as a non-count noun and "*langue*" by "language" as a count noun. But often the subtlety between the two usages does not suit the clear dis-tinction Meschonnic wishes to make. A further complication arises with his use of the definite and indefinite articles: "*la langue*" refers to a linguistic system, whereas "*une langue*" refers to an idiom. However, "the translator cannot use 'the language' for *la langue* without wreaking havoc with the grammar of English" (Sanders 2000: 352).

Since the solution proposed by Saussure's translator offers the benefit of clarity, both "language system" and the loan word "*langue*" are used in the essay. Because "*langue*" is shorter, it works more efficiently than "language system" – syllabically cumbersome – in discursive outbursts when Meschonnic argues back and forth for language and against *langue*.

To think

The verb "to think" used transitively is another significant value in Meschonnic's discourse, though not exclusive to it. In fact, it is commonly used in the French philosophical discourse to express the dynamic activity of constructing ideas about objects. The transitive mode well conveys the hands-on aspect of the thought process. Meschonnic explains that when he uses the phrases "*penser Spinoza*" or "*penser Humboldt*" the names stand as adverbs and not as direct objects of the verb *to think* (2007: 26). The same grammatical interpretation of the rule applies to the phrase "*penser langue.*" Therefore, in all of these cases – "to think Spinoza," "to think Humboldt" and "to think *langue*" – the grammatically correct use of the preposition in English ("to think about") would result in a gross mistranslation by failing to render the adverbial meaning. To "think Spinoza" means to adopt the outlook of Spinoza, whereas "to think about Spinoza" means to analyze his work. Similarly, "*penser langue*" has nothing to do with "conceiving of *langue*," but rather means to see the world from the semiotic (hence dualistic) view of

language. In light of these considerations, the verb "to think" without the preposition appears systematically throughout the essay with the intention of conveying the dynamism inherent to the active construction of thought fundamental to Meschonnic's theory of language.

The points discussed above stand out as key values in Meschonnic's poetics because they recur throughout his critical oeuvre and together form a system of thought. The importance attached to these values in the translation of the essay results from my decision to apply Meschonnic's idea of translating to translating his ideas. However, knowledge of the author's poetics only partly settles the question of translation; one has to decide what to do with this knowledge, that is to say how to convey it in English. Consequently, the last part of the introduction will deal with my translation strategy.

4.   Translation strategy

Even though Meschonnic dismisses as a sterile debate the whole question of target or source orientation (see Chapter VIII), this quandary appears very real in a context where readability partly determines the reception of Meschonnic's essay. To put it bluntly, the strategy of conveying his poetics of resistance by disturbing the syntactical conventions of proper English poses a risk: kindling the intolerance of the reader. On a larger scale, such intolerance could act as an obstacle to the reception of Meschonnic's essay and prove counterproductive to the very aim of the translation.

Risk management in translation varies according to historical and cultural contexts, but its definition is invariably underpinned by the translator's conception of language. While some consider thought to be a discursive construct and thus inseparable from words – as Meschonnic claims with the expression "the poem of thought" – others deem ideas completely independent from their linguistic representation, as one of Hegel's translators boldly argues:

> To translate the world's worst stylist literally, sentence by sentence, is possible – it has been done – but it is perfectly pointless; the translation, then, is every bit as unintelligible as the original. But the world's worst stylist is, alas, also one of the world's greatest thinkers, certainly the most important for us in this twentieth century. […] The attempt must be risked, therefore, to rescue its grandeur from its abstruse linguistic chaos. I have dared to translate – not the ponderous Hegelian jargon, which is as little German as it would be English – but the thought.
>
> (Mueller in Hegel 1959: 1)

The confidence of the translator, a professor of philosophy self-portrayed as the rescuer of Hegel's thought from the chaos of his words, is spurred by an ethos which today clashes with the consciousness of difference in translation that has emerged in the wake of the cultural turn. Nevertheless, Hegel's translator is mainly concerned with readability, an issue fundamental to translation studies. Readability is usually framed within the scope of a binary strategy, at whose poles are decentring and annexation, concepts posited by Meschonnic in 1973 as *décentrement* and *annexion* (Meschonnic 1973: 308), but more commonly known in English as foreignizing and domestication (Venuti 1995). For annexation of a foreign text to succeed, the target language must exert control over the source language by erasing all features threatening to betray its origins as well as any trace of the translator. The translated text is naturalized as part of the target language-culture by sounding fluent, thus creating the illusion[18] of having been written in the target language (Meschonnic 1973: 308).

Readability is seldom debated outside the twofold process of decentring and annexation inasmuch as it remains posited in terms of fluency. Yet, at a more general level of inquiry, readability relates to the fundamental question of how readers make sense of print. Cognitive studies has been dealing with this question along various lines, and its findings underpin my translation strategy.

A transactional constructivist strategy of translation

More than mere word recognition, reading is a process by which a reader is engaged in constructing meaning from written language. The idea that reading involves a transaction between reader and text comes from reader-response theorists such as Louise Rosenblatt, in her work *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978). Similarly, Wolfgang Iser (1974) in the field of reception aesthetics anticipated the problem of how readers produce meaning. However, it is within the perspective of recent research on reading in the field of cognitive studies that the transactional constructivist view is considered here.

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18. Meschonnic decried this operation: "The illusion of transparency belongs to an ideological system characterized by a series of interconnected notions: the heterogeneity between thought and language, the genius of a language, the mystery of art – notions founded on a linguistics of the word and not of system, on [the idea of] languages [309] as particular realizations of a transcendental signified (philosophical projection of a primacy that is Eurocentric, logocentric, colonialist in Western thought). These notions lead one to oppose text and translation, through sacralization of literature. This sacralization is compensatory in relation to its political neutralization. This sacralization and this compensation define the social role of the aesthetic" (Meschonnic 2003: 341–342).

The problem at the crux of my translation project is encapsulated in this straightforward question: How can one strike a balance between keeping Meschonnic's poetics and keeping the reader's attention? The answer clearly entails a compromise between agency of the text – the workings of which have been exposed under Meschonnic's poetics – and agency of the implied reader, who in the case of *Ethics and Politics of Translating* can be construed as a member of academia and as such an expert reader. This person can be imagined to have developed a high level of reading efficiency through processing large volumes of printed text on a continual basis, be it through graduate training, professorial tasks or professional editorial work. As regards the physical activity of reading, eye-movement research[19] has demonstrated that the eye focuses on approximately 70% of the words, often skipping function words and fixating[20] instead on content words (Goodman 2008a: 23). The fact that the reader's eye does not fixate on every word supports the constructivist view that readers are busy making constant "predictions about upcoming text" and that when they "encounter words that they expect, they need not fixate on those words or only do so for a brief time" (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 36). Over time, competent readers develop a certain number of automatisms, such as text sampling, through repeated anticipation of lexical, grammatical or syntactical items and combinations that form an ever-expanding repertoire. Sampling is done by efficient readers, who briefly fixate on a word they expect to appear in order to confirm their expectations of this upcoming word (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 36). The sampling process also occurs at the syntactical level when readers rely on their knowledge of the structure of language while predicting upcoming text. "This enables them to read more efficiently – to skip or spend less time on words that have been confirmed parafoveally"[21] (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 39).

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19. Using psychologist Raymond Dodge's technique, "a harmless beam of infrared light directed at the reader's cornea and reflected onto photographic film" (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 25).

20. Fixation is when the eye stops moving to focus on a word or between words. The eye being physiologically limited, it can only distinguish words within the foveal region (3 to 6 letters spaces around the point of fixation in the center of the visual field) and cannot deliver usable data to the brain during saccades (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 27, 44).

21. "The parafoveal region extends about 24–30 letters around the point of fixation" (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 27). Skilled readers are very active in controlling reading processes, ranging from identifying important information in a text and conscious inference-making to observing text characteristics, recognizing problems and activating processes due to awareness of difficulties at the level of words or phrases or in understanding the meaning beyond the word or phrase level (Pressley 1997: 250).

But automatisms, quick reading and skipping words all stand in perfect contradiction to Meschonnic's poetics of resistance and his will to transform our reading and consequently our thinking habits – though he knew from the beginning that reading would take longer to change (Meschonnic 1970: 12). As a result, tension is to be expected when reading his essay. The particularities of Meschonnic's writing will quite likely provoke what cognitive research calls reading miscues. Though miscues are usually studied during oral reading (Goodman 2008: 11) as events which disrupt meaning making, it seems reasonable to submit that miscues occur in silent reading (however, it is difficult to study a silent phenomenon). From a transactional constructivist point of view, "[m]iscues involve as much what readers bring to the text as what the writer brought to it" (Goodman 2008: 18). Not only does the way texts are structured cause "all readers, regardless of proficiency, [to] produce miscues" (Goodman 2008: 11), but readers' goals and inferences influence text processing (Pressley 1997: 248). In the case of disruptive syntax, the expert reader's predictions and automatisms are foiled; therefore, the eye is forced to regress – as a segment needs to be read over again – and fixate for a longer period on words (Paulson and Goodman 2008: 41). When regression and prolonged fixation occur often, reading becomes trying and the reader annoyed. Perhaps this is the moment when the expert reader perceives the author's style as being poor or not sounding like proper English. Conversely, proper style is perceived as conveying a coherent and regular message through fluency, that is to say predictability of words and word order, minimizing miscues.

Since reading is a constructive process – and not merely about converting alphabetical signs – the reader builds a repertoire of lexical and syntactical forms over the course of reading which serve as cueing systems. As the reader's experiential knowledge of the text grows, anticipation becomes possible and fewer miscues occur. The transactional constructivist strategy underlying the translation of *Ethics and Politics of Translating* involves providing some knowledge to the reader beforehand by means of the present introduction and the glossary. But it also relies on the reader's expert competence to apply this knowledge when constructing meaning from unexpected lexical and syntactical information encountered in the text.

Reading Meschonnic in French is trying even for native French speakers. The most striking feature of this text is syntactical rhythm, more specifically its paratactical constructions. Parataxis is characterized by run-on sentences and comma splices. Therefore, the English reader will encounter a multitude of verbless sentences and fragments as well as independent clauses simply joined by a comma, which are sure to be perplexing at first. Another characteristic of Meschonnic's poetics is repetitive rhythms, which place emphasis through reiteration of phonemes (alliteration and assonance), words or syntactical structures. All repeated items are endowed as foundational concepts of Meschonnic's thought, such as the

verbs "to do" and "to make" (*faire*), "to hear" (*entendre*) and "to listen" (*écouter*), as well as Saussure's idea of "point of view." Entire key phrases are also repeated, a process Meschonnic openly admits to the reader and which he deems necessary in order to make his point. Considering the value of repetition in the author's system of thought, synonymic diversity is avoided in the translation. Positional rhythms also play an important part: a word calls attention to itself when it opens or closes a sentence, a paragraph or even a book, as Meschonnic demonstrates in Chapter VII with the translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*. Likewise, prosodic rhythms emphasize sounds so as to link words through beat, as in the following sentence, where the [p] and [s] sounds reverberate: "*Le rapport à soi, à la pensée, aux autres, passe et repasse sans cesse par le langage*" [The relationship to self, to thought, to others, comes and goes ceaselessly through language]. In this particular case, it is difficult to render both the echo and the paronomasia (where "*passe*" is included in "*repasse*"). Many such prosodic plays occur throughout the essay, sometimes as puns but mostly as conceptual clusters designed to express either a continuum of concepts or the collusion between seemingly neutral common notions. For instance, a tight lexical network links "current language," "seeking currency" and "current translation," bringing the reader to realize that, far from being neutral, these notions partake of a predominant ideology which deserves closer scrutiny.

In order to keep the reader's attention, I could have worked to flatten the reading bumps into correct, smooth English, but this would have constituted domestication, which contradicts Meschonnic's idea of translating. He clearly outlines what should be translated in a text when he says that "we must invent discourse equivalences in the target language: prosody for prosody, metaphor for metaphor, pun for pun, rhythm for rhythm" (see p. 71). So I decided to apply Meschonnic's theory of translating to translating Meschonnic's theory. This decision implied doing to English what he did to French, resisting conventional forms in the translation as he does in his writing.

On an end note and perhaps as a warning, I should mention that reading Meschonnic's essay will be demanding. Parataxis, repetitions, run-on unraveling sentences and showers of commas: maximum involvement is expected of the reader, the way one would be all eyes and ears reading a poem. In our Western economy of ready-to-use commodities, which has spread to the market of intellectual goods, Meschonnic's position is radical. Yet the essay must be read with humour, as Meschonnic's writing is often playful. For instance, when asked[22] how he had come up with 36 as the number of propositions for a poetics of translation

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22. When I met with him in the summer of 2008.

in *Pour la poétique II*, he answered that he used 36 to mean a very large number following colloquial usage. The substance of the 36 propositions was nonetheless rigorous and far from funny as it laid the epistemological grounds of translation studies, emancipating it from its status as a sub-branch of linguistics. The concern for humor is recurrent in Meschonnic's thought with the leitmotiv "the comical," which describes a situation when serious people do something funny without realizing it. It was as a poet – acutely sensitive to what language does – that Meschonnic mocked the academic establishment and its conceptual compartmentalization of linguistics, literary criticism, history, anthropology and translation. The poet he was did not only talk about language, he also lived with and through it. Meschonnic's critical force, his untiring resistance to thinking habits and his dynamic decentring of conceptual complacency impelled my translation, which I hope will make the power of his language heard.[23]

Methodology

In his essay, Meschonnic cites passages of the Old Testament in Hebrew, transliterated into French. These citations could not be transcribed literally because of phonetic differences between French and English; for example the sound [ʃ] is spelled "ch" in French, as opposed to "sh" in English. Furthermore, there seem to be various transliteration schemes for the same Hebrew word, owing to concurrent pronunciations. For these reasons, citations were systematically drawn from the Internet Sacred Text Archive (http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/tan/index.htm), which hosts the Tanakh – the Hebrew Bible – transliterated into the Latin alphabet, but with diacritic marks. The same source was used to quote from the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. To maintain consistency with Meschonnic's use of disjunctive accents (/, //, ///), I added them to the Hebrew transliterations.

As regards the glossed biblical passages, they are all my translations except where otherwise indicated, such as the verses quoted from the King James Version. In the cases where Meschonnic quotes an author, I provide an existing published translation whenever possible. All of my translations are indicated as such in footnotes.

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23. While this book is the first full-length essay translated into English, Meschonnic's critical works have been translated into other languages: *Poética do Traduzir* (2010); *Ética y Política del Traducir* (2009); *Poetics of Translating* into Bulgarian (2007); the anthology *La poética como crítica del sentido* (2007); *Un golpe bíblico en la filosofía* (2007); *Crisis del signo, política del ritmo y teoría del languaje* (2000); *Modernité Modernité* into Korean (1999); *Pour la poétique* into Japanese (1982), Spanish (1996) and Korean (2004). A sociological study would be very interesting in analyzing who is translating where, how, why and for whom.

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An ethics of translating

An ethics of translating implies above all an ethics of language. And an ethics of language implies a theory of language as a whole, a critical theory in the sense of Horkheimer's approach, as opposed to regional theories that form the current heterogeneous categories of reason and academic disciplines: language for linguists (with all of its technical differentiations, which are all necessary, technically), literature for literary theorists, philosophy for philosophers and, according to the dividing lines between academic disciplines, ethics for ethics specialists, political philosophy for specialists in the domain and so on, from specialty to specialty.

And when language is thought without poetics, instead of thinking ethics with and through poetics, instead of thinking the political with and through poetics, for a poetics of society, it remains merely academic. It maintains academically the dualism of the sign and its whole declension, of letter and spirit, of identity and alterity, comforted by the theologico-political.

With these thinking traps which are, for translating, the notions of faithfulness and accuracy. Faithful to what? To *langue*? And to which one? But *langue* is not the same as language. Beware of the confusion.

If language is not thought through ethics, a typical blur appears, especially where the poem is concerned. It is, for example, what happens in Levinas' ethics and makes it, in my opinion, so pervious to Heidegger, this generalized essentialization of language, of poetry, of germanity that put the whole of translating into understanding, a view which some scholars are still repeating, such as Ricœur (2006).[1]

I am not defining ethics as a social responsibility, but as the pursuit of a subject striving to constitute itself through its activity, but where the activity of the subject is the activity by which another subject constitutes itself. And in this sense, as a being of language, this subject is an inseparable mix of ethics and poetics. It is in the extent of this solidarity that ethics of language concerns all beings of language, citizens of humanity, and it is how ethics is political.

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1. "To understand is to translate" (and Paul Ricœur repeats it after George Steiner in *After Babel*), p. 11. And recurrence of the same on pages 24 and 28. No, to understand is to understand, or believing one understands. Translating supposes understanding, but that is an entirely different thing. Elementary, Doctor Commonsense.

Poetics is also an ethics, as a poem is an ethical act because it transforms the subject, the subject who writes and the one who reads. By which means a poem also transforms all other subjects, from the philosophical to the Freudian.[2]

With matters of language, literature and literatures, thus also of translation, there is an urgent need to disturb, to displace preconceived notions. At least, without deluding ourselves, to work at what Rémy de Gourmont called dissociation of ideas. With regard to ideas so associated, so established, that they have become fixed. Meaning that they are no longer moving: they have traded pursuit of thought for preservation of power. Social power.

This pack of confusions, which makes up the cultural, contaminates contemporary thought. But people contemplate this as the spirit of the age.

To put into practice an ethics of language, I propose a programme along the following lines: to work at recognizing that we do not know what we are saying when we confuse *langue* with language, or with culture, or with literature, or with discourse – and that is what we do when we are translating a text and think that we are translating a language, with the sole concepts of that language –; and to work at recognizing that thinking in terms of *langue* is thinking in terms of the sign, of a discontinuum, in terms reduced to binarism. And binarism is incapable of thinking the body-in-language, affect-concept continuum, nor the language-poem-ethics-politics continuum, where each transforms all the others. Hence identity should no longer be opposed to alterity, rather identity comes only through alterity, thereby creating its own historicity.

That is precisely why translating is indispensable for thinking language, ethics and politics, but only if we are thinking poem, translating poem.[3] Translating power and no longer just meaning.

The utopia of this project, of the very thought of such an interaction, imposes a sense of humour as a necessity against all of the pseudo-seriousness that mistakes established ideas for movement of thought. This utopia imposes critique as a necessity, in the form of the study of functionings and historicities.

It is the comedy of thought which reverses the relation between *langue* and poem and shows that it is not Hebrew that made the Bible but the Bible that made Hebrew, and that it is not Arabic that made Arabic what it has become, but the Quran that made Arabic what it is. Just a few examples. More comical yet is that religious thought is the very temple of academicism.

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2.   See Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words."

3.   Thereby following up on *Poétique du traduire* (Meschonnic 1999). The goal is to position ourselves in a poetics of language and to make it a poetics of society.

Not only it, of course, and the witnesses are numerous. And famous. But it is also in part what justifies the few examples that will be given further on.

As for what can be called an ethics of translating, which proceeds from what I posit as an ethics of language in an inclusive theory of language, and without any pretension of being exhaustive in any way, we have to look at what has been attempted. All of the experience that I could possibly have in studies on translation brings to light that the very idea of an ethics of translating remains generally implicit. Its stand-in is the customary moralization, as taught in translation, of the translator's faithfulness, his self-effacement, according to a whole code of conduct (Conseil de l'ATLF 1999).[4] But a code of conduct, however elementary and necessary, will not suffice.

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4. Published under the title "Code de déontologie du traducteur littéraire."

A code of conduct will not suffice

A code of conduct will not suffice if poetics is missing. This is the situation at present, almost commonplace. And this is also where Anthony Pym has chosen to situate his book, with a hopeful but deceptive title, *Pour une éthique du traducteur* (1997).[5]

An ethics not of translating, not of translation, but of the translator. We may believe it is the same thing. It is not.

Anthony Pym's book starts by positioning the ethics of how to translate in the source language/target language pair, putting the "œuvres" on the source-language side and the "communicative acts" on the target-language side. All very traditional. The very binarism which opposes "academic theorists" (1997:10) and professional translators. Therefore, a binary ethics as well, an ethics lacking practice, a practice lacking ethics.

Anthony Pym thinks he is getting away from this binarism by replacing the question of how with the question of "should one translate?" (1997:11). In fact, the *why* and *for whom* replace the *how*. And he proposes an "ethics of content" (1997:13) – what one should or should not translate – and an ethics that is abstract, disregarding content. But this no longer pertains to translation. Pym is looking for a compromise through the "principle of interculturality" (1997:14), "an ethics centered on the translator and not an ethics which makes judgments about translations" (1997:16).

This leads him first to subscribe to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. And then comes the traditional dualism, classical, an "either or" (1997:21) from Cicero's "*ut interpres/ut orator*" (as interpreter or as orator), the opposition between *meaning* and *word* (*sensum, verbum*) in Saint Jerome. Nothing new in Nida's opposition between "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence." It is at once the traditional and the seemingly objective conditions of the problem of translating. Either the reader "stays home," or "he travels" (1997:24).

Anthony Pym tries to break away from this binarism in Schleiermacher by shifting the problem towards the "translator's identity" (1997:41). Which oddly

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5. The book is a revised version of a seminar given in Paris, at the Collège de Philosophie in 1994. (All quotations from the French original are my own translations – PPB.)

ends up shifting it towards questions of "diplomatic immunity" (1997:47). In his concern for ethics he becomes lost in platitudes about "general happiness" and "individual rights" (1997:50), all because a "Nazi translator" of an American ne-gationist text was sued and some translators of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* were put to death by Islamists. Anthony Pym comes to the conclusion that there is a translator's responsibility in terms of an "intercultural ethics" (1997:65), and he makes responsibility "the basis of ethics" (1997:67), a "professional ethics" (1997:68), normative, different from simply following "recipes" (1997:68).

He then draws on notions proper to the philosophical subject, because "eth-ics proceeds from conscience and reason" (1997:68). Hence poetics is not really avoided, it is simply unthought from the start.

But all he draws from such abstractions, regarding "translation competence," is that "some people are good at translating; others, not so good" (1997:70). Where is the consideration of criteria? As for professional practice, Pym associates this with "a degree of impersonality that does not require an ethics beyond explicit codes" (1997:70). Which eliminates any thinking of the subject.

And leads him to questions such as: "is the translator a professional because he translates (service) or because he provides *a* translation (goods)" (1997:72)? Yet these are obviously inseparable, hence the question seems pointless to me, since to translate "one must produce translations" (1997:74). He rediscovers the obvious: that a translation "is not a quote," "nor commentary" (1997:75). He vol-untarily avoided the term "faithfulness" (1997:82), but only to replace it by "re-sponsibility" to the profession (1997:82).

Pym wanted an ethics, all he has ended up with is social morals. His only reference to poetics is to "medieval poetics" (1997:85) as "potential applications for translation" (1997:85) of Aristotle's four causes: material, final, formal and efficient – as represented by the translator. Where one finds, according to Tricot, translator of Aristotle, the "linking of matter and form" (1997:85). Binarism of the sign, not poetics.

Pym remains, like Antoine Berman whom he often quotes, within hermeneu-tics. Within the sign. Without a theory of language. Besides, he does not seem to know anything about contemporary poetics. All that matters is passing on "in-formation" (1997:90). Through his critique of Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1999), all that binarism does is to change names, from "resisting translations" and "'fluid' translations" (1997:96). But he is trying to break away from these binarisms.

From metaphor to metaphor, the translator becomes "a sailor," Pym is look-ing for "the ideal moment." Whence the question returns: "Should one translate?" (1997:99). The answer: responsibility. Itself relying on "political and economic forces set in motion so that a text is transferred – materially – to a position where

translation becomes desirable, profitable, sometimes necessary" (1997: 100, ref. 19). Considerations which have nothing to do with an ethics. Of ethics, all that is left is a form of behaviour.

Pym moves on to a "simple logic of cooperation" (1997: 111), which he takes to be "a potential basis for an ethics of the translator" (1997: 113), then he moves on to "transaction costs" (1997: 117). Clearly such considerations cannot in any way be concerned with the realm of poetics. We are dealing with documents (1997: 121).

Social actors, rates, paying more and finding oneself unemployed, all these come into play, because "being faithful to clients is not enough" (1997: 125). From metaphor to metaphor, ethics has been lost in abstractions, because of the very nature of the concrete point of view that was chosen, as the examples show: translating documents from Catalan to English, where "the current weakness of the Aragonese language seems to go together with the weakness of the translator's bank account" (1997: 126). All this contributes to the level of abstraction of the code of ethics. For the sole purpose of "intercultural communication" (1997: 127). Where the very problem of translation disappears and is replaced by the concept of "learning languages," first for "short-term" relationships (1997: 127) only, then for "some long-term relationships" (1997: 130) as well.

In conclusion, odd for a code of ethics: "one must translate only when it is justified by the benefits of cooperation" (1997: 131). And Anthony Pym opposes "theorists such as Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer, who think about translation first, and only then about criteria of cooperation," arguing that they maintain a theoretical approach that is "extremely protectionist" (1997: 131), in defence of "proper French".[6]

And there you have an ethics based on "commercial criteria" (1997: 132). It is in this manner that Anthony Pym believes he has overridden the split between sourcerers and targeteers (1997: 132). But we are not rid of the sign. Pym has not overridden anything at all.

All of this is probably a reflection on "strategies" (1997: 132) and, if one is lax enough to bring the notion of ethics down to that level, an "ethics of cooperation" (1997: 133). But not an ethics of translating. It is market reductionism.

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6. Some of the works by Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer, professors at the École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs in Paris include: Danica Seleskovitch, *Langage, langues et mémoire,* Paris, Lettres modernes-Minard (1975); *Études traductologiques,* an edited volume by Marianne Lederer, Lettres modernes-Minard (1990); *Identité, altérité, équivalence? La traduction comme relation,* a tribute to Marianne Lederer, a volume edited by Fortunato Israël, Lettres modernes-Minard (2002).

We have yet to break away from the form/content binarism stamped on source language/target language. The binarism of the sign. We cannot break away from this if we stay within hermeneutics. It is the struggle of the poem against the sign, the continuum against the discontinuum. No poetics, no ethics of language.

This is why we are faced with the necessity of thinking language in order to think ethics and the political as poetics, and not only to use poetics as a starting point. Here, translating offers not only privileged but also unique grounds, even though, at the moment, an ethics and politics of translating, a political ethics of translating, is utopian. But this ethics is also thereby a prophecy of language.

Urgently needed: An ethics of language, an ethics of translating

Why urgent?[7] We could carry on as now. But it is precisely because we do not see the ill that we are doing, doing to others, and to ourselves, with our ways, with language.

Firstly because what we take to be language is but a representation of language. When we oppose, as we frequently do, as Bergson does, for example, but he is not the only one, a whole philosophical tradition does this, when we oppose language to life we think we are doing this, but in fact we are only opposing a representation of language to a representation of life. And we do not know this. And we do not know that we do not know.

This representation of language is what linguists call the sign. Signifier and signified, or form and content, or sound and meaning. And style, or what we call style, is only that which the sign allows us to think of what we call a poem or literature. Which we view separately from what we call ordinary language. Not only separately, but we even frequently set it against poetic language. Like a deviation.

Yet it has to be shown that these manners of speaking are first of all precisely just that, manners of speaking. Then, that they are deceitful and false and that another point of view can show that what we call ordinary language does not exist. Especially if we demean ordinary language in comparison with a poetic language that we claim to admire. In both cases we do not know what we are saying. And we do not know that we do not know what we are saying.

But I will at once be asked from where I draw my reasons for speaking this way, the why and the how of such arrogance or madness. Well it is from experience, that is triple, experience of the poem, experience of the theory of language, experience of translating. And it is crucial that the poem be there, it is the pivot point from which to overturn a knowledge that is itself arrogant, because it knows only itself, and is a master of deafness.

Hence, for all that is being repeated on ordinary language, and especially by certain philosophers, more than linguists. Malinowski was closer to hearing what

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7.   This is a revised version of an article published in *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale, « Le supplément »*, 230 (September 2004).

people say when they make small talk, to talk to each other, even when they apparently have nothing to say, nothing that the other does not already know, but do it for contact, and it is he who discovers, or invents, as it is said of those who find treasures, what he called the phatic function. While a pseudo-thought, but received as sublime thought, of course I am referring to Heidegger followed by all of his followers, spread and is still spreading dismissive misknowledge of ordinary language, supposedly inauthentic, in contrast and correlation with a misconception of poetry essentialized, sacralized. It is the noble tone in philosophy and in current use by many.

Given the damage caused by this representation, to which should be added the correlated damage that reduces the specificity of translating to the general concept of understanding, all of these effects of theory being embedded in an essentialized language and an unthought subject, and subjects, globalized through a chain reaction, I query whether a sublime form of the sign can be observed.

With its particular effects, which embarrassed Heideggerians leave in the past, in silence, on the essentialization of the German language directly related to Ancient Greek as the language of philosophy, an essentialization which was also a political one. Where Heideggerians cut their Heidegger in half, the big thinker and the little Nazi, and speak of Heidegger's silence. But there never was silence from Heidegger, as these good souls complain, since the master used to say "*Sein Nicht-mehr-sprechen ist ein Gesagt-haben*" (2002: 227) [His no-longer-speaking is a having-said in itself]. The silence is the silence of Heideggerians, which weakens their thought. The man himself thought in one thought language, poetry and politics.

This is a particular variety, especially pernicious, and this is why I insisted on it, of ways of thinking language, but it is entirely framed by the binarization of the sign. A pseudo-ethics of the authentic and the inauthentic. Doubly pseudo.

The problem, with the sign, is that in being taken for the very nature of language, it prevents us from thinking language. Taken as the functioning of language and its description, the sign impedes recognition that it consists, as far as I can see, of six paradigms. Yet it is only considered, to my knowledge, by proclaimed language specialists, as a linguistic model. But it also implies a philosophical paradigm, which opposes words and things. Then an anthropological paradigm, which opposes the live voice to writing, the dead word or the deadly word, and it is also the opposition of the spirit and the word, and some even say "the flesh of words," which of course is opposed to the soul. And here, naturally, that is culturally, is revealed its most beautiful, I mean its most hideous face, the theological paradigm, which is not universal, like the others, but a local concept which has become globalized, and it is the paradigm that reveals best how the sign works: not simply form and content, juxtaposed, but a signified that alone represents a signifier both concealed and maintained, and though being only part

of the sign it passes for the whole, and it is crazy how the theological paradigm resembles what goes on everyday in translation, and you recognize, I am sure, the theology that opposes the Old Testament, in the role of the signifier, and the New Testament, in the role of the signified, which is not without ethical and political consequences. To this a social paradigm is added, which opposes the individual to society. Finally, a political paradigm, which opposes, in a fine aporia, a minority to a majority following the symbolic schema described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of identification with the Sovereign.

The sign is all of that. I have already said it but it cannot be repeated enough. Since the sign rules. If one tries to observe its effects, the first is that it does not seem to be thought of as a representation. Its internal plurality, or rather the multiplication of its dualities, is not recognized as part of its coherence. The second effect is certainly the heterogeneous categories of reason, which comprise what the 18th century called humanities, and which constitutes our academic disciplines.

We think like sliced salami would think, if it could think. In fact, we are not worth much more.

Which our behaviour with language shows. Through its theory as through its practices. And that which gathers up the entire thought of the problem, as much to recognize it as to try to think differently, to do differently, to translate differently, is not a matter of knowledge, it is a matter of ethics.

Ethics, a question of behaviour. Towards oneself and towards others. Ethics is what one does with oneself, and with others. It is taking action, and creating value. And value cannot be anything but the subject, which instantly can only mean two things, to make a subject of oneself, to recognize others as subjects. And there can only be a subject if the subject is the value of life. By releasing from the individual all the subjects it bears within itself. A dozen, and more.[8] Ethics is different from morals, theologized or not, as a social codification of the commandments and the forbidden, of good and evil.

If ethics makes the subject, ethics is necessarily nominalist: each individual is this collection of subjects. It is what Montaigne used to say: "Each man bears in himself the entire form of the human condition." And the individual-subject is intermittent, as Groethuysen shows in his *Philosophische Anthropologie* (1928). No progress here. The defence of a little captain in the famous Dreyfus affair was nominalist, as the defence of the Army's honour (even if it takes forgery) was politico-logical realism. A realism making of the masses the subject of history. Another realism would tattoo numbers on arms. A realism of *langue* makes of *langue* the subject, which speaks only, according to Heidegger, when it answers to *langue*.

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8.   For more details, refer to *Politique du rythme, politique du sujet,* 1995.

It is the entire ethical and political potentiality of this old notional couple, usually left to logic, to the metalinguistic, to the quarrel of universals.

The relationship to self, to thought, to others, comes and goes ceaselessly through language. So there is no ethics without ethics of language, if ethics is not an ethics of language, through the ceaseless shift from *I* to *you,* including the absent, *he.* Which coincides with Rimbaud's famous words: in every way "I is someone else" (Rimbaud 2002: 366).

Hence ethics is unavoidably a matter of language. It is not a matter of subjective appreciations, of taste or emotion. It is a matter of knowing how one behaves towards language, how to behave with language. One can tell by the outcome. But first it implies thinking language, and how to think it.

Thinking language is different from knowledge, from sciences. It is concerned with what we do not know we are saying when we talk about "*savoir-vivre*." And Benveniste wrote that "language is used for *living*"[9] (1974: 217). From this we can draw a number of consequences, for language, and for what we can call *living*. Which necessarily implies that to think is first to invent thought, and at the same time to think the relationship between language and living. And if we give this strong meaning to what we call thinking, we will notice right away that it is unimaginable how we live in a culture that has accustomed us not to think. And we know nothing of this. We carry on with our business as usual.

We live in heterogeneous categories of reason. They have produced sciences, but sciences which, while they juxtapose the regionalisms of knowledge, do not allow us to know what they prevent us from knowing, and that first of all each science produces a specific ignorance, which it does not know, and it does not know that it does not know what it does not know. Hence it prevents us from knowing it erases that it is erasing what it erases. Through its very programme. And how strange it is that this science also, and very much so, does exactly, point by point, what current translation does. I will demonstrate this further on.

Immediately, and counter-Platowise, this problem with sciences, this problem with knowledge, is a matter of theory of language. In the multiple sense where theory implies pondering the unknown, precisely what our sciences prevent us from knowing for all kinds of reasons, where thinking means thinking together, and one through the other, living and language.

Right away, thinking-in-order-to, thinking in order to live, implies thinking against. Against sciences. Not against the need to know, but against the cultural organization of science. Thinking is a battle, not the business as usual for practices that our sciences have established. Which goes against the current of everything

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9.   My translation (PPB).

that our disciplines, as they say, have established: language is the business of language specialists who we call linguists, literature is the business of literature specialists, just as ethics is tended to by ethics specialists, philosophy the domain of its own specialists and observing society the work of sociologists and man in general the object of anthropologists, just as savages were observed by ethnologists. I am barely exaggerating the outlines to show the extent to which this compartmentalization perpetuates fallacies, so enormous that we cannot see them. Even distributed, what is more, into sub-domains: language among specialists in languages, literature among literature specialists, and there are also comparatists who compare, as translators translate from one language to another, from which we have extracted a supposedly autonomous discipline called translation studies. All of this seems perfectly reasonable.

This is precisely what I call not thinking: to confuse knowledge, science, with thinking. Each keeping to its own regionalism. Maintaining order.

As I am not opposing it as absurd. All of it is legitimate and necessary. Thus, in linguistics, one specializes in phonology, or in phonetics, or in lexicology, or in syntax. Generally in one specific language. So many studies whose technical nature is indispensable, just as they are subject to the relative compartmentalizing of this technical nature. Which creates the paradox that sciences of language are not, do not make the theory of language. This is not their purpose. The same thing applies to literature, this or that literature, but in a muddled, if not indistinct, relationship between a history of literature, indisputably necessary, and what we call literary criticism, this eclecticism which variously bandies about the critic's preference, the author's psychology, aesthetics, rhetoric and stylistics. This is what predominates in literature courses. And aside from a few who build bridges, linguistics is the business of linguists, and they do not deal with literature. Generative grammar was categorical about this. And literary critics leave linguistics to linguists. It is only normal.

As for the inventor of pragmatics, Austin, he declared that poetry as a "use of language" belonged to "parasitic uses" (Austin 1962: 104). Which, from my point of view on language, immediately places him in what Horkheimer called a traditional theory, in the museum of regionalisms of thought. I will stop at these examples.

I have no illusions in this respect: the problem would be to try to eventually change into truisms a series of paradoxes. A series not in the sense of a certain number, but in the sense of serial thought, a thought implying the internal systematicity of thinking, where thinking necessarily implies thinking language, and thinking the interaction between what it means to think language and what it means to think what we call living.

Hence my two fulcrums. The first, in the sense of what I mean by living, is the definition given by Spinoza in his *Tractatus Politicus*:

> When, then, we call that dominion best, where men pass their lives in unity, I understand a human life, defined not by mere circulation of the blood, and other qualities common to all animals, but above all by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind.[10]   (1955: 314)

The second fulcrum, as to what is to be understood by "theory of language," I find in Saussure's thought, where recent writings (2002) confirm that it is necessary to learn to understand that everything taught by 20th century structuralism and which all linguists, not some but all linguists, to my knowledge, continue to teach en masse, stands plainly in contradiction, and not in correlation, with Saussure. Because structuralism systematically disjoins what Saussure conceived as interacting, starting with *langue* and *parole*. Saussure in correlation to Humboldt.

In this sense, to speak of "theory of language" implies the primacy of both the point of view and an internal systematicity regarding matters of language.

So, we can undertake the task of thinking what language sciences do not think, what specialists of literature do not think, what specialists of aesthetics do not think, what specialists of ethics do not think, no more than those of political philosophy. Sorry for being unpleasant, and sounding arrogant, it is a question of emergency. It has been all this time.

Yet, it is simple. It is a matter of acknowledging that ethics is exactly where the relationship between language and living takes place, between the theory and practices of language and the thought of what a human life can or should be.

In other words, ethics and the theory of language are inseparable. Moreover they are one in the activity of thinking. Which is not without consequences.

The first is that ethics is endless, both as internal systematicity and endlessness. Which shows at once that this systematicity has nothing to do with what we called systems in the 19th century, doctrinary, dogmatic wholes, closed in on themselves. On the contrary it is a matter of exploring everything that we do not know of the specific relations between body and language, the relations between a work of thought and a language, relations wherein there are only "mother works" and no mother tongues, interrelations between language, ethics and the political such that ethics is no longer the same when it is thought by and for itself and when it is thought as an activity of language, as with the political, as with politics.

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10. *Cum ergo dicimus, illud imperium optimum esse, ubi homines concorditer vitam transigunt, vitam humanam intelligo, quae non solâ sanguinis circulatione, & aliis, quae omnibus animalibus sunt communia, sed quae maximè ratione, verâ Mentis virtute, & vitâ definitur.*

Thinking their reciprocal necessity immediately positions eclecticism as a socially charming blend of opportunism, cowardice and lack of thought. As when we were trying our best to marry phenomenology and structuralism. Never forget that matchmakers are comical characters.

But some will say that I am raving, that I am launching fireworks of absurdities by so defying the reasonable state of sciences. No, it is a utopian aspiration, lighting a bonfire with the logs of political discourse which makes use of the sign. So if one takes a moment to reflect, it is a question of points of view.

From my point of view, it is the sign, this familiar accumulation of sciences, which seems on the contrary like complete schizophrenia, like pure madness, when the living show us every instant that the assumed separation of form and content or of body and soul is and can only be a corpse.

This is where translating enters into its own and plays an emblematic role. Because, depending on what we will be translating, which means *how,* depending on what we do with *parole* or with *langue*, translating shows the difference between Saint Jerome, patron saint of translators, and Charon, who carried souls across the Styx. The difference resides in what happens on the other side of the river. Where it appears that it is not enough to see translators as negotiators (one of the favourite metaphors of translators), as Charon too negotiates. Yet one must be watchful of the state of what made it to the other side after the negotiations, and compare it to what was supposed to make it. There is more at stake than carrying across a message.

If it is a matter of points of view, if there are only points of view on language, we find ourselves faced with what Kuhn said of scientific theories: choose the stronger theory, which best accounts for what there is to be understood. And the sign is a weak theory. Proof of which lies in its compartmentalization of thought, its regionalisms, its incapability to think the body-in-language continuum, the language-poem-ethics-politics continuum. We have to think what the sign does not allow us to think.

What is it we have to account for? For what we do with language as a faculty of wholeness. Mauss said that rhythm is a faculty of wholeness. And it is in and through language that we think up and set up relationships to self and to others. It is therefore a matter of ethics. A matter which transforms ethics as it transforms the thought of language. A history of ethics would be a history of language, a history of language is a history of ethics, with its poetic and political effects.

To speak through emblems – certain names carry a whole history, accomplished or unaccomplished, and therefore a power of direction – we continue to think Hegel but we do not think, or not yet, Humboldt, we continue to think Descartes, as well as Deleuze, we do not think Spinoza. Let me specify that I am using these names as adverbs, not as direct objects of the verb *to think*. Because

they are modes of inventing thought, and not historical accounts or explanations of what these artists of thought actually thought.

This is the battle of the sign and of the poem.

I call poem the transformation of a form of life by a form of language and the transformation of a form of language by a form of life, both inseparably, or even the invention of life with and through the invention of language, or the maximum intensity of language. Life in the sense of human life.

This definition is already in itself, in part, a transformation of the usual, cultural, formal notion of poem. But, I would say, more in appearance than in part. Because I submit that a poem has always been that, that it is a poetic universal, which Mallarmé approaches or allusively implies, and, there, partially, when he opposes, in his response to Jules Huret's 1891 literary inquiry, *naming* to *suggesting*.

This definition gives rise, in my opinion, to four consequences.

The first: a poem is an ethical act. Because it makes the subject, it makes you the subject. First, fundamentally, whoever is writing the poem, but also, and differently, whoever is reading the poem and is possibly transformed by it. If it is an ethical act, a poem is only a poem if it is that ethical act transforming both a life and a language and thereby also transforming ethics: it is an ethics acting through language. Its poetics is nothing but that. Entirely different from aesthetics.

The second consequence is that, being the very definition of the poem[11], what we call poetry or rather the history of poetry, abounds with such acts, since it is made up of poems, and it constantly proves this. Which should at once serve as a criterion to recognize a poem among that which does everything to resemble a poem. But it does not, because the history of poetry abounds equally with such acts. Thus the question of criteria resides entirely in the very notion of value. Entirely different from products on the market or in style. Poetics is the ethics of the poem.

Third effect: this definition of the poem exceeds the traditional definition, which is essentially a formal definition: fixed-forms poems. It encompasses everything that can be called arts of language. In this sense a novel can only be a novel if it has poem in it. In each sentence. And this is just one example, because everything we call literary genres is included. As is the art of thought, which makes a poem of thought.

Which leads to a fourth consequence. Through its very definition, the poem rediscovers and reinvents life as the passage of the principle of life to all living creatures, such as in the fabulous story told in the beginning of Genesis (1 : 24–25, 2 : 7, 6 : 7). Which shows how the poem which invents life is a part of the divine, as

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11. Implying the difference made by Port-Royal between defining a thing and defining a word, I legitimately submit this definition, which will be judged consequently.

is all life. The poem that is poem thereby becomes part of a poetics of the divine in human life, taking care not to identify the divine that is the passage of life with any God. The paradox here lies in the detheologization of the divine.

Hence the seemingly strange notion of an atheism of the divine, or of an atheology of the divine of life, which is nothing other than a radical humanism, detheologized, making an anthropological and poetic universal out of an ethics of the subject, making a poetics out of anthropology, an anthropology out of poetics. And making history and meaning infinite out of the poetics of the divine.

The sign produces an anthropology of totality, or of totalizations such that each time one plus one equals all, like form and content equal all of the sign. But the poem is the subject infinite, and meaning infinite.

Hence another consequence of ethics of language and of ethics of the poem, namely the necessity of an ethics of translating.

Translating – anthropologically one of the oldest activities of language, since the Sumerians' bilingual lists. A technique for carrying messages across languages. Despite contrastive grammars, overwhelmingly, translating has not changed much. The sacred sacralizing word-for-word. Then we moved from word to sentence. There was the "*belle infidèle*." Florian would remove pieces from Cervantes and add some of his own. Then national specificity in its romanticism acquired the taste for alterity.

But it is the sign that we have always been translating. In two ways that stand back to back, and both maintain the sign: one aiming for form, the other aiming for content. The leading semiotician of this conception of translating, Eugene Nida, theorizes this duality in terms of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Others say source language and target language, sourcerer and targeteer. No matter the terminology, the behaviour is the same, and heeding the source language means heeding form, heeding the target language means heeding content. Translating poetry, given the formal definition of poetry is heeding form, free to translate everything else aiming for naturalness of expression, so that the translation will not look like a translation, or be the copy of a foreign language.

Two things are at stake. On the one hand, the aim for content insures that a message is being transmitted: translating shows that the notion of communication is taken for language. Which reinforces the semioticism of the sign and shows that the notion of communication is a major obstacle to thinking language, to letting language through, an epistemological obstacle, a poetic obstacle, an ethical obstacle, a political obstacle. But the sign does not see it.

On the other hand, the aim for content both shows and shrouds that what is at stake is identity against alterity. Annexation. And all of this happens with the sole idea that it is a language system, *langue,* that we are translating. *Langue*, sign, two reasons not to know what we are doing. And two errors.

To reverse annexation into decentring while staying within the confines of a language system, from one language to another, would be another error, and would keep us within the sign and project us into a mythology of languages and of language, which continues to ignore discourse and poem.

Because on *langue* there can only be discourses. Each time a specific *parole*. And if it is a poem, including a poem of thought, which is to be translated, but we translate the sign only, we have lost the poem. Wherein lie famous commonplace ideas, on the untranslatable, on the unspeakable. Well, between what there is to be translated and the person translating stands the representation of language and poetry of the person translating. It is his own representation of language the translator projects onto what is to be translated, it is his representations of language that translations first show.

I submit that the untranslatable is the theoretical effect of the sign taken for the poem, that it is a poem that always overthrows and overflows the unspeakable, another blurring of the sign.

If to translate a poem we translate form, we are not translating a poem, but a representation of poetry, linguistically and poetically false: linguistically, because only units of *langue* are being translated; poetically, because a poem is more than just form and content. The unit of the poem is the poem, not the linguistic units it contains.

What the history of translation, the history of poems, the history of major translations of major poems show is that identity is not opposed to alterity, but that identity is formed solely through alterity. Therefore the move from annexation to decentring, poetically, can no longer be thought in terms of *langue*, but in terms of what a work does to its *langue*, of what translating within this relationship of alterity does to the target language. Which banishes, theoretically, the effacement of the translator and the effacement of alterity. Unless we keep to *langue* and to the sign. It would be better then to refrain from the poem.

The sign instead of the poem, this is nonetheless the calamity produced by two situations in translation. One is the established semioticism which makes translating an autonomous process, turning thinking about translating into translation theory. Because this autonomy is fallacious. In reality, translation is then entirely seen and practised as hermeneutics, consigned to hermeneutical concepts, translating is thus a form of hermeneutics. In this sense, there is no translation theory. And hermeneutics is an activity of meaning which knows only the sign. As legitimate as hermeneutics may be in itself, let me note, from the standpoint of the poem, that it fails doubly when it reduces a poem to one truth or to one meaning, or many meanings. Because meaning stands entirely within the sign. Out of which arises another canonical error, that is to attribute polysemy to poetry, whereas polysemy is itself banality, in language.

Now then, hermeneutics applied to the things of translation tends towards a psychology of the translator, of his moods, and only repeats banalities on the subjects of loyalty and treason, on the fact that connotations exist, and it confuses translating with the possibility of talking about language – metalanguage – only to end up remarking, despite the argument on untranslatability, that translation exists. But it is a statement, not an ethics. Aligned with the opposition between letter and spirit.

Hermeneutics, for this very reason, lacks both poem and ethics. It takes the ethics of the poem, the ethics of the body-in-language, form-subject continuum for literalism. Because it knows only the sign.

The other calamitous, but at the same time subtly comical, situation, from the standpoint of an ethics of translating, is the venture consisting of pairing up a specialist in *langue*, hence of contents, with an artist of *langue*, poet, writer, who will contribute style, because it is the very incarnation of the sign but in two bodies. Not forgetting the pernicious effect of the so-called word for word approach, as applied by someone who knows the language for someone who does not know it, which is only a *vouloir-dire* [an intended meaning]. This is the very reason why the literary translators' code of conduct[12], while speaking of "moral obligations" and "ethical norms," set out in article 1 that a person practising the profession of Translator is thereby considered to have sound knowledge of the language he is translating and, in article 2, refrains from translating a text of which he does not master the writing or the field of knowledge.

It is however widely practised, by poets, and among poets, and particularly so for a so-called "sacred" text, the Bible. This is current practice in English, in Spanish. We have seen it in French. Which immediately poses an ethical problem. There are two kinds of translations: translations in current language, and even basic language for the unlearned public, and those where poets, writers, enter into their own, for a literate public.

But this ethical monstrosity does not seem to bother the religious, because translation into current language is first seeking currency with customers. Given that their business is conversion. Nida quotes a native from the Amazon: "I never knew before that God spoke my language" (Nida and Taber 1969: 173). And there you are, one more Christian. From this we can deduce two opposite modes of unwriting, and of lacking ethics. In the one, basic language unwrites the poem, the recitative of these texts, reduced to mere instruments serving a religious purpose. And the other, rewritten by writers, replaces the poem by poetization, which

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12. I gave the reference in Chapter I, "An ethics of translating."

leaves intact religious ideologies, which are theologico-political. Two opposite forms of instrumentalism, paved with good intentions.

The question so often stirred by the reasons for retranslating and especially retranslating what we call major works (other texts, we do not retranslate) could be seen, from the standpoint of an ethics of language, of an ethics of the poem, as a shift towards an aesthetic challenge, or a politico-religious one, or both, for a text such as the Bible, co-founder of Western culture, especially if we compare the French versions to the English ones, among which the successful King James, and to the German version, by Luther. The advantage of returning to this as a question of ethics of the poem, of ethics of language, is that ethics holds everything together, against the misknowledge of the language-poem-ethics-politics continuum. Which hermeneutics cannot see, being inside the discontinuum of the sign.

Unlike translational hermeneutics, which can only erase the continuum, an ethics of translating is listening to the continuum in the poem, listening not to what the poem says but to what it does, and which conveys in its movement what it says. Because if we only see what it says, we only understand what words say, and we practise hermeneutics without knowing it. Just as there can be no poem without an ethics of the poem, there is no ethics of translating without listening.

Which we can approach better if we acknowledge that a poem is what a body does to language: a serial semantics. It is rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech (and not as the binary alternation of the same and of the different, according to the sign's classical definition of it) within the rhythm-syntax-prosody continuum, combining all rhythms, sprung rhythm, final rhythm, positional rhythm, repetitive rhythm, prosodic rhythm, syntactical rhythm.

This awareness is not customary, is not taught, as far as I know.[13] To speak of what a body does to language can seem strange and unassailable. Yet here is a perfectly concrete example in what Marina Tsvetayeva says: "I hop, skip, and shout my way to the *idea*" (1985: 167). And in a notebook in 1940:

> My difficulty (in writing poems – and perhaps other people's difficulty in understanding them) is in the impossibility of my goal, for example, of using words to express a moan: ah–ah–ah. / To express a sound using words, using meanings. So that the only thing left in the ears would be ah–ah–ah. Why have such goals?[14]
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> (in Proffer 1980: 35)

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13. Among other sources, I am referring to *Traité du rythme. Des vers et des proses* (Dessons and Meschonnic 1998).

14. For more details, refer to *La rime et la vie* (Meschonnic 1990a: 208–231).

And it is remarkable that Marina Tsvetayeva reverses what I would call Wittgenstein's problem, when Wittgenstein, I cannot recall where, notes that with words, with language, if I say I have a toothache, I cannot communicate my pain, I am merely talking about it, and there you have the whole traditional heterogeneity between language and life, abstract and concrete. And from the standpoint of the poem, Adorno's famous 1949 dictum, saying that it is barbaric and impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz, only exacerbates the same incapacity to understand what a poem does. To which, in the tit for tat of commonplace ideas, we oppose Paul Celan's poetry. Moreover, Adorno was perhaps showing, without realizing it, how incapacity to hold an ethics of the poem was coupled with political incapacity, placed behind an "eclipse of reason." To think the ethics of the poem shows that both incapacities are one and the same. I would therefore say, paradoxically, that if we do not think the poem we do not think the political either. If not as an autonomous category, as the paradigm of the sign.

The power of Marina Tsvetayeva's musings, also remarkable for reversing another common representation, comes from placing the moan of the body *before* its expression through thought, whereas she contends that it is the very effect of the poem, its aftereffect which lets the body be heard. Cry out loud.

And if the poem, the way Marina Tsvetayeva speaks of it, is alone in doing to language what it does, it would be an error – *the* canonical error – to perceive it as an aberrance, a deviation from ordinary language. To avoid falling foolishly into this trap, we need only keep to the specific systematicity of the continuum, which is not opposed to "ordinary language," the reason being that that which we call ordinary language is a multiplicity of other systematicities, and they do not have the same ethics at all.

An ethics of translating means translating the maximum subjectivization of a system of discourse created by the poem. To translate a poem into an enunciation by the terms and means of the sign is to reduce the infinite to a totality. The poem has disappeared because the ethics of the poem has disappeared. Then come crocodile tears about untranslatability.

This is why I would say that the only way to think the limits of the sign, and I do not mean to depart from the sign, this semiotic fad of the sixties and beyond, when we were playing with Bataille's and Artaud's delusions (but they were far from delusions, they were interpreted as such), the only way to think the limits of the sign is to think the poem as the strongest ethics of language, precisely because the poem is the weak link in the chain of reasoning of the sign: the sign breaks at the poem.

The internal systematicity of the theory of language, brought to its maximum intensity by the poem, according to the language-poem-ethics-politics chain, makes the poem an act of life.

Which goes to show what certain political regimes illustrate and confirm about themselves, that an ethics of language, in a continued invention of life, is opposed to anything that is a threat to a human life. Whereby it is particularly appropriate to recognize the theologico-political as a culture of hate. Which sends Hegel to the museum: this is no longer the configuration in which he opposed a religion of love to a religion of hate. Let us recall that this is how he referred to Christianity and Judaism.

We can now move the theological paradigm outside of the dualism of the sign. From the standpoint of ethics of language, of ethics of the poem, the theological paradigm is the paradigm opposing the theologico-political to a radical detheologization of ethics, meaning paradoxically both the divine and the human. Ethics of language, counter-culturally, countering all that rules this world, more or less to perdition, thus works to *detheologicopoliticize* language, poem, ethics and politics. About which, naturally, our culture of the sign has no more notion than it has of a theory of language.

The comical element remained unnoticed in this situation, I see it in translation, for example, of religious texts by the religious. They need only see their truth to divide in two the ethics of the language to be translated: truth, and necessarily its residue, form. Thus, they weaken and destroy the very object of their devotion. Instead of translating the poem, they make the sign of the cross.

Thinking cannot be thinking without the theory of language, and thinking means to work at transforming thinking. Otherwise, it is simply about maintaining order. Hence, thinking means acting on society or it is nothing. Meaning that thinking and ethics are one, and an ethics of language, against the cult of death whether in the name of a God or not, is the meaning of a human life.

What is at stake in translating is the need to transform the whole theory of language

It is important to show that the major and even only problem in translation is its theory of language. Without knowing it, when we think we are translating a text it is our own representation of language that we are showing, and that interposes itself between the text to be translated and the intention of the translator. If we stand in the discontinuum of the linguistic sign when translating a poem, we do not translate the poem, we only translate one language system into another. As a result, the whole theory of language depends on its theory of literature, every translation depends on its theory of language, every theory of language depends on its theory of rhythm, the discontinuum depends on the continuum, therefore the whole theory of language depends on its theory and practice of translation, just as translation depends on its theory of language. Which immediately shows the major role of translation in the whole representation of language, and of society, as any society depends on its representation of language and is revealed by it. And this role shares no features with the role of message transmitter, assigned by the sign, which is the common representation of language. Translation is therefore the core of a real cultural revolution.

I am working at transforming the whole theory of language, that is thinking the whole relationship between language, poetry, literature, art, ethics, politics, to create a poetics of society. This unavoidably runs the risk, or rather the certainty, of not being heard except by a few people, given the long-running establishment of commonplace ideas, which conceives of its activities only as individually separated, as is shown by the state of knowledge, the state of humanities and philosophy, the state of the University. The theory of language, on the contrary, thinks the continuum and interaction between these activities.

I am told that this is difficult to understand and that I should write for the general public. This is significant misknowledge of what the labour of thought has always been. What we call the general public is nothing more than the social effect of this establishment's academicisms, which determine their horizon of expectations as the territory of the thinkable. Anything different and opposed to it is at once considered difficult and rejected then silenced. Nothing new under the sun, since thought is this madness eager to change the world against maintaining order. But it is the poem of thought.

There is no problem with translation. There is no untranslatable. There is only a problem with the theory of language, which is at work in the act of translating, whether we know it or not. The result of this activity is a product which varies according to this theory, in such a way that any translation, even before showing what may be left of what had to be translated, first shows its representation of language, and its representation of the thing called literature, or poetry.

The whole problem thus consists of recognizing which representation of language is at work. What is at stake, depending on the intended result. Depending on if we think language is in keeping with the sign, in the linguistic sense, that is of the discontinuum between signifier and signified, in keeping with *langue,* with words as units, and our whole attention turned to meaning, since the sign knows nothing else.

In particular all the sign knows is the discontinuum, therefore it has neither concepts nor means to acknowledge and voice what also exists in language and which irremediably escapes it, that is the continuum, rhythm, prosody, everything which is utterance and signifiance. All of which means there is more than meaning in words.

Hence, insofar as a text deemed literary, but it could also be a philosophical text, essentially partakes of a continuum and invents its thought as a system of discourse, if we see in this nothing other than *langue* and sign this is exactly what produces the non-translated, hence the current notion of untranslatability, a confused notion muddling anthropological elements and poetic elements, a notion determined essentially by the sign. It is therefore both a theoretical notion and an empirical problem. But here the empirical is the product of theory. Or rather, of an absence of theory. And it is precisely the ideology of *langue,* that is the transfer from one language system to another language system*,* with as cultural effect the ideology of the natural, which is taught in translation.

This goes to show directly that it is more than just an epistemological problem. It is also, inextricably, a cultural problem: a problem of the history of thinking language.

How naive it would be to believe that we know more today, through 20th century formal linguistics, about the history of hermeneutics and philology, than, for example, the Ancients.

Hence when, in Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* or *De interpretatione,* the canonical translation of *ta en tê phonê,* literally "things which are in the voice," is "the words." Which instantly results in all of these classics having to be retranslated.

But not because translations become out of date: it is the thought of language that is outdated. And the few famous translations which have stood the test of time are no more outdated than the original works. Like the King James Version

of the Bible, Galland's French translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* or Goethe's *Faust* by Nerval.

Hence translation is a very accurate record of the overall representation of language. And the traditionally poor status of translation, precisely insofar as it bears witness to a specific deafness, is enough, paradoxically, to reverse the sociological and customary contempt of which it is the object.

Because translation is in this way the very experimentation field of theories of language. The history of retranslations of major texts fully shows how looking and listening change. We can then conceive of translation as a means of testing the theory of language and the theory of literature.

Translation, in all its misery, shows that we suffer from sign-sickness, and that our entire representation of language, in its relationships to literature, has to change.

Translation thus poses the question of the whole theory of language and that of literature. It is linked to their history. It is not limited to being the instrument of communication and information from one language to another, from one culture to another, traditionally considered inferior to the original creation in literature. It is an experimental poetics. The best observation point for language strategies, through the study, for the same text, of its successive retranslations.

The most ancient point of view on language is the empirical and empiricist point of view of the translator, whose patron, emblematically, is Saint Jerome, translator of the Bible. From Cicero to Valery Larbaud, it is a point of view organized according to the effect to be produced, within the limits of a language system. Translation is conceived of as the passage from one language system to another. It is analyzed in terms of contrastive grammar ("differential stylistics") and individual style. This point of view presently underlies the teaching of translation in interpreting and translation schools. It seems to have in its favour experience and common sense. Its major precepts are the translator's loyalty and effacement with respect to the text. Its transparency must lead the reader to forget that it is a translation, and aim to be natural. However its power turns into weakness in the face of outdated translations, when compared to the permanent activity of the original, when dealing with a literary text of the kind that transforms literature. Its weakness comes from its being a mere concept of *langue,* not a concept of literature. And since it cannot grasp the specificity of literature, this point of view could not possibly be communicated by the practice it produces.

German hermeneutics in the early 19th century generated a conception of translation amplified by phenomenology, as it identified translation with a phenomenology of understanding, negating the difference between translating from one language system to another and understanding within a given language.

With, as its horizon, the ultimate misunderstanding. With Saint Augustine, who was to be the patron of the untranslatable. To understand would already be to translate, to partake of an "original translating" – of a "transposing of our whole being into the realm of a transformed truth" (Heidegger 1992:12). Periphrases and gloss in translation are direct effects of the Heideggerian doctrine of truth. Whence the developments by George Steiner in *After Babel* (1975) and Michel Serres in *Hermès* (1969, 1972, 1974) amounting with the one to a psychology of the translator and a theology of the incommunicable and, with the other, to a mythology of meaning and of history, by identifying the semiotic, the intersemiotic and the linguistic. As with the traditional empiricist point of view, the phenomenology of translation knows only the sign and etymologism (etymology-origin-essence-truth). It reduces language to information under the rule of the rational and universal harmony.

Attempts at automatic translation with the end of World War II, as part of the Cold War, have had an effect on the development of a linguistics of translation, whose applied eclecticism followed the development of various doctrines by amalgamating them, from generative grammar to contemporary pragmatics. American stimulus-response behaviourism left its mark on the theory and practice of translation (with American Biblicist Nida). This linguistics of translation remains a conceptualization of *langue,* following the dualistic terms of the sign: form ("formal equivalence" identified with literalism) and meaning ("dynamic equivalence"). The linguistics of translation is in no way searching for an inclusive theory of language and literature.

The last point of view to date is that of poetics. One that acknowledges the inseparability of history and functioning, of language and literature. And thereby the effort to acknowledge the historicity of translating, and that of translations. Hence translation in the Western world, as long as it was first a matter of sacred texts (the Bible) and a religious world, could only have the word as its unit and favour, in its generalized sacralization of language, the word-for-word approach. The Renaissance and the translation of profane texts brought about a desacralization of the word and a shift towards the sentence as unit, but not without misknowledge of the text as unit, with the translation of the "*belles infidèles.*" Romanticism, in its philological aspect searching for specificities, brought about a new demand for precision. In the 20th century translation has undergone a transformation. It is gradually shifting from *langue* to discourse, to the text as unit. It is beginning to discover orality in literature, not just in theatre. It is discovering that a translation of a literary text must function like a literary text, through its prosody, its rhythm, its signifiance, as one of the forms of individuation, as a subject-form. Which radically displaces the precepts of transparency and fidelity of traditional theory, revealing them as the moralizing

alibis of misknowledge duly invested in obsolete translations. The equivalence sought is no longer between *langue* and *langue,* attempting to make linguistic, cultural, historical differences forgotten; it is between text and text, working on the contrary to show linguistic, cultural and historical alterity, as a specificity and a historicity.

Because translation has followed more than one path towards its own acknowledgment. It also took part in the transformation of the relations between cultures in the 20th century, linked to various decolonizations and to the planeterization of these relations. It has shifted or is in the midst of shifting, as are these relations themselves, from an exclusive cult of one identity taken as a universal, confusion between universalization and universal, to a new meaning of alterity, and of plurality. The encounter between these two major transformations of that century – in language, from *langue* to discourse; in culture and in the political, from identity to alterity – an encounter whose site par excellence is literature, is, despite resistance specific to establishing the preceding points of view in the academic and literary world, the condition of the ongoing changes in the practice and theory of translation. It is also the ethics and politics of translating.

We can therefore consider as established that the major problem of translation is its theory of language. Which really implies two things: the inseparability of what we call theory and what we call practice, which is to say that a practice is not a practice if it is not reflexive or reflected, is but a babble of memorized recipes, and if it is reflexive, this practice necessarily implies an inclusive theory of language; and reciprocally a theory of translation which would not be the reflection of a practice would merely be a linguistics of *langue* applied to discourse, that is to say a non-thought.

But, if translating bears a theory of language and is borne by it, translating is no longer an ancillary activity, in the way it is traditionally and sociologically considered, translating plays a major and unique role in an inclusive theory of language: as an experimental poetics. Because the very history of translations, both in confronting successive translations of a major text and in observing various translation strategies, the evolution of techniques with place and time, this whole history is the only place in language activities where there is both an invariant, the text to be translated – to be retranslated – and variations operated on it through successive translations, each revealing first its conception of language, then its conception of the literary object. Literature itself does not have this particularity: anything redone is epigonic, thus stillborn.

All of this, that is both this major role and the explication of the theory of language at work in the least operation of translating, is only possible if translating pushes to its point of conflict, of rupture, thus of consciousness and transformation of the doing, the conflict between the sign and the poem.

The conflict here is between rhythm and sign. Between continuum and discontinuum, against the unthought and commonplace ideas – over language, *langue,* discourse, literature and poetics.

In the world of ideas as it turns, what rules is a thought of language through *langue*, in keeping with the dualism of the sign. Meaning and form, both heterogeneous one from the other, sometimes bridged by expressivity. The word-unit. At best, the sentence – the last unit of *langue.* Discourse is seen solely through what Saussure called the "traditional divisions" (lexicon, morphology, syntax), that is to say the concepts of *langue.*

The internal dualism of the dominant conception of rhythm responds to the internal dualism of the sign: an alternation between a strong beat and a weak beat – may this alternation be regular or irregular, coded or not – differentiating in one stroke verse from prose. This difference, à la française, going as far for some as metrifying rhythm and seeing prose as lack of rhythm.

In this sense, we can say that the canonical representation of rhythm belongs to the sign: rhythm is the rhythm of the sign, and the sign is the sign of rhythm. Two dualisms reinforcing and confirming one another, following the consensus of ready-made ideas. Confusing the nature of things – things of language – with their representations. Not seeing representations as representations. But as the nature of things. Thus two universals, eventually corresponding to one and the same universal: the common and undisputed view of language. The notion of "style" being nothing more than what the sign allows us to think of the literary and poetic object. Nothing to do with rhythm.

It is this establishment that the task of translating makes suspect. But also the slightest poem. By the irreducibility of discourse to *langue,* of continuum to discontinuum, which explodes the traditional notions of sign and rhythm.

Confronting other cultural worlds – precisely where translating stands – brings to light the non-universality of common notions of sign and rhythm and thereby their being representations, not nature.

The very experience of the poem and of translating leads to proposing that by rhythm we no longer hear the traditional (binary) alternation, but the organization of the movement of speech. Which causes a chain reaction, as far as representations of all of language go, and compels us to think the unthought of the empirical: where the certainties of master philosopher Mr. Jourdain melt away.

What can seem to some a detour through abstract considerations, on the contrary, does no more than place translating and the thing to be translated in where occurs what current translation, courting the sign, does not even hear. Thus does not translate. Moreover, it does not even know that it does not translate what it does not hear.

Translation keeping with the sign – current translation – is thus what should from now on be called an erasor. It erases the continuum, it erases rhythm in the sense of the continuum and it erases its own erasures. The poetic problem is to erase the erasors' erasures.

It is worth adding that the whole cultural West is based on the translation of its founding texts (in the sense that they are widely read but in their translated versions, from Plato and Aristotle to the Bible and the New Testament), and therefore the West based itself on the very erasure of its origins. Greek and biblical.

It is precisely these biblical texts that are technically and theoretically interesting for rhythm – far beyond their role as "Great Codes." Because they are led by a pan-rhythmics, unknowing of any metrics, thus of any opposition between verse and prose, and what is more, biblical anthropology does not know the notion of poetry. Only the opposition between the spoken and the sung.

This pan-rhythmics is a hierarchy of 18 disjunctive accents and 9 conjunctive ones (12 and 9 for Psalms, Job and Proverbs), with three values: musical, pausal and semantic. This rhythmics, the sole organization of the biblical verse, has been the object of a theologico-political rejection: the written notation of accents having come quite a while later. Nevertheless, the names of certain accents designating a very ancient cheironomy, the use of hand movements to direct cantillation, necessarily anterior to their written notation, authenticate their age. Thereby settling the theologico-ideological debate, at the expense of the Christian theologico-political. This was at stake in a problem, in itself so foreign to translation, but indirectly decisive for the status of rhythm, and its relation to translating.

The most blatant case, and at the same time the most banal (therefore nothing specific to the Bible), is the shift of a group accent. Everyone knows that moving a comma can change meaning. The most striking example in the Bible is undoubtedly that of the voice speaking in the desert, in Isahia (40 : 3). But in the text, the strong pause does not come after "desert": "*Une voix crie // dans le désert / ouvrez le chemin d'Adonaï*" [A voice cries // in the desert / open the way for Adonai].

Conjunctive accents are no less important, for affect, than disjunctive accents. Proof, in *Gloires*[15] (Psalms) 22 : 2, the sequence "*mon dieu mon dieu*" [my god my god], *ʾēlî ʾēlî*. Only one group, with a demarcative accent rising on the second *ʾēlî* – in one breath. Nothing in the meaning changed. Nonetheless, the affect is stronger, in one mouthful of language.

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15. *Gloires,* or Glories, is Meschonnic's translation of the psalms, which will be further discussed in Chapter XIII (PPB).

Thinking rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech – and Gerard Manley Hopkins knew this, he who spoke in a letter of "the record of speech in writing" – supposes a gesturing of meaning, thus a positional rhythmics or semantics. It is widely erased. If we do not translate it, translation is speechless.

Rhythm is not – or is no longer (has never been) – only a succession of stress accents, if it is the organization of the movement of speech in writing. It is the organization of the continuum. It thus includes, which in itself is nothing new, all syntactical effects.

Because rhythm as the continuum in the organization of the movement of speech in writing is not only pausal rhythm, group rhythm, positional rhythm, syntactical rhythm, repetitive rhythm, it is also prosodic rhythm, the narrative of the recitative, not solely the narrative of the meaning of words.

Hence the theory of translation implies thinking rhythm, that is to say conceptualizing the continuum, because it sets at stake the major and misknown conflict between the sign and the poem, between the discontinuum and the continuum. The role of theory is to transform practices, the role of practices is to reveal theories. The politics of theory, along with its anthropological and poetic necessity, is to make the shift from annexation to decentring. It is also its immediate relevance.

The sense of language, not the meaning of words

The whole problem of meaning, thus of translating, resides in this opposition, between the sense of language and the meaning of words, the meaning of the sign. Where, to think language, I pit the necessity of an inclusive theory of language against hermeneutics, which remains in the sign, as well as against what we call translation studies. For the same reason.

The starting point for what I call the sense of language is the expression *Sprach-sinn* from Humboldt. But I make of it an inclusive theory which he did not.

The paradox, the comical (always involuntary) of this opposition is that, as it is always a matter of understanding, of "interpreting," we could believe that, much like the Mad Hatter, while proclaiming this opposition, I am applying hermeneutics without knowing it. Since, like Aristotle has already said, to not philosophize is already philosophizing. And first to understand the meaning of words, to be able to translate.

The position I am trying to defend is uncomfortable and paradoxical, but powerful. It is precisely the sense of power in language. Of the unknown in a poem. Hermeneutics, for its part, works on the contrary in the known, not of meaning, but of the sign.

As for the sense of power, I tackle and retackle tirelessly, because we will never repeat it enough, in the inertia of the cultural, a small translation accident, apparently insignificant, involving two words from Cicero, *vis verbi, vis verbo-rum,* which, if words have meaning, and because they do, should translate into "the power of the word," "the power of words." Yet in French, all of the Budé editions translate Cicero's two words by "the meaning of the word," "the meaning of words." Even the French edition of Freund's Latin dictionary, the best of Latin dictionaries, under the word *vis,* "power," proposes "the meaning of the word," "the meaning of words."

It is against this that I measure the loss of the sense of power in language, the loss of the sense of language, among exegetes most erudite. This is where I position the battle of language, the battle of the sign and the poem, of the continuum against the discontinuum.

Because what rules, in the conception of meaning, in the sense of the meaning of words, is the sign. We live, since Plato, in the regime of the discontinuum of the sign. And of the discontinuum of rhythm. Both reinforcing one another.

The familiar, the cultural and all the sciences of language, where hermeneutics can include itself, with all of its techniques, all of its knowledge, all of this together constitutes and confirms the sign.

Yet, I submit, basing myself on Saussure, that the sign is only a representation of language, what is more, a representation which does not show itself as a representation, with its position and its limits. No. A representation which prevents us from seeing that it is a representation, that it is only a representation. It shows itself as the nature and truth of language.

My starting point is Saussurian: that on language there are only points of view. And that we have to understand, which is an infinite task, the internal systematicity of each point of view.

But since I know that, because of a certain time lag in structuralism, we continue to teach continuity between Saussure and structuralism which does not even know that it is reinforcing the sign, it seems to me necessary and urgent to make the view heard that structuralism is a series of misinterpretations of Saussure. To make the view heard that the sense of language no longer resides in the sign, in the discontinuum of the sign.

Because the sense of language implies the sense of rhythm, the sense of body-in-language continuum. And the discontinuum of the sign is what allows us to maintain, pedagogically and culturally, the opposition between literature and ordinary language, between original works and translations.

And this traditional opposition between creation or original work and translation is made within the classical mind/body paradigm. That is to say within the dualism of the sign.

This is a serial dualism, it is all of these oppositions of twos each heterogeneous one to the other, of original works and translations (translations becoming outdated, but not original works), it is the totality of these couplings that constitute the sign. Not just the linguistic model.

All of these dualisms culminate in the representation of the discontinuum which governs the heterogeneous categories of reason.

In language, we see *langue* opposed to discourse. The paradox proper to the notion of *langue* is that it prevents us from thinking discourse. Thus the notion of *langue* and the notion of *meaning* prevent thinking language. The *sign* prevents thinking language! Which is confirmed by the entirety of 20th century structuralism adding its scientism to cultural heritage dating back to more than two thousand years, since Plato, with the confusion still thought and taught between

Saussure and structuralism, while I count nine misinterpretations which radically oppose Saussure to structuralism, and I shall count them:

1. where Saussure says *system* (dynamic notion), structuralism says *structure* (formal and ahistorical notion);
2. where he says that everything is a point of view, structuralism presents itself as describing the nature of language;
3. where Saussure's systematicity is entirely deductive in his theorization of language, structuralism makes language sciences descriptive;
4. Saussure thinks the *langue-parole* unit, as discourse, while structuralism dichotomized *langue* and *parole*;
5. also, in Saussure, the theory of language postulates a poetics, whereas structuralism only sees an opposition between the rationalism of the *Cours* and the madness of the Anagrams;
6. in Saussure, the multiple associative is opposed to the syntagmatic, and structuralism has made a binary opposition out of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic;
7. for Saussure, the radical arbitrariness of the sign is a radical historicity, but structuralism has taken arbitrariness for conventionalism;
8. for Saussure, diachrony-synchrony is a history in movement, a solidarity, and structuralism has placed in exclusive opposition diachrony, understood as history, or movement, and synchrony, the *état de langue*;
9. and finally, instead of Saussure's critique of the traditional categories (lexicon, morphology, syntax), structuralism has been thinking the sign's dichotomies, the discontinuum.

But the discontinuum is also, among the collateral damage of the sign, the fallacious opposition between verse and prose. Yet, there are prose metrics in antiquity: the Latin *cursus*. And this opposition sets off another opposition still more fallacious, that between poetry and prose, verse-poetry and metrified rhythm being opposed to prose deprived of rhythm, a problem all the more exacerbated as the formal definition of poetry is wearing away with the prose poem and poetic modernity.

And here we touch upon the poetic universal posed by Mallarmé, who shifted the poetic problem towards the opposition between *naming* and *suggesting*.

If we start from Saussure, and particularly from his manuscripts published in 2002, from his two concepts of point of view and internal systematicity, not only does the sign as well as all of its effects appear like a representation, and no longer as nature of language, but also the representation of language can shift towards the continuum understood as a body-in-language continuum. Which produces its own coherence, its own internal systematicity.

And this continuum needs the thought of the poem to think the multiplicity of language acts. Another paradox: we should really stop opposing *poetic language* and *ordinary language* (two real essences to my mind, which, comically enough, means that they are cultural ghosts), and we should start from the poem to think the whole theory of language: the relationship between language, poem, ethics and politics.

By poem[16] I mean the transformation of a form of language by a form of life and the transformation of a form of life by a form of language. Four times the word "form," but not at all in the terms of the sign, as opposed to meaning. No, form, in the sense of organizing and inventing historicity, configuring a system of discourse. Power is not opposed to meaning in the same way that form is opposed to content: with power meaning gets carried through and away.

Which is directly linked to a new conception of rhythm, no longer as the alternation of a same and a different (that is rhythm according to the sign, a formal aspect), but as the organization of the movement of speech in language, and specifically in the writing of the poem.

Which in turn directly has a double effect. One is transforming the notion of orality: in the sign, oral is opposed to written; in the continuum, orality is of the subject that we hear. The spoken is opposed to the written.

The other effect then is transforming the notion of subject. There are a dozen subjects diversely constituting the very cultural *question-of-the-subject.* And I shall list them: the philosophical subject, the psychological subject, the subject of knowledge of others and subject of domination of others, the subject of knowledge of things and the subject of domination of things, the subject of happiness, the subject of law, the subject of history, the subject of *langue*, the subject of discourse, the Freudian subject.

None of these has written a poem. And if one did, it is not the poem that is read but the subject itself projected onto the poem.

Also, rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech in discourse leads us to posit a subject of the poem. I call subject of the poem the maximal, integral subjectivization of a discourse. Which becomes a system of discourse.

Which is what Péguy was saying when he said: "The signature is everywhere, in the very fabric of the text. There is not one thread of the text that is not signed" (1961: 1032).[17]

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16. I have explained it in Chapter III.

17. My translation (PPB).

The continuum body-in-language is then the sequence of rhythms, be they positional, sprung or final, inclusive, conjunctive, breaking, lexically or syntactically repetitive, prosodic. It is then a serial semantics.

Hence, and even before considering the other links and interactions with ethical and political representations of society in its language acts, it appears inevitable, from the poem's point of view, that translating is an activity that can no longer be thought within the sign as it is widely being considered. All that has so far been mentioned was necessary to position and transform translating, to transform the thought of translating, to transform the practice of translating, to transform the social and poetic evaluation of translating.

In other words, more than what a text says, it is what a text does that must be translated; more than the meaning, its power, its affect.

It is then no longer a language system that must be translated but a system of discourse, not the discontinuum but the continuum.

This certainly transforms the whole theory of language.

But what of the relationship between language and literature? How does the continuum transform the theory of literature?

First the continuum works outside or against the notion of literary genre: poetry, novel, drama, essay, philosophical text. If the continuum is the subjectivization of a system of discourse by a subject inventing itself in and through its discourse, inventing a new historicity, the continuum of the poem does not know the difference between genres. From this point of view, there is poem in novels, plays and even in a so-called philosophical text if there is invention of the subject, invention of historicity.

It is in the inseparation of affect and concept that meaning finds its power and invention.

It is even because it holds a poem within it that a novel is a novel and not a dime novel, and that a philosophical text is an invention of thought and not a discourse on philosophy.

This whole transformation from the point of view on language and literature, on relationships between identity and alterity, on relationships between continuum of rhythm and discontinuum of meaning keeping with the sign is the effect of an empirical and theoretical lever which is the activity of translating.

And yet each of us will have noted that the current practice of translating subscribes to the sign and accommodates perfectly well the cultural representation of language.

To break away from this, outside support is needed, otherwise we cannot find the thought nor the means to break free of the sign.

It just so happens that, in a very empirical way, my experience as a translator, linked to my work writing poems, leads me to propose such a lever. This theoretical lever is the functioning of rhythm in the Bible in Hebrew.

This functioning, as it is, belongs to the continuum. That is to say that it is radically exterior and irreducible to the Greco-Christian model of the thought and practice of language in which we are immersed.

That is because it does not make the difference, familiar to us, between verse and prose. Which is difficult for us to think, shaped as we are by this opposition. In fact, entirely rhythm.

From where a triple effect is set in motion.

One is that paradoxically this situation encounters the very situation of modern poetry, since the prose poem in the middle of the 19th century. Poetic effect, this is why I put it first, as it is usually invisible. Translating is a poetic problem, and one that is inseparable from modernity in poetry. It is indivisibly poetics and historicity of translating. Hence its ethics. Hence its politics.

Historically, conceptually, the initial situation is theologico-political, theologico-philological, theologico-poetical. It is the Christian rejection of the biblical verse's rhythmics, on the basis that the written notation of this rhythmics came later. Indeed, it appears between the 6th and the 9th century of the common era, and the first manuscript to be entirely vocalized and rhythmicized dates from the 10th century. A notation said to be inauthentic and illegitimate by Christian science, on the basis that it came later. A rejection rooted in the idea that Christianity was founded on the Greek translation of the Septuagint, in the 3rd century before the common era, and not on the Hebrew text.

Where it appears that the second effect is the destruction through Hellenization, inseparable from Christianization. Since, from Flavius Josephus, in the 2nd century, following the model of poetry in Homer, poetic beauty being necessarily metrical, the dominant idea is that there are hexameters in the Bible. For centuries a Greek rhythmics was sought and, since the Middle Ages, an Arabic one. Without success. Whence, in 1753, Robert Lowth postulated in place of an undiscoverable metrics a substitutive rhetoric, the theory of biblical parallelism, which is still today a commonplace idea. It is the Hellenization of the thought of language and the erasure of rhythm, not only in the Bible but for the whole thought of language.

Yet, without going into detail here, but recalling that biblical anthropology has also shown that the Hebrews do not know of the notion of poetry, knowing only the opposition between the sung and the spoken, it is essential, from my point of view, to pose and propose, for the general thought of translating, language and literature, and after having answered the theologico-philological objection, that the pan-rhythmics of the text, in the Bible, which establishes a poetics of continuum,

is a parable and a prophecy of language, way beyond its particular case, relating to the rule of the sign.

A parable, because it is a particular with a universal value, with the value of a universal; a prophecy because it rejects commonplace ideas in power.

The answer to the late notation objection comes out of a will to pass on what only had, until then, an oral characteristic: vowels were not written, the alphabet only having 22 consonants, and we must not confuse a language system, which of course had vowels, with the alphabet, which had none, and we encounter this non-sense that Hebrew had no vowels; and that reading rhythms were not written, as they consisted of melodic lines and indications of hand movements, as the names of accents show, which necessarily presupposes they existed before their written notation.

What is more, the term which refers to the rhythmic accent, constitutive of the verse (the notion having been confirmed since the 2nd century), is in itself a parable of the body-in-language, it is the word *ta'am* (plural *te'amim*), which means the taste in one's mouth, flavour, flavour being the very reason for the act of saying, and it is first and foremost the meaning of orality. What comes from the mouth.

The vocalized and rhythmicized text is called the Masoretic text, because it was created by Masoretes, whose name means "transmitters," from *massora,* "transmission," so that oral knowledge would not be lost.

Which immediately puts ideologisms back in their place, Christianisms as we say solecisms, biases which translate some passages of the Bible as verses, and others as prose.

But above all, and this is what exceeds the case of the Bible as a particular example, the lesson in rhythm, the strongest lesson, the *lectio difficilior* as philologists say (compared with *lectio facilior,* which is Hellenized), to translate the poem, in the specific sense I propose, is to translate the continuum and the power of discourse, and no longer only what an enunciation says.

The third theoretical effect is what I call a generalized *taamicization,* from the term *ta'am.* Because then we must translate an enunciation inseparably from its utterance, we must acknowledge that the notion of meaning is an epistemological obstacle to the thought of language. Therefore translating a serial semantics, which exceeds the traditional objection according to which what has been done in the phonology of one language system can obviously not be redone in the phonology of another language system (what Ezra Pound called melopeia in *ABC of Reading*). Because it is not a language system that we have to translate, but what a poem does to its language, thus we must invent discourse equivalences in the target language: prosody for prosody, metaphor for metaphor, pun for pun, rhythm for rhythm.

Here I must return to comparisons that have been made between my work and the translation of André Chouraqui, which has been much celebrated.

Because the accomplishments are diametrically opposed, because the perspectives in no way converge. And yet, I have more than once noticed these comparisons, which show unwittingly a complete lack of a sense of language.

I translate a serial signifiance, the rhythm of the continuum. My unit is the continuum. André Chouraqui translates etymology. Where in Psalms I translate "*ne me refuse pas les tendresses de ton ventre*" [do not withhold the tenderness of your womb from me], because we have the abstract *ra'hamim,* traditionally converted into "*miséricorde*" [mercy] or "*compassion,*" that is the plural form of *re'hem,* which designates the matrix, the uterus, and this is often how abstracts are formed in Hebrew, and the meaning here is of the feeling a mother has for what has come out of her womb, Chouraqui translates: "*ne boucle pas tes matrices*" [do not lock your matrix].

I am working at dechristianizing and desanctifying this text. I am the only one who says it and does it. There is no such effort with Chouraqui. He is as christianizing as the others, including the Rabbinate. For example: he translates *'hatzer,* which means "the yard" in front of a house, by "*le parvis*," which manifestly is the square in front of a church. And they all do the same.

Chouraqui presents his translation according to a versified typography, though there are no verses in the Bible, while constantly muddling the differences between disjunctive and conjunctive accents, constantly counter-rhythmically. From this point of view, his translation is the worst, worse than a translation presenting everything as prose.

I insisted on trying to dispel senseless comparisons. But the only thing that can really dispel them is a transformation of the common sense of language. And we are far from that. What is ruling is the sign. It is Goliath.

I have criticized deafness in the sense of language being theologico-politically programmed by Christian exegesis, including when it presents itself as scientific, but there is also a problem specific to Jewish hermeneutics proper.

There is, if I am not mistaken, a total lack of interest, from what I know about Jewish hermeneutics, in rhythm, a total lack of any idea that *te'amim* act as a prophecy of rhythm in the thought of language.

Where I would point to Rashi as a witness of the hermeneutical vulgate. For example, in his whole commentary on Genesis*,* Rashi makes all in all four remarks on *te'amim.* Let me call to mind that contrary to Christian hermeneutics, which ignores the *te'amim* (meaning that it intentionally disregards them), Jewish hermeneutics knows these and knows how to identify them. But these four remarks by Rashi deal only with the phonetic and grammatical aspects of accents. Nothing about rhythmics as the organization of the movement of speech in writing.

I know of only two exceptions in this mass of knowledge and questions, general and specific, that is biblical exegesis and one is Yehuda HaLevi, in his *Kuzari*

(1998: II, 72), where the rabbi mentions the perfection of oral communication, specifically accomplished by cantillation accents "that we use to read our holy texts," which indicate if we should pause or continue. And he also says:

> One who wishes to accomplish all this will certainly forego measured poetry, which can only be recited one way. One who recites in meter will end up proceeding where there should be a pause, and pausing where there should be procession […]

A valuable comment, and rare one, which shows the sense of rhythm and the sense of language that Yehuda HaLevi had, since it is rhythm that governs the meaning and movement of discourse.

The other exception lies in one sentence from Abraham Ibn Ezra, which I had inserted as an epigraph in *Critique du rythme* (1982: 395): "Any comment that is not on a comment of the accents you will not want it and you will not listen to it."[18]

The truth is, these two interventions are the only ones I know. And they do not even seek to transform the general representation of language underlying all the commentaries that I have read.

But I must add a third exception, on another level, and of major importance for poetics, insofar as poetics works at doing what hermeneutics does not do, and it is Maimonides, in *Le guide des égarés* [*The Guide for the Perplexed*]. But it has nothing to do with *te'amim*.

It is when Maimonides (1970: Part II, Chapter 43) says that the vision, the "name of the thing seen" is "indicated by the showing of a thing bearing a homonymous name." I quote:

> *Quand, par exemple, Jérémie dit: qu'il voyait* MAKKEL SCHAKED, **un bâton de bois d'amandier,** *son intention est de déduire (quelque chose) de l'homonymie du mot* SCHAKED, *et il dit ensuite :* **car je suis** SCHÔKED, **vigilant,** *etc. (Jér. I : 11 et 12); car il ne s'agit ni de l'idée du* **bâton,** *ni de celle de l'***amandier.** *De même, quand Amos voit* KELOUV KAÏÇ, **un panier de fruits d'été,** *c'est pour en déduire l'accomplissement du temps, et il dit : Car le* KÈÇ *(ou* **le terme***) est venu.*   (*Amos,* VIII, 2)

> [When, for example, Jeremiah says that he saw MAKKEL SHAKED, an almond staff, his intention is to indicate (something) by the homonymy of the word SHAKED, and then he says: for I am SHOKED, vigilant, etc. (Jer. I: 11, 12); but he is not referring to the staff or to the almond tree. As well, when Amos sees KELUB KAYIZ, a basket of summer fruit, he deduces from it the completion of time and he says: For the ḲEZ (or the end) has come.[19]   (Amos 8: 2)

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18. My translation (PPB).

19. The quotations from Maimonides are my own translations (PPB).

But where Salomon Munk wrote in his notes that they were wordplay, I would say rather that the prophetical vision is an audition, and takes place in and through language. Through signifiers.

In other words, contrary to Paul Claudel who said that the "eye listens," I say that the eye is deaf, that it is the ear that sees. Prophetically and poetically, anyway. Whence a whole acroamatic, which thereby comes through paradoxically, but logically, as we are removed from the sign, as we recognize that the full fulfillment of orality (which is no longer mistaken for the spoken, but refers to the dominance of rhythm) is writing, when writing invents historicity, poetics. That is the sense of language.

But it has remained exceptional and isolated, to my knowledge, in the Jewish hermeneutical tradition, where in the end *te'amim* are taken essentially for their musical value, since each accent is a melodic line, all the while bearing a conjunctive or disjunctive value. It is the chanted reading, the synagogue's cantillation.

And there again we come upon the general and also misknown fact that music precludes thinking language, in the sense where historical relationships between works of language and their setting to music, and relationships to the sung have been generating canonical confusion. One characteristic example being Adorno (see Meschonnic 1993).

As for traditional Jewish hermeneutics, the article on the subject in the *Encyclopædia of Midrash* starts by declaring that its principles "were set in the context of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition" (Porton 2005: 251). Which the article repeats more than once. Hillel's rules of exegesis mention nowhere *te'amim*. Questions that are raised concern social practices, rules of life, for Easter, for example. After the seven exegetical rules by Hillel, there followed Ishmael's thirteen rules to explain the Torah, that is the Teachings, from the general to the particular, with and within each context.

Nowhere did I find even a hint of an inclusive theory of language as a poetics of society and as a critique of the dualism of the sign. It is totally unthought. All of this rabbinism is peppered with borrowings from a "Hellenistic environment" (Porton 2005: 265), from a "Hellenistic terminology" (Porton 2005: 265). But according to a theology which implied that "each detail in Scripture is significant" (Instone-Brewer 2005: 316). Possibly with hidden meanings.

In fact, there are two theologies, one of hidden meaning, to which Philo would subscribe, and one apologetic, that of Flavius Josephus.

But if I move on to common exegesis, and in particular to the application of a veneer of literary notions on this text, for example in Édouard Dhorme's book on biblical poetry (1931), I note that, though he mentions *te'amim,* in his discussion

of "hebraic prosody," he speaks of the "hebraic verse" (1931:72)[20], which he compares to the "Latin pentameter" and makes parallelism a "principle of order and limitation" (1931:75). It is the customary Hellenization, which is a Platonization, a deafness to rhythm, thus to the sense of language.

It is not a question of rejecting that parallels and oppositions exist, they are everywhere, but of hearing that it is not a principle which opposes verse to prose.

Dhorme critiqued the notion of *stanza* applied to the text as being "founded on meaning above all" (1931:90). However, parallelism remained for Dhorme the "supreme law of hebraic prosody" (1931:93).

As for Luís Alonso Schökel, the other example, in his *Estudios de poética hebrea,* he speaks in terms of iambs and anapests, of feet (1963:166)[21], in short in Greek terms. In terms of verses and hemistiches, of opposition between verse and prose (1963:177), and of "free verse" (1963:163). He applies a "stylistics of rhythm" (1963:119), he quotes Antoine Meillet, who in his 1923 essay, *Les Origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs,* wrote that "metrics consisted of stylizing, of normalizing the natural rhythm of a language" (Meillet 1923:19).

I have not seen in Schökel one single mention of the *te'amim.* To him the rhythm of meaning is the normal rhythm of language, converted into "artistic rhythm" (1963:159) through stylization according to Meillet. In short, it is stylistics, in the very terms that radically misknow the biblical text's poetics.

The work of interpretation, very erudite, is always carried out following multiple techniques, but it is always, including in letterization games in the Kabbalah, the meaning of a word that is the unit, or the meaning of a given passage and of the role of characters.

If I have given such importance to things of rhythm in the Bible, it is to the extent of their role as parables for the whole theory of language, for the sense of language.

What I want to bring forth, in this reflection, is the role authentic rhythm plays in biblical texts. What proves this authenticity is the name of accents, as I have already recalled. And which dictates gesturing.

The sense of rhythm is certainly a major stake in thinking language. Christian exegesis is deafened to the sense of language by the theologico-political, and Jewish exegesis, by music.

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20. All quotations from Édouard Dhorme are my own translations (PPB).

21. All following quotations from Luís Alonso Schökel and Antoine Meillet are my own translations (PPB).

An example, then. To show what Hebrew does, and what translations keeping with the sign do to it. I am referring to Exodus, Chapter 20, verse 18. I am quoting entirely from my translation (2003):

> Et tout le peuple ils voient les voix / et les éclairs // et / la voix du chofar // et la montagne / qui fume ///
> [And all the people they see the voices / and the lightnings // and / the voice of the shofar // and the mountain / smoking ///]
>
> *Et le peuple voyait / et ils étaient dans des transes // et ils se tenaient / de loin*
> [And the people saw / and they shuddered // and they stood / afar off]

The example which poses a problem is "*et tout le peuple ils voient les voix*" [and all the people they see the voices], *wəḵāl-hāʿām rōʾîm ʾeṯ-haqqwōlōṯ.*

It is not an effect of homophony, in Hebrew, as we might think judging by the French "*ils voient les voix*." The comical in this case comes from the meaning, where the meaning of the word and the sense of language meet.

Since Rashi was already commenting that "they saw what is made to be heard, an impossible thing to encounter elsewhere."[22]

Indeed, translators interpreted. Hence they translated, restoring *meaning:* "*Or tout le monde entendait les tonnerres*" [And everyone heard the thunderings] (Le Maistre de Sacy); "*Or tout le peuple entendait les tonnerres*" [And all the people heard the thunderings] (Ostervald); "*Tout le peuple entendait les tonnerres*" [All the people heard the thunderings] (Segond); "*Or, tout le peuple fut témoin de ces tonnerres*" [And, all the people witnessed these thunderings] (the Rabbinate); "*Tout le peuple, voyant ces coups de tonnerre*" [All the people, seeing these thunderings] (La Bible de Jérusalem, 1998 edition); "*Or, tout le peuple voyait les tonnerres*" [And, all the people saw the thunderings] (Dhorme); "*Or tout le peuple voyait les voix*" [And all the people saw the voices] (Edmond Fleg). But the Hebrew is in the present tense. Yet Edmond Fleg is *the first,* in 1963, to voice what some had erased and others continue to erase, because they are interpreting: "*Tout le peuple percevait les voix*" [All the people perceived the voices] (Traduction œcuménique de la Bible). One exception, Chouraqui, who often follows Edmond Fleg: "*Tout le peuple voit les voix*" [All the people see the voices]. But with him, everything is in the present tense and he goes on to say "*le peuple voit*" [the people see] instead of the past "*voyait*" [saw]. Finally, the Bayard Bible, the "writers' Bible": "*Tout le peuple voit le tonnerre*" [All the people see the thunder]. Again the same semioticism, no doubt suggested to writers by exegetes.

Elsewhere than in French, the lack of a sense of language is the same.

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22. My translation (PPB).

The King James Version says "And all the people saw the thunderings," Luther says "*und alles Volck sahe den Donner*" [and all the people saw the thunder] the same thing, and Buber: "*Alles Volk aber, sie sahn das Donnerschallen*" [All the people now, they saw the thunderings] still the same as the King James Version, "they saw the thunderings," except that he kept the plural "they."

What these translations keeping with the sign *reveal,* whence the importance of translating for the general theory of language, is that interpretation goes as far as erasing the meaning of words, or rather signifiers, leaving only the signified. There lies the whole problem of the conflict between the poem and the sign, between the sense of language and the meaning of the sign.

There it is, the lesson in general poetics to be drawn from rhythm in the Bible.

But there are two more. One is the triggering of a sequence, which brings to light the interaction both thought and active between language and poem, ethics and politics. Because if the poem is the activity of the subject of the poem, it is first an ethical act, and if it is an ethical act, because it concerns all subjects, an ethical act is political act. Thus a poem is an ethical and a political act. Whence a poetics of translating is an ethics and a politics of translating. Now, to break away from the Christian theologico-political.

The other lesson, for a poetics of society and for a poetics of life, and probably the main paradox, based on the religious text that is the Bible, comes from an observation that I draw from my work of Bible translation, a work in progress: I see in Genesis what I have not found in any of the religious comments, no matter their religion, I see that the religious confuses indistinctively the *sacred,* the *divine* and the *religious.*

But the text itself does show clearly that there is first the *sacred*, I mean by this the fusion of human and cosmos and animal. The snake speaks to Eve. And Saint Augustine asked about Genesis 1 : 3 ("And God said, Let there be light") "in what tongue was God speaking?" To which he answered that it was not a human language but a figure of his will; then there is the *divine,* it is the principle of life and its realization in every living creature; and the *religious* still has not been mentioned.

The Stone Tables in Moses' hands, when he goes down the mountain, hold the ten sayings of an ethics which is an ethics of the divine. Of life.

The religious comes later, in Exodus and especially in the Leviticus, with religious restrictions, prescriptions and calendar. In other words, the religious is the socialization and ritualization of life, which appropriates the governing and even emitting of the sacred and the divine. And it becomes the emitter of ethics. Meaning that as soon as the religious becomes the theologico-political – and the history of religions shows that it is catastrophic what happened to the divine, against Lactantius' pseudo-etymological definition (*religio* rooted in *religare*: to

bind God to man, and Durkheim added: to bind men to one another) – religions kill in the name of God.

Insofar as I am translating the signifiance in the continuum of the Bible, I am translating atheologically. And it is according to this internal systematicity of the poem that I am dechristianizing the Bible in order to voice the poem's Hebrew and the Hebrew's poem. I am detheologizing because I am desemioticizing. Removing Christian theology from prefiguration.

There resides the very coherence of poetics as the acknowledgment of functionings and historicities in order to break away from the sign, from its commonplace ideas and the power it exerts, responsible for the present state of inferiority of translating and translations compared to writing and reading the poem.

Poetics is an atheology because theologization is a semiotization (truth, like meaning, generates a by-product: form), that is to say an inclusion in the sign, the sign which is not even seen as a representation, historical, cultural, therefore positioned and limited.

And the poem being a form of life, the fullest possible relationship between language and life, the theologico-political is the main enemy of both the poem and of life, life in the sense of the fullest historicization of life, in the sense Spinoza defines a human life in *Tractatus Politicus,* that is not by the circulation of blood, biologically, but "by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind."[23]

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23. I have given the complete Latin quote in Chapter III, "Urgently needed: An ethics of language, an ethics of translating."

Translating: Writing or unwriting

I will start[24] by recalling a famous passage from Montesquieu's *Persian Letters,* because we must never be tired of telling and retelling this, for its misknown topicality.

> […] I have great news to tell you: I have just published my 'Horace." "How!" exclaimed the geometer; "it is two thousand years since 'Horace' was published." "You do not understand me," replied the other. "It is a translation of that ancient author which I have given to the world: I have been engaged as a translator for twenty years." "What, sir!" rejoined the geometer; "have you been twenty years without thinking? You are only the mouthpiece of others.
>
> (Montesquieu 1901: 233)

Yes, this passage condenses wonderfully an entire past and a present, the present imperfect, of depreciatory opinions, perfectly integrated into culture, that translation is the absolute opposite of what is, in terms just as culturally sacralized, writing: the original work opposed to translation, writing and unwriting.

A cliché immediately transformed into an inversed cliché, when we read, for example, that writing and translation are to be viewed on the exact same level, as Michaël Oustinoff writes (2003: 19). Because most, the vast majority of, translations are unwritings. And that is why we say, without knowing what we say, that they become outdated.

The reflection I am proposing is entirely the theoretical effect of a work in progress, started a long time ago. This work does not separate the activity of writing a poem and thinking about what a poem does, about what makes a poem what it is; also the activity of translating and thinking about what translating is; and finally the activity of thinking based on this double experience of the theory of language in general specifically to transform the theory of language. Through the poem, and through translating.

Retranslating supposes an inclusive theory no doubt even more strongly than translating what has never yet been translated. Although the very historicity of

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24. This is a modified version of a paper published in *Traduction Adaptation Réécriture dans le monde hispanique contemporain,* Solange Hibbs and Monique Martinez (ed.), Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Toulouse, 2006.

any act of translation makes of any translation first a translation situated by the history of translating.

And quickly we see that the relationship between translating and retranslating must be modulated differently than by opposing what has not yet been translated to what already has been much translated.

Since every language act supposes its own historicity, not only as a situation in a history, but as an invention of its own historicity, when it is writing. And so that translating may be writing. It is in this sense that, as there is a history of translating and a history of thinking language, even translating that which has not yet been translated is borne by the history of translating.

Of course, how conscious we are of this is extremely variable. By looking at many translations, experience teaches that the act of translating most often shows, sometimes even shockingly, what it does not know it is showing, about the translator, that is, first of all the state of his thinking on language and literature. This is what is pasted on the thing to be translated, to the point that it becomes the thing that we see first.

Speaking from experience, not only on the particular ground of biblical translation, but much rather to draw from it principles and a method of general value, thus an inclusive theory, I am led, in order to illustrate my argument and the problem, to take a particular example. For its value as a parable. To show the difference between translating-writing and translating-unwriting.

That is what happens to two words from the Bible's Chronicles (its traditional name; the text is called *Divrey Yamim*, "the words of the days"), Book II, Chapter 29, verse 28.[25] Two words. But we will not read in any translation the way in which I translate these words.

The verse starts with *wəḵāl-haqqâāl* / mišətᵃḥăwîm, I translate "*et toute l'assemblée / ils se prosternent*" [and all the congregation / they bow]. Then come, in two words, *wəhaššîr məšwōrēr*, I translate word for word and rhythm for rhythm "*et le chant est qui chante*" [and the song is that is singing], and then the trumpets, etc. It is the singing that sings! Not the singers. Which, by a short circuit that is the whole poetics, meets Mallarmé, who, in "Crisis of Verse," says "the poem, enunciator" (in Lloyd 1999: 231)! It is the poem which makes the poet. Yet no translation translates these two words according to the way they are written. They are inaudible.

Starting with the Septuagint: *καὶ οἱ ψαλτῳδοὶ ᾄδοντες* [and the psalm-singers singing], then the Vulgate: *omni autem turba adorante cantores et hii qui tenebant*

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tubas erant in officio suo… this is long, it is what Le Maistre de Sacy exactly translates in the 17th century: "*les chantres et ceux qui tenaient des trompettes s'acquittaient de leur devoir*" [the singers and those who held trumpets carried out their duties]. Then Ostervald, in the 18th century: "*le chant retentit*" [the song resounded]; Samuel Cahen in 1830: "*le chant retentissait*" [the song was resounding]; then Segond (1877) and Crampon: "*on chanta le cantique*" [the song was sung]; the Rabbinate (1899): "*les chants s'élevaient*" [the songs rose]; Dhorme: "*on chanta des cantiques*" [chants were sung]; La Bible de Jérusalem: "*chacun chantant les hymnes*" [everyone singing hymns]; Chouraqui: "*le poème poétise*" [the poem poeticizes] (but it is an anachronism to say "poem" for *chir*, which in the Bible can only mean "song," and "to poeticize" is in contradiction with poetics); Osty has "*tandis que le chant retentissait*" [while the song resounded]; and the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible (TOB): "*le chant se prolongea*" [the song went on]. As for the Bayard Bible, it says: "*le chant se prolongea*" [the song went on]. Just like the TOB. Twelve French translations, *twelve unwritings*.

In German, it is the same. Luther says "*und der Gesang erscholl*," and the singing resounded, and Buber "*gesungen ward der Gesang*," the singing was sung.

In English, the King James Version has "and the singers sang"; the New English Bible, "the singers sang." The same.

In Spanish, the Santa Biblia, antigua versión de Casiodoro de Reina (1569, revised in 1602, 1862, 1909, 1960) by the Sociedades Bíblicas en América latina, says "*Y los cantores cantaban*" [the singers sang], the same thing; and the Biblia del Peregrino (Schökel 1995) inverses the whole sentence and says: *Hasta que terminó el holocausto toda la comunidad permaneció postrada, mientras continuaban los cantos, y resonaban las trompetas* [Until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed the whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singing continued and the trumpets resounded.] Each and every translation is *unwriting!*

I used as an epigraph in *Critique du rythme*, in 1982, Mandelstam's words, "there is always war in poetry" – I think we can broaden this proposition and say that there is always war in language, there is always war in translation.

Which immediately implies that critique is not destructive, but, on the contrary, constructive. In fact, *the against* is the reverse of *the for*. They who only see *the against* show who they are for without knowing it.

And war is always present between the sign and the poem. The poem against maintaining order.

It is true that there is a remarkable specificity to the biblical text. As a religious text, precisely, instead of closing the reflection in on one particular case, it opens up and extends it to all of translating, regardless of texts and idioms.

It is a holy mountain of paradoxes. Which only aggravates the basic fact that it is the most often translated text, apparently.

First paradox: the religious, which is the maximum worship of a text said to be sacred, immediately results in a general weakening, an *unwriting*, of the text it adores, because the theological truth acts like the sign. It is a semioticism. Truth produces a residue, form. Exegetes are only interested in meaning and hermeneutics.

The struggle to be *Verus Israel* has led to a refusal to hear the rhythmics of the text, because its written notation came later. But each rhythmic accent (*ta'am*) has a name, and some refer to hand gestures, or a melodic line, therefore they are *anterior* to their written notation.

And so: the biblical text has an interest (aside from being what we have called the Great Code) in producing a *rhythmic continuum* irreducible to Greek thought through which we think language, since Plato, that is the duality of verse and prose, aggravated by its extension into a duality opposing poetry to prose. The truth is that biblical anthropology ignores the very notion of poetry and knows only the opposition between the sung and the spoken. No metrics opposed to prose. Parallelism, invented in the 18th century is but substitutive rhetorics for absent metrics.

The added paradox is that it is exactly what poetic modernity finds, commencing from the moment in the 19th century when the prose poem is born, and the erosion of a formal definition of poetry begins. Which is still far from being culturally thought, including by certain poets. What do I draw from this? It is rhythm that leads the dance of language. Not the meaning of words.

Keeping in mind another language effect, where I make a distinction that the religious do not make: the sacred, the divine and the religious. It must be said again and again.[26]

In the cultural usage of the religious, the sacred, the divine and the religious are indifferentiated, to the advantage of the religious.

When listening to the poem, I practise an atheological reading of the text, that is to say dechristianizing, deacademicizing, desemioticizing. And this text, indisputably religious, I can no longer say it is *sacred,* since it is in my view (I am thereby on Maimonides' side) *idolatry* to call sacred what is *religious,* in the sense of founding of a religion. The work of humans.

Therefore I retranslate the Bible in and through its rhythm, its rhythms, its prosody, to voice the poem's Hebrew and the Hebrew's poem, and necessarily against all existing translations I know.

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26. I am referring to the preceding chapter.

An incredible, improbable adventure, but necessary. After eighteen or nineteen centuries of christianization, dehebrewizing annexation, academic dilution, in short, of sanctimoniousness.

Against the theologically correct, the linguistically correct, the poetically correct, the politically correct. To find the lost poem and make it heard.

This restoration work leads me (so its internal logic goes) to propose a certain number of neologisms. I notice this myself with a certain amusement. In the exultation of the poem.

I thus call translations erasors, since they erase the rhythm and the signifier. And to listen to the poem of the Bible, I am led to dechristianize, dehellenize, delatinize, embiblicize, enrhythmicize, taamicize (from *ta'am*, the taste in one's mouth) to be able to hear the rhythmic accents which are the very reason for the text. And this detheologizing, this desanctifying (shocking to the religious who do not understand that it is a question of desemioticizing and deacademicizing so that the power of language be heard) lead me not only to defrenchify, as Pierre Jean Jouve was already saying in the preface to his translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, but more precisely to decurrentfrenchify. Those who have reduced this text to current French, the currentfrenchifyers, are working to encatholicize it.

However, I am not deluded by what has been ruling language for twenty-five hundred years and will be ruling for ten thousand years. Is this like Don Quixote tilting at windmills? Pure madness?

A strange reversibility of this madness, though. Because everything is a question of point of view, in and on language, like Saussure's *Écrits de linguistique générale* (*Writings in General Linguistics*) only published in 2002 have shown extensively. A question of point of view and of its internal systematicity.

By its structure, the sign is serial binarism. Opposition-separation. We know that it is all dead bone. What Humboldt said of grammars and dictionaries.

But above all, the sign is characterized by the relationship linking these two elements to each other, and the relationship in itself is double. First these two elements make up a totality, so that one plus one equals all, so that the sign is a totality, whereas language is infinite. According to Humboldt's famous words: "an infinite use of finite means." But the relationship linking these two elements is such that the sign is not constituted of two equal halves. It is such that one of the two elements, always the same one, covers and erases the other, which ends up being no more than a virtuality.

It is always the signifier that is both concealed and maintained, while the signified, in fact, takes up the whole space. That is precisely what translation reveals. Which immediately gives translating a capital role in the representation of language and language activities, instead of the ancillary role it is traditionally assigned.

The other theoretical effect of the sign is that, far from being only a linguistic model, as it is traditionally acknowledged, according to the heterogeneous categories of reason, which are caused directly by the sign, the sign is an entire paradigmatics, encompassing all of society. Thereby, language, technically, is the business of linguists, as literature is the business of literary critics, philosophy the business of philosophy specialists, with specialists in ethics, specialists in aesthetics, specialists in epistemology, specialists in political philosophy…

In short, our university disciplines are divided up in regional theories. Which, after Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, can be called the traditional theories, to which there is cause to oppose a *critical* theory as an inclusive theory.

It is from this point of view precisely that I submit that there can be no critical theory without a theory of language. It immediately follows that from this point of view the Frankfurt School itself remains a traditional theory, because it is not, it has no theory of language. Because a critical theory of language has the task of thinking the *interaction* (another term from Humboldt, *Wechselwirkung*) between language, the poem, ethics and the political, making poetics, far beyond the acknowledgment of what literature does, a poetics of society.

The sign is a coherent whole. A whole of six paradigms. And it is all of these at once[27]:

– the linguistic model and, from this model,
– an anthropological model: the split between body and soul, letter and spirit, voice and writing;
– a philosophical model: the division-opposition of words and things, with the problem culturally assigned to logic and the Middle Ages of realism and nominalism[28] but which should be removed from its medieval and logical showcase and extended to ethics and to politics;
– a theological model, which is not a universal like the others but rather a globalized cultural model: it is the Old Testament and the New, a particularly invaluable model because Christian theological prefiguration shows to perfection the homology between the two elements of this duality, the Old Testament being entirely reinterpreted according to the terms of the New Testament, which constitutes the meaning of the Old, and the truth, the *Verus Israel*;
– then a social model, the coupling of the individual opposed to society, where individuality is either erased by and in the cultural or seen as conflicting with

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27. I am developing here what I introduced in Chapter III, "Urgently needed: An ethics of language, an ethics of translating."

28. I will expound on this in Chapter XIV, "Why a Bible blow to philosophy."

it and even as destroying the social, through individualism and hedonism according to sociologists or anthropologists, like Louis Dumont;

– finally, the political model, which opposes minority to majority as an aporia of democracy.

The whole of this makes up the sign and is reproduced by the classical relationship between source language and target language.

Just as the view on source language is a focus on form. Literalism, supposedly suited to poetry. As if the unit of the poem were the word, the words, which are units of *langue*, and not of the poem. And current, pragmatic translation is essentially turned towards the target language. Towards contents. It is the *sourcerer-targeteer* couple. With its usual sidekick, for the *targeteer:* the effaced translator, always transparent, aiming at having forgotten the linguistic, historical, cultural difference with the original. As if it were written in and for the target language.

Which thus clearly shows that in terms of religious texts current translation seeks currency.

The theoretical problem is not denying that there always is a source language and a target language of course, but that this position is a fallacious one because all it knows is the notion of *langue* and the notion of sign.

This position which believes to be dealing with the nature of things does not see, does not know that it is only a *representation* of language, as is the sign itself. The logical result is complete misknowledge of the poem, and of the continuum in language. But if we think discourse, and no longer *langue*, the problem shifts, the point of view changes, and so does the result.

Because on *langue* there can only be discourses. Especially, obviously, for ancient texts, whose language we no longer currently speak.

All of this can be reduced to something very simple: no longer to oppose an identity to an alterity, as one language system to another, but to listen to what a text does to its language, and is the only one doing this, and from that point onwards problems naturally shift – and the very history of art and literature shows that identity is formed solely through alterity.

If a passage, or a text, creates a semantic effect through the phonology of its language, we will no longer have to say that effect is lost before we begin, because the target language phonology is not the same. As it is not (or no longer) *langue* that we translate. And the entire classical notion of *equivalence* also shifts: we must do, with the means available in the target language, what the text has done to its source language.

Under that sole condition can translating be writing. Otherwise, translating is unwriting. It is translating the sign, not the poem. Translating the poem turns translation into a metaphor of the text. A transfer. Where what counts is no longer what a text says, but what it does. Its power, and no longer merely meaning.

Which several examples show. I take these, I have no alternative, from my own work.

In Ecclesiastes (which I have translated under the title "Paroles du Sage" in *Les cinq rouleaux,* 1970), there is a play on prosody (Chapter 7, verse 1). But first, we must know what it means – it is a proverb.[29] Le Maistre de Sacy: "*La bonne réputation vaut mieux que les parfums précieux*" [A good name is better than fine perfume]. The meaning is correct. But the Hebrew says *ṭwōḇ šēm / miššemen ṭwōḇ* (good name / better than perfumed oil good). *Šēm* (name) is echoed and included in *šemen* (perfumed oil). Inclusion: it is a paronomasia. A semi-inclusion of a word in another. I translate: "*plus précieux **un nom** / qu'**un on**guent précieux*" [more precious a name / than precious ointment].[30]

Here are a few translations. TOB: "*Mieux vaut le renom que l'huile exquise*" [Better fame than exquisite oil]; La Bible de Jérusalem: "*Mieux vaut le renom que l'huile fine*" [Better fame than fine oil]; Ostervald: "*Une bonne réputation vaut mieux que le bon parfum*" [A good reputation is better than good perfume]; the Rabbinate: "*Un bon renom est préférable à l'huile parfumée*" [A good name is preferable to good oil]; Chouraqui: "*Mieux vaut bon renom que bonne huile*" [Better a good name than good oil]. We can hear clearly and everywhere that the play of signifiers is lost. In the Bayard Bible, considered the "writers' Bible" (translated by Marie Borel and Jacques Roubaud): "*Mieux vaut bon renom que huile parfumée*" [Better a good name than perfumed oil]. Still the same unwriting. And in the Santa Biblia, Ecclesiastes o el Predicador: "*Mejor es la buena fama que el buen ungüente*" [Good fame is better than good ointment], or in the Biblia del Peregrino: "*Más vale buena fama que buen perfume*" [Good fame is more valuable than good perfume]. With *fama-perfume*, there is something.

Or, another example of prosodic inclusion: in Genesis 9 : 6, the play is on *dam,* blood, which is included in *adam,* man. First here is the Hebrew: *šōfēḵ / dam hā'āḏām // bā'āḏām / dāmwō yiššāfēḵ.* I translate, by shifting the effect on *sang* [blood] and *versant* [shedding]: "*versant / le **sang** de l'homme // par l'homme / son **sang** sera versé*" [shedding / man's blood // by man / shall his blood be shed].[31] Where *versant* [shedding] stands for *qui verse* [whoever sheds]… Elsewhere, the effect is diversely lost. Hence, in La Bible de Jérusalem: "*Qui verse le sang de l'homme, par l'homme aura son sang versé*" [Whoever sheds man's blood, by

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29. The corresponding proverb in the King James Version is: "A good name is better than precious ointment." (PPB)

30. The paronomasia indicated in bold is lost in this literal translation. The prosodic play could be rendered by "Better fame than fine perfume." (PPB)

31. The inclusion is lost in this literal translation. (PPB)

man will his blood be shed]; in Chouraqui: "*Qui répand le sang du glébeux, par le glébeux son sang sera répandu*" [Whoever spills a landsman's blood, by the landsman will his blood be spilled]; in the Bayard Bible (Frédéric Boyer for Genesis): "*Qui verse le sang de l'adam, l'adam son sang versera*" [Whoever sheds the blood of adam, adam shall shed his blood]. The repetition remains, but not the inclusion. La Santa Biblia says: "*El que derrama sangre de hombre, por el hombre su sangre será derramada*" [He who sheds the blood of man, by man will his blood be shed] and the Biblia del Peregrino: "*Si uno derrama la sangre de un hombre otro hombre su sangre derramará*" [If one sheds the blood of a man by another man will his blood be shed]. Same complete loss.

Or, in Genesis 11 : 7 (the tower of Babel), I translate *hāḇâ / nērəḏâ // wənāḇəlâ šām / śəfāṯām* by "*allons / descendons // et là embabelons / leur langue*" [come / let us go down // and there embabelize / their language]. And we find, in Chouraqui: "*Offrons, descendons et mêlons là leur lèvre*" [Let us offer, go down there and mingle their lip]; in La Bible de Jérusalem: "*Allons, Descendons ! Et là, confondons leur langage*" [Come, Let us go down! And there, let us confound their language]; in the Bayard Bible: "*Ah descendons tout brouiller dans leur bouche*" [Ha let us go down and confuse everything in their mouths]; in La Santa Biblia: "*Ahora, pues, descendamos, y confundamos allí su lengua*" [Now, well, let us go down, and there confuse their language], and the Biblia del Peregrino: "*Vamos a bajar y a confundir su lengua*" [Let us go down and confuse their language]. Meaning, merely meaning.

The translation of the signified makes the signifier inaudible, far beyond cases of paronomasia.

The signifier, in its serial semantics, is the power. Translating-writing, is translating this power.

And power is not opposed to meaning, as, in the sign, form is opposed to content, but power is that by which meaning is carried through and away. It is the movement of meaning. It cannot be any simpler. Coherence of the continuum, against coherence of the sign.

The opportunity to overthrow once and for all this well established, and mundane, inanity according to which a work is the sum of its translations.

Because it is mistaking the cultural effect of a work's diffusion, a sociological effect, with what a work does as a poem.

As it is the very motive by which translations become outdated but not the works. Another cliché.

Reality is completely different, as Ezra Pound showed in his *ABC of Reading*, because certain famous translations function as works. They age, that is they last.

And most works said to be original at a certain time are products of that time and die with it.

The whole difference between *activity* and *product*. Which I take from Humboldt. And which means that the modernity of a work is not that it is new or recent, but its capacity to be indefinitely active, and thereby indefinitely present in the present. According to which I immediately define writing. Nothing to do with the *état de langue*, which can be ancient.

The Thousand and One Nights translated by Galland, or the 1611 King James Version, or Baudelaire's Edgar Allan Poe, for example, last as works. They are writings.

That is to say, right away, the opposite from what is taught. To teach transparency, entirely produced by the sign, is to teach unwriting, when there is writing. Therefore teaching how to produce bad translations. The paradox is that it is the exceptions, that is the good translations, that should lay down the law.

Which law? The law of maximum subjectivization of a system of discourse, by which, no matter the literary genre, including philosophical texts, if there is what I call a poem, including a poem of thought, there is transformation of a form of language by a form of life and transformation of a form of life by a form of language. Writing is made of this: the invention of an orality.

And which leaves behind formalisms of stylistics and rhetoric all referring to a representation of language as *langue* and sign.

To translate the sign instead of translating the poem is to unwrite.

It is thus clear that writing supposes rethinking the whole theory of language. And that translating, more than any other practice, puts this theory at stake.

The conclusion is that what is at stake in translating is transforming the whole theory of language. Yes, a true cultural revolution.

Faithful, unfaithful, just more of the same, I thank thee O sign

I say "I thank thee O sign" like we say "I thank thee O Lord." A way of saying: faithful, unfaithful, scraps of the past. What exactly are these words about? This whole thing is a question of point of view.

My reflection stems from and deals with what we currently call translating, apparently from one language system to another.

That is to say that the first thing to smoke out, the theoretical prerequisite, is to make it understood that the main obstacle is the lax link, metaphorical at that, between *understanding* and *translating*, inherited from Heidegger's essentialization of language. According to which, as in both cases there is *interpretation*, understanding is already translating, and translating, of course, supposes understanding. I have in mind certain philosophers, and even a certain philosophical establishment, represented to perfection by Paul Ricœur, in his book *On Translation* for example, which I have already quoted, and where he takes up George Steiner. Still specialized in uttering banalities in a penetrating tone: in rehashing commonplace ideas on faithfulness and betrayal. Which perhaps explains the media attention, the horizon of expectations fulfilled. Ricœur submits as discoveries statements such as "it is because men speak different languages that there is translation" (2006: 11) and that "it is always possible *to say the same thing in another way*" (2006: 25). Wrong. I will return to this later. Where Ricœur puts on the same level "what we do when we define one word using another word from the same lexicon, as all the dictionaries do" (2006: 25) – such blissful ignorance of the notion of discourse – which only retains, or only knows, the notion of *langue*, and this confusion between translation and metalanguage. All this to end up discovering, against the famous motif of untranslatability, that "*there is translation*" (2006: 32). What he calls "*linguistic hospitality*" (2006: 10, 23). Always the house of Being, the letter being Heidegger.

All of this, these fossilized thoughts, in terms of "the flesh of words, that flesh which we call the 'letter'" (2006: 38), already places translating in hermeneutics, that is to say in the cultural tradition of the sign.

This is why I say "faithful, unfaithful, just more of the same." Because despite their apparent opposition these two notions do the same thing: they remain

in the opposition between form and content, that is to say in both cases, within the sign. Whether you translate faithfully or unfaithfully, you are doing one and the same, you are translating the sign, instead of translating, when it occurs, the poem of thought. When poetics foregrounds discourse, the system of discourse, the hermeneuticized translator and the philosopher look at the sign. They look at the pointing finger, instead of at the moon.

All they can translate is what an utterance says or seems to be saying, not what a system of discourse does, or what it does to you. And yet it makes you into a subject.

To set understanding and translating in a continuum is to not even realize that we are replacing a thought of language, a theory of language with the modish motif of communication and information. It is no accident that translators are fond of the metaphor of the negotiator and like to see themselves as negotiators.

All of this in a contemporary free thinking where we oppose identity to alterity, annexation-*langue* to decentring-*langue*, sourcerers to targeteers, calque to fluency, without seeing that what we take to be fluency is in fact a culmination of the cultural. From *langue* to *langue*.

Then we may begin to see that ambient hermeneutics is an erasor, that translation according to the terms of the sign is an erasor, for the same reason, that we must therefore radically critique the concepts and practices that we teach as the nature of things and a necessary evil. And there is no way out of this unless we change our point of view.

Faced with the omnipresent character of what I consider to be a lack of thought which does not know itself as such, and quite the contrary it is the prevailing thought, I could only, to elude the Establishment's bogus seriousness, enter the ring, and tally up the costs. For translating. For retranslating. For knowing what speaking means, and can do.

Thus, I will throw nine punches, and I will count each blow.

First blow – good news: There is no problem with translation. There is no untranslatable, there is only a problem with theorizing language, with representing language. Paradox number one, the sign prevents us from thinking language, while it is taken as the nature of language. Just as it prevents us from thinking language, it prevents us from thinking the poem, if not through the sign itself. Hence translating the poem through the categories of the sign is not translating the poem, it is translating the sign. Thus the sign also prevents us from thinking what translating is. Let me again say that I call poem the invention of a form of life through a form of language and the invention of a form of language through a form of life, both inseparably. By which thinking may become a poem, and we can speak of a poem of thought. If there is a poem of thought, it is that poem that we must translate, not the sign. When we translate according to the terms of the sign, we are not translat-

ing what there is to be translated, but the sign's representation of language, according to the terms of the sign. From this point on, I no longer know whether what I announced as good news is such good news, since the problem is much more difficult once we actually start translating a text. And translating will not come through on its own. As the problem is with the whole representation of language, and it is such that it gives us no reason nor means to find a way out.

Second blow – precisely, to show that what we take to be, depending on the means of the sign, the nature of language, is merely a representation of it. On the one hand, it is possible starting from anthropology, which allows us to jump out of the fish bowl where we were swimming in circles, and from the experience of the poem; on the other hand, it is necessary, in order to note the effects of the sign, and its limits. We must thus critique the sign, where the mere association of these two terms reveals what is to be understood by *critique.* It is the study of the functionings and effects of theory. Whereby critique is constructive (I am saying this because some believe that it is destructive, when they are not mistaking it for polemics and some even say that it is a Jewish thing), and it is also, thereby, the work of acknowledging effects in our practices, by which weak theories can be differentiated from strong theories. A question of performance.

The sign is an omnipresent cultural whole, and has been for about twenty-five hundred years. It has the power of the familiar reinforced by the language sciences, in their general state. It is currently represented according to the dualism of form and content, letter and spirit, wherein lies linguistic difference, to be translated maybe. There are grammars and there are dictionaries. This duality also characterizes the linguistic representation of languages. Thus, when we translate, we translate from one language into another, obviously.

Here there are two effects of theory. One is that things of language – that is to say of the sign taken as language – constitute a linguistic model. It is the very business of language sciences, of general linguistics and of *langue*-specific linguistics. The other effect is that all this model does, represented as such, in linguists' terms, by signifier and signified, is juxtapose these two as heterogeneous, sound and meaning.

And what the critique of the sign shows, from where I stand, is that the sign is not at all a mere linguistic model, but a model consisting of six paradigms, all binary, so that the sign is six times two equals two; what is more, out of the two components of the sign, one empirically takes the place of the other, which is both curiously concealed and maintained. All six according to the same homology.[32]

But the sign, by itself, does not let this show.

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32. I am referring to Chapter III, "Urgently needed: An ethics of language, an ethics of translating."

The effects of the theory of the linguistic paradigm are the rhetoric of the literal and the figurative, of etymologism for those who take origin for meaning (like Chouraqui in his translation of the Bible), and the opposition between prose and poetry, which Shelley said, in *A Defence of Poetry,* was a gross error. And also what Saussure called the "traditional divisions" and which he criticized: lexicon, morphology, syntax. And also the primacy of *langue*, which prevents thinking discourse. And also a poetic language conceived as a deviation from ordinary language – which is exacerbated by the old couple, à la Heidegger, of authentic and inauthentic, where Malinowski discovered the phatic function. From where I stand, poetic language and ordinary language are two real entities – ghosts of thought. A weird effect of language, that realism should produce ghosts.

Then there is the philosophical paradigm, which, by opposing things to words, has created the old problem, to be reconsidered through its ethical and political implications, of realism and nominalism. Look at Hegel: the word is death and even the murder of things. To return to the question of origin, this old Punch & Judy show. Still playing: look at Merritt Ruhlen's *The Origin of Language* (1994), translated in 1997 as *L'Origine des langues*, subtitled *Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue*. And it confuses origin and function, arbitrariness and convention. It is one of the comical things about it. The other thing being that Ruhlen focuses only on similarities. Yet it is differences that count the most: look at synonyms.

And the anthropological paradigm opposes language to life, the general to the particular, but also, in Lévy-Bruhl, the civilized to the primitive. Here too there is a need to acknowledge that we are opposing not language to life – as Wittgenstein does, as Adorno does – but a representation of language to a representation of life. This necessarily impacts on the thought and practice of translating. And the confusion between word and concept.

But that is not all. Academicism is renewing itself. Lévy-Bruhl opposed the white civilized normal adult male not only to the primitive, but to everything female, to madman, child, savage and poet. This logic rejects the foreign, as revealed in the names of certain peoples, but also this sensational salsa of Gender Studies, the essentialist/realist opposition between masculine and feminine, and the confusion between biological gender and grammatical gender.

I come to the theological paradigm, a cultural paradigm – but they are all cultural. It stages the concealment and maintenance of the signifier. It is the Old Testament, and the signified which gives it meaning is the New Testament, according to Christian theological prefiguration. There again, thank you Hegel, a religion of hate and a religion of love, and the political theologies of *Verus Israel*. After seventeen centuries of habits, one cannot even tell anymore: proof is the

continuum from antijudaism to antisemitism, and the use of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and *Mein Kampf* in the islamization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which the self-righteous (on the left) do not want to see.

As for the ideological effects, the most wonderful is without a doubt "*Dieu des armées*" [Lord of armies], *yəhwâ ṣəḇā'wōṯ*, which I translate by "*Dieu des multitudes d'étoiles.*" *It is the meaning*, attested by the Koehler-Baumgartner dictionary.

The translation "*Dieu ou Seigneur **des armées***" [God or Lord of armies] originates from the Vulgate, *Dominus exercituum, Deus exercituum*. In French in Le Maistre de Sacy it is "*le Seigneur des armées*" [the Lord of armies], and sometimes "*le Seigneur des puissances*" [the Lord of forces], a translation of the Septuagint's "*κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων*"; in Ostervald, it is "*l'Éternel des armées*" [the Eternal of armies] as well as in Segond; in Crampon: "*Yahweh des armées*" [Yahweh of armies], and in Osty: "*Yahvé des armées*" [Yahve of armies], as well as in Dhorme. In the King James Version, it is "The Lord of hosts," in the New World Translation: "Jehovah of armies," in the Spanish Biblia del Peregrino: "*El Señor de los Ejércitos*" [The Man of armies], and in the Latin-American version: "*Jehová de los Ejércitos*" [Jehovah of armies].

In the Bayard Bible, the translation varies according to texts and, for example, it is "YHWH des Troupes" [YHWH of Troops] in Isaiah and "Yhwh des Armées" [Yhwh of Armies] in Amos.

Yes, all of this is sickening.

But the sign is also its social paradigm, the opposition between the individual and society. It too holds its ideologisms, its theologisms: as with the destructive individualism of Western society, for socio-theologists like Gilles Lipovetsky or Louis Dumont. For whom the model of hierarchy is India's caste society and the second account of the Creation, in Genesis, the story of the rib.

Insofar as this paradigm has had literary effects, it is also a language paradigm and a score keeper of translating.

The last of this dogmatic paradigmatics is a political aporia, with the opposition proper to the *Social Contract* between minority and majority executing perfectly well the conceal-and-maintain maneuver on the minority. It is political conventionalism. Of which partakes the horizon of expectations, that literary myth. Which also poses the problem of the intelligibility of the present, the unpredictability of the past, the power effects of the greatest number on commonplace ideas, all accounting for what late translations reveal: Victor Klemperer's *LTI* (*Lingua Tertii Imperii*), rendered by *La langue du IIIᵉ Reich* in 1996, took forty-nine years to be published in France, while it had been an instant hit in German bookstores as early as 1947. A perfect example of the politics of translating, the lags and leaps of translation.

The sign is all of this, and it holds together. It is a power, an omnipresence, which rots thought: the thought of language, the thought of the poem, the thought of ethics and the thought of the political.

Yet translating works at critiquing the sign through its own historicity. Translating is not isolated in autonomous processes. The transformation of intercultural logics (decolonization, primitivism) and the transformation of the thought of language, through the notion of discourse, have transformed, or work at transforming translating.

But we must acknowledge that what dominates the thought of translating is the linguistics of translation, with the expansion of Eugene Nida's notions of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Which comes down to superimposing form on the source language and content on the target language. The binary character of the sign where pragmatics only adds the stimulus-response couple to the form-meaning couple. Empircism as much as hermeneutics reinforce this schema. And yet this schema, which rules, is bad for translation.

I want it to be heard that the familiar, the apparently reasonable, what is taught as truth and nature, the sign, is madness, a schizophrenia of language. You may have forgotten, but it will be my *third blow*. The paradox, if we think of Tzara, of Antonin Artaud, is that the relationship to the body and to the cry is considered near-madness. Although it is the separation of language into two elements radically heterogeneous to one another that is madness. Which means that we then have to tinker with passages: the symbolism of sounds which feeds an originism, or motivation through expressivity, or a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning, as Valéry would have it. Although from the experience of thought that is the poem, and which surpasses any experimentalism as much as any mystique, just as there is discontinuum in language, there is also continuum. But the sign does not know this, and prevents one from knowing it.

The sign is the main example that every science produces a specific ignorance, does not know it and therefore hides that it is hiding what it is hiding.

Whereby the sign is exactly like current translation, which I call an erasor.

We must then, starting from the experience of the poem and the experience of translating a poem, provoke the crisis of sign. The crisis of sign: an allusion to Mallarmé's "Crisis of Verse," of course. But what is at stake is the pushing further of a malaise, beyond a historical difference. It is a matter of acknowledging a universal hidden by misknowledge and a coherence unnoticed until now.

It is a matter of maddening the sign, this madness of language. And, socially, this madness, to madden it. To show its falseness through its illusion of limitlessness, that is to say its limits, is the utopia and the prophecy of the theory of language: utopia because it is placeless and displaced; prophecy, through the rejection of commonplace ideas. These are the two conditions of its freedom.

To destabilize the sign. Without relapsing into the pseudo-madness of the sixties that sought a departure from the sign. This literary Nietzscheism which extends deconstructionism in a bastardized way. No, to show the sign's strengths, and its weaknesses. To give the sign a Bible blow. A rhythm blow. Hither rhythm, thither poem. The sign breaks at the poem. Its weakest link. A hit of radical historicity against its essentialization, its chain dualization. To release an outpouring of its paradigms which would bit by bit lose their elements just like in Ronald Searle's cartoons books lose their letters. To yield to other paradigms.

A new praise of folly, maybe. And the height of utopia: not staying out of place, disqualifying established incompetence.

Also, to show the limits of hermeneutics, not that we do not need this, but to show that when it thinks it is all that can be said and done, all meaning, it is merely all within the sign. Whence the weak autonomy of translating in translation studies.

At this point, another blow must be landed, the *fourth* one, denouncing an imposture which has been going on far too long and, to my knowledge, still dominates: the identification of linguistic structuralism with Saussure. Saussure is given as the inventor of structuralism, and structuralism as his continuity. But, as the *Writings in General Linguistics* published in 2002 allow us to confirm, structuralism is a set of nine misinterpretations of Saussure, and I have counted them. A mountain of misinterpretations.[33]

All of this is what makes up the systematicity of things in language, seen from Saussure's point of view, which I have taken. It is why I submit that we must think Humboldt today. Because the diffusion of structuralism, reinforcing the sign in its apparent scientificity, cannot not have theoretical or practical effects on the act of translating nor on its outcome.

This then leads me to deliver my *fifth blow*: to build, against the coherence of the sign, the counter-coherence of the continuum. Where I can only briefly raise these points.

Because I submit a first continuum that is the body-in-language. No flesh – sheer meat – no neurones in a poem. To think the body-in-language is to think ninefold the relationship between language and life, from the definition of "human life" according to Spinoza, in *Tractatus Politicus*, not as circulation of the blood, "but above all by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind" (1955: 314) – "*sed maximè ratione, verâ Mentis virtute, & vitâ.*" As this necessarily supposes language, this opposes the common opposition of language and life.

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33. Again I refer to Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words." As for Spinoza, see Chapter III, "Urgently needed: An ethics of language, an ethics of translating."

Regarding discourse, what I propose to acknowledge as a system of discourse is a serial semantics which would consider rhythm, syntax and prosody in a continuum: rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech, and thus rhythms: positional rhythm, sprung rhythm, final rhythm, repetitive rhythm, syntactical rhythm, prosodic rhythm. We see that the unit is no longer the word, no longer the sign. The consequence is that there are no mother tongues, only mother works. That is why I say again and again that it is the Bible that *made* Hebrew, not Hebrew that made the Bible. It is but one example.

We understand that the consequences are inescapable for translation. But also for reading. Just two examples.

In *Poétique du traduire* (Meschonnic 1999: 107–111), I used two verses from Homer (*Iliad,* book VIII, verse 64–65) which *show* what words do not say, the equation between the word for crying the distress of those being killed (*oïmôguè*), three long syllables, and the word for crying the victory of the killers (*eukhôlê*). And this rhythmic equation, hidden in the hexameter's metrics, recovers what Homeric anthropology discovers.

But in Spinoza, there is an example which seems to me particularly comical, from my point of view of course. Spinoza begins his *Tractatus Politicus* with "*Affectus, quibus conflictamur concipiunt Philosophi…*" I translate by: "*Les Affects, par quoi nous sommes en conflit, les Philosophes les conçoivent comme des vices…*" [Passions, by which we are harassed, philosophers conceive of them as vices…].[34] *Affectus* is the first word of the sentence, the first word of the book. It is a major concept in Spinoza. Yet Pierre-François Moreau translates that by: "*Les philosophes conçoivent les passions à quoi nous sommes en proie…*" [Philosophers conceive of the passions to which we fall prey…].[35] Where the thinker put "affects" first, positional rhythm, the philosopher pushed "philosophers" ahead. A subtle sign that all the philosopher knows of the body is but the body of philosophy professors. He moreover translates *affectus* here by "*affection*," there by "*passion*." Which both breaks the coherence of Spinoza's thought and prevents us from thinking Spinoza's language.

If we think discourse, we think rhythm, as in the organization of the movement of speech. Here is a first meaning of continuum. But this meaning has three consequences.

The first is that we must think another paradigmatics than that of the sign. Six for six. Instead of the sign's internal dualism, of form and meaning, thinking the continuum is thinking the power in language.

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34. My translation (PPB).

35. My translation (PPB).

Instead of opposing words to things, convention to nature, to think the radical historicity of language, its systematicity, and the point of view.

Instead of a binary and mythologizing anthropology, to think plurality and diversity, not the opposition of identity to alterity, but that identity occurs solely through alterity.

Instead of the theological paradigm of the Old and the New Testament, a paradigm opposing the theologico-political to a generalized detheologization. I will return to this later.

Instead of the social paradigm opposing the individual and society, a thought of the subject. Of subjects.

And instead of the binary political paradigm, minority against majority, or force against freedom, a thought and a practice of plurality.

One consequence, also, is seeing the systematicity holding together this whole thought in a continuum, to such an extent that the body-in-language continuum necessarily opens onto the language-poem-ethics-politics continuum. To such an extent that a poem can be poem only if it is an ethical act, and if it is an ethical act it is a political act. While within the sign, language is a number of technicalities for linguists, poetics is a formalism, ethics is an abstract conception of values, politics is the cynicism of power.

In this case, translating is also an ethical act, it is translating the poetical ethics of the poem.

This systematicity imposes the revision of the question-of-the-subject. To land a *sixth blow*. Here also is an interesting situation, because instead of one subject, this indistinctive generic, it bears thirteen subjects to the dozen.

I have only enumerated them up to this point.[36] Let me now detail them a little: for the philosophical subject, conscious-one-willing, it is better that he refrain from writing poems, because if he knows what he is doing, he is doing what he knows; for the psychological subject, who feels emotions, when he writes a poem, he who can only enunciate, name, describe what he feels, it is better that he too refrain, but sure enough bookstores are full of his publications; then, for the subject of knowledge of things, subject of science, and for the subject of domination of things, subject of technique – they do what they have to do, nothing to do with a poem; and for the subject of knowledge of others, who invented ethnology, little to do with the subject of domination of others, who invented slavery and colonization; then for the subject of law, essential this one, under Article 1 of the 1789 French Declaration of Rights: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights…", which was not true and still is not true, though it is a true categorical

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36. In Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words."

imperative, a universal, which shows at once what happens when we confuse universal with universalization of the Western model, only to refute the latter as "White man's business," and the former at the same time; then Diderot invented the subject of happiness, in his preface to the *Encyclopédie* – Heidegger followed by his followers knows but domination and the question-of-technique, but anyway he does not think the subject, since to him man speaks only when he answers to *langue*; and there is the subject of history, passive and active, and to realisms only masses or nations can be subjects, the individual being but a number, that is sometimes tattooed on the arm; then there is the subject speaker, who is transformed into a subject of discourse as soon as he opens his mouth, he does not know this but it is irrelevant, he is as much subject to as a subject of; then finally comes the Freudian subject, but we are all Freudian subjects, and if you look for it in a literary text, you will find it, for two reasons, the first being that the subject stands there like letters in words and words in a sentence, the second being that when looking for this we necessarily apply psychoanalytical concepts and end up finding what we put in, no difference here with grammarians who will find verbs, adjectives and objects and who besides are not allowed to say anything else, and especially not of a poem or an imitation of one, they do not have the means, or else being the grammarian he, or she is makes him or her no less man or woman, and in conclusion if the Freudian subject finds itself in a poem, it is not that which makes it poem or a mock poem.

So much so that even after this enumeration, which I am not claiming to be comprehensive, I am forced to conclude that not one of these subjects has written a poem. I must then submit a thirteenth subject, which I call the subject of the poem. And it is not the author, this psychologico-legal notion, nor the individual whose hand we shake, what I mean by that is the maximum subjectivization of a system of discourse, by which orality is no longer sound. The subject is what we hear. The subject is what is being shaped, transformed. A specificity and a historicity invented.

This being the case, that subject must be translated, must be heard.

In other words, and this will be the *seventh blow*, listening is what must be translated, which consists of hearing what we do not know we are hearing (like the name *Ophelia* expanding into the words surrounding it, as I have shown in *Poétique du traduire*), and that goes beyond any hermeneutics: it is a desemioticized signifiance. Whereby, a vast enterprise, all that has been translated strictly according to the sign should be retranslated. Which implies critiquing invisibility as much as calque, and no longer opposing alterity to identity but to make the transformation of identity through alterity be heard.

And here, rhythm, rhythms play a major role. Which no longer has anything to do with form, nor with the bronchial metaphor of breathing. There are just too

many examples. I have evoked the case of Isaiah (40 : 3), the voice in the desert[37], where for so long the major disjunctive accent has been placed in such a way to say in the words of Le Maistre de Sacy: "*On a entendu la voix de celui qui crie dans le désert : Préparez la voie du Seigneur*" [We heard the voice of the one who cries in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord] for *qwōl qwōrē' // bammidॢॢॢ॒ॢॢ bar pannû derek̠ə yəhwâ.* And the King James Version says: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord," after the Septuagint, and after Matthew (3 : 3) and John (1 : 23). For two centuries, practically all of the translations have reinstated the semantic rhythm, whereby, for example, La Bible de Jérusalem has translated: "*Une voix crie : 'Dans le désert frayez le chemin de Yahvé…'*" [A voice cries: "In the desert set the way of Yahve"], I would translate "*Une voix crie // dans le désert / ouvrez le chemin d'Adonaï…*" [A voice cries // in the desert / open the way of Adonai]. But the misleading translation has endured long enough to have yielded a saying about a voice crying in the wilderness: "*prêcher dans le désert, 'discourir sans être écouté'*" [to preach in the desert, to ramble on without being listened to] (*Grand Larousse de la langue française*). And Le Maistre de Sacy's translation, which some Catholics see as the fairest of the French translations, and which has been re-edited in the "Bouquins" series in 1990, thus still perpetuates today the inaccurate version.

If we dwell a little on the theoretical effects of the relationship to the biblical text, briefly, the effect is both double and single. It is the *eighth blow.* A Bible blow.

First effect, from the pan-rhythmics of the text, the organization of *te'amim*, plural of *ta'am* meaning taste, the taste in one's mouth, a term which in itself is a parable of orality and of the body-in-language, I use rhythm as the theoretical pivot able to shift the whole theory of language.

And what is telling, is also that a theologically programmed objection has refused, and continues practically to refuse, *to listen* to this rhythmics, which is irreducible to our Greek thought categories. Hence the battle for rhythm is a battle against a theology, or against Theology.

Second effect, starting from the very text of Genesis, and from the point of view of the poem, we must acknowledge a distinction that the religious do not make, whoever they may be, about a text which is culturally, it is true, a religious text, founder of a religion, and it is the distinction between the sacred, the divine and the religious. That the text moreover clearly shows.[38]

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37. See Chapter IV, "What is at stake in translating is the need to transform the whole theory of language."

38. I mentioned it in Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words," and in Chapter VI, "Translating: Writing or unwriting."

It is on the basis of the text that I define the sacred as the fusion of the human with the cosmic. The fusional, the time when animals spoke, like the snake to Eve. Which at once allows us to tell the sacred apart from the nostalgia for the sacred. When Heidegger interprets Hölderlin, *das Heilige sei mein Wort*, "the holy be my word," as an indicative and not as a subjunctive-optative, he confuses both, which is not without consequences for ethics.

The divine is the passage of life, from the life-creating principle to the smallest living creatures. The religious is not yet involved. As for the divine it is fused with the sacred.

The divine is separated out in Exodus 3:14 when, instead of the name Moses is asking for God answers with a verb. I translate: "*Je serai / que je serai*" [I will be / that I will be], renewing the promise made in verse 12. Deleting the name immediately creates a rupture with the fusional of the sacred, an absolute transcendence of the divine with regard to the human. Negative theology, just like that. And the paradox is that the divine, understood in this way, is what makes history infinite and meaning infinite.

The religious shows up further, in the book of Exodus*,* and in Leviticus, as socialization and ritualization, the appropriation of the sacred and the divine, all three fused into one.

That is why the religious do not make the distinction that I make.

From the point of view of the poem, I consider as idolatry, following Maimonides in fact, to speak of a "sacred text" and of a "holy language" – all the Hebrew says is "language of holiness," *leshôn ha-kôdesh.*

We then stand before a fourfold effect. The first is a paradox, where the more the religious see in the text truths they revere, the more they weaken the text in translation, because truth, like meaning, produces a residue, that is form. And the continuum, the power of the text becomes discontinuum, sign. Translations inspired by religion show this paradoxical consequence, but do not see it and they cannot help it. The religious sees only itself, like the sign.

Second effect, for this text, both erased and instrumentalized by the religious, by an entire history, I submit is that it has to be dechristianized so that it be heard, and rehebrewized to be heard as a poem.

Thirdly, we must acknowledge that the religious does the opposite of what Lactancius made it appear to say.[39] Since nothing divides men anymore, but the theologico-political. The history of religions is proof enough. They are killers. From which I am forced to draw the consequence that the theologico-political is the major enemy of a human life.

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39. See the end of Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words."

Which leads, fourthly, to acknowledge that the work of the poem, whence emanates poem-translating, is to detheologize the divine.

Whereby the theological paradigm becomes the battle for a chain detheologization of language, of the poem, of ethics and of the political against the theologico-political. For a radically historical humanism.

Thus, translating shows simultaneously, inseparably, the interaction between language, poem, ethics and politics.

Obviously, translating Shakespeare or Dante, or Kafka, has different effects. It is proper to a text which has become part of the cultural, a "Great Code," to exacerbate these effects. Its interest is all the greater as it reveals this. Perhaps the greater the texts, the more they reveal, since we keep retranslating them.

It is through them that translating does not appear only as an experimental poetics, but also as an experimental ethics of the subject of the poem, an experimental politics of language.

Now it is time to hammer home the last blow, the *ninth* one, which sums up all the others: to think this interaction language-poem-ethics-politics as a sole systematicity. This is where translating reveals its utmost importance. Not much left to do with a medium, a passage from *langue* to *langue*, which irresistibly recalls what Montesquieu says in his *Persian Letters* about the translator, that he does not think. Nor does it have anything to do with a science of translation. The practice of an inclusive theory of language works at "a human life."

Sourcerer, targeteer, the same thing

Sourcerer, targeteer. Why not sourceteer?

I am just pastiching a tale by Lewis Carroll in the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*. He recounts that during the wars in 16th century England, between partisans of William and Richard, a man is caught by one of the armies, and they ask him whose side he is on, it is a matter of life or death, and panicked, he gasps Rilchiam.

Can't we do the same thing with sourcerer or targeteer? To break out of this dramatic opposition. Or perhaps comical. A question of point of view.

On this, I know that people take me for a sourcerer, but as for the notion of target evoking bow and arrow, good aim must be taken, and I am no longer sure of what once appeared as irreducible opposites.

My sole point of discussion remains the question of the specificity of translating, of which some people make a specific discipline, translation studies. It is about such autonomy that I have reservations, from the point of view of the theory of language, of the internal specificity of things of language.

As concerns the specificity of the humanities, I stand on Humboldt's shoulders.

It is just that I remain wary of what is dominant in the discourse of linguists, which continues, it seems to me, to convey a major misinterpretation of Saussure's continuity into structuralism, where I see structuralism as nothing more than mass misinterpretation of Saussure.[40] Which the *Écrits*, published in 2002, fully confirm.

We must then set the thought and practice of translating within an inclusive theory.

But I am asking: under what subject? Here we need the subject of the poem, meaning that it is both missing and necessary.

Otherwise I look at what we do to language, and instead of language all I find is academese, sign cant.

It is it that identifies source language with form, and target language with meaning. This ill is ancient and deep rooted. And what we currently take for common sense, reinforced by linguistic sciences, seems to me like schizophrenia. It cannot be said enough.

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40. I have expounded on this in Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words."

Language is sick. We know this because we are advised to watch our language. To watch what speaking means. And it does not know that it is sick, as it usually is with the healthy. One of the symptoms of illness is precisely that it seems to go unnoticed. Though a doubt may arise, by seeing the way, certain ways, translation and translating are spoken of.

It is exactly what happens, and surprisingly no longer surprises, when reference to Heidegger rules and dilutes all the specificity of translating into a notion of comprehension, into the act of understanding, thus into hermeneutics, that makes Paul Ricœur say, or rather repeat, that "To understand is to translate" (2006: 24).[41] Which goes through this fuzzy logic that "it is always possible *to say the same thing in another way*" (2006: 25). True for *langue,* not for discourse. And a double confusion: with metalanguage, and with synonymy. But Bernard Lafaye, author of what remains to this day the best dictionary of French synonyms wrote in his 1857 preface that he had wanted to call his dictionary "the dictionary of *anti-synonyms.*" No we do not *say the same thing in another way,* we say different things different ways. And all this just to rehash banalities.

In Madame Tussaud's museum of idées reçues, it is impossible now not to find the wax figure of Walter Benjamin, his theology of "pure language," from which we do not retain that the fertile inversion of Germanizing into Hebrewizing, that is from annexation to decentring, remained trapped in a *langue* to *langue*, instead of opening onto a discourse for discourse. And Benjamin's "nostalgia" maintained a Babelian mythology.

Which feeds another very in-vogue idea: that the translations of a text are part of the text, which is true only if we agree to reduce the great texts to their cultural effect, that is also to reduce the poem to the sign, in the ancient customary split between form and content. But everyone knows that, save rare and beautiful exceptions, all translations of a writing are unwritings.

Hence, not only is it trivial but lame to keep repeating this inanity, that a text is the sum of its translations. As soon as we look closely, Shakespeare's sonnets, or the *Divine Comedy*, or Kafka, for example, are in translation but a shadow of what the originals do. With a religious text, it is different: all that is left is the religious. Its sacralization invisibly made it disappear as text.

And to borrow from Walter Benjamin the first word of his title "the task of the translator," *Die Aufgabe des Uebersetzers,* which Jacques Derrida borrowed in "Des tours de Babel," in *Psyche*, when elaborating the idea of the "debt" (Derrida 2007: 200), we must indeed *render* what the text, through its writing, has *given* us, and that is not only the meaning of words, it is all its power through the

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41. I have dealt with this issue at the beginning of the book and in Chapter VII, "Faithful, unfaithful, just more of the same, I thank thee O sign."

continuum of its rhythm. Thus if we do not translate rhythm, we will not have translated the text, we will have translated the sign. There is much more involved than the restitution of meaning, as Derrida said (2007:202), borrowing literally from Benjamin's *Wiedergabe des Sinnes.*

It is a question of rhythm, *organizing the movement of speech in language*, thus in the sense of the continuum, in the sense of power not in the sense of its *traditional definition,* the alternation between a same and a different, a weak beat and a strong beat, that is form opposed to meaning. And it was always of "form" that Walter Benjamin spoke, from which Derrida borrowed: "translation is a form" (2007:205), opposed to "tenor" (*Gehalt*), as he also reminds us (2007:214).

So much so that it is still this dualist and semiotic representation of language, through its poetizing glamour, that multiplies metaphors, as when Benjamin says of Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles that "the meaning is only touched by the wind of language in the manner of an Aeolian lyre" (in 2007:212). The sign leads. Here the metaphoricity is a theoretical effect, when the relationship of a text to its future translations is given in the terms of "life and living on [*Fortleben*]" (Benjamin in Derrida 2007:203). Which Derrida also borrowed. Yet, this notion of survival needs to be demetaphorized if we think discourse, if we think poetics, that is to say value. That is to say *activity*, as opposed to *product*. In Humboldt's terms *energeia*, and not *ergon*.

That is our only chance to stop confusing cultural effect and value, the activity of the poem. To take this Babelizing, theologico-mythological poetization, according to which the original "requires translation" (2007:205), is to revel in the propagation of the fable, saying that the original begins "by pleading for translation," (2007:207) which Derrida said, but which immediately evokes other supplications: those that angels probably made, according to a passage of the Talmud, when the Bible was translated into Greek. A fable for a fable.

But even this fable continues to be told in terms of a "language contract among several languages" (2007:208). Walter Benjamin set for translation the goal "to express the most intimate relation among languages" (in Derrida 2007:209). Which he called "'the pure language (*die reine Sprache*),' or the pure tongue" (2007:221), another translation.

And there appears a revealing characteristic, the fusion of language and the sacred: "the very essence of the literary and the sacred, at their common root," said Derrida (2007:209). Where actually an ambiguity creeps in: we do not really know if he is still speaking of Walter Benjamin or if it is what he himself thinks. In fact, the ambiguity is soon lifted. It is on his own behalf, for sure, that Derrida speaks: "Let us accompany this movement of love, the gesture of this loving one (*liebend*) that is at work in the translation" (2007:212). While making his this metaphorical language: "the amphora is one with itself even as it opens itself to

the outside" (2007: 212). Later on the "hymen" and "wedding gown" (2007: 214). Benjamin spoke of a "royal cape with large folds" (in Derrida 2007: 215).

A relationship to the sacred which partakes of nomination as the basis of the thought of language: the acceptance of the fabulous, without thinking about its theoretical consequences: a non-thought of discourse, thus of poetics.

To which Jacques Derrida added a legal-like interpretation about a translator's copyright (2007: 218–219), translations being reputed as "works that are original only in expression" (Colombet: 1976 in Derrida 2007: 218). Where we again find content and form. Just to dispute the jurist: "only form can become property, and not ideas, themes, contents" (Colombet: 1976 in Derrida 2007: 218). Which, contrary to what Derrida believes he is saying, ends up pinning down translations: they only managed to pass on content. And we also find in the pleadings of another jurist the "genius of each language" (in Derrida 2007: 219).

All in all, it truly seems that Derrida made Walter Benjamin's Babelian mythology his own, when he wrote: "Translation promises a kingdom to the reconciliation of languages" (2007: 220). Where we find "truth as authenticity" (2007: 221), this notion of truth, a major obstacle with philosophers in thinking the poem. Which brings them closer to theology. And Derrida would add: "This religious code is essential here" (2007: 223).

There is also the sentence saying about this "pure language" that "[o]nly a translation can make it emerge" (2007: 222). To bring it out of the "core." Whence the absolute impossibility to think value, that is the critique, the critique of translations and translating. What makes their historicity.

The final adherence to the sacred mimics a certain mysticism: "There is only the letter, and it is the truth of pure language, the truth as pure language" (2007: 224). That is a form apparently recent, and widespread, of the oldest academicism.

To think what we do when we translate, we must readily acknowledge that the sign is not language, but a model of language; that the notion of *langue*, paradoxically, prevents from thinking language; that the notion of meaning is an epistemological obstacle to thinking what language does, what we do with it and what it does with us. Form, content: we must leave this infernal couple. It is simple: it is a question of understanding that in the discontinuum of the sign the continuum of the poem is at work; that in language it is not *langue* which is at work, it is discourse; that about *langue* there are only discourses; that there is more unknown than known in language. And that what is known prevents from knowing the unknown.

We must explore paradoxes and, at the same time, prepare for future truisms.

As long as we look at *langue* only, we will keep opposing languages to each other, morsels of one to be translated into another, we do not translate when we believe we are translating *langue* only. We oppose irreducibles: the phonology of one language system to the phonology of another. Even Ezra Pound, in *ABC of*

Reading, declared these, with good reason of course, to be intransposable. Melopeia, as he said, remains in its own language system. And grammars differ, and semantic fields of words differ. All of this is undeniable. The logical consequence is the notion of untranslatability, or that something is untranslatable, which often comes close to the notion just as unquestioned of the unspeakable. I submit that both the one and the other are academicisms of thought.

Now it appears that by opposing languages one to the other we also oppose language and life. It is an entire coherence, an entire representation system. Classical, schoolish, academical and politically correct.

Yet the first thing to note here is that this representation system is not taken for a representation system, but for the nature of things.

The sign is taken for the very nature of language. I insist because the cultural is deaf. From the sign runs a whole network of wires which makes up the self-perpetuating heterogeneity of all conceptual couplings from categories that supposedly constitute language, and thus the very conditions of any translation.

This observation leads me to initiate, and explore, an entirely different coherence, an entirely different systematics.

It is just that the model of language we teach is not the nature of things, of things of language, but a representation system. And, like any representation, this system is historical, cultural, situated, limited. It is not a question of wanting to eliminate it. It is a question of admitting its limits. And of thinking the unthought.

A first surprise, in the grab bag that is translation, is that the very experience of translation inescapably leads us to acknowledge that it is out of translating that the first paradox emerges, and then others emerge in its wake: it is translating that imposes that all we have about language are representations. Through the confrontation of very different manners of speech: he swam across the river, *il traversa la rivière à la nage*. Not *il nagea à travers la rivière*.

What clearly stands out in Saussure's *Écrits* only recently published, is that on language there can only be points of view. No truth of nature. Which, incidentally, completely reopens and renews the ancient dispute which some thought to be a medieval one between realism and nominalism.

Second consequence: if on language we can only have points of view, the theory of language, which is a reflection on the internal systematics of language, is inescapably necessary and included in the theory and practice of translating.

It is saying that this reciprocity is such that there could not be a theory of language without a theory of translating, no more than there could be a practice of translating without a theory of translating or a practice and a theory of translating without a theory of language.

Any so-called reflective autonomy of translating without a theory of language appears at once to be in this state of thought where the sign and *langue* are the sole

known and well-known representations of language. This very situation prevails in the current jumble of empiricism, eclecticism and pre-theoretical scientism, which refers everything back directly to hermeneutics, to the sole question of meaning, thus to the sign.

The result is that we do not know what we are doing, and that we do not know that we do not know what we are doing, and, what is more, we do not want to know.

Yet, Humboldt had said a long time ago that dictionaries and grammars are the dead bones of language; that words do not come before discourse, they come through discourse; and that, in language, historically, our concern is always with human beings who are actually speaking.

With this medley composed of three pieces of Humboldt's thought, we can grasp that what is at play here, and makes for an interesting problem, is that it is enough to think discourse, and no longer *langue,* to change the whole representation system of language, as well as the entire practice and theory of translating.

The point of view of the discourse continuum leads us to listen, in discourse, to the link between rhythm, syntax and prosody, which runs through all the words, in particular when there is a system of discourse. And rhythm*s are plural:* breaking and continuing rhythms, that is group rhythm, positional rhythm, sprung or final, repetitive rhythm, prosodic rhythm and syntactically organizing rhythm. Taking the sequence of all these elements no longer as rhetoric, nor as aesthetics, nor as stylistics, but as poetics.

Because rhetoric, or what it has become, considers this or that element as belonging to *langue*, not to discourse, and that rhetoric is the rhetoric of figures, and not Aristotle's idea of it as action through language, thus dealing with an entirely different relationship between language and life than the taxonomy of figures, which is, from this point of view, mere formalism.

Neither is it a matter of aesthetics, in the sense that aesthetics, stuck in its own history, in questions of the beautiful and the sensible, does not have the necessary concepts, which are those of what I call poetics, and which consist in searching for what constitutes value as in inventing a radical historicity of a system of discourse, by which precisely it reclaims questions of aesthetics. Poetics, from this point of view, is a retranslation of aesthetics.

Neither is it a matter of stylistics, in the sense that the notion of style is all the sign allows to think of the so-called literary thing, thus in terms of form opposed to content.

And if listening to the continuum requires listening to what a system of discourse is doing (I call *system of discourse* a work, when a thought is invented as a poem of thought), it then becomes obvious that a translation done within the frame of the sign can only erase the continuum, discourse and system of dis-

course. That is why I propose calling this type of translation, which is the bulk of current translation, *erasors*.

Then if we come back to this well-known coupling, of source with target, of sourcerer with targeteer, where they are both seeing double, the contradiction solves itself.

Yes, sourcerer, targeteer, same thing. *Twice the same*. Within the frame of the sign, both manage to reach only the sign: they start at the sign and end at the sign. Form, or content, these two opposites make one. But if we move them to discourse, the *source* is what the text to be translated *does*, its activity mode, which it invents, it is not what it says, but what it does. And *there is only one target:* to do what it does, using the means not only of *langue*, but of the subject of discourse who does to his or her language, to that language, what perhaps had never been done to it before. In the sense that I define a text as what a body does to language, to its language, and what has never been done to it before.

That is the sole condition for hitting a bull's-eye, that is to recreate the effect to be heard, and not to reproduce or imitate it.

That first means acknowledging that a text is a system of discourse insofar as it does to its language what has never been done to it before. Within these limits, it should be heard, I am saying it again, that there are no mother tongues, only mother works. When I say that it is not Hebrew that made the Bible, but the Bible that made Hebrew, it is also in the sense that the making leaves an unaccomplished, a continuing creation, where we can read (Psalm 115:15): "*lui qui fait / le ciel et la terre*" [he who makes / heaven and earth]. In other words, *he did not make them,* as it is said in the first verse of Genesis, no he continues to make them. Which also defines any true work: its action lasts, and in this sense it keeps on making itself.

Of course other examples can be evoked: it is the Quran which continues to make Arabic, more than Arabic made the Quran. Which is probably not theologically correct.

Which goes to show that the stakes of translating can be higher than we think, generally, even if the times are long gone when Tyndale was burnt for his translation of the Bible which would later on be used by the King James Version team in 1611, and when Étienne Dolet was burnt, for having unwisely added two words to Plato's translation saying that after death the soul was: "*plus rien du tout*" – nothing *at all*.

More generally, it is about literature, which does not yield the same consequences as religious texts.

Yet, with things said to belong to literature, or to the poem, the entire representation of language is at stake. It is the war of the sign and the poem. To the sign, the poem is a form, a "*forme-poésie*" said a questionnaire in the magazine *Action*

poétique a few years ago. Worried that it would disappear. To the sign, things are a question of form, we stand in the heterogeneous categories of reason. A weak position. To the poem, things of language put ethics at stake, the poem is first an *ethical act*, and if it is an ethical act, it is a poetic and political act because it implies subjects. An action on subjects. It is the strongest reading for theory, in the sense where it has more explanatory power, and a better language performance.

Thus there is an ethics and a politics of translating. Which also show empirically the lags and leaps of translating, in this or that country, this or that text, depending on interests and trends. Hence the time it took to translate the texts of the Frankfurt School in French. And the fact that Italy was translating Russian formalists before France.

Whence a triple effect occurs. First, from the point of view of the ethics of the poem, we must translate against erasor-style translating, thus we must translate what erasors erase, translate the recitative against the *récit*; secondly, we must translate what remains possibly untranslated, as it is not in conformity with the philosophically correct or the poetically correct of the moment and time. Which initiates, thirdly, an entirely different relationship between language and life. No longer their academic opposition, but the acknowledgment that a poem is a form of life transforming a form of language just as much as a form of language transforming a form of life. Then, we will stop confusing verse with poetry, which Aristotle had already avoided, but which certain contemporaries continue to do. And this subject-form is what we should be translating, focusing at once on the target-bound and the source-bound, and leaving literalism to the sign.

Having undertaken a complete translation of the Bible – *Les cinq rouleaux* in 1970, *Jona et le signifiant errant* in 1981, *Ovadia* in *Esprit* in 1982, and now *Gloires* (Psalms) in 2001, *Au commencement* (Genesis) in 2002, *Les Noms* (Exodus) in 2003 – I draw a few examples from *Et il a appelé* (the Hebrew title of Leviticus) so as not to reuse examples that I analyzed in *Un coup de Bible dans la philosophie* (2004) and in *Poétique du traduire* (1999).

It is a matter of making heard Étienne Dolet's fifth rule to his *Manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre*: "fidelity to the flow and rhythms of Classical Oratory: that is to say, linking and putting the words together with such harmony as not only to gratify the spirit but also to delight the ear,"[42] and further on, "a good copulation of words" and "a great Author who does not observe Classical Oratory is nothing."[43] Which he had said back in 1540.

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42. The translation is from Kenneth Lloyd-Jones (2001: 53) – PPB.

43. These two translations are my own (PPB).

I call this the recitative, by which I mean the serial semantics within the continuum of discourse, and which runs throughout the récit, that is the utterance.

Hence in *Et il a appelé* (15:4), there is a four-term sequence with an identical prosodic finish in the Hebrew, which sounds like this: *kāl-hammišəkāḇ // ʾăšer yišəkaḇ ʿālāyw hazzāḇ,* a marked sequence. I translate by a three-beat prosodic chain, three out of four, "*toute couche // où couche / celui qui coule / sera impure*" [every bed // on which lies / he who leaks / is unclean]. Out of the eleven French translators whom I have chosen for comparison, only two recalled the prosody, Cahen has three beats but not the rhythm: "*toute couche sur laquelle se couchera l'homme aux écoulements, sera impure*" [every bed on which lies the man with the discharge, is unclean], and Dhorme has two recalls but without the rhythm "*toute couche sur laquelle se sera couché celui qui éprouve un flux est impure*" [every bed on which lies he who has the flux is unclean]. As for the others, nothing. And yet it was an etymological figure. To hold the rhythm is not more difficult, it is a question of programme.

And now I take an example of rhythmic intensity points, where the disjunctive accent creates mini-dramatization, micro-expectation effects, which are certainly not linguistically correct in French. But no less than in the Hebrew. It is a momentary effect of discourse, with a counter-logical syntax, intensity in speech. Which in my version can be heard as such, Chapter 8, verse 2. The effect is entirely created by interruptive rhythms which, by splitting up logical groups, presentative followed by its noun, intensify speech: "*prends Aaron / et ses fils avec lui // et les / habits // et l' / huile de l'onction /// Et le / taureau de l'expiation // et les / deux béliers // et le / panier de galettes*" [take Aaron / and his sons with him // **and the** / garments // **and the** / anointing oil /// **And the** / bull for the sin offering // **and the** / two rams // **and the** / basket of biscuits].[44]

I put a mini-break five times between the presentative, the article and the noun following it to render the disjunctive accent on "*wə'ēṯ.*"

It is a moment that is completely marked, in comparison with an enunciation that is most of the time smoothed out. But similar effects are very frequent. They completely disappear with currentfrenchifyers. I am decurrentfrenchifying.

But already Pierre Jean Jouve was saying, in the preface to his translation of Shakespeare's sonnets, that to establish a French poem first, one must "do the opposite of 'Frenchifying,' to carry French poetry over to the poetic means of another idiom so that it competes with this foreign tongue" (1969).[45]

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44. *Qaḥ'eṯ-'ahărōn / wə'ēṯ-bānāyw 'itwō // wə'ēṯ / habəḡāḏim // wə'ēṯ / šemen hammišəḥâ /// wə'ēṯ / par haḥaṭṭā'ṯ // wə'ēṯ / šənê hā'ēlîm // wə'ēṯ / sal hammaṣṣwōṯ.*

45. My translation (PPB).

It is not translating literally, or word-to-wordly: the unit is not the word but the mode of linking words together.

To see what becomes of this mode, I will quote here, but briefly, only four translations. Dhorme says: "*prends avec toi Aaron et ses fils, ainsi que les habits, l'huile d'onction, le taurillon de l'expiatoire, les deux béliers et la corbeille d'azymes*" [bring with you Aaron and his sons, as well as the garments, the anointing oil, the bullock of the sin-offering, the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread].

Where in the text there are eleven disjunctions, with three intensities, which I render typographically, and six times "*wǝĕt̲,*" called the "biblical and," Dhorme has four commas, and only two "ands" remain, one has become "as well as," four have been deleted.

La Bible de Jérusalem says: "*prends Aaron, ses fils avec lui, les vêtements, l'huile d'onction, le taureau du sacrifice pour le péché, les deux béliers, la corbeille des azymes*" [take Aaron, his sons with him, the garments, the anointing oil, the bullock of sacrifice for the sin, the two rams, the basket of unleavened bread]. Six comas. "And" has disappeared. Why even bother calling it biblical?

Chouraqui has: "*prends Aaron et ses fils avec lui, les habits, / l'huile de messianité, le bouvillon défauteur, / les deux béliers, la corbeille d'azymes*" [take Aaron and his sons with him, the garments, / the oil of messianity, the rightdoing bullock, / the two rams, the basket of unleavened bread]. Five commas. Only one "and" remains. The text is set on three lines. The other versions are typographically in prose. But both lines fall on a secondary disjunctive accent, of level two intensity, and the only major accent, which acts like a cæsura, the *atna'h* accent, which in his translation should correspond to a new line after "messianity," is drowned in the second line. Hence, behind all the hype this translation generated, it distorts rhythm more than any other version, through pseudo-versification.

Finally, the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible, or TOB (this name sounds like it is insidiously hinting to say in Hebrew that it is the right one, *tov* meaning *good*): "*prends Aaron avec ses fils, les vêtements et l'huile d'onction, le taurillon du sacrifice pour le péché et les deux béliers, et la corbeille des pains sans levain*" [take Aaron along with his sons, the garments and the anointing oil, the bullock of sacrifice for the sin and the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread]. There are only three commas and three "ands" left.

And just for the fun of destroying an idol, I am adding the phony fairest of them all, which a purely ideological operation has reintroduced on the Bible market; here I mean Le Maistre de Sacy's translation: "*prenez Aaron avec ses fils, leurs vêtements, l'huile d'onction, le veau qui doit être offert pour le péché, deux béliers et une corbeille de pains sans levain*" [take Aaron along with his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the calf which must be offered for the sin, two rams and a basket of unleavened bread].

Four commas, one "and." It is the banality of correct French. Nothing more. In other and numerous examples, it is the wordiest and the most unintentionally comical, especially when it comes to "*impuretés légales*" [legal impurities], in Chapter 15 of Leviticus, and to "*abominations défendues*" [forbidden abominations]. But there is more.

What the climate of the text does, through its rhythmics, does not come through in any of these variations on correct French.

But rhythm, the power of speech, does not merely depend on disjunctions or prosody. What plays a striking role is the syntactical violence.

They are not only what Jean Paulhan, in his book on *hainteny*, called "the illusion of the translator" due to contrasts between two language systems. They are clearly marked, intended cases.

From this point of view, there is a need to make audible what all other translations have muted.

There was such a syntactical violence in psalm 18, verse 41: "*et mes ennemis // tu me les as donnés la nuque*" [and my enemies // you gave me them the nape]. Through apposition. Which has yielded variable gloss, such as: "*tu les fais fuir devant moi*" [you make them flee before me] (the Rabbinate) or "*tu me fais voir leur dos*" [you show me their backs], for La Bible de Jérusalem.

Here is a particularly strong, and difficult, example in Chapter 15, verse 18 of *Et il a appelé*: "*Et une femme // que / couche un homme / une couche de semence /// *" [And a woman // on whom / a man lays down / a layer of seed ///] – *wə'iššâ // ʼăšer yišəkaḇ 'îš / ʼōṯāh / šiḵəḇaṯ-zāraʻ ///*.

The phrasing is complex: it is a double accusative. Literally: "*Et une femme // que / la / couchera un homme / une couche de semence*" [And a woman // that / which / a man will lay down / a layer of seed]. That is to say "*coucher avec*" [lie with], but that expression is used later on, in verse 33, to say: "*pour un homme // qui couche / avec une impure*" [for a man // who lies / with an unclean woman] – *ʼăšer yišəkaḇ / ʻim-ṭəmēʼâ*. It is therefore marked, and violent by making the man the subject, the woman object number one and the seed object number two.

Such phrasing is rather banal elsewhere: *to teach someone something.* A double accusative.

To this an etymological figure is added, for the expression "*couche de semence*" [layer of seed] – *šiḵəḇaṯ-zāraʻ* –, which is a variant of the verb *shakhav*, "to lie," and *mishkhav*, "a bed." Ostervald, Cahen and Segond call this "*pollution*," and the TOB "*pertes séminales*" [seminal discharge]. And Le Maistre de Sacy, in verse 16: "*l'effet de l'usage du mariage*" [the effect of consummation of marriage].

Here, Le Maistre de Sacy translates: "*la femme dont il se sera approché*" [the woman whom he will have approached]; Ostervald: "*Et quand une femme et un homme coucheront et auront commerce ensemble*" [And when a woman and a man

will lie and engage in commerce together]; the Rabbinate: "*et une femme avec laquelle un homme aurait habité charnellement*" [and a woman with whom a man has lived carnally]; La Bible de Jérusalem, which preserves social manners: "*quand une femme aura couché maritalement avec un homme*" [when a woman will have maritally slept with a man]; the TOB: "*quand une femme a eu des relations sexuelles avec un homme…*" [when a woman has had sexual relations with a man…].

I will stop here. I chose this example precisely for its grammatical naught… not everything is like this.

The invisible and inaudible comical in all this is the contrast between the undeniable reverence surrounding these texts, being reputed as sacred, since they are religious writing, and the carelessness in the handling of the signifiers.

This contrast is readily explained by the very fact that it is religious literature, therefore edifying, and as such handled like material for conversion.

The reasons will change depending on if it is Kafka, or Dante, or Shakespeare's sonnets or plays. But the nucleus of the problem contains the same information: translating the sign, or translating the poem. And it is the poem which is both the source and the target. The sign does everything to miss the target. And then there is nothing left, neither source nor target. All that remains are hypocritical tears induced by the discourse of identity.

Religious texts in translation, God or Allah

I say "religious texts," and not "sacred texts."[46]

My work situation is aimed at showing, in a general way, including and exceeding religious texts, that what is at stake in translating is the need to transform the whole theory of language. But in so doing, also, transforming the entire notion of the religious, the notion of the religious text, and the notions of the sacred, the divine and the religious.

To be sure, I am talking about a revolution, all the more urgent that no one, or almost no one, seems to sense it.

To awaken this sense chloroformed by the contemporary, and so that there may truly be an encounter between subjects, I am proposing the following seven-point programme:

1. to work at recognizing the confusion in what we call modernity, without realizing what we are saying; and at recognizing that far from exceeding modernity we are never sure of reaching it; and that the universal should no longer be confused with the universalization of the West – a notion just as mythical as the East;
2. to work at acknowledging that neither do we know what we are saying when we oppose invention to tradition, but that there would be more to think if we opposed activity to product;
3. to work at acknowledging that we do not know what we are saying when we confuse *langue* and language, *langue* and culture, *langue* and literature, *langue* and discourse;
4. whence it should be understood that when we translate a text which functions as literature, it is not *langue* that needs to be translated; not only what an utterance says, but what a text does;
5. and that the thought of *langue* is a thought of the sign, of discontinuum, unable to conceptualize the continuum, which is double: body-in-language and the language-poem-ethics-politics continuum, a reciprocal interaction and implication of these four elements so that each transforms all the others; thus, from the point of view where I stand – which is that of observing the how,

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46. I began explaining the difference in Chapter VI, "Translating: Writing or unwriting."

how a text does what it does, which is different than looking at what it says, and which shows that if we only look at what it says we forget the how, while the how includes the question of what it says, from the point of view of power and not of meaning – we must say again and again that it is not Hebrew that made the Bible but the Bible that made Hebrew, and that it is not Arabic that made what Arabic has become, but the Quran which made what Arabic has become, even though it is not theologically correct;

6.   and that, consequently, in what we call creative writing, we must no longer think form and content in terms of a binary opposition, a spontaneism and an experimentalism, and oppose identity to alterity;

7.   but that the universal at stake in this whole ordeal is that identity occurs solely through alterity, through the invention of its own historicity. Through which art is indispensable to thinking ethics and the political.

To which an eighth point can be added, as it is an irresistible must: the urgent need for humour in the face of all of this pseudo-seriousness which takes its well-established position for contemporary movement: to rediscover the comical of thought. Works of public utility.

Worst things first: that the ordeal should come from a text everyone considers religious, the religious being the temple of academicism. And of bad faith.

I will necessarily limit myself to a very small number of examples. For the Quran, it is obvious, just one example will do. I have examined a few others elsewhere, noting the different effects of the negative theology in the Bible and the Quran, in the chapter "Dieu absent, Dieu présent dans le langage," [Absent God, present God in language] in *L'utopie du Juif* (Meschonnic: 2001a). From *la ilaha illa alla*, "no god except God," the diffusion of the name of God throughout Arabic.

Here I will focus on just one word, a name, God, the first word of the first verse of the first sura: *bismillahi erra'hmani erra'himi* [in the name of God the merciful, full of grace]. Which is accompanied by the poetic problem of its double qualification. Which I will address first. The orality in repeating almost the same is audible.[47] I will quote eleven French translations.

The first three, chronologically, present the same variations on meaning and treat only meaning: "*clément et miséricordieux*" [clement and merciful] (Savary 1751); "*Le Très miséricordieux, le Compatissant*" [The All-Merciful, the Compassionate] (Édouard Montet 1925); "*Le Bienfaiteur miséricordieux*" [The merciful Protector] (Régis Blachère 1949). Likewise Michel Orcel: "*le Miséricordieux, le Tout-Compatissant*" [the Merciful, the All-Compassionate], who would rather

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47.   The suras' opening phrase over which all translators break their backs, according to Michel Orcel (2005: 170).

stay "away from this experimenting and research"[48] (Orcel 2005: 171). It appears that all of the following versions have sought, diversely, to render the return of the same signifier: "*le Très Miséricordieux, le Tout Miséricordieux*" [the Very Merciful, the All-Merciful] (Muhammad Hamidullah, 1959); "*celui qui fait miséricorde, le Miséricordieux*" [he who has mercy, the Merciful] (Denise Masson 1967); "*le Miséricordieux plein de miséricorde*" [the Merciful full of mercy] (Jean Grosjean 1979); "*le Matriciant, le Matriciel*" [the Matricious, the Matricial] (André Chouraqui 1990); "*le Maître de miséricorde, la Source de miséricorde*" [the Master of mercy, the Source of mercy] (René Khawam 1990); "*le Tout miséricordieux, le Miséricordieux*" [the All-Merciful, the Merciful] (Jacques Berque 1990); "*le Tout-Maternant, le Clément*" [the All-Mothering, the Clement] (Youssef Seddik 2002). Three have added an etymological note: Denise Masson, André Chouraqui, Jacques Berque. Only one tried to render the etymology of *ra'him*, the matrix, the uterus, it is Chouraqui. Where it should be noted that, in French, unfortunately, "*matriciel*" [matricial] is a technical and administrative term, mathematical-like, little able to convey the force of fecund femininity which here characterizes the divine. The problem is identical for the form if I may say cousin to the same word in Hebrew, *ra'hûm*, in the same usage qualifying the divine. It refers to the feeling of a mother for the child who came out of her womb. There is thus well more to it than the notion (culturally Christian) of mercy. As a temporary, fully temporary rendition, I propose: "*le maternant le maternel*" [the mothering the maternal] or "*la tendresse le tendre*" [the lovingness the loving].

But the main issue is elsewhere. It is in the rendering of *bismillahi*. Eight of these same translators put: "*au nom de Dieu*" [in the name of God] (Savary, Hamidullah, Masson, Grosjean, Khawam, Berque, Seddik, Orcel). Three kept: "*au nom d'Allah*" [in the name of Allah] (Montet, Blachère, Chouraqui). In other words, they did not translate. They left the name in Arabic: *Allah*. And this immediately reveals a theological issue, that is to say a considerable, dramatic theologico-political issue, very much of current concern. If we say "*God*," in translation (in whichever language), we place ourselves in a universal perspective: "God" means that there is one God, who is the "lord of the worlds" (verse 2), the "King of judgment day" (verse 4). It is a universal. Which by definition harbours both the whole world and everyone. Whatever the translating language.[49]

But if we translate, or rather if we do not translate, keeping "Allah," we make of Islam a universal. And it is this non-translation which is the most accurate from the theologico-political point of view of Islam, with the consequences it implies, on

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48. My translation (PPB).

49. N. J. Dawood translates "In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful."

the continuity of Islam into Islamism. And from humanism into *ummanism*, from *ummah*, the religious and political community. "God" is the denegation of Allah. Alas… It is not at all the same to say "God is the greatest" and "*Allah aqbar*." It does not take much for everything to topple over. All it takes is the name of God.

It is why this first example is so important, straight away, so that be heard what translation can either show or hide (and most of the time it hides it): that what we call a "sacred text" includes stakes that no other text probably carries. But to hear and to sort out what is fused into this notion, precisely – and, paradoxically, only the so-called "sacred" text can show this – it is capital, even vital, to acknowledge a difference that the religious is hiding, between the sacred, the divine and the religious.

And I start back at Genesis, in the Bible. I have defined the sacred, may I recall[50], from the standpoint of the theory of language as the fusional of human and cosmic, including animal. Hence the sacred is anterior to human language, and it implies a logical realism. I add that the poetic problem is then not to confuse the sacred and the nostalgia of the sacred. Which situates my critique of Heidegger (Meschonnic 1990), when he understands Hölderlin's verse, *Das Heilige sei mein Wort,* "the holy be my word," as if Hölderlin had written that "the holy is my word." It was only a wish.

The distinction I am making is important, and vital. With the divine as a life-creating principle which is passed on to all living creatures, even to the smallest of them all. And in Genesis the divine is all tangled up with the sacred. In this legendary story of the beginning of the world, there is no religious yet.

Then a rupture happens, in Exodus (3 : 14), when Moses asks God his name, God answers with a verb, and I translate: "*je serai / que je serai*" [I will be / that I will be]. A repetition of the promise made in verse 12: "*je serai avec toi*" [I will be with you]. In my opinion, and according to this fantastic story, as soon as a verb is used and that there is no longer a name, a negative theology begins: the divine breaks radically away from the sacred and becomes an absolute transcendence, which both makes magic impossible (it was possible to act on a name, by a name) and opens the infinity of history and infinity of meaning.

Up until then, there is no religious. Given these definitions of the sacred and the divine, we can acknowledge that the religious is what codifies and organizes itself in the book of Exodus and especially in Leviticus. The religious is the socialization and ritualization of the sacred and the divine. It appropriates them, it includes them within it to the point of fusing into one with them, into a wieldy weld. It is their fundamentalism. In other words, the religious is a generalized

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50. See Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words," and Chapter VI, "Translating: Writing or unwriting."

theologization of values, ethics and politics. The religious is thus theologico-political. The emitter of ethics, such as anyone separating the divine from the religious, like Spinoza, is said to be atheist.

We refer to the religious, unknowingly, when we speak of a "sacred text," a "sacred language." Biblical Hebrew has an interesting expression, I have already mentioned it[51], it does not say that language is sacred, it says *leshôn ha-kôdesh*, "language of holiness." Where I understand that "holiness" is the divine in its transcendence, and language, that which is related, and only related, to it. A point of view which I believe to be Maimonides' when he calls idolatry any cult of what is human. And language is human.

That said, I am not speaking as a theologian, but from the point of view of one who listens to language.

And here, strangely, the religious cannot see the difference between a religious text – that is to say considered from the religious point of view imparted by the text – a religion and a literary or philosophical text.

Because the religious is unavoidably, essentially, dualist, as it sees the religious text as truth, and it does not see that the notion of truth works exactly like the notion of meaning, by producing a residue, form. That is also why the religious is essentially a hermeneutics.

The paradox is enormous, that the more the religious sees power in its religious text, the more it weakens it. Because it converts the continuum of language, and specifically of its power, into the discontinuum of the sign.

It is what makes the infinite weakness, for example, of denominational translations of the Bible. The weakness, also, of philosophy and hermeneutics seeking in it the original – that is typical of Christian hermeneutics – without knowing what Saussure said, that it is the functioning that is the origin.

Thus there lies, much beyond its particular domain, the interest of rhythm in the Bible, in Hebrew, which is called *ta'am*, "taste": a corporeal, oral, gustative metaphor of language, which sparks, in my opinion, a chain reaction. Because the totalization of the rhythmic organization imposed on biblical texts creates a situation which throws into a crisis our language-thinking habits, which are those of globalized dualism: sound and meaning, form and content, verse and prose and (in a mess of misconceptions) poetry opposed to prose.

All of this no longer holds before biblical rhythmics. It is why for seventeen centuries Christian hermeneutics, which does not see how Greek it is, or rather neo-Platonic, applies itself to denying this rhythmics. While all Jewish hermeneutics sees is music and logico-grammatical punctuation.

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51. In Chapter VII.

This is what the religious is incapable of conceiving. Because it hides it, hides it from its own self, it does not know it is hiding it, and cannot allow anyone to know that it erases the very fact that it erases what it is erasing.

Which makes it all the more fun to work at recognizing it and making it heard.

Thus rhythm, but in the Bible. The rhythm of the Bible. That is radically irreducible to our Greek conceptual categories of language. The categories of dualism – the sign. Those of the master of philosophy Mr. Jourdain. Those of deaf exegetes, all ecumenically united in a same and different not listening to rhythm. In the ignorance produced by their very exegetical knowledge, exegetically knowledgeable. And the more knowledgeable they are, the less able they are to listen to rhythm.

The battle between the sign and the poem, always.

The Bible as parable and prophecy of rhythm in language. A parable because, all the while being a particular example, this example goes for all languages, all texts and all times. A prophecy, because it is, upon having rejected common representations of language, the postulate of an unthought which has yet to be thought, against all traditions, against all the theologico-political: yes, a cultural revolution. A quiet one, since no one, or almost no one, will hear it. Which makes it twice as urgent. And thought, twice as comical.

The Hebrew biblical text is thus a rhythmical semantics of the continuum. And we think language in terms of Greek dualism, of a semiotics.

A prophecy concurring in fact with the notion of utopia, in both senses of a lack of commonplace ideas, a rejection of commonplace ideas, and of an imperious intimation to think what is not thought.

First for the Bible, its comprehension and its translation. And then, for the whole conceptuality of language in general, whatever the languages and their cultural relationships, from the moment it is no longer a question of the meaning of words, but of the power and continued activity of a text. And to think power is different from thinking meaning.

It is the absolute opposite of reducing language to meaning. Where, as useful and indispensable as it may be, hermeneutics has always been blocked, and continues to block the thought of language.

Whence emerges a double effect of urgency and power: the necessity of thinking the poem in order to think the whole of language, the whole of language activities, including of course all of those other than the poem. Because what is thought depends on what is unthought, because meaning depends on the movement of meaning.

The other effect of urgency and power is giving, or giving back, to translating its role of testing language theories and practices. To evidence that the first and sometimes only thing translated is not the text but the representation of language

at work in the act of translating. All the more misknown is that the reduction of language to *langue*, to the sign, is sure of itself. Wherein lies precisely the arrogance of philology, and of hermeneutics. They have no conception of their conceit.

From the moment we understand that what there is to translate is what a text does to its language.

Then starts a chain reaction that nothing can stop.

If the theory – which is pondering the unknown – of rhythm changes, the whole theory of language changes. If the theory of language changes, so too the whole view of power in language changes and becomes listening. If listening becomes the sense of language and of power, then translating practices also change, or will change, as well as reading practices. And writing too.

Hence to critique the sign which the deaf take for a destructive attitude appears as the very act of constructing a thought of meaning as multiple and infinite, and of its power, in language.

In emblematic terms, to be developed, we must cross over from the philosophy of Descartes to that of Spinoza to think language, we must go from the canonical semioticism to thinking Humboldt, for whom the categories of *langue*, represented in grammars and in dictionaries, were but the "dead bones of language."

It is thus a question of radically transforming modes of thought.

The better to recognize the differences, usually muddled, and devoid of any issues, between the sacred, the divine and the religious.

In oder to detheologize what we call thought. To detheologize ethics too. To acknowledge the necessity of thinking within it a radical historicity of values.

This work calls for stripping. Old paintings covered in layers of grime can be stripped. Here it is matter of several cultural layers.

We must denounce this feeble and unconsciously condescending pact in the way it seeks "ordinary French," current, basic. Not to mention that it instrumentalizes the text in order to convert it. To my knowledge, this is done in French, in Spanish, in English.

This practice determines two audiences, with two types of translation: style is added for a supposedly literate audience. The others presumably do not need it.

And I also mean by "to defrenchify" to upset this inanity opposing so-called poetic language to so-called ordinary language. Two real entities – that is, two illusionisms.

In other words, the task to be considered and carried out is to be considered and carried out for every language, and it is an ethical task: to clearly show that the separation between a text for the literate and a text in current French for the vulgar, the linguistically correct, is an ignominious ethical and political act, and poetic poverty. A human defeat: a defeat of the human for a victory of the theologico-political. From this point of view, the poetically correct is an accomplice.

All this work of stripping seeks nothing other than to have the Hebrew of the poem, and the poem of the Hebrew heard again. For the Bible. No longer the "*Dieu des armées*" [Lord of armies], but the "*Dieu des multitudes d'étoiles*" [God of multitudes of stars]. Where we recognize at once the multisecular ideological mass which ends up opposing, in Hegel, a religion of hate to a religion of love.

We could not have shown more clearly, from this tiny example, that the stakes of the poem are ethical and political.

To recall only one example of the role of translations as erasors seeking currency with current French, hurrying past Hebrew, an example which is a parable unto itself and applies to all texts of the Hebraic Bible, I will quote "*et le chant est qui chante*" [and the song is that is singing], which I analyzed in the chapter "Translating: Writing or unwriting." I am referring to it.

The parable of "and the song is that is singing" doubles and even triples itself: by being customarily unheard and erased in translations, by concurring with Mallarmé's thought of the poem, and the major theoretical proposition – that it is the poem which makes the poet, not the poet who makes the poem.

Rhythm is the why. The why and the how.

It is why we must retranslate. The how and the why are inseparable. But the why commands the how.

In neutral value, a translation can be said to be good or bad. In evaluative value, the absolute of identification is arrived at between value and definition. Which was what Claudel did, upon reading the Vulgate, when he said that all French translations made him sick to his stomach. In this sense I can say: the Bible has been translated in English, in German, the Bible has yet to be translated in French.

The only justification for this maximalism is that something has changed in how language is thought, how rhythm, the poem, the relationship between the divine and the religious are thought.

Against the current and ancient rule of the erasor.

The fact of aiming for the *natural*, as if the text had been written in the target language, erases the act of translating as such, and erases (tends to erase) possible linguistic, cultural, historical and poetic specificities. The result: translation is an erasor.

In other words, the ideology of the natural is not *natural*. It is *cultural*.

To believe that literalism suits poetry, the poetic stance, is a gross error, which does not know itself to be such, because poetry is not made of words.

Because the word is not the unit of discourse anyway, but a unit of *langue*. We believe we are being loyal to the text. We are being loyal to the sign.

Where it appears that those who believe blindly that there is good common sense in this do not realize they are confusing discourse and *langue*, thus that

they only have a *langue* linguistics. Which means they are a good seventy years behind the times at least. And as they probably do not even know, we can say that they do not know what they are doing. And will continue this way for a good while to come.

As for the confusion between poetry and form, and of verse in particular, or parallelism, there too a reorientation is to be expected.

Retranslating changes, transforms, is transformed solely through listening to the continuum of rhythm and prosody, the continuum between body and language, between *langue* and thought. Therein lies its entire justification. Otherwise retranslating only starts over again what the sign has been doing forever, in which case we cannot call even it retranslating.

Translating, when it involves an invention of thought, can no longer remain in the theoretical fossil separating a general theory of language and a theory of translating. Any translation necessarily supposes a representation of language, any literary translation supposes a theory of acts of literature, that is a poetics – otherwise it is entirely relying on (and trapped in) hermeneutics, and hermeneutics supposes and knows only the sign, only questions of meaning.

A translation of what pertains to poetics supposes that it is no longer *langue* that we translate, but a system of discourse. Concepts change. It is no longer (only) what words *say* that we translate, it is what a discourse *does*. No longer just *meaning*, but power.

Retranslating then transforms the whole theory and practice of language, when rhythm (which itself has gone from the alternation between a same and a different to the organization of the movement of speech) transforms all of theory and practices of language. Transforms thinking into listening. The sign, as far as it is concerned, sees only itself. Just like the religious.

And religious texts, in comparison to texts commonly deemed literary or philosophical, probably push to their peaks the ethical and political stakes of translating. Because they are, in essence, the exhibitors of the theologico-political, thus of every translating's politics. Translating "God" or "Allah" is political.

Why I am retranslating the Bible

I am retranslating the Bible to make heard what all, yes that is right, all other translations erase. It is why I rejoice at listening scrupulously in French to the accents of the text, the *te'amim*, which are its rhythms, its prosody and also the violence of its grammar. Through which I rhythmicize French. Pleasure is in the recitative, where the others only translate the *récit*. I work to make the poem heard, something different than the meaning of words.

By departing from other translations, which is different from simply critiquing them, I am not attacking them. It is not an *against* which is at stake, it is a *for*. When *Les cinq rouleaux* was published, in 1970, I titled my first essay *Pour la poétique*.

Ever since, ceaselessly, I have been deepening this *for*. For the poem. Which to me requires the inseparation of saying and living, the deepening of the continuum between body and language, the continuum making the poem, which I have defined, and keep coming back to because it is necessary, as the transformation of a form of language by a form of life and a form of life by a form of language. This work is not only accomplished through all my poems, my poems in my life and my life in my poems, but also through translating and thinking the poem, thinking translating. That is why it is a battle, a battle of the poem against what we call the sign, this representation over two thousand years old of language as the separation between form and content, letter and spirit, body and soul. *Sign is death.* The death of the poem through this separation of life and language. It is why *the for* is also against all that is against the unity of saying and living. And translations? Well, they are undertaken, especially in the case of the Bible, by people full of science and full of faith. But what I learned by working with the Hebrew text, and by looking at what translations do to it, is that the whole science of exegetes hides a limitless ignorance of the poem, which it hides even from them, and the more faith there is, the more bad faith there is. The result is that translations show an outrageous carelessness for what they pretend to be revering. The poem has disappeared. By seeking currency with current French, it is customers they seek. Converts. A double perverse effect of the religious.

The Bible is a founding text, but founding is an ambiguous term, because it is already set in the religious. Rather I mean that there is in the Bible, in Hebrew, a work of language which is unique. It acts as a parable, a theoretical lever, a prophecy. It is rhythm, encompassed, symbolically, by the word *ta'am*, which first

designates the very corporality of language, before designating, later on, a raison d'être. Whence an organization of the movement of speech through *te'amim* in the entire biblical text, radically foreign to our Greek representation of language in verse and in prose. This continuum of rhythm is then our theoretical lever to transform the heterogeneous categories of reason, in order to think language, the poem, ethics and politics as interacting. Which launches a cultural revolution. All the more so that it is theologico-politically denied and misknown.

Because what is leading our representation of language is theologico-politically programmed. Hence the search, presented as scientific, for an original text, destroys the text. It is a hunt for origins because the theology of our Christian world is tormented by a major identity crisis: to be *Verus Israel*. As for the religious, more generally, it is politically motivated insofar as it confiscates for its own benefit the sacred and the divine.[52]

And it comes with what I call sanctimoniousness or the academicisms of the religious. In the French translations, they are mostly Christianisms, as we say solecisms. A nice one is "*parvis*" for *'hatzer*, the yard. Since "parvis" refers chiefly to the space in front of a church. But the nicest is "*Dieu des armées*" [Lord of armies] for *ĕlōhê ṣəḇāʾwōṯ*, which I translate by "*Dieu des multitudes d'étoiles*" [Lord of multitudes of stars]. Good examples of bad faith.

Pickled in Hellenization, it is first the opposition between verse and prose. Whence the old nonsense pitting poetry against prose. Even Aristotle knew it was an error. So much so that, as most of the time we do not know what we are saying when we speak of poetry, and we do not know that we do not know, we add another academicism of thought when speaking of "biblical poetry." An unknown notion in the Bible. When it is used to say that Song of Songs is more "poetic" than Leviticus, it is both confusing feelings and poetry, and an effect of reading only in sign-translation. On this, biblical "parallelism" invented in 1753 by Robert Lowth pastes a rhetoric of substitution onto an absent metrics.

Hellenization also because the Septuagint is the feeder text of Christianism and, for centuries, preferred over the masoretic text, with the inconvenience always denied that any difference with it would prove nothing, precisely because they have the text they translated, which has disappeared. A problem relating to the Christian rejection of the masoretic text, the notation of vowels and *te'amim* having come rather late, from the 6th to the 9th century. But in consonantal writing vowels were not notated. And the names of *te'amim* not only designate a graphic form but also gesturing and orality, which prove that the notation only put in writing an orality that necessarily preceded it.

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52. As I have discussed it in Chapter V.

The result is that most translators erase the text's poetics. No, not most, all. As enormous as this may seem, it is a fact I keep noting. And when there is a semblance of versified typography, it is worse than when it is prose because the internal hierarchy between the intensities of the *te'amim* is falsified. And it is not only about disjunctions and junctions, there is also the syntactical violence, the effects of serial semantics. It is exactly what I am working to translate. Generally, in the world of the sign, "form" is left to the source language, and what is passed on, in the target language, is meaning, rhetorically rearranged. Yes, the Bible in Hebrew is a lesson in rhythm, and it transforms the current, and Greek, notion of rhythm.

And even the Aramaic translation of the Hebraic Bible by Onkelos (2nd century) derhythmicizes, as Onkelos does not separate the translation from the gloss. Different times, different attitudes. Which in no way belittles its moments of beauty, as when he renders *nefesh 'haya* by *rua'h memalela*, "living soul," by "speaking breath."

And the worst perhaps is in Exodus 3:14. When the Rabbinate translates in 1899 "*Je suis l'Être invariable*" [I am the unvariable Being] not only are they copying, as it happens more often than not, Lazare Wogué, whose translation dates from 1862, but they are not translating the Hebrew, they are translating the Septuagint, "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν," which Wogué was actually critiquing, because "*je suis celui qui est*" [I am the one who is] does not "*conform to Hebrew.*"[53] The problem is not just with the unaccomplished of the verb "to be," but also with the grammatical fulcrum *ăšer*, which Wogué even saw as "because."[54] As for myself, I proposed "*Je serai / que je serai*" [I will be / that I will be]. And I make way for the disjunctive accent on the first *'ehəyeh*. The long note I joined to my translation explains that it is the repetition of the promise made in verse 12, a promise whose future opens onto infinite history and infinite meaning.

But then, if translations are erasors, one could think that it is possible to hear the rhythm in the Hebrew original. But there is no guarantee there either. For three reasons. The first is that reading in Hebrew does not prevent the reader from remaining deaf to the theory of language and rhythm that I am initiating starting from the Bible, and thus from remaining in academicisms. Second reason, I am trying in fact to *taamicize* the translation of this text as poem and, from there, to *taamicize* the whole of translating, the whole theory of language, to show the necessity of a poetics of society. The Hebrew, by itself, does not tell this. Third reason, to state that it has not yet been translated, and not only in French but in any other language, is not to say an absurdity or an arrogance, but it does say two things: one

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53. My translation (PPB).

54. Here is the Hebrew: *'ehəyeh ăšer 'ehəyeh* (PPB).

being that if we do not translate rhythm we will not have translated what language does, but only the meaning of words, and the other being that, according to this apparent maximalism, the value and the definition of an act of speech are one and the same, and if we do not understand this we will remain in the mediocrity of the sign. By this act of rhythm, I am not concluding, I am opening.

The Bible, atheologically. This connection between these two terms must seem to some like a scandal, if not an absurdity. But before the shouting starts, let us remain calm, we must hear ourselves out.

A certain rabbi was offended by this "detheologizing." Rabbinically, I sympathize. But it is the same rabbinizing that is still excommunicating Spinoza.

Hence, all the while "denying" (Eisenberg 2005)[55] my translations any originality, though they are the only ones making the *te'amim* visible and audible, he opposes the "translator as traitor" – now here is an original thought – and that "the real quest of Judaism is meaning and not interpretation." Following which, to him, a "work exclusively devoted to translation remains on the margins and absolutely deprived of meaning" for whoever "is truly interested in the Bible's message rather than in pseudo-scholarly semantic ranting." By which he shows that he knows nothing of my poems or my theoretical work on rhythm and language, that are "pseudo-scholarly semantic ranting." An unintentional pastiche of the famous scene with the translator in *Persian Letters*.[56]

It is a delight to read in so little words such a dose of ignorance and incomprehension. I am grateful to him. The clichés replace any reflection: "the translator as traitor," to which are opposed the "meaning" and the "message." Never try to teach a sign to sing. In opposing meaning to interpretation, he plainly does not know to what extent he is thinking sign instead of thinking language, and thereby he does not know that he is thinking Greek-Christian. Well done for a rabbi, and, well, not as rare as we may think, just look at the Rabbinate's translation. Christianized-Frenchified. And that is the very effect of the "message" and of the religious on this religious text. It is why he did not understand anything in "we must detheologize the Bible," and he cries wolf. He places poetics in the category of "absurd literary coquetry" which evokes to his mind "rambling" on "pure poetry." He confuses what I call "sanctimoniousness" with the Nietzschean motif of "God is dead." Come on, you can do better!

But what I mean by "to detheologize" should not be causing such panic. As what I mean by it is complex. And it is first reacting against, in order to stop, the multisecular Christianization of the biblical text. Which is theologizing.

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55. All quotations from Eisenberg are my own translations (PPB).

56. Which I have quoted at the beginning of Chapter VI, "Translating: Writing or unwriting."

It is also working to elucidate, of course not to everyone's liking, the confusion between the sacred, the divine and the religious, a necessity of thought, and to stop confusing the theologico-political with things of faith. And when I add "to desanctify," it is to deacademicize, after having deideologized. To top it off, the paradox: it is to rehebrewize, to erase the erasure of the irreducibility of biblical language to Greek thought of language which has permeated us for so long that we no longer notice it.

To detheologize is to desemioticize. As the sign is Greek, even if it is so globalized that we no longer think it induces a denial, that is multisecular misknowledge of rhythm which has had its effect on the denial of rhythms that *taamicize* Hebrew.

And also, to detheologize, through rerhythmicizing, is to dearcheologize this text, whose "founding" status, paradoxically, is such that we no longer hear the text. Which denominational translations, including those of the Rabbinate, show pathetically. That is why I say again and again that it does not translate Hebrew, but the state of French Judaism of its time: 1899. Jewish inside, man outside.

Hence appearances are reversible, and to work at having the Bible-poem heard involves removing the religious.

Le Maistre de Sacy wrote: "these texts were conceived by God much more for Christians than for Jews."[57] This is confirmed by a very recent example, a fabrication which seems innocuous. The erasure of the Bible through its Christianization takes all kinds of forms. Including those that do not look like erasures. Hence an exhibition was held at the Galerie des Hospices in Limoges in the spring 2006 titled "*Torah Bible Coran, les chemins des Écritures*" [Torah Bible Quran, the paths of the Scriptures]. A telling choice of words: set up according to the three monotheisms, these "Holy Scriptures" refer to Judaism by the sole term "Torah." Rendered of course according to the usual Christian version by "*La Loi*" [the Law] (Zabbal 2006: 49). Which is absolutely restrictive, and doubly so: *Torah* just designates the Pentateuch and does not mean "the law," with its legalist and formal implication, but rather "Teaching," the way to show the way. And the Hebraic Bible, with its 24 books, contains, according to the customary terminology, the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. By reducing the entire Hebraic Bible to the Torah, this presentation of the "Holy Scriptures" assigns the term *Bible* to the sole Christianism of the triad. It is a castration, removing from Judaism the Bible, *its* Bible, that is to say its "books," in order to simply turn it into the text of Christianity.

But when we juxtapose the three monotheisms, for form, and as it is banally done, we do not think of it as another deceitful, all rhetorical affair. Including

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57. My translation (PPB).

when the Bible is presented as a founding text and triply so: "the founding text of three revealed monotheisms – Judaism, Christianism and Islam – the Bible appears as the 'Book' since the Middle Ages"[58] (Armel 2005: 33). A triple illusion, since, theology after theology, the second erases the first, and the third annexes and replaces the first two.

Biblically, with all its fabrications and denials, Christianism has been a collage of impostures (the virgin instead of the young woman, in Isaiah, to announce the Virgin Mary) and mythology, which has also contained a killing machine, with *Verus Israel*, an invading machine (which is what the term "catholic" says etymologically), a machine set on dehebrewizing the Bible.

It is why, poetically, as much as I can, I retranslate.

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58. My translation (PPB).

Rhythm-translating, voicing, staging

Could the theatricality of language be an ethics of the voice? Where poem and theatre would meet to fulfill one another. It is a question which has the whole body yessing.

It is the theatricality of the rhythmics of biblical verse, its accents set by means of the mouth, where orality is buccality, through rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech. Ironically, the sign showcases itself, but it is the poem that runs the show, the poem is the stage director, who, provided it is being listened to, turns translating into staging, as Antoine Vitez said.

The difference between texts not only resides in the question of "what," "what does it mean," but mostly in the question of "how," of the signifying mode.

The transformation in listening to rhythm having come from the biblical verse, it is interesting to recall that one of the words to designate the Bible, in Hebrew, is *mikra*, which means "reading," but also "convocation" and "religious assembly," from the verb *kara*, which can very well mean, depending on the context, to call, to shout, to summon, to name or to read. It is an internal parable of the relationship between reading, voice and community. Neither silent reading nor solitary reading. And not the opposition of reading to writing. Which says that we stand severally in language and that orality is founder, of the subject and the social.

Maimonides says somewhere that the events of the Bible are "events of the soul." And if there is, in this orality, a parable, an allegory of language, it is of a generalized theatricality. We could speak of a restricted theatricality and a generalized theatricality. Both diverse. Restricted theatricality, of drama, is not the same in Molière and in Labiche, in Corneille, in Tchekov… And we could see there a representation of the general theatricality of language.

I believe that there is something like an ethics of the voice in the drama work of Claude Régy, in whose work I have rejoiced, ever since his staging of *Paroles du Sage*. The thought of language and of theatre, in Claude Régy, achieves what I have tried to put in my rhythm-translation of biblical texts.

There are oralities of speech, with their gestures. And individual, or cultural, ways of oralizing. And they belong to anthropology and sociolinguistics. The poetics of the voice is something else, it is when an invention of speech happens, an invention of orality which transforms orality. The paradox: what we call writing,

in the poetical sense, is where this orality takes place. And it is Claude Régy's place, through his sense of speech.

It is also the place of translations that remain active, that are encounters of the voice. It is Baudelaire and Poe. It is how Lermontov has translated into Russian some of Goethe's short poems, both Lermontov and Goethe in one.

This rhythm-translating escapes literalism as much as current language and translation seeking current language. Instead of being a product of interpretation, the translation is then productive, as the original text is productive. It is both a poetics and an ethics. We are overwhelmed by something that envelops meaning but is not meaning. Language produces networks which can only be discovered through a certain way of looking. Which does not prevent them from acting. Language, as in the functioning of Ophelia's name in *Hamlet*[59], acts, not randomly, not intentionally, it is active whether or not we are conscious of it. A new variable in the linguistic unconscious.

In the staging of *Paroles du Sage*, the actor chosen by Claude Régy, Marcial Di Fonzo Bo, was in language as much as language was in him. He acted it out, with his whole body, and even standing almost still he communicated an extreme tension.

Because of the cultural effects of psychoanalysis, relationships have often been established between body and language, but without a poetics of the body in language. With Marcial Di Fonzo Bo, it was both the power of language in the body and body in language.

I submitted, in *La rime et la vie* (1990a), that the poem did the opposite of hysteria: hysteria, a somatization of certain things of language, as Freud had demonstrated, and the poem, an invasion of the body and its power in language. Not flesh, but maximum rhythmicization. And it is also this intensity that is played out by the slowing, the stillness in the voices, the lights and the shadows that Claude Régy does. A maximum of body in language. The junction between the actor's physicality and language's physicality.

Nothing to do with the mimicry of ancient diction manuals: when reading the adverb "quickly" in Lafontaine's fables, accelerate the flow. Grumble for anger. What redundancy.

Flaubert speaks somewhere of an inscient poetics.[60] There is an inscient poetics of the body and of orality in Claude Régy's work.

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59. Which I have studied in the chapter on "Le nom d'Ophélie" in *Poétique du traduire* (1999).

60. My translation (PPB).

I was very touched when I met Antoine Vitez, who has meant a great deal to me. Meeting Claude Régy is the renewal of this. And a deepening. Through his work with the voice.

Vitez had made an extraordinary attempt, in the *Phaedra* he staged at the Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry in 1975. There are recordings of it. There were moments of cantillation and voices stretched to a cry. I still remember the "a" completely, madly stretched in the verse "*Aricie a mon cœur, Aricie a ma voix*" [Aricia has my heart, Aricia has my voice]. This work on orality in *Phaedra* remains unique in Vitez. When, thereafter, he staged *Britannicus*, diction returned to being relatively classical.

I gathered from this that there is no ordinary alexandrine, contrary to what a contemporary neoclassicist believes. The alexandrine, in Racine, could be different in each of his plays. Which has yet to be proven, of course. But it seems to me it is poetic reason that made Antoine Vitez unable to recreate in *Britannicus* all the passion there was in the verses of *Phaedra.* The intuition of the specificity of the verse, as metrics of discourse, in each of these plays. It would have to be studied in Corneille, Racine… Not the same phrasing. If a play, in everything it says and in its speech mode, is the only one doing what it does. We find what Reverdy called *means*. The elements of a system. Vitez has not theorized this, which also delivers the effect of a parable: to do knowing the reason why, without knowing how to say it nor wanting to say it.

When this goes through translation, it has to be mouthable. There is a seemingly small example which I find telling, at the beginning of Raymond Lepoutre's translation of *Hamlet* that Antoine Vitez had played at the Théâtre National de Chaillot. And a translation much criticized then by an *agrégé* of English in an article in the *Figaro*, to which Vitez had asked me to reply, and thus brought me to look closer at that translation.

When the changing of the guard takes place, one of them says: "I think I hear them." And Lepoutre had translated by: "*Je crois, je les entends*" [I think, I hear them], while Hugo (the son) and practically everyone translates by: "*Je crois que je les entends*" [I think that I hear them]. From the point of view of schools of translation, Lepoutre is making a mistake, but what is interesting is that he transforms a grammatical term into a rhythmical term, by a comma, a juxtaposition, a paratax. And I liked that he had the nerve, around such a small element, to which no one would have paid any attention, to create a problem. He could be criticized for creating an effect where there is none in the original. But he brings something important to the climate of the play, right from the start. This translation shifts grammar towards orality. It does not comply with the rules. It is a cue for the actor to gesture language. It is staging the translation – the very accomplishment of Vitez' word. Translating as staging. Stage directions directly in the text.

And for Claude Régy, the text is not a given, but a proposition. This is what I hear in the typographical blocks, between spaces which render differently the three intensities of disjunctive prosodic accents, and where rhythm for the eyes and rhythm for the ears meet. Syncopations, interruptions, rises in the voice, certainly no drops. And Claude Régy accomplishes the intended diction in my typography. It is the same poetics, his comprehension of theatre and my comprehension of the poem.

There is more than the hierarchy of the pausal value of accents in Hebrew. My own subjective sense of language intervenes as well. The pauses, but also even the choice of every word, the most simple, concrete, the most sensuous. To render what I felt in these texts. With everything I knew too. As the use of tenses for what Benveniste calls discourse, not the narrative tenses: the present perfect, so that the continuity of an act of utterance reaches the reading subject, who is saying the text. Hence I translate by the present perfect: "*Et il y a eu un soir et il y a eu un matin / jour un*" [And there has been night and there has been morning / day one] and not "*il y eut un soir et il y eut un matin*" [there was night and there was day], the preterite being the tense of the past, without any living relationship with the enunciator. For continuity, from this speech coming from time immemorial right up to the one saying "I." The topicality of the text, and its presence in the present. Poetic invention starts from the moment where it continues to be, indefinitely, its own effect. Hence meaning partakes of the infinite.

Doing infinitely exceeds intentionality, all the while including it. It is the element which allows us to be conscious of what is going on, all the while preceding this consciousness. Two words in the Bible gather this work very strongly. It is in Exodus (24:7): *na'ăśeh wǝnišǝmā'* – "we will do and we will listen." Doing precedes listening, precedes the very knowledge we have of what we are doing. Which implies prophecy in this doing. Poetically, we do what we do before knowing what we do. And we must never do what we know.

There is also an inscient ethics.

Embiblicizing the voice

Embiblicizing, yes that is what translating the Bible does to the voice.

But only if listening to rhythm is understood within the Bible-poem as a theoretical lever that serves to transform the whole representation of language, to unveil a universal, starting from a specific concrete particular, superbly misknown because of eighteen centuries of theologico-political rule. Because the Bible is a religious text.

Embiblicizing, provided we take the rhythm in the Bible, yes, as a parable of the major role of rhythm in language, through the short-circuit which makes of the neither-verse-nor-prose in biblical Hebrew the very problem of poetic modernity. And the prophecy of rhythm in language.

This, against eighteen centuries of denial and deafness theologically programmed, religiously maintained – no worse faith than people of faith who have relentlessly pasted a Greco-Christian model onto an organization of language which is irreducible to it. From absent Greek metrics to absent Arabic metrics, right down to the substitute rhetoric of biblical parallelism which still is the commonplace idea. But which to me is a theologico-rhetorical pasting, overlooked by traditional Jewish exegesis, which yet is all eyes in the matter.

While biblical rhythmics knows not of verse nor prose. It is entirely poem. But not in the sense where verse is opposed to prose, resulting in this unparalleled inanity we still hear in certain poets, who actually believe they are saying something by opposing poetry to prose.

Or else this rhythmics is entirely prose. But then it is in the sense of Pasternak, who said in 1934 at the first Soviet Writers Congress that:

> "Poetry is prose…the voice of prose – prose in action, not at second-hand. Poetry is the language of organic fact, that is, fact in all its living consequences…Pure prose in its pristine intensity – this is what poetry is."
>
> (Pasternak in Ivinskaya 1978:73)

The paradox is that it embiblicizes you.

Pasternak's departure, like a departure from ruling clichés, has remained, as far as I know, a unique case, in the "terrible concert for donkeys' ears"[61] as Éluard was saying at a time when one was surrealist.

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61. My translation (PPB).

The poetic short-circuit is there. And by *embiblicizing* I am intent on making heard the inaudible of this whole poem prose. Erased in all translations, denominational, whichever the denomination, and poetizing, whichever the poetization.

And the religious who revere this text paradoxically erase what gives it its power: rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech, which is the continuum of affect to concept, the continuum of body-in-language, of the poem extended to the infinite of language.

The religious also erases the distinction which this text makes between the sacred, the divine and the religious.[62] Yet, theologization, what the religious do not see, seeing only truth, is a semioticism, the sacralized form of dualism.

Embiblicizing, is thus also, paradoxically, detheologizing, that is to say desemioticizing, decurrentfrenchifying this language. Which has never been current language. To recover the power of the continuum erased by the work of erasors, that is translations seeking currency through current French in order to sermonize. Whatever the denomination.

It is a matter of radically historicizing language, discourses and the poem. Against the globalized rule of the sign.

The problem is a poetic problem, in the sense where in order to hear and make heard the action and the power of speech, and not only the meaning of what is said, we must trace back the serial nature of the entire text, the sequence of the all-rhythm. Power yields meaning. Meaning, without power, is the ghost of language.

By *the voice*, I mean orality. But no longer in the sense of the sign, where all we hear is sound opposed to meaning. In the continuum, orality is of the body-in-language. It is the subject we hear. The voice is of the subject passing from subject to subject. The voice makes the subject. Makes you subject. The subject makes itself in and through its voice.

And that, wonderfully enough, the Hebrew word *taʻam* has said without even knowing that that was what was meant, this word being usually rendered by disjunctive or conjunctive rhythmic accents, but which specifically means the taste in one's mouth, the flavour of what one is eating. A metaphor-prophecy of what Tristan Tzara said, and probably without knowing it, when he said: "thought is made in the mouth."[63] No, he probably did not know all that he was saying by that, just as a poem most often is what makes us hear everything that we do not know we are hearing.

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62. I have already discussed this in Chapter V, "The sense of language, not the meaning of words" and Chapter VI, "Translating: Writing or unwriting."

63. My translation (PPB).

Right away comes the very theatricality of the voice.

Hence, the *ta'am* is the prophecy of the poem in the voice. In the sense where the poem announces its arrival against the stereotypes of the thought of language through the sign. To put poem into voice is what I call, coining the verb from the Hebrew word, *to taamicize* language, *to taamicize* translating, *to taamicize* French, since the poem in French is the French the poem will have you invent. Whence *to taamicize* all languages, the whole thought of language. To embiblicize is *to taamicize*.

And why this, to push and pull *langue* towards the invention of a subject, in the poem of a subject's voice, to bully the sign, this catastrophic division disjoining as heterogeneous to one another sound and meaning, oral and written, form and content, letter and spirit, body and soul, this game which is but heaviness of spirit. That is to say generalized discontinuum.

But then, translating the Bible-poem is an encounter of *taamicization*, serial semantics, and the poem-voice of who is translating, an encounter with the poem we have in our voice. And it is not the Bible that acts on the poem-voice, it is the other way around, it is the poem-voice that hears, listens, encounters, and that can make the Bible-poem heard.

The roles are reversed. It is the reversibility of listening. The encounter takes place in a moment where we relate to the infinite of history and to the infinite of meaning. A voice hearing its own history, a voice speaking its history is heard as a recitative. What we hear in it is not what it says but what it does. What it does to itself, to the one speaking it, and also what it does to the one hearing it. It transforms. It does what we do not know to be hearing. The work of listening is to recognize at certain moments, unpredictably, all we did not know we were hearing. The mouth to ear becomes the mouth to mouth.

The voice shows that it is with the mouth that we hear best. Just like Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, showed with the examples of Amos and Jeremiah that it is the ear that sees things.

Then, if translating is at stake, oddly enough we will find an either-or: writing or unwriting. But it is not a dualism, in which one plus one equals all. Sound and meaning, it is the sign. No, it is an against which is a for. Against the sign, for the poem.

The poem, I repeat again and again, because it must be said again, I define this as the transformation of a form of language by a form of life and the transformation of a form of life by a form of language. Hence a poem is the maximum relationship between language and life. But a human life. In the sense Spinoza gives to it in *Tractatus Politicus* (V:V), I have already quoted him but I will quote him again for the joy of thinking: life is not defined biologically but rather "by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind – *sed quae maximè ratione, verâ*

Mentis virtute, & vitâ definitur." Nothing to do with vitalism, which only opposes language to life.

Thus we must know that with the concepts of the sign all we can translate is the sign. The poem is erased. But everyone knows the poem is erased. It is precisely because we know it that we speak of the untranslatable. We resign ourselves to it. We are used to resigning ourselves. The translator of the sign is a used soul. As Péguy says: "Dead wood is wood that is extremely accustomed. And a dead soul is also a soul that is extremely accustomed"[64] (1961: 1399).

Translating the sign, it seems that we do not know any better, means not having any voice. The sign leaves us voiceless, all the while making us deaf.

Translating the poem, everything that is poem, including the poem of thought, supposes having some poem in the voice. It is only then that translating is rewriting. And after, as another toad out of the mouth, we say that translations become outdated. We confuse the *état de langue* with the state of the voice. From this point of view, no difference between so-called original works and translations.

Most of the works presented as originals are products of their times, not activities remaining active, no matter how old they are. They are thus like translations which are said to become outdated. They are bygone like their times. With their times.

Only works that are in activity age, simply meaning that they continue to be active. Indefinitely present in the present. As well as translations that are works, because they are poems of the voice, they too remain.

But writing is writing the poem that is in our voice. For that we must listen to ourselves. And none of us has quite the same voice. To listen to the history in our voice. To hear our mouth.

To embiblicize the sign.

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64. My translation (PPB).

Restoring the poems inherent
within the psalms

These texts are so well-known that we cannot tell that they are in fact misknown, inaudible.[65] So we must have them resound, recognized as poems. Covered as they are by several layers of paradoxes. Layers blotting them out, having been laid down by the passage of religions and languages. And by layers of ideas on language foreign to them. My attempt here, its sense and pleasure, is to strip these layers to restore the text. After all, it is done to ancient paintings that are cleaned to restore the brightness of their colours.

The challenge was thus to restore (what an ordeal!) the divine masked by the religious, and the rhythm masked by meaning. As the entire common conception of language sees only this schizophrenia, the splitting of the unit of language into two puppets, form and meaning. We are so used to it that we no longer realize that we are watching a masquerade. And then there are other maskings. Hebrew is erased by translation. Which is accepted as an only natural and inevitable fatality. In translation. Because translation commonly only knows how to adhere to the mechanical schema of form and meaning, together both forming the sign, which seems to double the opposition between the language to be translated (form on one side, the source) and the language in which the text is translated. Meaning on the other side. The target.

This opposition, which seems to make sound common sense, covers up two other senses: first it is not a language we translate, but a discourse, a text, which is what a subject does to its language, and if it is a poem or something of a particular power, it is the poem, it is this power that must be translated, and not just the meaning of what is said; and this is where we come up against the second opposition, banal even: what is said is inseparable from the movement with which it is said, just as what you give is inseparable from the way you give it, and then on we

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65. This was first published in issue 9 of "LEXI/textes," the Théâtre de la Colline's review, in fall 2005 to echo the staging by Claude Régy and Valérie Dréville of selected translations of the psalms, *Gloires* (Meschonnic 2001), under the title *Comme un chant de David.* I have made substantial changes.

are now no longer in the discontinuum between a form and a meaning, we are in the continuum of a physicality of language. We are in a poem of thought.

The psalms then. But I can no longer say "psalm." For reasons too lengthy to be developed here. Quickly: it is a Greek word, not Hebrew, and it entails and mixes two different words in Hebrew, one that I have translated by song, "*chanson*," the other by chant of glory, "*chant de gloire*." Whence *Gloires* [Glories] as the old new title of the songbook. Because it is not exactly a question of praising God either, it is a matter of telling of the greatness, the transcendence, the might of God. And from *gloria in excelsis Deo* to the entry "*gloire*" in the Littré dictionary (your everyday reference), oddly enough, I am innovating and I am not: I am restoring.

I dearcheologize, I detheologize, I desanctify, I dechristianize, I dehellenize, I delatinize, I decurrentfrenchify. And yes, my work brings me to neologize so much, what can I do. Which is probably the very expression of an incredible, an improbable adventure since it is going against the grain of nineteen or twenty centuries of Christianization, Hellenization, Latinization, dehebrewization of these texts which are, culturally, religious texts. And the religious even say that they are sacred texts. Whereby they do not see, blinded as they are by their faith, which also makes them deaf, how deep in idolatry they are. Whose definition I borrow from Maimonides, as the cult devoted to a work of human accomplishment.

Thus, in the exultation of the poem, I rehebrewize the Bible, which says nothing more than my working to make heard the poem's Hebrew and the Hebrew's poem. That is to say that I enrhythmicize French, enrhythmicize translating, enrhythmicize the whole thought of language. I am in fact *taamicizing* language, it is a delight, and I am coining this word from the Hebrew word *ta'am*. In medieval Hebrew it takes on the meaning of the rationality of a discourse. On its own this word is a parable. The parable of the corporeality of language, its buccality, which is the very physicality of its orality: what we have in our mouth.

To taamicize language is to deplatonize it. It is making the body-in-language continuum heard, the continuum of serial semantics, against twenty-five hundred years of thought on language based on the discontinuum invented by Plato (I admit the genius in it, after all Baudelaire did say that to create a cliché is genius), who added order (*taxis*), measurability (*metron*) and mathematical proportion (*harmonia*) to the Heraclitean continuum of rhythm as flow. It is a cultural revolution. And naturally the cultural does not hear it.

Because all this time, the cultural which has been filling our ears, sometimes taken both as common sense and science, puts rhythm into meter – look under "rhythm" in any dictionary, all you will find is meter, metrics, which has toads coming out of your mouth (remember the tale about toads and diamonds), this canonical rubbish according to which prose has no rhythm and, verse being

opposed to prose, poetry is opposed to prose. You do not realize it but your ears and mouth are full of them. Spit them out. And clear your throat.

Yet Aristotle had already said that meters are parts of rhythms. Not the other way around. But it is bull-headed stupidity that rules. The paradox of innovation: to restore Aristotle. To restore the continuity between action through language, action through the poem, ethics and politics, which lies with him. Which the sign's heterogeneous categories of reason, what linguists call the sign, form plus content, make forgotten. And what rules is the duality of one plus one equals all, as the sign is a totality, while language is an infinite. According to Humboldt's famous phrase: "an infinite use of finite means."

Hence the poem is a body-in-language continuum by way of rhythm as the organization of the movement of speech, which implies a specific subject, the subject of the poem, by which I mean the subjectivization of a system of discourse, and only this can transform the whole multisecular representation we have of language, of all of language, thus also of what it is to translate. And here, either we translate the sign, or we work at translating the poem. What I mean by *to taamicize*. Against the Greco-Christian which thinks for us and which, theologico-politically, has forever prevented from hearing what is irreducible in the continuum of the biblical poem.

The paradox, through a short-circuit which is a theoretical effect, is that this situation meets the very situation of modernity in poetry since Baudelaire, since there are prose poems, since it is difficult to go on holding to a formal definition of poetry, through verse. Even if certain contemporary poets continue not to want to hear, believing that there is a poetry-form, and that poetry is opposed to prose. Yet Shelley has said in *A Defence of Poetry* that opposing writers of verse to writers of prose was a gross error. And Aristotle – him again – already knew, through reading Empedocles, that one writes as a naturalist, even when writing verse.

It is all this mud, this grime of simili-thought that is covering the biblical text, while in Hebrew it is all-rhythm. Where, as the particular case that it is, as for any work, it becomes a parable and a prophecy of rhythm as a universal in language, not of rhythm according to the world dictionary of deafness, which presents it as the alternation between a strong beat and a weak beat, a more or less regular cadence of the same and the different, but rhythm in the sense of the movement of speech in language, and thereby a subject-form.

To taamicize, is to oralize, in the sense where orality is no longer sound, it is subject, it is thus translating the power of a language, and no longer just what words say. It is reviving Spinoza's interrupted sentence when he was saying: "no one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body" (1981: 112–113). Where precisely follows a sequence – he said *concatenatio*. A sequence of de-theologizations transforming the whole theory of language through a radical

historicization, and which makes of the theory of language a poetics of society, a language-poem-ethics-politics sequence. Yes, a cultural revolution.

As listening to the poem detheologizes three times. It detheologizes Christianization – an entire theology of prefiguration which, wanting to be *Verus Israel*, converts the theologico-political into the theologico-philological and the theologico-poetical. With its entourage of famous clichés, for example the "*Dieu des armées*" [Lord of armies] which, biblically, is just the "*Dieu des multitudes d'étoiles*" [Lord of multitudes of stars], as I translate it. It is not a fanciful invention: I refer to the Koehler-Baumgartner, a biblical dictionary. It is the first detheologization.

And this encatholicized theologization refused to acknowledge the rhythmical notation because it came late. Yes, since the Hebrew alphabet only had twenty-two consonants. The notation of vowels and reading rhythms was finally set up in the 9th century of the common era. Yet, we know that the names of the accents indicate staging directions for hand gestures, and melodic lines, all this being necessarily anterior to the diacritical signs invented later on, just as there was singing before music writing was invented. There you have the Christian objection. I dedicate it to the Museum of Arts and Traditions of Language. For the fossils collection.

There is also, following this first detheologization, a work on religious deafness specific to Jewish hermeneutics, a deafness to rhythm as an inclusive theory of language. With a few outstanding exceptions, Yehuda HaLevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra, it is a different kind of deafness. As Judaism knows the *te'amim* perfectly well, it does not have the reasons of Christianism for denying them, but either, as with Rashi, it assigns accents a mere logico-grammatical value, or it hears in them, which is most often the case, only the synagogal cantillation. And music prevents hearing language. That too is a commonly misknown element of the culturally hearing-impaired.

With all the wrong good cultural reasons of real historical relationships between poetry and singing, from *arma virumque cano* – the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*, "Arms, and the man I sing" – from real singing to singing as metaphor, to Ronsard's sonnets modified when set to music, and which set this fallacious symmetry of interchangeable terms between the "music of a poem" and "musical language." To hear the poem as the rhythm of a radical historicization of language, that is the second detheologization.

The third detheologization is based on the very reading of the biblical text, which clearly distinguishes between the sacred, the divine and the religious, while the religious, which has contaminated everything cultural in language, no matter the religion, indistinctly blends together the sacred, the divine and the religious, in such a way that the sacred and the divine end up indistinguishable from it, assimilated by it.

The paradox of the religious, just look at denominational translations, is that the sacralization of a text read as truth revealed produces, like the sign, a residue, form. Theologism is a semioticism. The worst thing, for the maximum reverence of a text, is that it weakens it, and because it is not listening – though the Great Other did say "Listen" – it does not translate the power, it only translates meaning. Up to and including the Rabbinate, it does not know how much it is Hellenizing, and Christianizing.

I translate following these three detheologizations, committed to translating the text's taste, its *ta'am*. Rehebrewizing is thus here nothing else than seeking to make heard, once again, the poem's Hebrew and the Hebrew's poem. It is not really what we could call rejewishing. In the sense where it is not a religious enterprise. Because of the religious' very attitude towards rhythm, in the sense I make of it. I am doing something different, which moreover is not without irritating certain proprietors of the religious, who react exactly like proprietors, proprietors of meaning, when I talk about detheologizing and desanctifying. Here lies the whole conflict between listening to significance, listening to the power of language and hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is necessary, and venerable. But its sole quest is for meaning, which is why it has already subscribed to the sign. I am in no way underestimating its necessity. I am trying to fight against its arrogance, which confuses totality and infinity.

Also, to dechristianize is not to pit one denomination against another, and the Rabbinate's against the Catholics' and Protestants'. On the contrary, I have never stopped pointing out the pains of language (the opposite of pleasures of language) in this translation. Which starts off badly, like all the others, from the very first verse: "*Au commencement, Dieu avait créé le ciel et la terre*" [In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth]. Period. Yet Rashi had clearly warned that the first verse was an incomplete sentence, and that after the second verse inserted as a parenthetical clause, the main clause was the third verse: it was light that was first created, not heaven and earth. No different than all the other erasors, I mean the other translations.

I am working on the sense of language as an atheological listening. I work to hear, and to make heard.

Translations show what they do not know they are showing, the show is obscene.

It is also why it is so much fun to watch. Hence in *Gloires* (120:7), *ănî-šālwōm*, "*je suis la paix*" [I am peace]. Exactly.

Le Maistre de Sacy: "*j'étais pacifique*" [I was peaceful]; Ostervald: "*je veux la paix*" [I want peace]; Samuel Cahen: "*je suis pacifique*" [I am peaceful]; Segond: "*je suis pour la paix*" [I am for peace], sounding like a political tract; the Rabbinate: "*je suis, moi, tout à la paix*" [I, myself, am all for peace]; Dhorme: "*moi, j'incarne la paix*" [myself, I embody peace]. Only the Traduction

œcuménique de la Bible, "*je suis la paix*" [I am peace], and Chouraqui, "*moi, je suis paix*" [myself, I am peace], have kept, diversely, the signifier. The Bayard Bible, "*Moi / je parle de paix*" [Myself / I speak of peace], exaggerates like the others. An erasor, like the others.

Certain examples are of major importance, including theologically. As the beginning of poem 22, verse 2[66], with "*à quoi m'as-tu abandonné*" [to what have you forsaken me], instead of the famous "*pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné*" [why have you forsaken me]. Where everything depends on rhythm. There is also an allusive value at play, according to which I translate in the first verse "*à qui la victoire*" [to whom the victory] instead of "*au chef de chœur*" [to the choirmaster], because in the Hebrew *lamənaṣṣēḥa* I tried to render what the word sounds (*menatzéach*), that is *netzach*, eternity, and *nitzachon*, victory, and Saint Jerome had already done this, with *Victori,* "to the victorious."

And the affect of the conjunctive accent groups into one breath *ʾēlî ʾēlî*, in verse 2, "*mon dieu mon dieu*" [my god my god], which yields more power than the disjoined succession of both words. Which changes nothing to the meaning, but makes the affective element heard.

And positional rhythms: "*les dents des malfaisants tu as brisé*" [the teeth of evildoers you have broken] (Glories 3:8), "*ma prière il prendra*" [my prayer he will take] (6:10); breaking rhythms: "*Tous fuient / ensemble pourris // pas un qui fait le bien /// Pas / même un*" (14:3) [All flee / together filthy // not one who does good /// Not / even one]; or syntax forcing the so-called current language: "*tu demeures // les chants de gloire*" [you remain // the chants of glory] (22:4), "*tous ceux qui descendent poussière*" [all who go down dust] (22:30); or prosodic effects: "*il entasse // et ne saura pas qui ramasse*" [they accumulate // and know not who will liquidate] (39:7).

And here is one of the poems of the book in its entirety, first because it is short, then also for its particularity, which for me has both the rare form of a drollery and the charm of a song.

Gloires 133
1 *Chant des montées   de David   vois qu'il est bon   et qu'il est doux*
         D'être frères tellement ensemble
   [A song of ascents   by David   behold how good   how nice it is
         To be brothers so together]

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66. In most existing English versions of the Bible, the attributions preceding certain psalms are not counted as verses, contrary to the French versions. This at times offsets verse numbers. For example, verse 2 of Psalm 22 in French corresponds to verse 1 in English (PPB).

   2 *Comme la bonne huile   sur la tête   descend   sur la*
      barbe   la barbe d'Aaron
         Qui descend   sur la bouche de ses habits
  [As fragrant oil   on the head   runs down   in the
    beard   the beard of Aaron
       Which flows down   in the mouth of his robes]

   3 *Comme la rosée du Hermon   qui descend   sur les*
      montagnes de Sion   car c'est là   qu'à ordonné
      Adonaï   la bénédiction
         La vie   pour toujours
  [As the dew of Hermon   that settles   on the
    mountains of Zion   for it is there   that
    Adonai ordained   the blessing
       Life   everlasting]

– *A song of ascents*: fifteen poems (120–134) have this title, generally under-
stood as the climbs to Jerusalem, or the pilgrimages.
– *By David*: it is the written attribution. It entails two things: some of these vic-
tory chants have probably been composed by David, we do not know which
ones. And, symbolically, the entire book is attributed to David. Hence the
division of Glories into five books, in response to the five books of Moses–
Pentateuch (which only really means "five books" in Greek).

Then, it is the rhythm of a song: "*vois qu'il est bon / et qu'il est doux /// D'être
frères tellement ensemble*" [behold how good / how nice it is /// To be brothers so
together]. It is no accident that it has become a popular Isreali song. In French it
is a rhythm of 4-4 /// 3-4. In Hebrew: *hinnēh mah-ṭṭwōḇ / ûmah-nnāʿîm /// šeḇeṯ
ʾaḥîm gam-yāḥaḏ* (4-4 /// 4-3). I have not deleted, not added anything.

    The blanks separating the groups, in the typography, are a simplified equivalent
of the hierarchy of disjunctive accents separating the groups in the biblical verse. An
organization without any equivalent: twelve disjunctive accents and nine conjunc-
tive ones for Glories*,* Job and Proverbs (eighteen and nine for the other books of the
Bible). It is the only rhythmical organization of the verse, in the whole Bible. Follow-
ing three intensities, which I render visually by three spacing intensities. Whereby
rhythm is "organization," and not (metrical) alternation of strong beats and weak
beats. No metrics. Therefore no opposition between "prose" and "verse." You will
have to make do. My point exactly: the Greco-Christian West never has made any-
thing of it. The trial is ongoing, one could say, has been for nineteen centuries. I will
not go further into detail here. So, if we look at other translations (keep in mind that
if you are reading in translation, it is not the Bible you are reading, you are reading a
translation of the Bible), we immediately see that others have not asked the question

of rhythm, they have thus not responded to it. In the way Paul Claudel "answers the psalms" and said: "I do not always understand, but I answer nonetheless."[67]

Also, for these few words, the workshop must be opened to all. Segond (1877) said: "*Voici, oh! qu'il est agréable, qu'il est doux / Pour des frères de demeurer ensemble!*" [Here oh! How pleasant it is, how nice it is / For brethren to dwell together!]; The Rabbinate (1899): "*Ah! qu'il est bon, qu'il est doux à des frères de vivre dans une étroite union*" [Ah! how good it is, how nice it is for brethren to live in close unity]; La Bible de Jérusalem (1955, 1998): "*Voyez! Qu'il est bon, qu'il est doux / d'habiter en frères tous ensemble!*" [Behold! How good it is, how nice it is / to dwell as brethren all together!]; Dhorme (1959): "*Ah! Qu'il est bon, qu'il est doux / pour des frères d'habiter ensemble!*" [Ah! How good it is, how nice it is / for brethren to dwell together!]; the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible (1975): "*Oh! quel plaisir, quel bonheur / de se trouver entre frères!*" [Oh! such pleasure, such happiness / to find oneself among brothers!], and Chouraqui (1985): "*Voici, quel bien, quel agrément, d'habiter, frères, unis ainsi!*" [Here, such goodness, such pleasure, to dwell, brethren, thus united!]. The song has disappeared. Because the rhythm has disappeared. And in the psalms according to Olivier Cadiot, in the Bayard Bible, "*Voilà / quel bonheur // Quel délice / d'habiter en frères // Tellement ensemble*" [Here / such happiness // Such delight / to dwell as brothers // So together], it has also disappeared.

See how in their confrontation translations both confirm one another and self-destroy. The erasors are future erasees.

As for the drollery, there seems to be here a rare case of Hebrew humour to point out (while Jewish humour is so talked about): it is this cascade of oil running down Aaron's beard (twice the beard), and compared to the mountain dew, which also runs down. Yet this oil is not hair lotion, it is the lotion of sacralization, and the skirts of Aaron's garments are, by metaphor, designated as a mouth, which will drink this oil. Let us not forget that Aaron is himself the "mouth" of Moses (Exodus 4:14). Segond and Dhorme, instead of keeping the metaphor, put: "*sur le bord de ses habits*" [on the edge of his clothing]; the Rabbinate: "*le bord de sa tunique*" [the edge of his robe]; La Bible de Jérusalem: "*le col de ses tuniques*" [the collar of his robes]; the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible and the Bayard Bible: "*le col de ses vêtements*" [the collar of his clothes]. Only Chouraqui, in his etymologism, maintains the metaphor: "*la bouche de sa chape*" [the mouth of his cape].

Hence, whichever way we ask the question of poetry in the Bible, or the question of the relationship between a religious text and a poem, translating a text from the Bible, and what we call here the psalms, which are a mix of music and

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67. My translation (PPB).

speech, is first and foremost a poetic problem. Which reverses the usual relation-ship between interpreting and translating: translating the power, the rhythmic continuum can no longer come after interpreting. It is something else: "to inter-pret" remains in the realm of meaning, nothing other than sign.

With the "psalms," there is practically no récit, no story. Everything is in the recitative. Neither are there dates or authors assigned. Even the mention of Aaron is just an allusion, metaphor, and floats somewhat in timelessness. It is what hap-pens to this short poem. The other "psalms" each have their own way of making the poem. But this is an entirely different story.

It is all this you hear, and you do not know you are hearing it, when Valérie Dréville speaks these poems. They are written to be carried by the physicality of a body and a voice, a voice walking, in the dark on the brim of light. It is the deep connivance, already ancient and which is to me one of the world's won-ders, between the stage set by Claude Régy, the voice played by Valérie Dréville, the speech performed by translating. Theatre becomes an oracle. The spectator is no longer reading the poem, he is inside it. And theatre becomes an ethics of the poem.

Why a Bible blow to philosophy

> In fact, philosophy itself is a divine service.
> (Hegel 1962)

I wrote *Un coup de Bible dans la philosophie* (2004) [A Bible blow to philosophy] because I love language, when language transforms life and when life transforms language. That is called rhythm. And rhythm, so redefined, against the common thought of language recorded in all dictionaries, is the poem.

I tried, and I have been working at this for a long time, to make understood that the Bible, in its language, is an adventure in rhythm both unique and maximal, because the Bible is a continuum of rhythm.

The major paradox, which invisibly erases the Bible, is that the religious, since it is a religious text, erases the poem; that the Christian religious has denied all of this rhythm under its rule, by virtue of a quest for origins that kills origin; and that all translations, since the Bible is essentially read in translation, erase this organization yet consubstantial to the text. I show why and how.

It is an enormous pleasure, as it is a question of sharing with everyone this suppressed power. It is what I render when I retranslate. And why "against philosophy?" Because philosophy is the accomplice and beneficiary of the common thought of language, through the discontinuum of the sign. Elementary, Doctor Commonsense. Listen, you will see.

After the first blow, we must ponder. Give ear. Why, the question also commands how. It is truly a question of detheologizing ethics and politics, detheologizing language, to work from the poem on the language-poem-ethics-politics interaction, to denounce the pact philosophy made with the sign. And the rhythm in the Bible, through its specificity, acts here as a theoretical lever. As well as Spinoza's thought, the poem of thought in Spinoza.[68]

Hence the undertaking is double, from one translation of biblical texts to the next, and from one thought to the next. It is why the distinction I have discovered, or learned of, between the sacred, the divine and the religious, seems to me capital and vital.

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68. Which is why I wrote *Spinoza poème de la pensée* (2001b). But also *Le langage Heidegger* (1990). Precisely because I am not a philosopher. And I still have a score to settle with philosophy.

I gather from this, as I go, an ethical and political remotivation of this old coupling of realism and nominalism, usually relegated to logic and to the Middle Ages. The paradox is that this remotivation should come precisely from the biblical language described as being holy or sacred, and thus theologized. As the very functioning of abstracts in this biblical Hebrew is typically nominalist: *ḥayim*, life, is the plural of *ḥay*, living – life is, primarily, the living, as *neourim*, youth, plural of *na'ar*, is, primarily, the young ones. One example of many. The most beautiful probably being *ra'hamim,* the plural form of *re'hem*, the matrix, traditionally translated by compassion or mercy, and which I understand as the feeling a mother has for what has come out of her womb, and I translate by "*les tendresses de ton ventre*" [the tenderness of your womb] (Meschonnic 2001, 40:12).

It is exactly like the famous example discussed in Abélard's time, and it posits the problem again: *humanity*. According to realism, humanity exists and individuals are fragments of humanity. According to nominalism, only individuals exist, humanity being the whole of individuals. A question of point of view. But with different ethical and political consequences. Realism implies a massification, through essentialization, it is the logic of fascisms. Only nominalism can make an ethics of subjects possible.

Clearly the indistinguishable fusion into the religious of the sacred, the divine and the religious does not allow for this ethics. It is not irrelevant that this ethics stems from speech acts, which presuppose the separation between the sacred and the divine, where the divine since Exodus 3:14 is radically separated from the sacred, as Spinoza said, with his *Deus sive Natura*. Negative theology is a paradoxical starting point for a radical historicization of life. And the theory of language is necessary in order to think ethics. Against the theologico-political.

Which leads ethics of language to critique what I call the heterogeneous categories of reason, manifest in the regionalism of university disciplines separated according to their autonomy, including philosophy. Specialty by specialty. Where philosophy is especially guilty of being both the accomplice and the beneficiary of the sign. Depending on its essentializations.

The sign rules over hermeneutics, and over the little essentialisms derived from Heidegger. It is why I ended *Un coup de Bible dans la philosophie* with musings on forgetting about Hegel and recalling Humboldt.

These essentializations are dim and lax, and their contemporary success shows that they meet the horizon of expectations of the cultural.

Which is why my critique is seen as polemic, though it is the acknowledgment of the functionings of historicities, not a battle for power over thought. But the absence of thought is well established, just think of the success of "to understand is to translate."

This is why humour, but also the comical, are valuable triggers to show how naked the king is. And the sign, the sign is naked. But it does not know it. Seriousness does not know it, does not know that every science produces its own ignorance, and prevents knowing, and it does not know that it does not know.

Is this not good enough reason to laugh? Theory, being the search for the unknown of thought, watches knowledge like one watches a show. It is both a tragedy, as is the theologico-political, and a comedy that thought has a duty to share. To intervene in thought, and work to change it.

Whereby thinking sets off a joy of thinking which is an ethics unto itself and a poetics of thought, an erotics of thought. In sum, quite a programme.

CHAPTER XV

Grammar, *East of Eden*

John Steinbeck, in *East of Eden*, wonders about the intertwining of translating, and ethics, in "sixteen verses of the fourth chapter of Genesis"[69] (Steinbeck 1952: 301). The story of Cain and Abel. In fact, everything lies in one word of verse 7, the last one. And in the next verse, Cain kills Abel. One character quotes from the King James Version, which in the French version is translated the following way: "*Certainement, si tu agis bien, tu relèveras ton visage, et si tu agis mal, le péché se couche à la porte, et ses désirs se portent vers toi, mais toi, **tu le domineras**"[70] (Steinbeck 1956: 381). It is this "***tu le domineras***" [thou shalt rule over him] which caught my attention because it was a promise made to Cain that he would rule over sin. Then Steinbeck's character takes a copy of the American Standard Bible, which says:

> '*Do thou* rule over him.' Now this is very different. This is not a promise, it is an order. And I began to stew about it. I wondered what the original word of the original writer had been that these very different translations could be made.
> (Steinbeck 1952: 301)

So they set to studying Hebrew. And one of the characters notes:

> The American Standard translation *orders* men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in 'Thou shalt,' meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word *timshel* – 'Thou mayest' – that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if 'Thou mayest' – it is also true that 'Thou mayest not.' Don't you see?
> (Steinbeck 1952: 303)

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69. It is Anne Brunel, from the group Escambiar, in Toulouse, who has brought this text to my attention and led me to pore over it.

70. The King James Version in fact goes differently: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." And I translate by: "*Si tu fais bien, ne seras-tu pas accepté? et si tu ne fais pas bien, le péché couche à la porte. Et vers toi **sera** son désir et toi tu règneras sur lui.*"

And he goes on: "Any writing which has influenced the thinking and the lives of innumerable people is important" (Steinbeck 1952:303), and "a man is a very important thing – maybe more important than a star. This is not theology" (Steinbeck 1952:304).

The very discussion attests to the inseparability between language and ethics, through the problem of translation. It is enlightening to take on the enquiry and carry it forward.

I translate (Meschonnic 2002, 4:7):

> *Est-ce qu'il n'y a pas si tu fais bien   tête haute   et si   tu ne fais pas bien   à l'entrée   l'égarement se couche*
> *Et vers toi   sa convoitise   et toi   tu auras l'empire sur lui*
> [Is there not if you do well   head high   and if   you do not do well   at the door   confusion crouches
> And unto you   its lust   and you   you will have empire over it]

By "*tu auras l'empire sur lui*" [you will have empire over him], I translate *timshol-bo*[71], where *bo* means exactly "in him," in the sense of "against him." And *timshol* (not *timshel*) is the second person of the unaccomplished *mashal*, a verb meaning "to rule over, to have power over." The unaccomplished implies that the action has not reached completion. Whereby it is a present continuing indefinitely in the future. Of which the strongest example is probably Exodus 3:14, *ʾehəyeh / ʾăšer ʾehəyeh*, which I render, against the tradition, by "*je serai / que je serai*" [I will be / that I will be], since the promise only holds if it remains a promise, and it is its unaccomplishment that opens onto infinite history and meaning.

Depending on the case, the unaccomplished has the value of a present or a future. As is the case here. The imperative, grammatically, would be *mshol*. It is not the imperative. But the unaccomplished being an indefinite does not mean "you can." It is enlightening to see how the translations dealt with it.

Out of twenty-one translations, seven transformed this unaccomplished. Only five used the future: the Septuagint, "*καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις αὐτοῦ*" [and thou shalt rule over it]; the Vulgate "*et tu dominaberis illius,*" same meaning; the King James Version, already quoted; Le Maistre de Sacy: "*et vous la dominerez*" [and thou shalt master it] (your lust), and Fleg: "*et toi tu domineras sur elle*" [and you you shall master it] (the fault). Two used the present. The 1939 American version: "while you rule over it" (the sin), and Jean Grosjean: "*et tu la domines*" [and you master it] (the fault). Seven used the imperative: Luther, "*sondern herrsche über sie*" [but rule over it]; Buber: "*du aber walte ihm ob*" [now you overcome it]; Segond: "*mais toi, domine sur lui*" [but you, rule over it]; the Rabbinate: "*mais toi, sache le dominer!*"

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71. The corresponding transliterated biblical Hebrew is *timə̄šāl-bwō* (PPB).

[but you, master it!]; and Rashi commented: "*Si tu le veux, tu seras plus fort que lui*" [if thou wilt, thou shalt be stronger than it]; Chouraqui: "*toi, gouverne-la*" [you, govern it] (his passion); Dhorme and the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible: "*Mais toi, domine-le*" [But you, master it] (the sin). Four chose "you can": Cahen, "*mais tu peux le maîtriser*" [but you can control it] (the sin); the Spanish Biblia del Peregrino: "*tú puedes dominarlo*" [you can master it] (*el pecado*, the sin); the Italian translation by Disegni: "*ma tu puoi dominarlo,*" same meaning, and the American translation by the Jewish Publication Society: "yet you can be its master." Three preferred "you must": Ostervald, "*mais toi, tu dois dominer sur lui*" [yet you, you must rule over it] (his desire), and another variation: "*à toi de dominer sur lui*" [you have to rule over it] (Crampon and Osty). One translation rendered it by an interrogative phrase, La Bible de Jérusalem: "*pourras-tu la dominer?*" [will you master it?]. Another even used the passive voice, that is the New English Bible of 1970: "sin is a demon crouching at the door. It shall be eager for you, and you will be mastered by it," but with a note: "Or but you must master it."

These variations are telling of a difficulty. In fact, four[72] declared the text corrupted and unintelligible. Crampon: "Of rather questionable meaning"; Osty: "Text is altered and obscure"; the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible: "The Hebrew text of verse 7 is obscure and its translation is uncertain," and La Bible de Jérusalem:

> Approximative translation of a corrupted text. Literally: "Is it not that, if you act well, elevation, and if you do not act well, at your door couching (masc.) sin (fem.) and unto you his (masc.) lust and you will master him." The text seems to describe the temptation menacing an ill-disposed soul.
>
> (École biblique de Jérusalem 2003 : 43)

And they call this hermeneutics. Interpretation. The translationers take an elliptical and poetic construction for an "altered and obscure" text. This is why contemporaries of Mallarmé considered it untranslatable into French. Both full of themselves and empty handed.

Unaccomplished – the term states clearly that the action is not accomplished. The terminology is not innocent. A whole tradition, instead of keeping to the signifier, translates its own interpretation of the text, substituted for the versatility of the signifier. Right down to the very representation of a language supposedly given through grammars.

Hence Mayer Lambert (1946), who, for the verbal system of biblical Hebrew, future and past, uses terms from the French grammar for what he calls the future indicative, and translates for example Genesis 2 : 5 the reality of the context not

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72. All four comments are my translations (PPB).

the signifier: "*aucun arbuste des champs n'existait encore sur la terre*" [no shrub of the field yet existed on the earth]. I translate: "*Et pas / un buisson des champs / n'est encore sur la terre*" [And not / one shrub of the field / is yet on the earth].

He submits[73] that in addition to "a time to come," the future, that is the unaccomplished, "also indicates a permission, for example *nō'ḵēl*, 'we may eat'" (Genesis 3 : 2). I translate the signifier because it is the form of the meaning: "*Du fruit des arbres du jardin / nous mangerons*" [Of the fruit of the trees of the garden / we will eat]. Or, he adds, that it is "a possibility in the future or even in the past, for example *haleven mea shana yivaled*, 'can it (that a child) be born to a man who is a hundred years old?' (Genesis 17 : 17)." But the text says, with a future of improbability, what I translate by: "*Et il a dit dans son cœur / est-ce qu'à un fils de cent années / sera né un enfant // et est-ce que Sara / qui est fille de soixante-dix années / enfantera*" [And he said in his heart / to a son a hundred years old / will a child be born // and will Sarah / who is a daughter of seventy [sic] years old / give birth].

  Signifier – the meaning of the word is straightforward: that which signifies. To replace it by one of its signifieds is a misuse of language, but the most current attitude of our cultural tradition.

As another example (Genesis 44 : 34), Mayer Lambert translates *ēḵa 'e'ēleh* by: "*comment pourrais-je monter?*" [how could I go up?]. But the unaccomplished says, as I translate very precisely: "*Car comment / est-ce que je monterai vers mon père…*" [For how / will I go up to my father…]. Where we can clearly see that the "possibility in the future" comes both from the meaning and the context, and is perfectly encompassed in the signifier of the unaccomplished.

Hermeneutics is not innocent. Neither is grammar (as the description of a language system). An American grammar of biblical Hebrew (Harper 1901: §19, 20) poses the perfect for future events and the imperfect for past events, where the prophetical past is changed back to the future. In order to restore a reality, against what the text says. Hermeneutics is on the side of what philologists call *lectio facilior*, the easier reading. Self-satisfied reading.

So, "you shall rule over him" or "rule over him"? The interpretation itself turns into an ethics of self-satisfaction. And useless. Because the signifier of the unaccomplished contained virtually all of the interpretations. Also to choose one, the most accommodating one, is cheating turned into casuistry.

What the affair shows is that one does not translate on the basis of grammar, but rather on the basis of ethics itself.

Rashi made a clear distinction between the form of meaning and its interpretative handling. To substitute interpretation for translation of the signifier is

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73. All quotations from Lambert are my own translations (PPB).

to reverse ethics into a perversion. Its effect, unpredictable by customary herme-
neutics – which combines, with the best intention in the world, several false tru-
isms, such as to understand is to translate, or that we must interpret in order to
translate – is to highlight unwittlingly the major importance of ethics in language.
From signifier to signifier.

And translating shows, better than any other act of language, that an act of lan-
guage is an ethical act. Whence translating is more important for man than a star.

The Europe of translating

Europe founded its culture of language on Greece. It is Plato who continues to shape the thought of rhythm in all European dictionaries: a metrical definition, which reduces rhythm to meter, contrary to what Aristotle believed, that meters are parts of rhythms.

And we owe to ancient Greek thought the representation of language through the sign, which is universalized, with its serial dualism, its thought of the discontinuum alone, of sound and meaning, form and content, placing style in the sign, and hermeneutics in the sign. Europe is the sign.

And the sign is not taken as a representation of language, but as the nature and truth of language. While another point of view, and Saussure saw that on language there can only be points of view, another point of view, that of the continuum, the continuum of the body-in-language, of rhythm-syntax-prosody, the continuum of a serial semantics shows that the sign is but a representation, a representation hiding the continuum and preventing it from being thought. Thus preventing it from being translated.

Because translating supposes a representation of language. The representation that has prevailed for centuries, to the point of being the only culturally familiar one and reinforced by the knowledge of language sciences, a knowledge entirely subscribing to the sign, being that of the sign, translating translates the sign.

But as soon as there is an invention of thought, poem, literary work or philosophical work (not to be mistaken for discourses on), the work imposes the point of view of the continuum, since it is a transformation of a form of language by a form of life and the transformation of a form of life by a form of language. Hence translations in keeping with the sign are partially non-translations, erasors.

The task, and the difficulty, is thus to change the representation of language. To critique the sign through the poem.

The paradox, in a Europe traditionally taken as the original coupling of Athens and Jerusalem. Athens: philosophy and science, Jerusalem: the religious, itself split into Greek/Hebrew. The paradox is that the very piling up of academic traditions hides the fact that it is hiding a potential of transforming cultural clichés, which is at work without anyone listening to it, in the organization of the biblical verse's rhythm. Because this organization is that of the continuum in language. And listening to it transforms sign-translating into poem-translating.

This is our task today, which needs to be thought and done, starting with what makes and unmakes Europe, in the history of European thought of language.

Here, for the beauty of it, is the example Mikhail Bakhtin quoted in his book on Rabelais, even if it was not analyzed, pertaining to Lyubimov's translation of Rabelais in 1961. I like to quote this passage:

> It can be said that the Russian reader has read Rabelais for the first time, has heard his laughter for the first time. Though Russian translations began back in the 18th century, it was always of isolated passages, and no translator had managed, even by far, to render successfully the originality and richness of the Rabelaisian language and style. The task seemed exceptionally difficult. Some even went as far as declaring Rabelais untranslatable […] It is why, among all the literary classics of the world, Rabelais was the only one who had not entered Russian culture, who had not been assimilated by it (as were Shakespeare, Cervantes, etc.). That was a considerable lack, since Rabelais gave access to the enormous universe of popular humour. Now, thanks to Lyubimov's remarkable translation, remarkably conform to the original, it can be said that Rabelais speaks Russian, speaking with all of his inimitable familiarity and casualness, with all of his endless and deep comical verve. It is an event whose importance should not be underestimated.[74]
> (Bakhtin 1970: 147)

It is precisely for its value as parable that I retain this example, a parable of the war of the poem against the sign. Mandelstam said that there is always war in poetry. There is also, and foremost, the war of language. Whence the war of translating. Not only in the biblical verse. It is always the sign and the poem. Their war.

The basic observation, in the present situation, the rule of the sign, implies problems which are not all thought equally.

Translating is taken as the switch from one language system to another. Elementary Doctor Commonsense. Otherwise, from culture to culture, there would be generalized autism. But *langue*-translating forgets that all we translate are discourses. By thinking *langue*, we aim to switch from an alterity to our own identity, we oppose identity and alterity. Instead of the poem, and art, showing that identity occurs solely through alterity. Which we should then make heard.

Sign-translation erases what translating should make heard.

And here Europe's situation is particular, since it is the only cultural continent to know its founding texts exclusively through translation (ancient Greek, biblical Hebrew), save in the case of specialists.[75]

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74. My translation of Andrée Robel's translation of the Russian original by Bakhtin (PPB).

75. As I have developed it in *Poétique du traduire* (1999: 32–57), the Europe of translations is foremost Europe erasing translations.

Not to forget the ignorance, cultivated by the Christian culture, making it impossible to count those who ask in which language the Bible was written and believe it was in Aramaic or in Greek. Only a few passages are in Aramaic.

Hence, Europe is founded on translation, and the oblivion of what translations should do. The starting point, and the point of reviving reflection, is mostly this oblivion, and what this oblivion is hiding.

This oblivion is hiding the poem, which in turn hides the thought of the subject, and that the subject is what is at stake in ethics, that the poem is an ethical act. And if the poem is an ethical act whereby subjects are transformed, otherwise it is not a poem but poetization, then the poem is also a political act (as when Mayakovsky wrote his love poems in Soviet Russia, which considered them as bourgeois degeneration), the poem is a political act because the subject is radically social, thus wholly political.

The whole representation of language is truly what is at stake, and for all of society. Because the internal discontinuum of the sign extends into the discontinuum of the representations of the relationships between individuals and society. And what the theory of language shows, that is the language-poem-ethics-politics interaction, is that every society depends on its representation of language, as every representation of language contains, overtly or covertly, its representation of society.

What is at stake, what is most at risk, is the subject. The example which here again plays the role of a parable is what Mandelstam said in 1920 at the beginning of his essay "Government and Rhythm" because he said it as a poet, and as such conscious of what is at stake for the subject.

He wrote:

> While organizing society, while raising it from chaos to the harmonious order of organic existence, we tend to forget that what must be organized first of all is the individual. The greatest enemy of society is the amorphous person, the unorganized individual. Our entire educational system, as it is understood by our young government led by the People's Commissariat of Education, consists essentially in the organization of the individual. Social education paves the way for the synthesis of man and society in the collective. The collective does not yet exist. It must still be born. Collectivism appeared before the collective, and if social education does not come to its aid we shall be in danger of collectivism without the collective.
> (Mandelstam 1979: 108)

I wanted to quote this poet's warning because it poses a major poetic-ethical-political problem, even if it does not evoke translation, yet translating is implied in this premise. Just as much as Europe. And well beyond the 1920s and State Marxism.

Because the problem evoked by Mandelstam is the very problem of the permanent conflict between a realism of essences, of essentializations, and a nominalism of individuals, of works.

This problem runs through the entire European thought.[76] It is an anthropological universal and a constituent of Europe just as much as a representation of language. This problem thus has an effect on the thought and the practice of the poem and of translating.

Europe and translating are both to be rethought, one through the other. We will see further on what translating has done with Europe.

We must no longer take translating just as a means of transmitting meaning, but as an unveiling of the unquestioned and unthought theory of language in the act of translating. The theory of language understood as the language-poem-ethics-politics interaction. About which linguistics (even renamed "Language Sciences") is completely clueless. As are philosophers. And literary critics even more so. The theory of language is thus necessary to think together ethics and politics, *through the poem*. Hence necessary to think Europe. To think Europe through the poem. Even if it seems crazy to the politically small-minded.

In order to think the subject through plurality, and plurality through the subject. To think Europe as the site of this thought.

Hence the theory of language is the protection against the destruction of the plurality of languages, against the reduction of language to communication, where the universalization of English is taking place. To protect languages is not to protect every single one, but rather the thought of language as a critical theory.

This calls for thinking the radical history of values, their radical historicization, a radically historical humanism. In recalling Benveniste's words: "Much more than used for communicating, language is used *for living*"[77] (1974: 217) – the radical historicity of living in and through our language for each one of us.

We must thus think of speaking as an ethical act, and that languages are not first and foremost means of communication, but ways and means of living.

Historically, in the Middle Ages, Europe was a harmony of national languages, through the universality of Latin as the language of scholars, of the clergy. But this surface universality was eroded by the development of great works of mind in different national languages: the troubadours in Occitania, the minnesingers in German, Dante in Italy. There is the Arab-Andalusian symbiosis: Maimonides writes in Arabic, he is spread through Latin translation, Yehuda HaLevi writes his *Kuzari*

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76. It is the problem of discontinuities in the notion of the individual, as Bernhard Groethuysen discusses it (1980).

77. My translation (PPB).

in Arabic (translated-known in Latin), but he writes his poems in Hebrew. Then there is Cervantes in Spain, Rabelais and Montaigne in French, and Montaigne says somewhere he is sorry he did not write his *Essais* in Latin, thinking he would have lasted longer. How wrong one can be! There is the founding role of the byliny in Russian.

A paradox appears as in each case it was the works that created the national languages. There are only mother works, no mother tongues.

The translation of the Bible into national languages plays a special role, and in certain cases, a founding one. I would even say that it is the translation of the Bible which has contributed massively to making Europe, whereas it is the works themselves which have founded national languages. The two most renowned translations of the Bible being the King James Version of 1611 and Luther's Bible, the last edition on which he had worked dating from 1545.

The translation of the Bible made Christian Europe. And in Latin first, through Saint Jerome's Vulgate. From a starting point which is a theologico-political conflict, with its theologico-philological and theologico-poetical declension: the founding of Christianity on the Septuagint, the Greek translation from Alexandria in the 3rd century before the common era, against the Hebrew text, first only consonantal, then vocalized and rhythmically notated by the Masoretes[78] between the 6th and the 9th centuries, where for centuries this Hebrew text was reputed to have been falsified by the Jews (the Jews being reputed to have been the Bible's counterfeiters right up to Ernest Renan). But the very names of the rhythmic accents (the *te'amim*, the text's "tastes") designating melodic lines and especially the cheironomy, hand movements used to guide reading, prove counter-christian-wise, the authenticity and antiquity of these accents.

In passing, it can be pointed out how problematic the traditional term "Judeo-Christian" is not only in theology, but also in translation. And I will only quickly mention a certain number of famous translation mistakes, which have played their roles in the history of Christian Europe. I have already too often quoted "Lord of armies" instead of Lord "of multitudes of stars," or "*la Loi*" [The Law], for Torah, instead of Teachings. But it had to be done, and it is never enough. Christianisms, as we say solecisms. Which have contributed to the founding of a "religion of hate," Judaism, against a "religion of love," Christianity, in Hegel's essay "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate."

But we cannot separate Luther's translation of the Bible from the rest of his works, while lending a special ear to a famous article he wrote, "Über die Jüden und ihre Lügen" (Of Jews and their lies), where the rhyme, in German, proves the

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78. I have explained this word in Chapter V.

truth. Rhyming always proves the truth. Proof: "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit." It is a matter of cosmogony in language. And this article from Luther is so embarrassing, because it is revealing, that it is edited out of Luther's works (1966–1967). It contributes to the Christian theologico-political theme of *Verus Israel*.

The culturally-founding role of the King James and Luther Bibles is obviously linked to the Reform, and has no equivalent in France, the eldest daughter of the Church, though there had been a French protestant Bible, the Olivetans' in 1535. But the most celebrated came later, that is Le Maistre de Sacy's Bible, from 1682, and it translates the Latin translation. Wordy, it does not hold the beauties of the King James Version.

We must not misknow, in the foundation of Europe through translations of the Bible, the one Cyril and his brother Methodius translated in the 9th century from Greek into Common Slavic, or Church Slavonic: "by bringing the holy text over from Greek to spoken Slavic, they also raise this speech up to the status of language"[79] (Caussat et al. 1996: 16). It was a matter of revoking the privilege of "holy languages" (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) in order to pass this privilege on to the idiom into which they were translating: a linguistic transfer of *Verus Israel*. Whence a popular religion and a sacralization, where from originates the Slavophile movement, and the notion of the Russian people, "a theophorus people" (Caussat et al. 1996: 31) in Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed,* the God-bearers. In their prologue in verse, Cyril and Methodius (Jakobson 1985: 194–199)[80] speak to the "Slavic people" (verse 24) and pose that "naked indeed are all those nations without their own books" (verse 81).

The translation of the Bible, being a messianic work, the access to the Holy Communion in the idiom of the translating nation, has been, it must be admitted, *both* constituent of Europe and constitutive of Europe's Christian anti-Judaism, whose logical resolution was the Nazi Final Solution.

But even without this extreme, the translation of the Bible in national languages, Luther's German, Hus' Czech, has been a theologico-linguistic project. The limit being that where papism was the law, the Church fought these vulgar versions, the Council of Trent proclaiming in 1546 the Latin Vulgate to be the sole authentic version.

Hence, to this first paradox that the works created in each case the national languages, that there are only mother works and no mother tongues, a second paradox is to be added, that it is the translation of the Bible that made Europe: as *Verus Israel*.

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79. Both quotations from Caussat et al. are my own translations (PPB).

80. The text is quoted by Jakobson in Slavonic and English.

To this is added a parable of modernity, and the prophecy of the poem, through these biblical texts (in Hebrew), that these texts are neither verse nor prose, foreshadowing the very problem of poetic modernity, in European poetry, that is the erosion of the formal definition of poetry based on verse. Since Shelley and Baudelaire. From "*et le chant est qui chante*" [and the song is that is singing] (2 Chronicles, 29:28) to Mallarmé's "the poem, enunciator" in "Crisis of Verse."[81]

Whence a paradoxical effect: the poem is modernity, modernity is poetics, poetics is the poetics of modernity, which is the activity of remaining present in the present, if a poem is the transformation of a language by a life, of a life by a language.

And translating then stands as a major activity for the theory of language, because translating stages the representation of language which is at play. Thus translating must be transformed by the theory of language just as translating can transform language, its practices and representations: an ethics and politics of translating.

This way, theory is a reflection on forms of the unknown that knowledge generates without knowing it, each form of knowledge producing its form or forms of the unknown, thus preventing their acknowledgment.

Biblical exegesis and translation show this particularly well. They are the work of people full of science. But the theologico-philological, derived from the theologico-political, prevents them from hearing the continuum in language, as it is the exercise of a reciprocity between the sign and the theological. Christian. Right down to the Rabbinate's translation. Since truth acts like meaning, and produces a residue, form.

The major problem, poetic, ethical and political, is then the historical relationship between Europe and the sign. It is also the major problem of translating. Both are one and the same problem.

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81. See Chapter VI.

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Glossary

Note: All italicized words in brackets are the terms originally used by Meschonnic.

Academicism: A received idea prevailing among scholars and imposed as hegemonic knowledge with the effect of obscuring any idea that does not corroborate it. The suffix "ism" imparts a negative value to the term. [*académisme*]

Continuum: The state of things or ideas that are interdependent; epistemological interconnectedness. [*le continu*]

Currentfrenchify, to: To render the Bible into common French for the layman with a view to proselytism. Such a strategy presupposes a hierarchy in language based on the Aristotelian elitist view that current language is for the ordinary person and exceptional language belongs to the poet. [*françaiscourantiser*]

Deacademicize, to: To translate the Bible following the power of expression of the text, rather than conforming to canonical interpretations established by academic exegetes. [*désacadémiser*]

Dechristianize, to: To translate the Bible regardless of the Christian interpretation. [*déchristianiser*]

Decurrentfrenchify, to: To render the modes of expression of the Hebrew Bible – such as accentual and positional rhythms as well as paronomasia – rather than transform them into current language as many French versions of the Bible have done. [*défrançaiscourantiser*]

Dehellenize, to: In Bible translation, to render the verses by following the rhythmic notations inscribed in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament by Masoretes, and not by applying Greek metrical structures. [*déshelléniser*]

Deplatonize, to: To dispense with the Platonic view of language, according to which rhythm in poetry is a mere imitation of life (mimesis) – a view presupposing that language is "outside of" life rather than constitutive of it. [*déplatoniser*]

Desemioticize, to: To dispense with the semiotic model of language, which separates the signifier from the signified and studies language in a compartmentalized manner following what Ferdinand de Saussure called the "traditional divisions" – lexicon, morphology and syntax. In the act of translating, to render the signifiers and the rhythms of a text as essential components of meaning. (see Enrhythmicize; Poem-translating, Taamicize). [*désémiotiser*]

Detheologize, to: To translate the Bible regardless of a given religious interpretation. [*déthéologiser*]

Discontinuum: The state of things or ideas that are compartmentalized; epistemological disconnectedness. [*le discontinu*]

Embiblicize, to: To render the rhythmic features specific to the Hebrew Bible in order to convey affect and produce a translation of forceful expression. [*embibler*]

Empirical: Relying on practical experiment and observation. The empirical, in its adjectival noun form, designates the discursive activity (such as reading and writing) of the human subject whose creativity generates new linguistic forms.
[*empirique; l'empirique*]

Empiricism: The belief or an idea emanating from the belief that concepts are based solely on experience and should not require scientific method or theory. The suffix "ism" imparts a negative value to the term.
[*empirisme*]

Enrhythmicize, to: In translation, to render the various rhythms of a text. (see Rhythm; Poem-translating; Taamicize)
[*enrythmer*]

Erasor: A translation which fails to render the signifiers or the rhythms of a text because it is strictly focused on rendering the meaning of words. Such a translation erases the discursive features of the text and often resorts to linguistic fluency in order to lead the reader to believe that the text does not originate from a foreign language. Not to be confused with the effacement of the translator.
[*effaçante*]

Inseparation: Almost a synonym of inseparability, but suggesting an organic and vital union of things, such as the one binding affect and concept or speech and life.
[*inséparation*]

Misknowledge: Failure or refusal to acknowledge something; lack of understanding, misunderstanding.
[*méconnaissance*]

Orality: A signifying mode characterized by consonantal and vocalic rhythm (prosody) as well as accentual rhythm. Not to be confused with sound, orality occurs as much in written as in spoken discourse.
[*oralité*]

Poem-translating: The creation of discourse equivalences in the target language with a view to reproduce what the original text does to the source language. (see Enrhythmicize; Taamicize)
[*le traduire-poème*]

Rehebrewize, to: In biblical translation, to restore the rhythmic features of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, which were omitted by the translators of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. (see Taamicize)
[*réhébraïser*]

Rhythm: The way units of discourse are organized syntagmatically and paradigmatically, in both prose and poetry, to produce meaning and power of expression. Rhythm also refers to the notation of discursive elements, such as prosody, accent, consonantal or vocalic patterns and emphasis, metrical structure, syntactical structure, word order, sentence length and pauses.
[*rythme*]

Semioticism: An idea corroborating the semiotic view that language can be reduced to formal elements (the signifiers) and semantic ones (the signifieds). The suffix "ism" imparts a negative value to the term.
[*sémiotisme*]

Sign: The signified or the meaning of words, but never the signifier, though both the signifier and the signified are constitutive of the linguistic sign. Used figuratively, the sign designates that which predominates by way of consensus and obscures everything that it is not.
[*signe*]

Signifiance: The process by which meaning is produced in a text. The organization of prosodic chains linking sounds and words together in such ways that they stand out and gain power of expression. Not to be confused with signification, which equivocally designates production of meaning, meaning of words and interpretation by interlocutors.
[*signifiance*]

Sign-translating: A practice limited to rendering the meaning of words. (see Unwriting)
[*le traduire-signe*]

Taamicize, to: In Bible translation, to render the disjunctive and conjunctive accents (*te'amim*) that the Masoretes inscribed in the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) in order to provide syntactical, phonetic and musical information for its reading (*mikra*). (see Enrhythmicize; Poem-translating)
[*taamiser; ta'amiser*]

Theologico-political: Relating to the reduction of the divine dimension of the Bible to a specific religious belief and its proselytizing concerns. Also used as a noun.
[*théologico-politique*]

Unthought: The state of that which has escaped reflection and remains to be pondered. Also used as a noun.
[*impensé; l'impensé*]

Unwriting: In translation, a practice limited to a semiotic view of language in that it renders either the meaning of words or the formal features of texts. The result of such a practice destroys the signifiance of a text because it renders its features as individual units of a language system (*langue*) and overlooks their interaction within the whole discursive system of the text itself. An unwriting ignores that what words do have as much if not more meaning than what they say. (see Sign-translating)
[*désécriture*]

Index of subjects

Index of names