Disapparition I: The National Idiom and the Translatability of Culture

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Abstract: Jacques Derrida's contributions to the philosophy of translation give voice to a constellation of absences, silences, and secrets in language and culture, through which the question of translation marks a perennial and meaningful site of analysis. In the following, I offer one such analysis of the question of translation of the 'object' of culture alongside the implicit description of a national idiom as part of a problematic around what I call *disapparition*. Beyond what would otherwise seem at first to bear the specificity of a technical discourse, consideration of the general problematic of the notion of translation offers pause for reflection on persisting questions of the transmissibility as opposed to the 'borders' of languages, where careful analysis uncovers a host of issues in the spacing, gaps, losses and accumulations of meaning that take place. Rather than maintaining the assertion that 'a culture cannot be translated,' and attending to a particular nationalist reasoning that underpins it, I argue instead that translation must be conceived as foundational for thinking on language, culture and philosophy.

Keywords: Disapparition, culture object, national idiom, translatability, Jacques Derrida

Introduction

Current philosophical debate around the possibility or impossibility of translation have focused on the intersections between philosophical and political questions: the problem of the *philosopheme's* foreignness to its own origin (Johnson); the interdiction against translation embedded in the delimiting of sacral and poetic languages (Kilito); the uneasy space opened for resituating translation in light of 'world literature' (Apter, *Against World Literature*); particularly in relation to translation as a refusal of colonization and imperialism, a reassertion of the responsibility of a postcolonial agent (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*).[1] Scholars have not always dealt directly, however, with the repetition of the image of a nation-statist framework within a system of global linguistic affairs first observed by Jacques Derrida[2] even when this phenomenon is prominently recognized.[3] The looming pressure of the nation-state bears heavily on the question of translatability; where the world is divided into linguistic communities coterminous with the division of national communities. Often, this is the ground upon which the assertion of untranslatability stands, a position that upholds a practice of delineation of the national community by protecting its national idiom.

Nevertheless, increasingly scholarship in philosophy,[4] alongside the humanities and social sciences generally, have taken on the grand task of exploring and extricating research from the implicit tendencies of nationalist projects.[5] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller have offered a framework for the critique of sociological and anthropological research produced with an implicit nation-statist frame, while also observing the enduring thread of a latent transnationalism (302). So, too, we place into question a philosophy of 'untranslatability' in which it is proposed that a language as national idiom exists so remotely 'of its own,' as such a self-standing entity, that the prospect of its translation into another

is unthinkable. What is translation such that our vision is clouded at the borders of the nation-state, the jealous protection of a national idiom, the interdiction against translation? In posing the question of translation we are asking how cultural production, the space opened uniquely by texts and their linguistic forms, *risk*—rather than protect—a culture by bringing it to its own margin and away from its center, and how the assertion of untranslatability occludes the fact that what is being translated also serves as the ground upon which this object is rendered present. In this way, we inaugurate a shift toward thinking a fundamental translational activity that precedes the jealous guarding of a cultural artifact *as if* coded as the metonymic protection of the national 'unit' itself.

From this vantage point, it would seem even at the outset that one must take sides in translation—between a suspect process of globalizing homogenization and a suspect process of nationalization,[6] but also between an established banal nationalism[7] and the open possibility of a cosmopolitan thinking of translation.[8] This crisis constitutes the very structure of what we call 'a culture,' a grand risk of going outside of itself, and one that is representative of both the possibility to lose oneself or one's culture, and the fact of translation as centrally-in-between cultures, standing as the very structure of language itself.[9] Scholars like Emily Apter[10] who contend with the hazard of an *a priori* presumption of a plural discourse of world literatures without a practice, one that rests heavily on the exportation of the English language alone, and already offers a synthetic reading of translation studies—navigating deftly both the nationalist presumption and a superficial assertion of 'world literature' in translation. So, too, we find in Derrida's works the acute sense that an uncritical interpretation of the notion of cosmopolitanism—particularly from the vantage of a globalized age—is one that contributes to the continued homogenization of a world of translation, and of difference, into an Anglo-American hegemony, rather than one that gestures toward a more fruitful planetary cosmopolitic.[11]

Yet, a looming concern remains through which the open possibility of translation is threatened by a primordial foreclosure, which demands that one retread old ground to come to new conclusions, where a *neither/nor* of national or world literatures will not have the balanced effect presumed. Instead, a 'universal refusal' operates asymmetrically on the (im)possibility of translation of a national language, particularly where the already-political act of asserting untranslatability is grounded in the structure of an authority that bears the capacity to do so—untranslatability is not asserted in/for any idiom and not all languages are afforded the same protections. Thus, another hazard is outlined by Arjun Appadurai: "the simplification of these many forces (and fears) of [globalization as] homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more 'real' than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies" (296). Appadurai speaks to the strategic effect of an already entrenched national fabric from which an emergent global system—of politics, economics, cultures—comes into being. From this vantage point, we remain in an asymmetrical sense to need to take sides in translation and for translation.

Finally, to orient the discussion to follow, we might carve two lines of inquiry. First, if translation were to take place, what is it that would be translated? We pose for consideration, the problematic of the 'object of culture,' which we might assert is the object subjected to disapparition (in Derrida's terms, that which is placed *under erasure* [*sous rature*][12])—it does not exist at the moment it is asserted to have existed, it is absent at the moment it is declared present. The 'culture-object,' regardless, is that which, in the analysis of translation, is the focus or object of research such that the gaze of this focus produces its object, and conversely, outside of the sphere of this analytical consideration, tends to fade into oblivion, or into the scene beyond its careful delineation—its place amongst others.

Two poles might be outlined even at this pre-emptive stage, to orient this line of inquiry. Firstly, under analysis, the culture object is placed *under erasure*—as that thing whose

being is in question, as that which may remain standing or fall under such analysis, and whose presence or absence must be posed itself—that is, the 'culture object' is that 'thing' which is asserted to exist only within the *ethos* of a culture. It is in this way that the culture-object is found to be exteriorized in its 'being' as a representative of 'its' culture, 'its' national idiom. As well, outside of analysis, the culture-object seemingly fades *as such*—not in its presence but in its representation—so that its 'everyday' character may be asserted beyond its placement within the fabric of a national idiom, of the representative of a culture, as member to an absent scene. It is in this latter sphere (wherein the necessity for the culture-object *as such* dissipates) that its creative possibilities are assured in translation.

Second, if the problematic and the notion of translation is to be found to be more ubiquitous than expected, how might translation fare in light of the question of difference, as a matter of difference beyond the scope of translation between national idioms? Our last paragraph has left us in suspense; what is this 'in translation' that has returned? How is 'translation' taking place in an everyday speech which assuredly also holds itself within, shelters itself inside of a well-assured national idiom? How is translation of a text taking place already within this idiom? We propose tentatively to answer this question with a rehearsal of Derrida's comments on language and experience as translational activities—from the pre-experiential phenomenon to the 'sign' and 'meaning' [*Bedeutung*] in Husserl, but also as *iterable*, in which the sign itself as the guarantor of meaning is repeatable, risking meaning itself in an ever-present possibility of translation.

Two Controversies of Translation: *The "Neutral" Problem*

Friedrich Schleiermacher opens his 1813 lecture "On the Different Methods of Translation"[13] by declaring a line of inquiry on the question of translation he will subsequently dismiss. He notes that an intra-linguistic translation activity must still take place even between contemporaries "who are not separated by dialects but who come from different social classes that have very little contact and who are far apart in their education" (36). Thus, an act of interpretation (if not, for Schleiermacher, a 'true' act of translation) takes place between two even sharing in an idiom and a dialect. Still, some manner of understanding must be made, no longer in the substitution of signs—not in finding the appropriate supplementary words—but in revaluating the constellation of words shared such that two individuals can be brought onto common ground. In fact, before he will set aside this thorny difficulty, he notes an even greater one: "Occasionally, we must translate even our own words, when we want to make them our very own again" (37). The fact of difference is not only apparent between two subjects intra-linguistically (sharing an idiom), but within 'one' subject who becomes foreign to themselves—whose language seems no longer to 'represent' them—and must take on the translational-interpretive work of reappropriating their own self-understanding, perhaps over time.

Schleiermacher then dismisses these intra-linguistic dimensions as not bearing on the issue of translation directly. Why would he be so quick to draw such a distinction, and to leave aside the notion of interpretation—a notion that could easily be the category of (or a sub-category to) that of translation? He offers two responses. First, a generalizable question of the notion of translation in relation to interpretation—wherein one is compelled by "that necessity to translate even within one's own language and dialect" (ibid.)—is simply too large to handle. Furthermore, it would seem that interpretation and translation are distinct (if not entirely separate) activities corresponding to different realms of life. As he states:

> The interpreter's job is in the business world and that of the true translator in the area of scholarship and the arts. Those who find these definitions arbitrary—considering that interpreting is usually understood to mean oral transferral and translating the transplantation of written works—will forgive me for using them, since they respond quite well to the

present need and since the two definitions are not particularly far removed from each other. Writing is appropriate for the fields of scholarship and the arts because writing gives their works permanence. To transfer scholarly and artistic works orally would be as useless as it seems impossible. For business transactions, on the other hand, writing is only a mechanical device. In this case, oral exchanges are the most appropriate ones, and written interpreting should basically be considered only a transcript of oral interpreting. (37-38)

The two realms Schleiermacher makes note of—that of business against that of scholarship and artistry—correspond also to the separation of the *spoken* against the *written* word, and where—contrary to Derrida's thesis borne out in the *Grammatology*—it is the written word that bears a sort of privilege; of translatability certainly, but also of permanence, and the prestige of beauty (art) and knowledge (scholarship). But so, it would also seem that writing bears the heavy mark of translation because of the immense separation between texts on a cross-lingusitic or inter-linguistic level, whereas the deployment of speech (oral/vocal) even between two (business) subjects of different languages and dialects benefit merely from relying on interpretation.[14] In contrast, the written work requires a cipher, the addition of a third party, whereas the spoken word requires no such heavy-handed medium; the need for a "true translator" is posed only for writing, for scholarship, for the arts—for all that wants for permanence.

But Schleiermacher has also noted that one desires permanence even at the most intimate level, which requires once again the redoubled commitment to a form of (self-)translation. It would seem the intimacy within the 'one' of a single subject[15] is not enough to stave off the necessity for translation. This is even more so the case because, as he mentions:

> Every human being is, on the one hand, in the power of the language he speaks; he and his whole thinking are a product of it. He cannot, with complete certainty, think anything that lies outside the limits of language. The form of his concepts, the way and means of connecting them, is outlined for him through the language in which he is born and educated; intellect and imagination are bound by it. On the other hand, however, every freethinking and intellectually spontaneous human being also forms the language himself. (38)

Retaining the sense of an autonomous transcendental subject, Schleiermacher has proposed to reconcile this with a form of linguistic determinism that makes its way into the problem of translation. No longer is one an unconditioned subject free of constraint—one who does not need to concern themselves with the decay of memory, the defamiliarization of the sign which grounds the compelled desire to reappropriate it in the first place—but instead a subject fundamentally subjected-to-language.

Accordingly, we might approach the problem of translation slightly differently, to refuse to dismiss what Schleiermacher has set aside too quickly. This would be to not only deal with the movement of an object from one context to another—the translation of the 'sign,' the 'word'—but the emergence of the 'thing' in light of its relation to the subject-of-language, a context which cannot be reduced to linguistic, cultural, or national delineation, but *is that very delineation as an act of interpretive translation*. That is, the presumption that translation takes place only between nationally delineated languages seems—practically—to be opposed to another act of translation taking place in the midst of one, as a fundamental relation between the 'self' and itself, the 'self' and its world. Derrida outlines a problematic of translation in his seminars on hospitality, the contention between language and language, between personal and national idiom, in a similar way to Schleiermacher:

> In the broad sense, the language in which the foreigner is addressed or in which he is heard, if he is, is the ensemble of culture, it is the values, the norms, the meanings that inhabit the language. Speaking the same language is not only a linguistic operation. It's a matter of *ethos* generally. A passing remark: without speaking the same national language, someone can be less "foreign" to me if he shares a culture with me, for instance, a way of life linked to

a degree of wealth, etc., than some fellow citizen or compatriot who belongs to what used to be called (but this language shouldn't be abandoned too quickly, even if it does demand critical vigilance) another "social class." In some respects at least, I have more in common with a Palestinian bourgeois intellectual whose language I don't speak than with some French person who, for this or that reason, social, economic, or something else, will be more foreign to me in some kinds of connection. Conversely, if we take language in the strict sense, which doesn't include nationality, a bourgeois Israeli intellectual will be more foreign to me than a Swiss worker, a Belgian farm laborer, a boxer from Quebec, or a French detective. This question of language, in the sense we are calling narrow—namely, the discursive idiom that is not coextensive with citizenship (French and Quebecois, or English and American people can basically speak the same language)—we would always find implicated, in endless ways, in the experience of hospitality. (133)

Unlike Schleiermacher, for Derrida there *is* a context from which the issue of parallel (inter/intra-linguistic) translations can be posed. The argumentative thrust of his work, *Voice and Phenomenon*, relies upon the recognition of an implicit constellation of translational activities taking place in Edmund Husserl's foundational work on phenomenology. In this piece, he enumerates the fundamental translational activities it would seem that Husserl wishes not to contend with between the *moment*, *indication* and *expression*—the crossing, between each 'event,' from one to the other that results in the possibility of *meaning* [*Bedeutung*]—translational activities that both take place within, and also profoundly disrupt, Husserl's transcendental subject of phenomenology. Between each, there are chasms marked by Husserl's silence. These crossings—where the 'moment' must be translated into an interpretable (useable) sign for the sake of *indication*, and where this indicative function must pass over to the creative capacities of a free subject who *means-to-say* [vouloir-dire, Derrida's translation of the German *Bedeutung*]— imply an insurmountable interior-exterior problem for his framework. Only after this has been done can a—now no longer—'transcendental' subject be posed *per se*. In this way, Husserl does not necessarily, himself, construct a fully fledged theory of the sign, of signification, or of a linguistic order of phenomenology. Yet, at each turn of his development of a groundwork method of phenomenology, Derrida uncovers these translational activities taking place—both in the system and in the world (the subject-formation, the *epochal* world of the subject-of-phenomena, the *transcendental ego*) that system describes. Such a discovery seems both to be aligned with Schleiermacher's discussion of the interior subjective activity of translation, and one posed as the key starting point for a problematic of translation and the possibility of experience that undermines Schleiermacher's original dismissal. A discussion of translation does not begin with a cultural institution against an economic one, but in the very groundwork of human experience.

We might present these concatenating translations Derrida uncovers in Husserl's work as follows: first, the translation of *experience* from the '*moment*,' the 'picture-taking' activity somewhere between the blink of an eye and the processes of the mind where, for example, the incomprehensible impression of a tree becomes an intelligible phenomenon; second, simultaneously and conditionally, the translation of *indication* from *experience*, which is marked by a form of designation, in this case with the sign 'tree,' and where for the first time the phenomenon becomes intelligible at all; third, the translation of *expression* from *indication*, the translational activity which ultimately begets *meaning* (the *vouloir-dire* as *Bedeutung*) and where meaning is defined through expression which occludes its origins. 'Expression' is defined as the use of a sign under the presumption that its 'origin' is from within a transcendental subject, which is to say, only after this translational process has progressed far enough to no longer recognize an object exterior to the subject before the Husserlian 'moment'. Through 'expression', the sign refers not to an 'outside' world but an 'inside' world.

Admittedly, this third translational activity is difficult to comprehend in itself—it would seem that the entirety of Husserl's phenomenological system is an attempt to internalize a Nietzschean *amor fati* such that the transcendental subject inhabits a world entirely of their own making, where they may look in any direction and not only see all that they must affirm, but that this subject has reclaimed (reappropriated) control; the 'world' has become theirs (Husserl 18-21). Preceding this, though, Derrida finds small hints—traces— as to Husserl's acquiescence to the structuring of a 'transcendental' subject that are decidedly exterior to them; where there is no control over the 'moment,' of the 'blink of an eye,' the impression that it leaves, the sign supposed to designate it. Thus to understand the final shift from indication to meaning (as expression) is to invoke that entire system in the crossing inaugurated by Husserl's *epoché* as the act of making-transcendental the subject of phenomenology by bracketing all that they are not—the world as fundamentally exterior—in order to retrieve that world as 'for me' (op cit.); something that seemingly can no longer happen, has become unconditioned by his admission of processes beyond the transcendental subject *per se*.

For the world as an epochal 'for me' structure from the standpoint of transcendental phenomenology to work, for that subject to remain properly transcendental, not only does the world need to undergo this reappropriative process, but the signs which designate the world—which perform the double task of signifying the world and (as we've already noted in Schleiermacher) providing the structure for thought itself—in their exteriority must be suppressed for the sake of an interiorizing appropriation. However, instead, Derrida expounds on language as a form of *originary prosthesis*, a sort of primordial and 'natural' *techné* which ultimately exteriorizes the subject, rather than interiorizing their language. In *Of Hospitality* he notes that, "Language resists all mobilities because it moves about with me. It is the least immovable thing, the most mobile of personal bodies, which remains the stable but portable condition of all mobilities: in order to use the fax or the "cellular" phone, I have to be carrying on me, with me, in me, as me, the most mobile of telephones, called a language, a mouth, and an ear, which makes it possible to hear yourself-speaking" (91). Language is the *techné* that I hold within me. But further, "What we are describing here, which is not the same as endorsing it, is the most unbreakable of fantasies. For that which doesn't leave me in this way, language, is also, in reality, in necessity, beyond the fantasy, that which never ceases to depart from me. Language only works *from* me" (ibid, italics in original). Derrida treads the ground that will be central in *Monolingualism of the Other*, "I only have one language; it is mine" (1). So, too, to allow to stand on its own 'internally' the movement from indication to expression, from the designation of the sign for an external referent to its reappropriative internalization, *betrays* a translational activity that in fact exteriorizes the subject rather than interiorizing the language.

Two Controversies of Translation: *The Non-Neutral Problem*

Having said this, we must be aware of the great risk, the fact of an exposure and a vulnerability inhering within the structure of language as prosthesis, one which opens the fundamental phenomenon—and enduring possibility—of translatability, whilst also compelling the desire to assert untranslatability. The presumption of untranslatability marks the boundary of a sacred or undeconstructible object, its delineation being the basis upon which the object emerges.[16] The assertion of an incapacity grounds not a sphere of 'truth,' but instead, the sphere of a *decision upon the possibility or impossibility of truth* as the *speaking of an idiom and from within the sheltered space of that idiom*. Here we might quote Heidegger, "language is the house of Being" (217). The presumption of untranslatability operates as a repeatable assertion—iterable in any idiom *as such*— authorizing the distinction of the national idiom, its inherent uniqueness, its impossibility

to be appropriated, forged, or duplicated, *as if* asserted on the plane of truth exclusive to one national idiom over others. The assertion adds itself to the 'object' at the moment of a translation (from the 'moment' to indication, from indication to expression), and thus it constructs in order to maintain the authorial boundary of that object, to keep it safe, to place it in reserve, to hold it inside. This is to say, the statement rendered in this way— "this sentence cannot be translated," "this text must be read in the original in order for it to remain meaningful"—operate declaratively as observations of fact, and descriptively as assertive positions. Their *duplicity* is that such a statement is wrought in both registers; an assertion hiding behind the statement of a fact. It is, we should say, a matter of decisiveness within a topography of *assertive* contest upon which one declares, even more so when one *declares the immutable uniqueness of the text, their text, whose appropriation is declared impossible at the moment of appropriation.*

Thus, the declaration of untranslatability hides an assertion. But the assertion betrays its declaration. No longer is the declaration rendered as being able to replace the fact, which would require no such declaration. Instead, its assertion, its utterance, the fact of its saying and needing to have been said opens the tenuous web beneath which there can be found no ground, but upon which the fabric of a subject-object relation, and the wider sphere of a structure of a linguistic idiom, take hold in the decision to assert, the decision to declare *as if* as a fact the untranslatability of the object, and by extension, the idiom itself— where not only this particular text, but the very words that comprise it are excluded—a relation that is exclusive through this protective assertion, which, in protecting the object through exclusion marks out the privileged place of a subject and a language which are also protected in their sacred separation from an Other. They remain 'pure' in and of themselves.

Let us presume that this *is* true, that an idiom—*my* idiom, that of *my* homeland, of *my* "Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland" (Derrida 42), which will always seem uneasily like the protections of a colonial project or its nationalist resistance—is untranslatable. In what language does it speak? What is the untranslatable idiom? We might conceive of two such responses. Either the untranslatable idiom is that which is held entirely in secret; or the untranslatable is that which cannot be uttered. Certainly, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive—the secret and the unutterable bearing the shared mark of that which cannot be said, and thus remains in silence. However, we might also attempt to describe these in some exterior way—for we are assured that it is already impossible to penetrate into their internal depths. A language held entirely in secret is, like the coding, the encryption, the cypher of a secret society, refuses to be uttered publicly, and thus is not made available for translation. It is withheld, but it exists. This sphere of linguistic possibility—the possibility of an impossible translation of a secret idiom—is also the place of child's play, of terms of endearment (often ones that circulate widely—'honey,' 'love,' 'baby'—but still bearing the weight of what is intended to be unique—'*my* love,' etc.), and of a great subterranean expanse of linguistic activity in which the abstract and impersonal form of language is affixed with the personal in the act of communication. One could not understand within the idiom the meaning affixed to such a term—'my love'—when issued *from me*. Partaking in a shared idiom confronts the personal demand to refuse to share, to reject equitable distribution of language, and thus to hold in reserve, to maintain a vigilant silence. This either contributes to or opposes what would otherwise be a public economy of signs held only internally by the public assertion of the boundary of the national idiom— where 'mine' is translated as 'ours.' *My/our language is untranslatable to you, fellow-stranger of the idiom I/we speak.*

The rather recent history of translation studies (TS) and its sociological method of inquiry has been constrained by the axiomatic assertion that what takes place in translation is the movement between already well-established and nationally defined idioms, even

when the very notion of translation as a central—and competing—tenet invokes the idea that a language is transformed under the auspices of the translator and in view of the work in translation. This was certainly a key insight offered by Walter Benjamin on *good* translation (that is, the 'highest praise' that can be attributed to a translation, the mark of its value, is its conditioning of such a radical change). He notes:

> The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realized to what extent this is possible, to what extent any language can be transformed, how language differs from language almost the way dialect differs from dialect; however, this last is true only if one takes language seriously enough, not if one takes it lightly. (81)

So, too, Benjamin remarks that a *good* original is one that lends itself to translatability:

> The extent to which a translation manages to be in keeping with the nature of this mode is determined objectively by the translatability of the original. The lower the quality and distinction of its language, the larger the extent to which is information, the less fertile a field is it for translation, until the utter preponderance of content, far from being the lever for a translation of distinctive mode, renders it impossible. The higher the level of a work, the more does it remain translatable even if its meaning is touched upon only fleetingly. (ibid.)

Between these two poles—between the original and the translated work—there seems to be the possibility to re-ascribe the mutability of languages as an apparent fact, one that we should not allow to escape from our notice even when attempting to define—and thus to fix—these two poles.

Nevertheless, an enduring trend in translation studies occludes these transformations entirely for the reappropriative mode we have critically explored above. Lefevere (1992) captures incisively in numerous fragments the foundational work that study of translation seems to engage in through 'naturalizing' languages. Here, he presents under the heading of 'ideology' an entirely separate problematic from that which we've referred to above—not between the nationalist and the cosmopolitan, but between two embedded and implicit national 'uses' of translation:

> Translators, in Horace's understanding, thrive on the trust their patron and their public put in them. They do not have to translate "word for word" because both patron and audience literally "take their word" at face value. Victor Hugo describes the other extreme: "When you offer a translation to a nation, that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself." Translations can be potentially threatening precisely because they confront the receiving culture with another, different way of looking at life and society, a way that can be seen as potentially subversive, and must therefore be kept out. (14)

Here, Lefevere finds evidence for what Maurice Blanchot will explore in a short essay, stating, "Translating, I would remind the reader, was, for a long time, regarded as a baneful pretension in certain regions of culture. Some do not want anyone to translate into their language, and others do not want anyone to translate their language; and war is needed in order for this treachery, in the literal sense, to be carried out: to hand over the true language of a people to a foreign land" (57).

Sergey Tyulenev offers a model for critically engaging the sociologist of culture who must—in speaking plainly, particularly to students—present the object of their research as if as a substantive national object.[17] After outlining the sedimenting methods of situating 'culture' in English speaking Enlightenment discourses—from the 'individual,' to a 'collective' to a 'nation'—he remarks that, "National cultures were often referred to as 'spirit (Geist or

ésprit) of a nation…" (*Translation and Society* 21). We might consider Tyulenev's own definition of culture, which offers much to consider in light of the issue of translation:

> As is the case with the term 'society,' the application of the term 'culture' varies in terms of scale… Human culture is determined by three types of adaptations ensuring the survival of the human race. Culture needs to adapt to: the external environment requiring protection from hostile natural forces and other human groups' offensive actions; human bio-social and psychic nature, which requires physical and social contact with other human beings, the need for status and self-respect, leisure and recreation, mutual care, etc.; collective living (which follows from human bio-psycho-social needs), which requires going beyond individual needs and implies the need to coexist with other human beings, avoiding both chaos and excessive domination. (ibid. 20)

Culture is a particular manner in which a human being (a general category) takes on— and exceeds—the immediate biological needs they are confronted with. He continues:

> In a narrower sense, the term 'culture' means behavioural patterns acquired through socialisation into a particular human collectivity. In this sense the term is usually applied to large groups extended in space and time, usually in modern societies associated with nations or nation-states, that is, nations as geographical and political units or to peoples within such units (Hungarian, English, Buryat, Flemish cultures). In this sense, we can speak of a culture or cultures and, what is especially important for TIS [Translation and Interpreting Studies], cultures have their own languages and require interlingual translation in order to interact one with another across space and time. Finally, small groups occupying much more modest territories during a short period can also be described as having their distinct cultures (the culture of the Moscow intelligentsia of the post-Stalinist Thaw). What are called in sociology 'subcultures' also belong to this group. (ibid. 23)

Tyulenev is not shy of a language that will help, even for the time being, fix his object— not only 'culture' but 'cultures,' a plethora of undesignated cultural communities. As a result, he offers a similar translator–subject oriented and decidedly nationalist definition of translation: "Even if the translator translates on his/her initiative, s/he represents some social system, into which s/he is socialized and to whose communication in the form of traditions, logic, culture, etc., his/her translational decision and behavior can be traced" (*Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies* 148).

Where Tyulenev's sociology of culture seemingly *must* give credence to its research 'object' as a substantive 'thing,' and thus also to—only descriptively, never declaratively— valorize the unit of the 'nation,' his oft-cited antecedent, Wilhelm von Humboldt, provides for us an overt formulation of a nationalist project of translation. In his famous introduction to a translation of *Agamemnon*, he states, "I have tried to guard against un-Germanness and obscurity. But in the latter respect one should not make unjust requirements that might preclude gaining other higher assets" (58). This assertion, however, is the culmination of two competing desires that, for von Humboldt, are at the root of the question—the desire, the danger—of translation. On the one hand, he begins his introduction by noting that, "…no word in one language is completely equivalent to a world in another, if one disregards those expressions that designate purely physical objects" (55). We might be scintillated to follow the question of what constitutes the 'purely physical object,' how an 'expression' may be rendered in such terms; wouldn't any idiomatic expression— "under the weather," "call it a day," "hit the sack," "speak of the devil"—bind an 'object' (a subject of predication and/or an exterior state of being) with an idiomatic function that is supposed to exceed it (where being "under the weather" *does* invoke an object and a predicate, while metaphorically referencing bad weather to illustrate that they have taken ill)?[18] Instead, we might ask what is *not* an impure object, given our analysis above.

On the other hand, von Humboldt seems to find a (nationalist-imperialist) demand for translation specifically into German, and specifically against French. Speaking to the need for a translation to "feel foreign" (Fremde), he notes, "How else has it happened that none of the spirit of the ancients has been assimilated by the French as a nation? Even though all of the major Greeks and Romans have been translated into the French language, and some have even been translated into the French style quite well, neither the spirit of antiquity nor even an understanding of that spirit has permeated the French nation (we are not speaking here of individual scholars)" (58). This, of course, he juxtaposes with the German spirit of translation (the quotation on 'un-Germanness' being the statement that directly follows). He makes a further claim, saying, "For it is the wonderful characteristic of languages that, first and foremost, each one accommodates the general needs of everyday life; yet, through the spirit of the nation that shapes and forms it, a language can be infinitely enriched," (56), only to add further that, "To the same extent that a language is enriched, a nation is also enriched. Think how the German language, to cite only one example [as if at random], has profited since it began imitating Greek matter" (57). It would perhaps not be enough just to note the overtly economic discourse of enrichment which permeates these statements, and binds the nationalist with the imperial desire to translate. However, as it seems, there remains always the possibility for this economy to emerge within the discipline if not carefully approached.

Even the earliest tentative gestures toward a sort of internationalism remain too within the mode of reifying the 'nation' itself. We witness also, the metonymic slippage wherein the political unit of the 'nation' is supplemented for the fundamental unit of the 'individual,' and where the 'nation' is treated as a 'one.' In Lefevere's collection we find a short fragment from Goethe within which he states, "A truly general tolerance will most certainly be reached if we respect the particular characteristics of single individuals and nations. We should, however, keep in mind that what has real merit distinguishes itself in that it belongs to humanity as a whole, and translate accordingly" (24). Here, the 'singularity' of individuals is extended to a concomitant 'singularity' of nations; both might be treated as 'units.' This is so, even when clearly Goethe's declared statement, that which we should—and do—hold in clearer view, is intended to counter these 'units' with another: "humanity as a whole."[19] So, too, we find in Tyulenev (*Translation and Society*) an attempt to bind a notion of 'interculture' with the biological language of 'symbiosis' such that distinct biological entities might merely be brought together—not necessarily entangled, but as two distinctly categorical and nominal entities merely in contact.

Conclusion: Taking Sides

We might coin a term, *disapparition*, to capture how specific focus on the linguistic object in the context of a national idiom is liable to find it 'bobbing' in and out of existence, how it appears one moment and disappears the next, much like a ghost or phantom. Further, we might draw into our discussion a constellation of *ephemera* which seem to abide by the same conditions—of dreams, mirages, madness and death—which become apparent to us and, at once, dissolve into nothing, which were perhaps only half real to begin with. However, extending beyond ourselves for a moment, attempting to reach perhaps beyond what we can grasp, *disapparition* is a *problem of translation*, one which ultimately threatens the internal structure of this house of the nation.

As Emily Apter reminds us, we cannot overlook the many problems posed by the uncritical acceptance of a term like 'world literature' in relation to translation, to a dogmatic acceptance of notions of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'globalization' which remain problems to be explored. In fact, it would be possible to forge an entirely different line of inquiry which places the question of (un)translatability in proximity to the relation the seemingly

antipodal nationalist vs. cosmopolitan contention perhaps too easily erects. For example, we could contend with how there remains consistently an imperialist project within the nationalist chauvinisms of a certain kind of approach to translation, one best demonstrated again by von Humboldt. The question of 'spirit' has eluded us only somewhat here—bearing resonances to a protean modernist nationalism von Humboldt wishes to use to fix the linguistic realm in place as much as to a religious Christian globalization that Derrida has already cautioned against ("Faith and Reason").

And certainly, developing this line of inquiry, there would be no need to attempt—when perhaps such scholarship cannot be done rigorously, when such a division could not hold—to separate the nationalist impulse from the imperialist in translation studies. Certainly, Friedrich Nietzsche already remarked of his predecessors in a German idiom that a history of translation drawing primarily from ancient Rome would have to contend with how, "In those days, indeed, to translate meant to conquer—not merely in the sense that one would omit the historical dimension but also in the sense that one would add a hint of contemporaneousness to the material translated and, above all, in the sense that one would delete the name of a poet and insert the translator's name in its place" (69). Perhaps too well-said for ourselves to offer our own paraphrase, he continues, "and all this was done with the very best conscience as a member of the Roman Empire, without realizing that such actions constituted theft" (ibid.).

As mentioned at the outset, it would seem that one must take sides in and for translation. Apter's work on translation, her contention with the hazard of an *a priori* presumption of a plural discourse of world literature without a practice, where there remains a need for vigilance over a world literature already in translation, and one that maintains difference, also bears the acute sense of Derrida's that an uncritical interpretation of the notion of cosmopolitanism as the homogenization of a world of translation into an Anglo-American hegemony, rather than one that gestures toward a more fruitful planetary cosmopolitic. We remain vigilant also against the open possibility of translation being threatened by a primordial foreclosure, where a *neither/nor* of national and world literatures operates asymmetrically on the (im)possibility of translation, particularly where the already-political act of asserting untranslatability is grounded in the structure of an authority that bears the capacity to do so—untranslatability is not asserted in/for *any* idiom and not all languages are afforded the same protections. In fact, we must remember: *a homogenizing 'globalized' world is already a world divided into nation-state units*, the world we live in.

Nevertheless, the thrust of our problematic remains also the enduring impossible hope for a project in outline of the problematic and the possibility of translatability itself, its implications cutting across language(s), posing problems to a structure of establishment for language which, although posed in light of a horror of crisis—an impending ruination, a disaster of having offered the object, the subject, the text, the idiom for sacrifice to be erased—is just as much an opening upon an *elsewhere*. The allowance of translation maintains the possibility of this opening, even if translation is a fruitless and ruinous venture, even if it invites the so-called 'enemy-other' into one's midst. Taken together, it would seem that the relation between language—*a* language—and translation is reversed. Translation precedes language in the fact of its deconstructibility. For a language to exist, it must already undergo a 'primordial' or 'originary' act of translation—not merely between national-units and their separable languages, but in general.

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Notes

[1] I have taken my cues primarily from Emily Apter's "Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability" to outline some of these general fields; a wonderfully accessible entry-point into the problematic at hand.

[2] Derrida, in "Faith and Reason," does not deal directly with the question of translation, and so it would not be surprising to overlook the connection. Nevertheless, he does outline a method of analysis of the phenomenon of globalization having given rise to the issue of monolingual vs translational politics within a global system—where an overarching Anglo-American idiom is part of an imperial project of linguistic-territorial expansion—in contention with the tendency to articulate a nation-statist notion of community.

[3] See for example, Apter's preface to Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, as well as her incisive identification of Abdelfattah Kilito's *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, that, "Kilito's bid for monolingualism risks sounding anticomparatist or, at worst, xenophobic, but it seems directed at safeguarding the sacred language, particularly as the sacred resides in the singularity of poetry." ("Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability" 57-58).

[4] See: Derrida's *Eyes of the University* and "Interpretations at War"; Apter's *Against World Literature*.

[5] Unfortunately, the seminars Jacques Derrida conducted under the unofficial title of "philosophical nationalities and nationalism" between 1984 and 1989 bore no typescript—and thus, no translation is likely to be forthcoming—although the culminating year would comprise the material for *The Politics of Friendship*. See also: Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas' preface to Derrida's *For Strasbourg*.

[6] See: Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge, *Eyes of the University* and *Sovereignties in Question.*

[7] See: Billig's *Banal Nationalism*; see also: Lefevere's introduction on ideology in translation (14).

[8] See: Rée (240-51).

[9] In this way, the place of literature has only ever been apprehensively positioned in relation to conceptions of 'national literatures,' pulled on another side by what Goethe—and so many after him—conceived of as 'world literature(s).' See: Damrosch; Derrida's *Monolingualism* and "Who or What is Compared?"; Amoui.

[10] See: Apter's *Against World Literature*.

[11] See: Derrida's "Globalization, Peace and Cosmopolitanism." For a discussion of 'planetarity, see: Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*. For a key text on 'cosmopolitics,' see: Cheah and Robbins eds.

[12] See: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

[13] Reference to Schleiermacher, Nietzsche and von Humboldt are derived from Schulte and Biguenet's *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida.*

[14] This bears the mark of the *phonic* privilege of the 'voice that hears itself speak' mentioned in both *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Of Grammatology*, the latter of which grounding a discussion of Western logocentrism (3-5).

[15] The parallels between these levels outlined by Schleiermacher—inter-linguistic subjects, intra-linguistic subjects, a single subject 'themselves—and the Kantian transcendental subject have not been lost on us. The 'mode' of the lecture, in which an exploration of a single character making their way through a great many questions of translation, would seem to invoke his well-established indebtedness to his predecessor here, Immanuel Kant's method of critique as much as to the transcendental subject. Schleiermacher's contribution, much like Fichte's, is to foreground the question of language absent from Kant's *oeuvre*; still so, Schleiermacher's return ("on the other hand…") to the Kantian subject retains the debt.

[16] See: Fredrik Barth's pivotal work on ethnicity as "boundary maintenance." See also Eriksen; Eriksen and Jakoubek.

[17] Again, see Wimmer and Glick-Schiller for an incisive critique of what they call 'methodological nationalism' particularly in anthropology and sociology.

[18] Instead, I submit the insight of Walter Benjamin, who mentions that, "The words *Brot* and *pain* "intend" the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word Brot means something different to a German than the word pain to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing" (74).

[19] This is, of course, where the assertion of untranslatability might now be located, as what Apter subversively retrieves from Harold Bloom as "saving difference," wherein the notion of difference is used to counteract the hegemonic appropriation implicit in the imperial act of authorizing translatability particularly by a hegemonic culture against its 'others' (Apter, "Against World Literature"; see also Cassin's *Dictionary*; Johnson on difference; Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" on forms of resistance to the imperialism of translatability).

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