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Translation, Micro-Modernity and the Global City

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An inevitable failing of thinking in the present is presentism. The notion that what is happening now is unique and unprecedented is part of the propaganda that we construct for our age. It is all too easy in the flight towards exceptionalism to forget that human experiences have repeated themselves throughout history, albeit with different emphases. Nowhere is the exclusivism of the present more obvious than in discussions around globalization and cities where late modernity is often construed as a period that is uniquely beholden to the global. But if we look more closely at the histories of other cities and other times we find the traces of the transnational and the translational everywhere.

In Vermeer's 1660 painting *View of Delft* offers us an insight to what these traces might look like. By the Rotterdam Gate to the right lie two herring boats. The boats are evidence of global climate change. Between 1550 and 1700 Europe was in the grip of a mini ice age. As temperatures fell and

arctic ice moved into the North Sea, the herring stocks moved southwards into that part of the Baltic Sea under Dutch control. The Dutch were able to take advantage of the abundant fish stocks which now came their way. The result was an unexpected financial windfall which enriched the kind of people who would provide patronage for Vermeer and others like him. But the outward connections do not stop there. To the left of the Schiedam Gate the red-tiled roofs of the Dutch East India company are clearly visible. The company was established in 1602 as the world's first large joint stock company and it is estimated that largely as a result of its activities close to a million people travelled made the journey from Holland to Asia between 1595 and 1795 (Brook 2008: 17). As the contacts became more extended and prolonged, language acquisition and translation inevitably enter the picture as Timothy Book is quick to point out:

> More people were in motion over longer distances and sojourning away from home for longer periods of time than at any other time in human history. More people were engaging in transactions with people whose languages they did not know and whose cultures they had never experienced. At the same time, more people were learning languages and adjusting to unfamiliar customs. First contacts were for the most part were over. The seventeenth was a century of second contacts. (20-21)

These second contacts continue to this day and what I want to explore in this essay is how the position of the translator and the spatial and cultural flux of late modernity are linked in important ways. In terms of how local places can give expression to global connectedness, I want to further explore how translation as a way into thinking about what might constitute a notion of sustainability for cultures and societies.

Anthony Giddens famously, if not particularly memorably, defined globalisation almost two decades ago as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are

shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'(1990: 64). It has become customary to speak of time-space compression in accounts of the contemporary world where the time taken to travel distances was greatly reduced in the twentieth century. The emergence of international institutions (IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO)), the spread of global brands (McDonalds, Starbucks), heightened environmental awareness (Chernobyl, the Brundtland report (1987), UN reports on climate change), worldwide protest movements (Vietnam, anti-globalization protests) are seen as both causes and symptoms of the 'intensification of world wide social relations.' Time-space convergence at a national level in the 19th century and the first half of the twentieth century is facilitated notably through the construction of railways and road networks. Time-space convergence at a global level in the second half of the twentieth century is enabled through the exponential growth in air travel and the proliferation of IT and telecommunications networks.

The last two centuries might be termed the era of *macro-modernity* where the emphasis has been on assembling the overarching infrastructures which allow time-space compression to become a reality. So the most commonly invoked paradigm of our age is the planet as 'a shrinking world.' The collapse of Soviet communism and economic reforms in China further added to the sense of the rise of one System under the Market (Fukuyama 1992). From this perspective not only is the world smaller but the earth is flatter, to borrow Thomas Friedman's coinage, where the world is conceived of as a level playing field, all competing for the spoils of free trade (Friedman 2006).

The advent of globalization and globalizing processes is not always or inevitably seen as a benign development. From the rise of the anti-globalization movement in the 1990s to the meltdown of financial markets at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, globalization has become a synonym for a plethora of ills (Klein 2007). One constant is the contention that what it entails is an irretrievable loss of innocence, a death sentence for diversity and

the spread of what I have called elsewhere ‘colonialism’, the viral spread of corporate, hegemonic sameness (Cronin 2003: 128). As the world shrinks, so do our possibilities for exploring, preserving and promoting difference. The global villages begin to resemble each other in dispiritingly predictable ways, carbon copy model towns presided over by brand uniformity. There is, however, another way, in which contemporary experience can be approached and this is through the prism of what we might term *micro-modernity*.

By this we mean that starting our analysis from the standpoint of the local, the nearby, the proximate, the micro, we can conceive of the local not as a point of arrival, the parachute drop for global forces, but as a point of departure, a opening out rather than a closing down, a way of re-enchanting a world grown weary of the jeremiads of cultural entropists. In advocating this shift of perspective, we wish to suggest that it is possible to situate translation in a new *politics of introversion* which seeks to expand possibilities, not reduce them and which reconfigures fundamentals of space and time in the new century with attendant socio-political and cultural consequences. Three privileged sites of micro-modernity are mobility, digital worlds and urbanization and we will explore each of these sites in turn, incorporating specific translational perspectives.

Mobility

When Italo Calvino’s Mr Palomar enters a cheese shop in Paris he is enchanted by what he finds:

> Behind every cheese there is a pasture of different green under a different sky: meadows caked with the salt of that the tides of Normandy deposit every evening; meadows scented with aromas in the windy sunlight of Provence; there are different flocks with their stablings and their

> transhumances; there are secret processes handed down over centuries. This shop is a museum: Mr Palomar visiting it, feels, as he does in the Louvre, behind every displayed object the presence of the civilization that has given it form and takes form from it.' (Calvino 1986: 66)

A random visit to a Parisian shop becomes a dramatic journey through space and time. A local shop becomes a secular stargate, a portal into the geography and history of an entire nation. Palomar's epiphany gives vivid expression to a distinction set up by the French travel theorist Jean-Didier Urbain between exotic travel and endotic travel (Urbain 1998: 217-232). Exotic travel is the more conventional mode of thinking about travel where travel is seen to involve leaving the prosaic world of the proximate everyday for a distant place, even if the notion of 'distance' can vary through time. Exotic travel implies leaving familiar surroundings for a place which is generally situated at some remove from the routine world of the traveller. From the perspective of macro-modernity, because far becomes nearer, it becomes all the more commonplace to equate travel with going far. Endotic travel, on the other hand, is an exercise in staying close by, not leaving the familiar and travelling interstitially through a world we thought we knew. Endotic travel is the mobile site of micro-modernity.

There are three different strands informing the practice of endotic travel. The first strand is the exploration of what Georges Perec has called the 'infra-ordinary' (Perec 1989). Perec explores the teeming detail of confined spaces in works such as *Espèces d Espaces* (1974), *Tentative d épuisement d un lieu parisien* (1982) or *L Infra-Ordinaire* (1989). In *Espèces d Espaces*, the narrative focus moves from the bed to the bedroom to the apartment to the building to the street to the street to the town and space itself. In this reverse Google map, the cursor of the writerly eye pulls back from spatial minutiae to a picture which is constructed on a larger and larger scale. However, as is evident in *Tentative d épuisement d un lieu parisien*, where the narrator

compulsorily lists all the goings on in and around the Café de la Mairie beside the Saint Sulpice church in Paris, the primary aim of Perec's method is to make evident the sheer scale of the 'infra-ordinary', the encyclopedic density of things going on in our immediate surrounding which generally pass unnoticed.

The second strand is an ethnology of proximity expressed in a tradition of writing which goes from Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721) to Marc Augé's *La Traversée du Luxembourg* (1985) and *Un Ethnologue dans le métro* (1986). In this ethnographic practice, the usual poles of enquiry are reversed so that it is the domestic not the foreign which becomes the focus of analytic enquiry. In Montesquieu's famous conceit, it is to treat French society and mores as purportedly observed from the viewpoint of Persian visitors. The familiar is exoticized through this foreignizing practice and along the way the French writer points up the disturbing shortcomings of a putatively 'civilized' society. Marc Augé, for his part, treats the Parisian underground as if it were an unknown and hitherto unexplored ethnographic terrain.

The third strand contributing to endotic travel practices is internal travel writing. Internal travel writing makes its point of departure, in a sense, its point of arrival. One of the earliest examples is Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794). In this account de Maistre treats his bedroom in Paris as if it were a vast, uncharted and perilous territory where moving from his bed to a chair has all the adventure of an expedition on the high seas. A more recent example is François Maspero's *Les Passagers du Roissy Express* (1990). In this travel account Maspero spends two months with the photographer Anaïk Frantz doing a journey that normally takes forty-five minutes. They stop off at each of the stations on the way to central Paris and what are revealed are whole other worlds normally invisible to the traveler hurtling through seemingly featureless spaces on the way from the airport to the city.

What these different strands share is that they are all strategies of

defamiliarization. They compel the reader to look afresh, to call into question the taken for granted, to take on board the infinitely receding complexity of the putatively routine or prosaic. They suggest that shrinkage is not a matter of scale but of vision. A narrowing of focus, a reduction in scale can lead to an expansion of insight, an unleashing of interpretive and imaginative possibilities often smothered by the large-scale, long-range hubris of the macro-modern.

Endotic perspectives

There are two levels at which the notion of the endotic has implications for translation, the textual and the social. A common misconception among apprentice translators or external observers of translation practices is to assume that translation is first and foremost about foreign languages and their acquisition. In other words, translation is assumed to be primarily an exotic traveling practice, taking the translator to foreign languages, cultures and places. It goes without saying that the view is not wholly mistaken as not knowing a source language would be a poor qualification for a translator, even if this does not stop a great deal of poets in the English speaking world from 'translating' poets from languages wholly unknown to them (the fig leaf in this instance is the coy synonym, 'version'). However, what students of translation soon realize is that it is the endotic dimension to their travels in language which becomes paramount as they realize that they scarcely know the language they had hitherto taken for granted. Translation defamliarizes the language of the proximate, of the everyday. The student translator becomes increasingly aware of the uncharted territories and the unsuspected complexities of the familiar tongue. They begin to explore domains of usage, webs of intertextual reference, differences of register, shifts in historical meaning, which had previously remained under the radar of native language awareness. It is indeed the development of this endotic sensibility at a textual level which accounts for

the significant and repeated contributions of translators to the construction and development of national languages.

The endotic manifestation at a social level is best captured in Stuart Hall's notion of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Hall 2002: 30). Hall argues that the most notable shift in societies in many parts of the globe in the latter half of the twentieth century has been the rapid, internal differentiation of societies. In other words, whereas formerly, the foreign, the exotic, the other, was held to be over the border or beyond the mountains or over the sea, now the other is next door, or across the street or in the same office. Globalized patterns of migration and the creation of supra-national structures like the European Union have meant that a great many places, in particular, but not only, cities, are host to peoples with many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This, indeed, is one of the most salient features in Maspero's decelerated odyssey through the stations of the Roissy Express. He comes into contact with migrants speaking a plurality of languages and bringing with them a variety of spoken and unspoken histories. They are bearers of what James Clifford has called 'travel stories' which he distinguishes from 'travel literature in the bourgeois sense' (Clifford 1992: 110).

The stories are unlikely to be listened to, however, if there is no language in which they can be understood. This is where the endotic dimension of translation comes into play at a social level. What community interpreting most notably does is to open up the communication channels in an era of vernacular cosmopolitanism. As the neighbourhoods of global cities become more densely invested with the linguistic diversity of migrant populations, it is translators and interpreters who are crucially involved in making sure that voices are heard and that the attendant richness of multilngualism and polylingualism becomes something more than an incomprehensible soundtrack to visual paens to multicultural diversity.

Digital worlds

There is more than one way of making voices heard, however, and crucial to how we conceive of a sustainable future for humanity is the role of machine-human interaction. One of the most notable developments in the last two decades has been the shift from stand-alone PCs, located at fixed work stations to the spread of distributed computing in the form of laptops, wireless PDAs, mobile phones with internet connectivity and so on. It is not only humans but their machines which are on the move. As Dennis and Urry express it:

> This trend in distributed computing is developing towards a shift to ubiquitous computing where associations between people, place/space, and time are embedded within a systemic relationship between a person and their kinetic environment. (Dennis and Urry 2007: 13)

Ubiquitous computing sometimes referred to as the 'third wave of computing' is one 'whose cross-over point with personal computing will be around 2005-2020' and which may become 'embedded in walls, chairs, clothing, light switches, cars—in everything' (Brown and Weiser 1996). Greenfield has talked of 'everyware' where information processing is embedded in the objects and surfaces of everyday life (Greenfield 2006: 18). The probable social impact of everyware can be compared to electricity which passes invisibly through the walls of every home, office and car. The transition from fixed locations of access to increased wireless presence coupled with the exponential growth of internet capability means that greatly augmented information flows become part of an information-immersive environment.

A consequence of the emergence of ubiquitous computing is that computing capacity dissolves into the physical surroundings, architectures and infrastructures. Marcos Novak has developed the term 'transArchitecture' to

signify ‘a liquid architecture that is transmitted across the global information networks; within physical space it exists as an invisible electronic double superimposed on our material world’ (Novak ref.). William Mitchell in the 1990s had already spoken of a ‘city of bits’ where the combination of physical structures in urban spaces with the electronic spaces and telematics would be known as ‘recombinant architectures’ (Mitchell 1995: 46-105). Although it has not appeared, somewhat predictably, in the literature so far, it is difficult to conceive of the trans-architectural in contemporary urban spaces without factoring in the multilingual. That is to say, part of the thinking about next-generation localization is precisely the role that translation will play in the era of distributed, ubiquitous computing.

It is possible to conceive of buildings—government offices, university halls of residence, transport hubs—which would be multilingually enabled. A hand-held device such as a mobile phone would allow the user to access relevant information in the language of his or her choice. Thus, rather than the static and serial presentation of information in a limited number of languages, such a development would allow for a customised interaction with the language user with the possibility for continuous expansion in languages offered and information offered.

Advances in peer-to-peer computing and the semantic web further favour the transition from a notion of translation provision as available in parallel series to translation as part of a networked system, a potentially integrated nexus. In other words, rather than content being rolled out in a static, sequential manner (eg separate language information leaflets at tourist attractions), translated material would be personalised, user-driven and integrated into a dynamic systems of ubiquitous delivery. Such developments are in line with the four dominant ideas for the future as articulated by the UK Foresight Report: Personal Mobility; Cyberspace; Smart Flows; and Urban Environment (Sharpe and Hodgson 2006). More specifically, the trans-architectural dimension to the practice of translation not only adds another

dimension to the endotic experience of the social but it invites larger considerations about how we might think about the 'Urban Environment.'

Urbanization

A positive construction of language otherness in urban settings is to see linguistic otherness as an area of genuine possibility, bringing with it new perspectives, energies, traditions and forms of expression into a society. This, of course, begs the question as to how this positive view of alterity might be realized in view of the sheer language diversity of contemporary migration. Here again translation has a crucial role to play and nowhere more obviously than in urban planning. Richard Sennett claims, for example, that the major contemporary problem for urbanists committed to a cosmopolitan perspective is 'how do you intensify rather than localize social interaction?' (Sennett 2002: 47). One way of doing this is to see multilingual, multi-ethnic urban space as first and foremost as a *translation zone*. In other words, if translation is primarily about a form of interaction with another language and culture (which in turn modifies one's own), then it is surely to translation that we must look if we want to think about how global neighbourhoods are to become something other than the regime of non-interactive indifference decried by Sennett.

China, for example, intends to move 400 million people, which is roughly half of the country's rural population into urban centres by 2030 (Dennis and Urry 2007: 10). The urbanisation of the population is the rule rather than the exception in contemporary demographic developments and indeed the nature and extent of urbanisation has exercised many commentators from Jacobs to Sassen (Jacobs 1962; Sassen 2006)). Town planners ritually concern themselves with problems of traffic management, the state of public utilities, the availability of green spaces, the viability of urban communities, the sustainability of waste practices and so on but it is seems inexplicable that the

multilingual composition of cities across the planet is wholly ignored. The lacuna is all the more surprising in that language difference is the most immediate, audible and practical sign of the presence of others. More worryingly, the failure to address the question of multilingualism from an informed translation perspective allows the emergence of unhealthy alliances between stereotype and rejectionist purism. For example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted in its Third Report on the Netherlands (2008) that it had 'received an increasing number of reports according to which racial profiling (i.e. the use, with no objective and reasonable justification of grounds such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin in control, surveillance and other similar law enforcement activities) is not uncommon in the Netherlands' (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2007). Given that language tests are now a central and public part of citizenship requirements in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom, it is hardly surprising that racial profiling should find an alibi in a systematic distrust of language difference. Indeed, translation itself has been identified by certain commentators in the United Kingdom as a dangerous abettor of civic disloyalty:

> It's a shocking figure: more than £100m was spent in the past year on translating and interpreting for British residents who don't speak English. In the name of multiculturalism, one Home Office-funded centre alone provides these services in 76 languages[…]The financial cost is bad enough, but there is a wider problem about the confused signals we are sending to immigrant communities. We are telling them they don't have to learn English, let alone integrate. Worse by isolating them linguistically, we have created communities that are now incubators for islamo-fascism. (Rahman 2006)

There is a translation paradigm underlying these comments, an assimilationist paradigm which sees all newcomers and residents as translated into the

dominant language of the host community. It is a unidirectional, binary conception of translation which adjudges the nature of translation to be *either* one thing *or* the other. Either everybody speaks the target language or everyone is condemned to the fractured solipsism of source languages. Such a translation scenario is ultimately grounded in the world view of monoglossia which can only conceive of difference as oppositional. In other words, if the target language is to be dominant then the very existence of source languages is a threat to the hegemony of the One. Arjun Appadurai in his exploration of large-scale violence against minorities in Eastern Europe, Rwanda and India in the 1990s speaks of the 'anxiety of incompleteness.' His argument is that numerical majorities can become violent, even genocidal towards 'small numbers' when minorities remind majorities of the 'small gap which lies between their conditions as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethos' (Appadurai 2006: 8). Such movements become particularly prevalent in times of rapid change where national economies and welfare systems are made fragile by the globalization of financial and market relationships:

> The virtually complete loss of even the fiction of a national economy, which had some evidence for its existence in the eras of strong socialist states and central planning now leaves the cultural field as the main one in which fantasies of purity, authenticity, borders, and security can be enacted. (22-23)

States which are invited to open themselves to the flows of Western capital and the ministrations of transnational corporations compensate by acting out dramas of national sovereignty in the cultural arena. Hence, the prevalence of moral panic around foreign migrants, foreign customs, foreign beliefs and foreign languages.

In positing the city as translation zone we are arguing for a different

paradigmatic representation of translation and language. The fundamental move is to see translation as an analog, both/and praxis which allows for *both* the instrumental utility of target language translation *and* the pragmatic and cultural necessity of mother-tongue maintenance. In other words, translation can obviously be used to allow for the circulation of meaning between a dominant host community and different minority language groups (translation into target language) but it can also be used as a means of legitimising language alterity and social accommodation (provision of translating and interpreting services in minority or community languages). To take just one example, integration is not all about either English or nothing else. As the evidence of countless countries throughout the world attests, it is perfectly possible for human beings to operate in more than one language at any number of different levels (Edwards 1995). In this respect, due attention to the practice of translation and the encouragement of language diversity in societies is to do nothing that is particularly exceptional in global terms but it is to do something that is deeply enriching in local contexts. What is more, authoritative research has shown that the surest way to enhance second-language acquisition is to pay careful attention to mother-tongue maintenance (Baker 2000; Cummins 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

Crucial to the availability of translation is a conviction that language should not be seen as ‘barrier’ or an ‘obstacle’but as an opportunity. Implicit in this conception is polyglossia rather than monoglossia. If multilingualism suggests a serial image of discrete units, polylingualism implies a more open, networked form of language relationships. Translators are, by definition, polylinguals, but in the repeated representations of cities as sites of serial monolingualism the role of polylinguals is minimised or forgotten. The reformulation of public space in urban centres as primarily a translation zone has the potential to promote a model of social cohesion which promotes the inclusion not the elimination of difference. So in everything from small local theatres presenting translations of plays from different migrant languages to

new voice recognition and speech synthesis technology producing discreet translations in wireless environments to systematic client education for community interpreting to translation workshops as part of diversity management courses in the workplace, the possibilities for a more dynamic and less hegemonic conception of urban centres from a translation perspective are numerous.

If cohesion is a watchword of civic viability, sustainability is the mantra of ecological survival. The Scottish theorist Alastair McIntosh describes a 'cycle of belonging'which he sees as integral to any notion of the sustainable. The cycle has four elements which follow on from each other, a sense of place (grounding) which gives rise to a sense of identity (ego/head) that carries with it a sense of values (soul/heart) which generates in turn a sense of responsibility (action/hand) (McIntosh 2008: 235). In emphasising the role of place, McIntosh is trying to formulate a basis for collective togetherness and responsibility which has an inclusive civic basis rather than an exclusive ethnic basis. The concern with place has equally pressing pragmatic concerns which are to do with the sustainability of human communities. For humans to live like the average Indian, half a planet would be needed, to live like an average European, three would be needed, and to live like the average American, seven planets would be required. McIntosh concludes that 'It is only if we can find fulfillment in close proximity to one another and local place that we can hope to stop sucking what we need from all over the world' (71-2).

It is the disconnection from place where agricultural land is drained, rivers are straightened and concrete is poured over ground that once served as a vital sponge, which leads to the catastrophic flooding in various parts of the world, aggravated by increased rainfall due to climate change. But fundamental to any ethics of sustainability or cycle of belonging must be an understanding of place not only as an object in space but as a phenomenon in time. By this we mean there is a further dimension to the city as translation zone which resides not only in the social (community interpreting) or the technological (ubiquitous

computing) but in the historical. The historical dimension fundamentally relates to the role of translation history in re-presenting histories of place. In this respect, it has much in common with contemporary 'global history' which crosses national frontiers, takes a long-term perspective, is comparative in spirit, draws on several disciplines and is particularly interested in questions of contact, exchange, hybridity and migration (Testot 2009: 7-8).

In tracing histories of contact and exchange in urban settings, cultural historians such as Sherry Simon, show that any proper or fuller understanding of place involves bringing to light the multiple, embedded stories of how language communities have negotiated their relationships through translation down through the centuries (Simon 2006). In other words, what is made apparent is that places have a multiplicity of origins and what contemporary migratory developments bring to the fore is the buried multiple histories of specific places. For example, Timothy Brook in *Vermeer s Hat: The 17th Century and the Dawn of the Global World* draws on the material objects found in Vermeer's paintings (a beaver fur hat, a china bowl) to chart the relationship between Dutch cities and forms of proto-globalization (Brook 2008). The objects are used as evidence to show how local lives were intensely connected with and affected by currents of migration, exchange and influence. None of these connections would have been possible were it not for the existence of translators and translation moments. In a sense, what is being suggested is an endotic form of translation history which explores the local place for its connections outwards, its inter-dependence on other languages, cultures, places. Allowing for this approach invests place with a form of fractal complexity which is appropriate to the model of micro-modernity mentioned at the outset of the essay. Highlighting the historical dimension has the added advantage of providing a historical 'home'to newcomers in that they are made aware of the fact that many places have been places of passage and interchange and that their very 'newness'is part of a long tradition of arrival and settlement.

Cultural translation

One common way of discussing both historical and contemporary developments in the context of urbanization and globalization is to speak about 'cultural translation.' In discussing cultural translation part of the difficulty lies with the way in which culture itself has assumed a foundational role in contemporary society. If, in previous ages, God or Nature, was seen as the ground on which all else rested for its meaning, in the post-modern age, it is Culture which is summoned to the basement of epistemic and ontological coherence. The sense that culture goes all the way down satisfies the essentialists who see culture as a set of immutable attributes passed from one generation to the next. Conversely, the notion that anything can be understood as a cultural construction cheers the relativists who can disassemble the handiwork of national chauvinists. The primary difficulty is that both camps explicitly or implicitly subscribe to culturalist readings of social and historical phenomena which has the signal disadvantage of marginalising structural questions in political discourse and analysis. In other words, whereas formerly racial or class difference was invoked to justify exclusion and inequality, it is now culture which is recruited to justify surveillance and marginalisation. 'They'are not like 'Us' not because they eat differently or dress differently or speak differently. The differentialist racism of societies becomes culturalised.

This is one of the reasons why a common response to the highly mediated and mythologized 'crisis' of multiculturalism ('ghettoes'as the sleeper cells of terror) is to focus on the cultural shibboleths of integration, notably the language and citizenship testsmentioned earlier, designed to elicit appropriate cultural knowledge. However, the point about citizenship tests is not that most British or German or Danish or Dutch citizens would fail them. That is not what they are there for. The purpose is explicitly performative. The aim is to subject migrants to the public gaze, where the State can be seen to exact a particular form of linguistic or epistemic tribute. However, what is crucial to

note is that ‘integration’ which is held up as the telos of the tests is not a static but a dynamic category, which can be indefinitely reframed depending on the exigencies of the moment. That is to say, if the other becomes too well ‘integrated’, too well ‘translated’, if they enthusiastically embrace the language, institutions, the habitus of the host society, they become equally suspect as the ‘fifth column’, the ‘enemy within’, that dissimulate treachery through feigned assimilation.

The murderous forensics of anti-semitism in European history fed off precisely the highly volatile reconfiguration of what it meant to be ‘integrated.’ Therefore, the question which might be asked is whether the very term ‘cultural’ translation is not complicit in the de-politicization of the public sphere. As the social theorist Alana Lentin has noted:

> Many theorists, artists, musicians and writers have emphasised the fluidity of cultural identities. But without challenging the underlying reason for why culture dominates our understandings it is unlikely that this will have a significant impact in the realm of politics and policy making. Thinking culturally about difference is the default for not talking about "race", thereby avoiding the charge of racism. But the need for such a substitute obscures the fact that the hierarchy put in place by racism has been maintained. (2004: 99)

When migrants are being asked to translate themselves into the dominant language and value system of the host community, they do so from a vantage point which is almost invariably structurally defined by categories of class and race, yet these structural conditions or contexts for the translation process (whose telos, the successful ‘translation’is often indefinitely postponed) are rarely made explicit as such.

Translation historians have detailed the co-option of translation for the process of nation building and the manner in which linguistics in certain manifestations has posited a reified notion of what might constitute a speech

community (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995). It is possible to argue, however, that the notion of cultural translation highlights an even more fundamental feature of contemporary societies than the oft-repeated lingering hegemony of nation-states, namely, an intolerance of conflict.

Conflict

A substantial section of bookshops in many richer countries is given over to self-help manuals. Implicit in these manuals is the notion that there is an ideal self which is somewhat out of kilter because it lacks confidence, vitamin B, the X factor or has failed to dejunk its life. 'I am not myself today'implies that there is a unitary, consensual self which is the desirable default value for the good life. This psychologised consensualism finds its correlative at a political level in the notion that representative democracy consists of a collection of points of view which are all equally valid. The point of view of the workers'representative where 2,000 jobs have been delocalized is as valid as that of the corporate vice-president who has engineered the 'rationalization.' So everybody gets to have their say. But what they are saying is that real conflict is no longer acceptable. In other words, in reality, points of view are irreducible, as speakers are situated very differently, both materially and structurally, but the false symmetrization of the media sphere conceals the very genuine conflict of interests through the irenic fiction of the representative sound bite.

In another version of the tyranny of compliance, when social movements oppose government measures, such as penalizing public sector workers for the financial irresponsibility of the private sector, government spokespersons and stockbroker economists talk about a 'communications deficit.' If only the people understood what we were doing, they would realize it was ultimately for their own good. Opposition can only be conceived of as cussedness or

stupidity. No allowance is made for the fact that there are grounded material interests and structural conditions which make opposition not only inevitable but vital. It is in this context that translation can be of value to us in proposing a way of thinking about the ontological necessity of conflict.

As even the most rudimentary translation exercise soon reveals, translation is above all an initiation into unsuspected complexity. The simplest of texts turns out to be not as straightforward as we thought. Putting what we find in one text into another language and text and culture throws up unsettling questions about our sense of our own language and makes the familiar alien. What this schooling in complexity reveals is the radical insufficiency of cultural shorthand. That is to say, the cultural categorisation of society as made of recognisable types designated by labels, 'dyslexic', 'epileptic', 'Paddy', 'Gay', 'Muslim', reduces the multi-dimensional complexity of humans to one defining trait. Once someone is described using one of these labels, that is all you need to know about them. They become transparent. What gay rights activists and the women's movement in various parts of the globe and at different times have attempted to do is to restore multi-dimensionality and complexity to the lives of human beings who were deemed to be instantly intelligible as 'gay' or 'woman', gender or sexual orientation revealing all.

Transparency, of course, is a kind of invisibility and this is conventionally how translation is perceived, as an unproblematic transcoding process. The practice is predictably different and translators must of necessity engage with the multi-dimensionality of texts, languages and cultures. Nothing can be taken for granted (novices take a lot for granted, hence the culture shock of translation). Words are not what they seem and cultures are maddeningly plural. But there is particular quality to the agonistic basis of translation. In the classic binaries of translation theory, SL and TL, source and target culture, author and translator, translator and reader, we find the binary logic of specular confrontation. Entities with fixed identities face up to each other in a zero sum of binary opposition. But translation as conflict is not confrontation, it is

conflict as engagement with the multidimensionality of texts, languages and cultures. It contests the culturalist versions of contemporary biopower which denies translation and interpreting rights to internal minorities in the name of avoiding a 'clash of civilisations' where all conflict is presented as confrontation through the binary stereotyping of Us and Them.

An agonistic conception of translation, which runs directly counter to the beatific visions of universal understanding underlying many public pronouncements on the subject, takes as a basic premise the incomprehensibility of the other. That is to say, translation is not simply the revelation of what is already there. If that were the case the statistical chances of a relatively large number of students, for example, producing identical translations would be high, whereas in reality this almost never holds true. The reason is that in translation we have the creation of some form of shared sense, some degree of commonality, which gives substance to the idea of translation as not the uncovering of a universal substrate, waiting to be revealed, but the contingent construction of bottom-up commonality. It is in this conflicted sense that translation can provide a way of thinking about contemporary multilingual and multicultural societies in a way that moves beyond revealed universalism and schismatic relativism. Christopher Prendergast, drawing on the work of Victor Segalen, claimed that we 'are never "closer" to another culture (and hence liberated from the raps of ethnocentrism) than when we fail to understand it, when confronted with the points of blockage to interpretive mastery' (Prendergast: 2004: xi). If translation is about the eternally deferred, asymptotic attempts to get close to another culture, it also brings into sharp relief the material, social and historically situatedness of peoples, their languages and their texts. Translation in the current age is at the heart of what matters and offers us a way, both practical and conceptual, of envisioning sustainable communities in a period of great flux. The 'glory' however is not about power, but more humbly, survival.

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[Abstract]

Translation, Micro-Modernity and the Global City

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In this essay, the position of the translator will be linked to the spatial and cultural flux of late modernity. In terms of how local places can give expression to global connectedness, we will explore translation as a way of thinking about what might constitute a notion of sustainability for cultures and societies. The last two centuries might be termed the era of macro-modernity where the emphasis has been on assembling the overarching infrastructures which allow time-space compression to become a reality. So the most commonly invoked paradigm of our age is the planet as 'a shrinking world'. In this essay, we will be advancing an alternative notion of micro-modernity. Three privileged sites of micro-modernity are mobility, digital worlds and urbanization and we will investigate each of these sites in turn, incorporating specific translational perspectives. In the area of urbanisation, it is proposed that a way to view multilingual, multi-ethnic urban space is as first and foremost a translation zone. In other words, if translation is primarily about a form of interaction with another language and culture (which in turn modifies one's own), then it is to translation that we must look if we want to think about how global neighbourhoods are to become something other than regimes of non-interactive indifference.

▸ Key Words: globalization, sustainability for cultures and societies, micro-modernity, Endotic perspectives

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