

Translation Sites

In *Translation Sites*, leading theorist Sherry Simon shows how the processes and effects of translation pervade contemporary life. This field guide is an invitation to explore hotels, markets, museums, checkpoints, gardens, bridges, towers and streets as sites of translation. These are spaces whose meanings are shaped by language traffic and by a clash of memories.

Touching on a host of issues from migration to the future of Indigenous cultures, from the politics of architecture to contemporary metrolingualism, *Translation Sites* powerfully illuminates questions of public interest. Abundantly illustrated, the guidebook creates new connections between translation studies and memory studies, urban geography, architecture and history.

This ground-breaking book is both an engaging read for a wide-ranging audience and an important text in broadening the scope of translation studies.

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New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies

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These lively and highly readable texts provide an exploration into various areas of translation and interpreting studies for undergraduate and postgraduate students of translation studies, interpreting studies and cultural studies.

Translation Sites

A Field Guide

Sherry Simon

Translation and Translanguaging

Mike Baynham and Tong King Lee

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017
*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-23285-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-23286-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-31109-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For Eleanor, *plus ultra*



Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	x
Introduction: Polyglot places	1
PART I	
Architectures of memory	13
1 THE MONUMENT The struggle for memory: Space of Synagogues, Lviv	15
2 THE OPERA HOUSE Languaged architecture: The Neues Deutsches Theater in Prague	30
3 THE CHURCH The work of conversion: Santa Maria la Blanca, Toledo	42
PART II	
Transit	53
4 THE HOTEL Between place and non-place, difference and indifference: The Grand Budapest Hotel and the Tokyo Park Hyatt	55

viii *Contents*

5	THE MOUNTAIN TOP Translation changes you: The language of heptapods	69
6	THE TOWER From ziggurat to spiral, from Brueghel to Primo Levi	80
7	THE BRIDGE Across small spaces: Where is the “Between”? The bridge of Mostar and the Øresund bridge	94
8	THE WAR HOTEL The Holiday Inn, Sarajevo	112
PART III		
Crossroads		121
9	THE MARKET Urban translanguaging: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong	123
10	THE STREET Activist translation: The streets of Montreal and Cairo	133
11	THE MUSEUM Displaying Indigenous languages: The National Gallery of Canada	144
PART IV		
Thresholds		157
12	THE TRANSLATOR’S STUDY Picturing translation from Saint Jerome to Nurith Aviv	159
13	THE LIBRARY Near and far: Chicago and Czernowitz	177
14	THE GARDEN Replication: The Japanese garden in Ireland and the German garden city in Turkey	188

15 THE PSYCHOANALYST'S COUCH The Schizo body and translation as self-defence	200
PART V	
Borders, control, surveillance	211
16 NO MAN'S LAND The step-mother tongue and the Dead Zone, Cyprus	213
17 THE CHECKPOINT The Shibboleth and Ellis Island	222
18 THE EDGE OF EMPIRE Far from where? Joseph Roth and Brody	233
Conclusion	250
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	255
<i>Image credits</i>	258
<i>Index</i>	264

Figures

0.1	Tatlin's project for a monument to the Third International (1919)	10
1.1	Multilingual storefront in modern-day Lviv	18
1.2	Stones in the Space of Synagogues project, Lviv	21
1.3	Debora Vogel, Yiddish poet of pre-World War II Lwów (1902–1942)	26
2.1	Exterior of the Czech National Theatre (1881); Interior of Czech National Theatre	34
2.2	Roof detail of the exterior of the former Neues Deutsches Theater, today the Prague State Opera House (1888); Exterior of the former Neues Deutsches Theater, today the Prague State Opera House	37
3.1	The Toledo train station, 1922	43
3.2	The synagogue called Santa Maria la Blanca; plaque with name of synagogue	46
4.1	The Palace Bristol Hotel in Karlovy-Vary	58
4.2	Facade of the Hotel Bristol in Vienna	63
5.1	<i>Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog</i> (1818), painting by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), Kunsthalle Hamburg	70
5.2	Symbol of the heptapod language in Denis Villeneuve's <i>Arrival</i>	74

6.1	Detail of <i>The Tower of Babel</i> (right side of the tower; 1563), by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1526/1530–1569)	84
6.2	<i>La Divina Commedia di Dante</i> (Dante and the Divine Comedy; 1465), fresco by Domenico di Michelino, in the Florence Cathedral	87
6.3	<i>The Collapse of the Tower of Babel</i> (1547), etching by Cornelisz Anthonisz	89
7.1	Photo from <i>Truth in Translation</i> (2008)	95
7.2	The Mostar Bridge	98
7.3	The Øresund Bridge	106
8.1	Holiday Inn, Sarajevo	114
8.2	Photo of Gavriilo Princip in a Belgrade bookstore, 2014	117
9.1	Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong (ground-level view)	124
9.2	Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong (view of building and neighbouring structures)	129
10.1	Demonstration on Montreal streets, 2012	136
11.1	Inuit language label for the work of Tim Pitsiulak, the National Gallery of Canada, 2018	147
11.2	A Toronto street sign with the Anishinaabe name for Spadina Avenue	153
12.1	<i>Saint Jerome in his Study</i> (1426), painting by Giovanni di Paolo	163
12.2	<i>Saint Jerome in his Study</i> (c.1475), painting by Antonello da Messina	164
12.3	Detail of the Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio (1478–1482)	166
12.4	Detail from <i>The Annunciation</i> (1433), painting by Fra Angelico	168
12.5	1514 engraving by Albrecht Dürer, <i>Saint Jerome in His Study</i>	171

xii *Figures*

13.1	University of Chicago Library in the snow	179
13.2	Czernowitz in Yiddish written into the pavement of the Herrengasse in today's Chernivtsi	184
14.1	The Ryōan-ji garden, Tokyo	193
14.2	The Frankfurt kitchen (1926) designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000)	197
15.1	The cover of Louis Wolfson's <i>Le Schizo et les langues</i> (1970)	202
15.2	Poster from the film <i>Yes Sir, Madame</i> by Robert Morin (1994)	205
16.1	Still image from the film <i>Poets in No Man's Land</i> (2012)	214
16.2	Still image from the film <i>Poets in No Man's Land</i> (2012)	219
17.1	<i>Shibboleth</i> , by Doris Salcedo, Tate Museum, London (2007)	223
17.2	Ellis Island reading test in Armeno-Turkish	227
17.3	Ellis Island	230
18.1	Russian-Austrian Border at Brody (postcard)	244
18.2	Brody Jewish cemetery	246
19.1	<i>In the Gallery</i> , photograph by Semyon Fridlyand (1927)	252

Introduction

Polyglot places

This is a guidebook. In its pages you will find a hotel in Sarajevo, an opera house in Prague, a memorial in Lviv, a bridge in Mostar, a museum in Ottawa, a garden in Ireland, a market in Hong Kong and a church in Toledo, among others. These are all sites shaped by conversations across languages. Here words and histories meet – in modes of coexistence, rivalry or conquest.

The itinerary was inspired by questions about language and memory. Translation sites are polyglot places, echoing with overlapping stories. To visit them is to experience competing versions of history and the uneven fit between present and past.

Each of the stops on this journey highlights the impact of language interactions on daily life. A similar connection was made in a remarkable museum exhibition in 2016 in Marseille. This big splash of a show was imagined by Barbara Cassin, one of France's leading philosophers. Displays of comic books, colonial figurines, illuminated manuscripts, a performance of moving lips – these brought translation to vivid life. Maps traced the worldwide travels of the great classics, from the *Thousand and One Nights* to the writings of Karl Marx.

2 *Introduction*

Called “Après Babel, Traduire” (“After Babel, Translate”) the show had a strong message: translations have shaped history and, more than ever, they have an impact on contemporary cities.

By its very success, however, the exhibition drew attention to the ordinary neglect of mediation. The evidence might be all around us, but, without clues, language histories are invisible. Translations open up routes of commerce and exchange, circulate stories, create the possibilities for coexistence on the streets. But to see the translational nature of objects and places is to be attentive to the shadows of other times and languages.

My aim in this book, following Cassin’s exhibition, is to identify and describe sites of translation. Instead of museum displays, I offer hotels, markets, museums, checkpoints and border zones. To follow my routes is to visit gardens, bridges and streets where languages compose ever-changing palimpsests and where spaces are charged with the tension between here and elsewhere. It is to visit places whose cultural meanings are shaped by language traffic and by the clash of memories.

Like any good guidebook, this one hopes to evoke a strong physical sense of place. The dialogue with difference often comes with a sensory charge. Each stop invites engagement with the sometimes contradictory emotions that translation sites can inspire. A Japanese garden in Ireland, a German opera house in Prague, a mountaintop between earth and sky – these activate the senses. They can provoke confusion or disorientation, as with a converted synagogue or mosque. They can inspire stronger feelings of abjection, as in the derelict spaces of the Dead Zone in Cyprus.

At the heart of each site is an encounter and an unresolved exchange. Like translated texts that display the

double realities of which they are composed, they are unsettling, exposing the lineaments of difference.

Stimulating the imagination, these sites recall the habit of mind that Anne Carson describes from long years of reading bilingual books. Every page read seems to refer to some forgotten or vanished left-hand original. This is like seeing “two tracks of reality running at the same time”. Illuminations gather in the folds between the pages, offering “two realities for the price of one” (1999, 8). For Carson, “the best connections are the ones that draw attention to their own frailty” (2016).

Counter-translation

Translation sites are often located in border zones, where the wounds of history are still legible. One of the formative geographies for this project was the linguistic landscape of Eastern Europe, shaped by a succession of political regimes. Here, translation is a powerful framework for reading cities and buildings smothered in layers of language.

For the cities of Central Europe, renaming in the twentieth century was a form of violence. Lemberg-Lviv-Lvov-Lwów, Pressburg-Pozsony-Presporak-Bratislava, Danzig-Gdansk, Wilno-Vilna-Vilnius, Czernowitz-Cernauti-Chernivtsi: each variant of the city name stands for a new regime of political and linguistic power. Entangled in the transformations brought about by the fall of the Habsburg Empire, two World Wars, and the end of Communism, the cosmopolitan cities of Central Europe fell prey to many forms of language makeovers.

But translation is a pendulum. The back swing recalls the violence of voices suppressed. The forward swing embraces the struggle to reanimate and reinstate those languages and the worlds they contain. Each of these

4 *Introduction*

cities has their “ghost signs”, glimpses of languages that resurface under the crumbling brick of a shop’s façade, announcing products to customers long gone. Messages from another time, they recall populations who have been expelled, annihilated. They also gesture towards acts of rememorialization, such as the Space of Synagogues in Lviv, where the words of the city’s once numerous Jewish community can be read again, summoning back the lost sounds of sidewalks.

Disappeared languages are reinserted into public space through the collective activist work of memory. This happens too in the very different context of the North American continent, where in today’s museums, Indigenous languages take their place on the walls – not as exotic artefacts, but as messages addressed to new publics. These versions bring into being forms of inclusive and democratic expression.

Memory is therefore an important theme in these pages. While translation can be an instrument of suppression, counter-translation can bring languages back into circulation.

In their relentless pursuit of the affect of place, writers like W. G. Sebald or Teju Cole wander the streets of cities in pursuit of stories buried beneath the surface. They sift through layers of history, seeking signposts in “an endless apprenticeship of seeing” (Kumar 2013). They juxtapose odd places and moments, creating flashes of the uncanny. But what of hearing? What of the layered geographies of sound? Language, too, needs its archaeologists.

Near and far

The streets of today’s cosmopolitan cities, markets, cinemas, universities are increasingly polyglot. But polyglot in this book does not refer to the peaceful coexistence of

languages. Translation sites argue against multilingualism as a simple juxtaposition of languages. Instead of seeing cities as avenues of free-flowing words, they crystallize language relations in time and space, defining specific moments of exchange or confrontation. They focus attention not on the multiplicity of languages but on their interactions and their rival claims. Whether in the context of sites of memory (Nora 1998), in the pioneering *Siting Translation* (1992) by Tejaswini Niranjana or Valeria Luiselli's *Translation Spaces* (2015), whether in neighbourhoods (Simon 2006, 2012) or the micro-spaces of courtrooms and migrant camps, situating translation directs attention to struggles for recognition.

Translators are often imagined as figures in motion. By dint of their multiple affiliations, they are considered marginal, even alienated, from a sense of home. But in fact, as becomes evident when attention is focused on space, interlingual exchange is anchored in the everyday life of today's citizens.

Polyglot places bring together the past and present; they also scramble the near and the far, the rooted and the transient, the stable and the impermanent, the low and the elevated. The tensions and ambiguities of place are beautifully illustrated in a famous Renaissance painting of Saint Jerome by Antonello da Messina. Jerome is pictured at work in the centre of a vast palace with windows opening onto a lively landscape. He is writing within the protective enclosure of a study, yet this hutch opens onto the vast corridors of a palace which in turn opens onto the busy world outside. This cascade of spaces also figures in a series of contemporary cinematic portraits by Nurith Aviv, in her 2011 documentary film *Traduire*, which frame the translator at once within the closed space of the study and against the window opening onto the city.

6 Introduction

Jerome and Aviv's translators inhabit literal sites of translation – places where translations are carried out. The *mise en scène* invites consideration of the paradoxes of intimacy when a distant reality is also being accessed. The library, as described by the Indian poet and translator A. K. Ramanujan, can also be a place where near and far meet. It is in the cold city of Chicago that he connects most intensely with India. On the bookshelves in the city of Chernivtsi (the former Czernowitz) the continued presence of German-language books calls up a fractured and disappeared culture. And in the experience of the Habsburg borderlands, as recounted by the novelist Joseph Roth, the separate languages of the border gradually distance themselves from the powerful norms of the capital city, Vienna.

The hotel is a site of both transience and rootedness. The Hotel Bristol in Vienna beloved of Joseph Roth or Wes Anderson's filmic *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) – these hotels speak the language of community. By contrast, the Tokyo Park Hyatt in Sophia Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* is more like a “non-place” and aligns weak forms of translation with melancholic indifference.

The bridge, too, comes in different versions. Consider the bridge of Mostar, a magnificent Turkish construction dating from the seventeenth century, destroyed in 1993 during the Bosnian war, and rebuilt in 2005 with the aid of the European Union. Used as the backdrop for a performance of a South African play, *Truth in Translation*, in 2008, the Mostar Bridge became a focal point for debate over post-trauma reconciliation. The Mostar Bridge represents a “thick” version of the bridge in contrast to the “thin” and frictionless Øresund Bridge crossing between Denmark and Sweden. Both bridges navigate between languages characterized by “small differences”. In one case, those differences are magnified, in the other, downplayed. In the 2011 television series *The Bridge*, those differences

are reduced to the point of inaudibility for the non-local viewer.

If the hotel and the bridge ask questions about engagement with cultural difference, the mountaintop introduces dialogue with the sublime. Can translation change you? On the mountaintop communication across spheres is played for the highest stakes – with the fate of humanity hanging in the balance. Louise Banks, the character in Denis Villeneuve’s 2016 film *Arrival*, attempts ascension in order to translate words of great importance to humanity and is transformed by her mission.

To discuss sites of elevation is to recall the most celebrated structure associated with translation – the Tower of Babel. The spiralling form associated with the structure favour readings of the Babel story as an optimistic one. But while the heights are usually associated with the divine, Primo Levi’s experience of Babel at Auschwitz (1947) focuses rather on the gap between human victims and non-human taskmasters.

Colliding voices

Five kinds of sites are considered in the following pages. Most of these can be found on a map. Others can be found only in books or on movie screens.

Architectures of Memory (I) define stratified memories, where one language history has been imposed upon another, where places are renamed or subjected to linguistic conversion. Translation participates in the aggression of overwriting, obliterating former histories. In the aftermath, however, a movement of counter-translation can become an instrument of redress.

Sites of **Transit (II)** are liminal zones which enable travellers and pilgrims to move from one sphere to another. The hotel, the bridge, the mountaintop, the tower – these

8 Introduction

nurture communication across languages – human, divine or alien. Modes of communication result from the tensions between large or small differences, encumbered or smooth passage, horizontal or vertical trajectories.

Crossroads and **Thresholds** engage with multiplicity and conversation across differences. **Crossroads (III)** call up colliding voices and activist forms of intervention and include the market, the street, the museum. Here trans-languaging and metrolingualism expand beyond written, textual forms to become more volatile figures of passage across forms of expression. Language crossings challenge conventions, whether they be the norms of commerce in Hong Kong, modes of political protest in Montreal and Cairo, or the presence of Indigenous languages in museum displays. Through “aspirational terminologies” or “as-if equivalences”, translations bring ideas and subjectivities into existence. The question of *who translates* is not always obvious. The author may be the forces that lead to the “making present” of language in urban space – forces such as histories of violence, colonialism or neo-liberalism. Other kinds of translations have collective authorship, as when collaborative and activist forms of expression emerge on the unruly spaces of city streets.

Thresholds (IV) define language transactions through frames that separate inside and outside, here and there. The translator’s study, the garden, the library, the psychoanalyst’s couch – these are structures that foster dialogues between the immediate present and a wider universe. This section introduces the idea of a “translation disorder” leading to psychic breakdown.

Section V explores spaces which Michel Foucault would call disciplinary, where languages are a form of **Surveillance and Control**. This is the case at borders, checkpoints or reception centres where migrants are processed for entry into national territory. Also considered here are zones of exchange (No Man’s Land, the Edge of Empire) that resist

treating authors as representatives of their national, religious or linguistic origins. “Contaminated languages” and the “step-mother tongue”, put pressure on language borders and foster forms of incomplete exchange.

Each of the short chapters of this book examines place through a different facet of translation. It is important to note, however, that neither place nor translation is a reliable touchstone: each explodes into fragments. What kind of place? What kind of translation?

The ruins of Babel

Translation in all its forms is a great teacher, fostering a critical engagement with difference. As a posture of inquiry, an attitude of mind, translation sees all knowledge as resulting from movement, encounter, transfer.

Vladimir Tatlin’s spiralling monument to the Third International (1919–20) was among the images on display at the exhibition at the Marseille Museum. It is a stylish, updated version of the Tower of Babel, symbolizing the brash utopianism of the Bolshevik Revolution. It was to be a communications tower and, like Babel, was seeking ever broader spheres of contact. The hopes of the Soviet idealists, however, were short-lived. Their ideals would collapse, as Soviet history advanced into totalitarianism. Tatlin’s structure remains nonetheless a stirring tribute to the appeal of collective dreams.

For Barbara Cassin, the story of Babel continues to be about dreams, but these are reconfigured for the twenty-first century. Of the two parts of the Babel story – the striving for a single, universal future and then the collapse, dispersal and wandering – it is the second that most interests Cassin and the thinkers to whom she is indebted. Our century is wary of utopian ambitions. Rather it is from the ruins of Babel, from the broken, splintered, dispersed state of humanity that a new ideal of communication emerges.

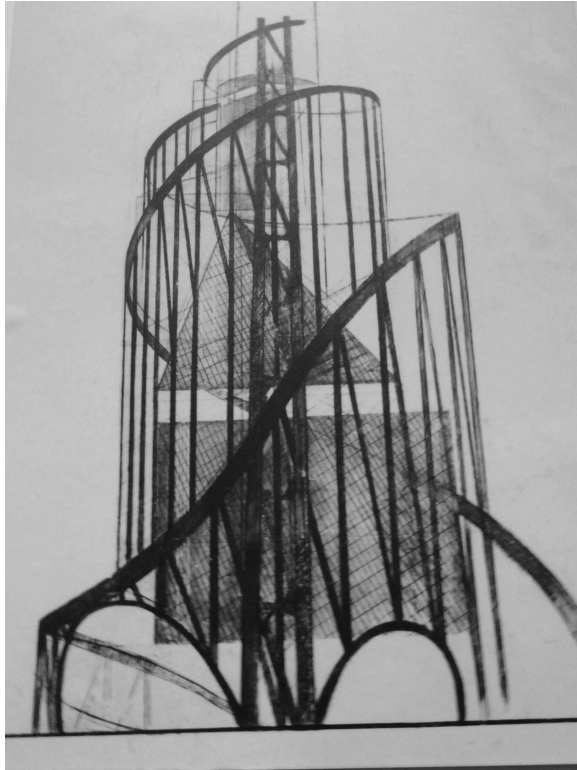


Figure 0.1 Tatlin's project for a monument to the Third International would have dwarfed the Eiffel Tower. It reimagines the Tower of Babel in a spirit of revolutionary optimism.

Out of these fragments comes the exuberant diversity of our cosmopolitan present – with translation its most powerful form of expression.

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Part I

Architectures of memory



1 THE MONUMENT

The struggle for memory

Space of Synagogues, Lviv

A traveller to Lviv, transiting through Munich Airport, might react with astonishment to a sign announcing the flight. The sign says Lemberg, the Habsburg name by which this city was known until the fall of the Empire in 1918. Flying there today is like catching a plane for Constantinople.

The author and human rights lawyer Philippe Sands notes the anomalous sign in the Munich Airport in the introduction to his 2016 book *East West Street*, a remarkable detective-like investigation that reaches back into the imperial history of the city. Sands would well understand the resonances of this apparition from the Habsburg past. His book is the story of the intertwined lives of three Jewish men born in interwar Lwów, then a Polish city. While researching the life of his grandfather Leon, Sands discovered that two remarkable figures in the history of modern human rights law had also lived and studied in the city. These were Hersch Lauterpacht, the inventor of the term “crimes against humanity”, and Rafael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide”. Both would considerably influence the procedure and outcome of the Nuremberg Trials.

Sands uses the acute mind of the legal expert to reconstitute an extraordinary chronicle. It shows the interwar

Lemberg/Lwów/Lvov to have been a breeding ground for new ideas, a cosmopolitan and modern city, until its future was hijacked by World War II and its aftermath.

Sands was in Lviv in September 2017 to launch the Ukrainian translation of *East West Street*. He was adept at conveying his passion for the city, but he was especially effective in communicating this enthusiasm to young people. Because of the circumstances of history, he told them in essence, you may not know of the extraordinary men who were born here or some of the contributions your city has made to modern history. But with his lectures and his book, Sands was trying to correct this neglect. What he was saying to them was: this city has experienced remarkable events, and the memory of these happenings – the bad and the good – also belongs to you. The translation of his book was not only a report on what he had discovered, but an invitation to his Ukrainian readers to make the story theirs.

The import of such an invitation is especially meaningful in a city like Lviv. Here history and memory meet at odd angles, and belonging comes with heavy baggage. Translation, whether of a book, a personal testimony or a public inscription, has significant resonance. When languages have been eliminated, restoring them to public presence becomes all the more powerful. To be effective, translations must be embedded in a collective desire to reinstate a forgotten, repressed or wilfully suppressed memory. Both Philippe Sands' book and the memorial known as the Space of Synagogues in Lviv such attempts – reflecting a will to reinscribe the Jewish presence into the urban fabric of the city.

Shallow roots

Today's Lviv (Ukrainian) has been called Leopolis (Italian), Lemberg (German and Yiddish), Lwów (Polish),

and Lvov (Russian). Until 1918, the city was called Lemberg and had been the capital of the province of Galicia. Between 1918 and 1945, the city changed hands no fewer than eight times.

The name of the street that the Grand Opera sits on, according to the “renaming history” which appears on the website of the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe, changed ten times between 1940 and the present – from Untere Karl Ludwig Strasse in Habsburg times to Opernstrasse, Adolf-Hitler-Ring and Prospekt Lenina, to today’s Prospekt Svobody. The successive city maps that can be called up today with an easy click on this website are chapters in a turbulent history of murderous conflicts.

Lviv’s Jews, fully one third of the city’s pre-World War II population and one of the largest Jewish populations in Poland, were obliterated by the Nazis. The Polish residents of the city disappeared too after the War, forcibly resettled in Poland after Lviv became Soviet and Ukrainian territory. The Ukrainian population was a minority in Lviv until after the war, when the populations of the surrounding rural areas resettled the city, along with displaced persons from Eastern Ukraine and Russia – significantly changing its character. The new citizens of Lviv would have had little connection with the historical fabric of the city and its memories.

Travelling through Eastern Europe in the late 1990s, the historian Anne Applebaum remarked that the people she saw on the streets of Lviv did not seem to fit the city they were a part of. There was a disconnect between the look of the population and the grand city they inhabited. Exactly what clues triggered Applebaum’s observation is not clear – was it the bad clothes and babushkas, was it the hesitation in the stride of the pedestrians, the improvised rows of barterers? Whatever her reasons for making the observation, she underlined an important truth.



Figure 1.1 This display of Lemberg's languages (German, Polish and Yiddish) in modern-day Lviv is purely nostalgic. There is no food for sale. Rather there is a photocopy shop inside, as indicated in Ukrainian over the windows.

Like many other Eastern European cities (such as Vilnius, for instance, which only became Lithuanian at the end of World War II), Lviv now has a population of citizens whose urban roots are very shallow. Their knowledge of the city and its past is inevitably partial.

Polylingual Lviv: Wittlin

Lviv has had its great chroniclers, but none as compelling as Józef Wittlin. Wittlin was a novelist and translator who lived much of his life in the city then called Lwów, before

being forced to leave Europe as an exile during the Second World War. *My Lwów* is an account full of charm, wit and nostalgia – telling stories of what was one of the grand cultural centres of Europe during the interwar period. With the distinctive irony of the East European writer, Wittlin gives a sense of the polylingual streets of Lwów, as he sprinkles his own story with different languages.

Wittlin's book was written in Polish and published in New York in 1946. The languages he calls upon are not only the ones that would be heard on Lwów sidewalks, but also Latin and French – the languages of the intelligentsia.

Des Lebens Ausgang! Exitus vitae. I was not born in Lwów, but for a very long time I flirted with the idea that I'd spend the last Polish autumn of my life there, nodding quietly to myself. *Point de reveries!*

(2016, 80)

All the same, for the “key” he has contributed to the “keyboard of my native lingo”, he hopes one day to have a street named for him in Lwów. “Not a major thoroughfare with mansions, banks, a court, a prison, a school, a chamber of trade and commerce and a Turkish bath. God forbid! All I need is a small side street without any sewers and with just ten houses” (80).

Wittlin did win real acclaim during his lifetime. He was especially well-known for his anti-war novel *Salt of the Earth*, first published as *Sól ziemi* in Polish in 1936 and subsequently translated into fourteen languages. The book was published in English in 1939 and was considered a serious candidate for the Nobel Prize. In the tradition of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* and Jaroslav Hašek's *Good Soldier Švejk*, Wittlin gives voice to a simple conscript in Franz Joseph's army. In the course of a few weeks following the outbreak of the First World War, he

is transformed from an illiterate citizen into a cog in the Emperor's war machine.

Wittlin's compassionate portrait of Peter Neviadomski, whose Polish family name means "of unknown origin", opens a window onto the polyglot Habsburg world. The novel is saturated with the sounds and sensibilities of the languages of the realm, a music which is familiar and dear to Peter until it closes down on him. Peter finds himself in the company of a motley group of fellow villagers, all conscripted and shunted off across the empire. Each stage of travel, each encounter with high-ranking officials, introduces new languages. The illiterate peasant is all the more sensitive to these tongues, because he cannot decipher the written orders that ultimately determine his fate. Published at the start of a new European conflagration, the novel denounces a war apparatus that spouted violence in all the official languages of the realm.

Wittlin was also a prolific, award-winning translator of Homer, Cervantes and many other classics into Polish. He was the Polish translator of his good friend Joseph Roth. Roth returned the favour by arranging for the German translation of Wittlin's novel.

The Space of Synagogues

Because of the successive layers that make up the history of Lviv, language is a powerful vehicle of memory. Ukrainian is now the language of the modern city. Russian has a role to play, with a significant minority of Russian-speaking Ukrainians. But what of the languages that were once seen and heard on the city's streets and in its shops, the languages so present in Wittlin's writings? Following Philippe Sands's invitation, can the memories of Yiddish, Polish or German be claimed and shared by those whose link with the past is simply that of urban citizenship?



Figure 1.2 Stones in the Space of Synagogues. The many languages of the testimonies engraved on the stones are a map tracking the voyage of memory into the lands of displacement and diaspora. Visitors must make their way through the stones and stoop to read the inscriptions.

These languages have indeed begun to resound again in the city. But the conversations are not those of locals but rather of tourists, as they make their way from one symbolic landmark to another. Visitors have become the bearers of linguistic memory. Large groups of noisy Polish tourists visit the iconic restaurants, palaces and museums that celebrate the pre-war version of the city. Somewhat less prominent groups of German-language tourists visit Habsburg sites. And Jewish tourists have begun to return to the city in search of a tragic past.

22 *Architectures of memory*

There is a renewed mixing of languages, then, but a confusion over which ones count as insider tongues, which ones are considered mere observers. In “Landscapes of Guilt, Landscapes of Rescue”, the poet Iryna Starovoyt (2018) worries that textbook explanations of the Holocaust are perceived as words from the “outside”, and not testimonies that issue from the “inside” spaces of the neighbourhoods and buildings that still belong to today’s Lviv. The story of the past, the Jewish history of Lviv, she argues, must be told in the idiom of shared citizenship rather than that of a distant, foreign reality.

Of all Lviv’s languages, Yiddish is the one that has the least public presence. Spoken by one of Lviv’s most populous communities before the war, this tongue is absent from the city, as it is absent from the entire region of Central Europe. A single memorial in Yiddish, created in 1989 during the final moments of the Soviet era, honours the Russian Yiddish-language writer Sholem Aleichem who spent some time in the city.

The project called The Space of Synagogues is an attempt to change this, to inscribe Jewish history into the urban fabric. This memorial, opened officially in 2016, is located on Staroievreiska (“Old Jewish”) Street next to the main Rynok Square. The Space encloses traces of three synagogues which were all destroyed during the Second World War – the Great City Synagogue, the Beis Midrash and the Renaissance (1582) Golden Rose Synagogue. This area was allowed to become largely derelict during Soviet time, abandoned rather than preserved. And, so, the project to restore this zone, begun in 2008, indicated a significant turn in the city’s history. The monument is artfully designed as a minimalist garden, carrying traces of the past and yet leaving empty spaces where absence can be strongly felt.

The Space of Synagogues was the first instance in Ukraine where commemoration of a Jewish historical

location was initiated by city administration in cooperation with various community groups, and therefore as an object of shared civic responsibility. Town-hall discussions were conducted and the prize-winning design (2010) by German architect Franz Reschke was informed by extensive dialogue with international Jewish studies experts, historians and local Jewish organizations. This is in stark contrast to previous haphazard efforts under the Soviet regime to put up minimalist plaques, or commercial ventures like the Jewish-themed restaurant “The Golden Rose”, which offers a facsimile of Jewish food and a display of pre-war memorabilia. The effective reappearance of Jewish memory in Lviv is the outcome, rather, of a concerted and collective effort.

Translating absence

At the centre of the Space of Synagogues is a row of thirty-nine stone tablets, which resemble tombstones. Some stones are imprinted with grainy images of shops and houses from pre-war Lviv. Others are engraved with quotations from former residents about their lives in Lviv, their experiences of the Holocaust or their lives in the aftermath. These sixteen quotes take visitors on a physical journey as they walk among the stones – and an emotional journey as they absorb the dramas of history as told by its witnesses. In order to see the images and read the text, visitors are required to bend down, to move between the stones, to make an effort to enter into these testimonies. Each quotation is in its original language – German, Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Dutch and French – and supplemented by English, Hebrew and Ukrainian translations.

These fragments of language evoke both ordinary and extraordinary events. They recall daily life in Lviv before the war, when its many populations shared the spaces of

sidewalks and cafés, as they evoke the events of the war and the Holocaust. Three examples are particularly striking for their translational resonances.

The quote from Inka Katz was first published in Philippe Sands's book *East West Street*. Inka Katz is a niece of the legal scholar Hersch Lauterpacht, who lost her parents to Nazi violence in Lviv at the start of the war. Living in France today, she told her story to Philippe Sands and contributed the following testimony of the devastating murder of her parents:

My mother had been taken. . . . I saw everything looking out of the window. I was twelve, not a child anymore. . . . I saw my father running after my mother, behind her, on the street. . . . I understood it was over. . . . I knew what was happening. I can still visualize the scene, my mother's dress, her high heels.

(in Sands 2016a, 105)

Given in French, the diasporic language into which Inka Katz was obliged to translate herself as a survivor of the war, Katz's quote is also rendered into English, Ukrainian and Hebrew on the monument. The languages create a circle of transmission, from the tongue in which the event took place (Yiddish) to the new language of the place where it happened (Ukrainian) to the new lived language (French) to the languages of international memorialization (English, Hebrew).

Brought into language through dialogue with Philippe Sands, a newly discovered relative, the words of Inka Katz enter into a circuit of conversation, with differently charged tongues. Each layer of translation carries additional kinds of information, recontextualizing the event, setting it against different degrees of distance.

The second example, a Yiddish-language poem by Israel Ashendorf engraved on a stone, is not so much a direct memory of events in Lviv as an imagined return to a “home” which has been taken over by strangers. What more disquieting a feeling than to imagine your own house and find it occupied by people with whom you have no links, and who sleep in your bed and cook in your kitchen? The house that Ashendorf’s dreamer returns to has “foreign food” on the table, and has an icon hanging on the wall.

The house will probably be the same / I will push the
door / Neighbours will come by / But of my relatives –
none / I will see the old furniture / used by new people /
In the bed will sleep strangers / foreign food on the
table / When I will approach the window / I will see a
vase / On the wall will be hanging / a silent icon

(Israel Ashendorf, in Yiddish)

This imagined memory evokes the situation of all those whose homes and possessions have been stolen from them and who have been barred from their past by the imposition of new histories and languages. The poem dramatizes the double injustice of appropriation. Not only has the physical space of belonging been taken away, but also the right to memorialization. What comes of the memories of those from the past who are no longer present to claim the territory? As James Young asks, “How does a city ‘house’ the memory of a people no longer at ‘home’ there?” (2006, 8). The project of the Space of Synagogues addresses this question by enlarging the community of those who are the holders of memory. This community must extend to the new owners of the place, who become participants.

Deborah Vogel

The poem fragment by Deborah Vogel illustrates a story lived through layers of translation and, today, once again reactivated. Vogel was a Yiddish modernist critic and poet. She was close to Bruno Schulz and conducted an intense literary correspondence with him.



Figure 1.3 Among the first Jewish women to be granted a doctorate in Polish literature, Debora Vogel went on to learn Yiddish and to become one of the most accomplished modernist poets in that language.

She was murdered with her husband and son in the Lviv ghetto in 1942. The following words, engraved on yet another stone, were taken from a text she wrote in the 1930s:

The streets are like the sea: / they reflect the colour of
longing / and the difficulty of waiting.

(Deborah Vogel, in Yiddish)

The quote is in Yiddish, the language which became Vogel's literary language, but which she learned only as an adult. Yiddish was not Vogel's native tongue or even the language of her early environment. She came from a Polish-speaking Jewish family, and, unusually for a Jew during that period, earned a doctorate in Polish literature. She was active in modernist circles and, during the 1930s, came under the influence of a Yiddish-language poet, learned the language, and went on to publish both prose and poetry in Yiddish. She was particularly attracted to montage as a modernist technique.

Vogel's self-translation into Yiddish speaks of an era when Yiddish modernist literature was flourishing. In the 1920s and 1930s, literary activity was intense – from Warsaw, Vilnius and Berlin, to New York and Montreal. To choose Yiddish as a language of expression was to take on a forward-looking project, one informed by experimental aesthetic practices and a belief in the vitality of secular, diasporic Jewish culture.

Vogel is only now being translated into English, her work recently discovered by young readers able to read Yiddish. Anastasiya Lyubas is one of these readers, a Ukrainian who has learned Yiddish and who has published English-language versions of the poems. In 2015, a first translation of Vogel's work into Ukrainian was published by Yurko Prokhasko. According to Lyubas, this Ukrainian version has

done exceptional service to Vogel's poetry by remaining very close to its rhythm and economy of words, and by translating such stylistic devices as repetition and parallelism.

The translation of Vogel from Yiddish into Ukrainian, from Yiddish to English, becomes an action equivalent to the invitation made by Philippe Sands: for the young people of Lviv to take on these stories as their own. This offer implies a task of shared responsibility, shaped by respectful distance towards a tragic past.

"Memory", writes Eva Hoffman, is a "moral force" for Eastern European writers, who have long struggled with falsifications of the past (2016, 10). As a vehicle of memory, language also carries a moral force, the possibility of restoring truths that have been effaced. Memorialization is therefore a story of unfolding translations, of texts that open outwards from dark places into the possibility of light. These versions, as in the *Space of Synagogues*, come to take their place on the very materials of urban existence – in the inscriptions of memorial stones, on the space of sidewalks, on the wooden slats of park benches, where they dramatize in the most forceful way the disputed character of urban space and the power of language to mark possession.

Józef Wittlin remembers the park benches of Lwów,

Blackened with age and rain, coarse and cracked like
the bark of medieval olive trees. Generations of pen-
knives have etched girlfriends' names on you . . .

Where are you today? Who, and in what language, is
now carving their lovers' initials on you?

(2016, 18)

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2 THE OPERA HOUSE Languaged architecture

The Neues Deutsches Theater in Prague

The Latin phrase *Saxa loquuntur* enjoyed new life in the nineteenth century. It accompanied a fascination for relics and ruins, for “stones” that “speak”. John Ruskin’s wildly popular *Stones of Venice* (1851–3) was key in stirring up fervour for the eloquence of architectural antiquity, for alphabets that could reveal traces of an obscured past.

Stones spoke for Sigmund Freud, too. He compared the digging of the archaeologist to the probing of the psychoanalyst. Both set out to decipher an alien language and excavate a buried truth. In *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896), Freud imagined a “seeker” tracking down “half-effaced and unreadable inscriptions”. Were this explorer able to decipher and translate them, he would come back with “undreamed of information about the events of the remote past. *Saxa loquuntur!*” (1962, 189). For Freud the analyst was a “seeker” of a special sort. Conversant with the vocabularies of the unconscious, the analyst could dig deep and bring the buried material to light.

But the language of ancient stones was also a burning political issue in nineteenth-century Europe. Architecture became a platform for political and nationalist claims in places where dominance was disputed, especially in the cities of Central Europe from the 1880s onward. Emergent

national languages were asserting their claims to the urban landscape. With its competing languages of German and Czech, Prague was perhaps the most openly conflicted of these.

The language disputes of Prague, including the widely publicized acts of replacing German-language street signs with new Czech versions, were news all over Europe. They even made their way into Freud's dreams. In a dream he shares with his friend Wilhelm Fliess, he sees a street corner in Rome (a city Freud longs to visit) cluttered with a puzzling array of German-language signs. He realizes that the scene in fact refers to Prague, which is "not an agreeable place for a German to walk about in". The dream, he tells Fliess, brings to mind two contradictory feelings. The first is his long-held wish that German might be better tolerated in Prague. The second is his sense that he must have understood Czech as a child brought up in the province of Moravia (in Simmons 2006, 137). These contrary language tugs – defending German against the Czech nationalism, but then remembering Czech as a language of his own childhood – make Freud a very representative citizen of late nineteenth-century central Europe.

Prague, the double city

Prague was a double city, marked by competing linguistic institutions, with German the more powerful and prestigious language of empire and Czech the rising tongue of the more populous and increasingly militant population. The struggle between two versions of the city – the *Deutsche Kaiserstadt* (the German imperial city) and *staroslavná slowanská Praha* (time-honoured Slavic Prague) – was fought on the pages of historians' monographs, on painters' canvases and museum walls, in concert halls and on

opera stages, in the chants of sporting events, in university lecture halls, in guidebooks to the city, on postcards ... and in architecture.

Prague's opera houses are a case in point. Two opera houses were built in the 1880s – first the Národní divadlo (Czech National Theatre, opened in 1881, reopened after a fire in 1883) and its linguistic rival the Neues Deutsches Theater (New German Theatre, which opened in 1888). The stones of both theatres were designed to deliver messages as eloquent, as meaningful and as ideologically tinted as the musical languages played within them. The Czech National Theatre translated the glorious Czech past into the present. The New German Theatre, built as an expression of the Habsburg Empire, was later translated out of its German origins into the Czech-speaking Státní Opera (Prague State Opera House).

These structures show how architectural forms can be “languaged” when they are associated with specific tongues at the time of their construction or through subsequent layerings of meaning and memory. The imprint of language on buildings is especially apparent at moments of intense linguistic rivalry, when competition for public space occupies centre stage and when cultural projects are understood as forms of symbolic territorialization. Each new stone utterance is an argument in an ongoing debate.

The idea of the Renaissance

The Czech National Theatre has attained mythical status in architectural annals as a successful realization of the national ideal. The Theatre “harnessed the language of history to produce a building that became an outstanding representation of Czech identity in the late nineteenth century” (Alofsin 2006, 30). From the choice of site and architect, to building materials, to style, interior

decoration, mode of financing (involving a public campaign for participation across Czech lands) and the grandiose opening ceremonies – all aspects of the construction were guided by nationalist considerations. The association of Czech nationhood with the institution was so strong that the building was called the Cathedral of National Rebirth.

Theatre and opera were at the heart of national movements in the nineteenth century, mobilizing all sectors of the population. Splendid houses echoed the nationalist preoccupations of opera itself, from Verdi to Wagner. According to Martina Pecková Černá, “The Czechs weren’t the first to get their National Theatre, yet they came to an extreme understanding of the idea” (2016, 63). The iconography of the Opera, exterior and interior, became “the equivalent of words that any informed citizen could read” (Alofsin 2006, 42).

To say that the language of the building known as the Czech National Theatre was Czech is to make both an obvious and a provocative statement. In contrast with the many other nationalist forms of expression in the late nineteenth century, the building did not use a specifically nationalist idiom like Ödön Lechner’s fanciful Hungarian folk motifs, or the exotic language of so-called Moorish ornamentation used in Jewish synagogues. The style chosen was a French-inflected neo-Renaissance style. There is nothing particularly Czech about this choice.

The link is rather a figurative association with the idea of the Renaissance. The Renaissance refers to a rebirth, and there were hundreds of such rebirths across languages as diverse as Catalan and Hungarian, Bengali and Welsh, Arabic and Turkish. Translation is a tool of revival: it turns the languages of the past into those of the present.

Czech citizens of the early twentieth century would have understood this connection and its reference to the rebirth



Figure 2.1 Czech National Theatre, exterior (above) and interior (below). The Renaissance style of the Czech National Theatre, inaugurated in 1881, evoked the glory of a mythical Czech past in the service of the modern nation.

of a Czech glory that had been achieved during the reign of Emperor Rudolf II (1576–1612).

An important inspiration for the interior decoration of the Theatre was the story of Princess Libuše, the mythical founder of Prague, symbol of the Czech motherland in opposition to the German fatherland. The discovery in 1817 of epic ballads and lyric poems of this tale, allegedly written in an old medieval Czech dialect, created a sensation. Though the manuscript was revealed in 1866 to be a fake, the “discovered” poems and attendant fantasy of a mythical past enhanced the legibility of the interior decoration.

That the Czech National Theatre opened with a performance of Bedřich Smetana’s opera *Libuše* created an explicit link between the decoration of the theatre and the foundational narrative of Czech nationalism. The idea of the Renaissance as a conscious yoking of past and present, ancient and modern, is fully realized here.

The German riposte

Prague’s New German Theatre was conceived as an explicit response to the Czech National Theatre. But the German Theatre was not “national” in the way that the Czech one was. Built by the Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner (1847–1916) and Hermann Helmer (1849–1919), the theatre expressed rather a transnational, imperial identity. Fellner and Helmer were at the centre of a building boom that left a Habsburg imprint on countless large and small cities across the empire. Between 1873 and 1916, their firm built theatres, concert halls and opera houses in almost every major town in the dual monarchy.

The two buildings were “languaged” not only through the politics of their construction, but through the artistic programmes they championed. Each institution geared its offerings to a different audience, German- or

Czech-speaking. The Czech National Theatre was led by František A. Šubert from 1883 to 1900; Angelo Neumann was director of the New German Theatre from 1885 until 1910. The two men had an agreement: Šubert would give the first performances of new pieces from French, Italian and Czech composers, while Neumann would always have first rights to direct new German works (Locke 2006; Ther 2014, 177).

Šubert reneged on the arrangement, however, when he staged Wagner's *Lohengrin* in Czech, and other Wagner operas before the First World War. And there was overlap when the New German Theatre occasionally presented Czech operas or symphonies, and vice versa. The main competition centred on Wagner, because he was so popular. The Habsburg building opened in 1888 with a performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. On January 1, 1914, both performed *Parsifal*, because that date marked the end of a thirty-year prohibition on the performance of *Parsifal* outside Bayreuth. In the Czech National Theatre, however, it was sung in Czech (Cohen 2014, 20).

The language of opera performance was, of course, of great importance to its audiences. The modern tradition of opera in the Czech language started at the turn of the nineteenth century, when Czech versions of German and Italian works were frequently staged in Prague. Smetana, Dvořák and later Janáček introduced operas in Czech. But the Czech National Theatre continued to perform in Czech translation: the first performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* north of the Alps was given in Czech in January 1888, the first Prague production of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* was performed in Czech translation, and Strauss himself conducted a Czech-language production of *Elektra* in June 1910.



Figure 2.2 This German-language opera house in Prague, built in 1888 as a rival to the Czech National Theatre, was one of many designed by Habsburg architects from Vienna to Czernowitz. It exists today in Czech translation as the Státní Opera.

History translates

The fortunes and linguistic identities of both institutions would be dictated by the course of history. Both structures would have to negotiate the changing political regimes from 1918 to 1989. But it is the New German Theatre which would experience these changes through forms of renaming and translation.

With the creation of a Czech nation in 1918, the New German Theatre was renamed the Deutsches Landestheater (German State Theatre), but retained its identity and avant-garde artistic programming under the direction of Alexander Zemlinsky. Under Tomáš Masaryk, the German community continued to consider itself at home in Czechoslovakia. This was unlike the situation in Trieste, for example, where the German-language Habsburg administrators were forced to leave.

The events of the 1930s, however, set into motion forces that would transform the theatre. As the Nazis gained control in Germany, the Deutsches Landestheater played an important role in supporting the performances of composers banned in the Reich and in employing refugee artists. Under Nazi occupation, the newly named Deutsches Opernhaus (German Opera House) was used for political assemblies of the Nazi Party and for the occasional guest presentations by ensembles from the Reich. With the defeat of the Nazi occupiers in 1945, the German-language population was expelled. At this point, the building became the Theatre of the Fifth of May (Divadlo 5. Května) and, then, the Smetana Theatre in 1949. Its avant-garde agenda came to an end after only three seasons, as the Communist government exercised increasing control. Only after the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 did the theatre once again become independent and acquire its current name, the Prague State Opera (Státní Opera, part of the Národní divadlo).

The translations of the German Opera house were among the myriad that afflicted the cities of Central Europe in the

post-war period and in particular the fate of the *koine* that had once been the cultural cement of this vast region. With the defeat of the Nazis and the shifting of national boundaries, cities like Breslau, Danzig, Königsberg, Lemberg, Brunn, Czernowitz, Prague, former centres of German high culture, were de-Germanized. “Street and shop signs were painted over, place names changed, German libraries pillaged, monuments demolished, inscriptions, some of them very old, erased from churches and other public buildings; the German language itself had to be abolished” (Buruma 2013, 159). German had been the *lingua franca* of Central Europe for more than two centuries, from the eighteenth century to the First World War, giving rise to a great cultural and literary tradition of fertile interconnections. This tradition was brought to an abrupt and definitive end in 1945.

The meaning of the German language in Central Europe after World War II had to be reevaluated. To what new purposes could this past be dedicated? One of the most successful archivists of the heritage of the German language in Central Europe is the Triestine essayist Claudio Magris. Though intensely mindful of Nazi crimes, he nevertheless celebrates the great chapter in history that was polyglot Mitteleuropa when German was the language that presided over a continent of culture. His river essay, *Danube* (1990), tells the large and small stories created at the confluence of languages. As a grand watery metaphor for persistent change, the Danube reminds us that there can be no proper end to the process of translation.

Are today’s visitors to the Prague State Opera House aware of the former linguistic identity of the building? Markers like statues of Goethe and Mozart were removed from the building after the Second World War. The archive of the theatre was also destroyed. However, the website of the Opera draws attention to the earlier identity of the building and to a project to retrieve and perhaps revive that past. In the historical section of the website, we learn

that, at its inception in 1992, the Prague State Opera created a documentation centre devoted to reconstructing the activities of the New German Theatre. Today there are also plans to perform elements from the repertoire of the earlier theatre. These explicit memorializing activities will no doubt create awareness of the history of Prague and restore the music of a divided city. Like Freud's archaeologist, the performers will plunge deep into the ruins of the past, surfacing with sounds both ancient and new.

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3 THE CHURCH The work of conversion

Santa Maria la Blanca, Toledo

Visitors arriving in Toledo by train get a spectacular greeting. The station is as richly decorated as a palace, with its ceramics, vaulted windows and motifs of latticed wood. It is not an ancient building – it was built in 1922 with the encouragement of King Alfonso XIII (1886–1931). He wanted to impress foreign dignitaries as they arrived in this showplace city of Spain. And, so, ordinary tourists today get to begin their visit in a place that mimics the splendours of the city itself.

The style of the station is known as neo-Mudejar, a revival of the fusion of Christian and Moorish influences that is characteristic of medieval Toledo. While Mudejar refers to the mixed architectural style, the term in fact comes from the skilled Arab craftsmen who were responsible for its palaces and churches, deriving from the Arabic *mudajjan* (“permitted to remain”).

Walking through the streets of Toledo, one comes to appreciate the irony of this name. The Arabs were “permitted to remain” when Toledo was reconquered from the Muslims by Christians in 1085. What followed was a period of some three centuries in which Muslims, Jews and Christians enjoyed a fabled social and artistic *convivencia*. But, in 1492, the word no longer applied. Muslims,



Figure 3.1 The Toledo train station, built in 1922, in a modern version of the MuDejar style. The interior is richly adorned with tile and lattice work.

like Jews, no longer had permission to remain and were expelled from Spain unless they converted to Christianity.

It is impossible to take in the magnificence of Toledo without feeling the weight of 1492 and the translations and misnamings that have come in its wake. Two narratives collide in the city. First, there is the memory of the legendary coexistence of languages and religions during the Golden Age of Spain. But, then, there is the cruel shadow cast by the expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims by Ferdinand and Isabella. Some especially poignant renamings bring this second moment into sharp focus. Tourists are invited to visit a “synagogue” called Santa Maria la Blanca. The Christian name literally obliterates the medieval Ibn Shoshan (or Sinagoga Mayor) and recreates the action of a forced conversion.

The renamed structures of Toledo reflect a historical moment of conquest. Here, in a particularly explicit manner, the replacement of one language by another is also the triumph of one history over another. The “mosque”, once called Bab Al-Mardum, is today known as San Cristo de la Luz.

Because of its charged history, Toledo brings translation into vivid light. Anyone interested in the interrelations between architecture and language will find inexhaustible material here. Its bricks and stones are rich with memories, its streets noisy with competing histories. Its story is written in the fraught passage across languages.

Mixed forms

From the outside, Santa Maria la Blanca, the oldest standing synagogue in Europe, is stark in its simplicity. But the interior tells a very different story. It was constructed according to the spatial organization of a mosque. Built in 1180, by exceptional permission of King Alfonso VIII (1158–1214) as a favour to the Jewish community, it was the work of Muslim builders in Christian Spain.

Many kinds of mixtures distinguish this building at its origin and these mark its later translation all the more as a betrayal. Santa Maria la Blanca is an architectural hybrid, a product of the intermingling influences active in the convivencia of thirteenth-century Spain. The interior is lined by four rows of pillars topped with arches shaped in a characteristic horseshoe style covered with smooth white plaster. While the columns are of Almohar and Mudejar influence, the complex stucco pinecones of the capitals recall the Christian decoration of Toledo churches.

To enter this astonishing building is to be struck, as in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, by the majestic forms and intricate finishing work of remarkable artisans. It is to

marvel at the moment of cultural convergence that allowed this aesthetic fusion to take place.

The hybrid architecture of the synagogue imitates the many other Muslim influences which permeated the social and cultural life of the Jewish community in the early Middle Ages. During this period, the Jewish community took on Arab ways of dressing and speaking, shopping, eating, farming . . . and composing poetry. Arabic was the “currency of high culture” (Cole 2009, 4). Like the pillars and columns that the Jews borrowed from the Arabs, Hebrew-language poets absorbed Arabic literary forms into their emerging literature. Starting in the tenth century, the Jews built on the well-established tradition of Arabic verse in order to imagine a new kind of literary production in Hebrew.

While the Mudejar architecture of the early Middle Ages is what defines the visual landscape of Toledo today, literary masterworks are also an enduring heritage of that period. This moment of cultural effervescence has been called a “miracle”, a great “flowering” of poetry in Hebrew that has had few equals. Until the literary experiments with Hebrew in the nineteenth century in Europe and then the full-blown revival of Hebrew which accompanied the founding of the modern state of Israel, Hebrew was largely a sacred language. The grafting of Hebrew themes onto Arabic forms saw an outpouring of creation in Hebrew that indelibly marked the language.

The work of the giants Shmuel HaNagid, Shelomo ibn Gabirol, Moshe Ibn Ezra and Yehuda HaLevi was a product of the intermeshing of two languages. The movement was initiated, according to Peter Cole, by what he calls a “deep translation” of Arabic forms. In his classic study, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950–1492*, Cole tells an engaging narrative, tracking the course of this poetic inspiration from its first moments, when a poet named Dunash Ben Labrat

(920–90) had the idea of importing the metric system of Arabic verse into Hebrew. Ben Labrat reimagined the very nature of Hebrew poetry by adopting the Arabic metric system and its distinctions between the length of vowels, “endowing Hebrew for the first time with precise (if not entirely organic) criteria for measuring the pace and weave of the line, which in turn intensified the focus on the language itself and its lyric properties”. This work was often sung or recited to music, and “the patterns, symmetries, and series of rhythmic and aural expectations that the new metres established allowed the Arabized-accent of their Hebrew to sound like the flowing Arabic poetry that the Jewish poets admired so” (10). The name of Ben Labrat



Figure 3.2 The present-day plaque refers to the original identity of this church-synagogue without restoring its name.

is little-known today, but the works of the major poets of this era continue to resonate as elements of the religious liturgy and today's poetic spirit.

And, so, both in architecture and literature, the medieval Jewish community drew inspiration from the Arabic language and Islamic forms, in order to redirect them towards new ends.

Toledo the translator

The exceptional poetry created in Hebrew during the Spanish Golden Age was a product of cross-language influences. Such an outburst of creativity is consistent with the portrait of Toledo as a many-faceted centre of translation activity, including an official programme of humanist texts. Like the earlier examples of Alexandria and Baghdad in the sixth and eighth centuries, Toledo was a city of translation. While the first two cities saw works of Greek scholars rendered into Arabic, the confluence of languages and knowledges in Toledo resulted in the transmission of precious Greek manuscripts – via Arabic – into Latin and then the Romance languages. First the Church and then the King were official patrons of a concerted effort to produce Latin and Castilian versions of texts from Arabic – many originally translated from Greek. This programme was carried out in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in specially prepared scriptoria near the cathedral, in the service of humanist learning. Jewish scholars were important mediators between Arabic and Romance languages, as were the Mozarabs (Christians who wrote in Arabic).

The “School” of Toledo is considered by some to be a misnomer, because translation activity was dispersed geographically, and there was no real coherence to the philosophy or practice. But Toledo has come to stand for the widespread

activities of mediation in the Iberian Peninsula. Toledo is especially known for the way the translators worked in groups. Jews and Mozarabs would translate from Arabic to “Romance” (or proto-Castilian), while Christian clerics would translate from “Romance” into scholastic Latin. The Jews also translated from Arabic into Hebrew and from Hebrew into Latin. Thus, the works of Aristotle, Avicenna, Maimonides, Averroes and many others were made available to Christian Europe. In the twelfth century, versions were mainly from Arabic to Latin, whereas, in the thirteenth, they were from Arabic into Castilian. Centred on the philosophical and scientific achievements of the Greek and Arab world – especially in the areas of medicine, mathematics, astronomy and astrology – the translations of that period had a profound effect on knowledge in the West (Delisle and Woodsworth 2012, 110).

The act of translation is rarely represented in paintings. But depictions have come down to us from thirteenth-century Toledo, because of the celebrity of the translators, but also because of the particular configuration of individuals participating. A fourteenth-century manuscript of the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna shows Gerard of Cremona (c.1114–87) translating from Arabic to Latin, at the vertically tilted desks characteristic of the Middle Ages. Cremona was an outstanding figure associated with Toledo, the author of some seventy works in philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, alchemy and divination. Several images show Alfonso X (1221–84) in conversation with scholars and translators. Such visual prominence for the activity of translation would reappear only in the Renaissance, with the cult of Saint Jerome.

Conversion and crypto-identities

Hybrids are fragile composites. At any time, the bond holding the individual elements together can be broken.

The spirit which had sustained the *convivencia* in Toledo died when Christianity took control of the Iberian Peninsula and imposed its exclusive truth. This movement found violent expression in the case of the Ibn Shoshan synagogue in the late fourteenth century. The synagogue was invaded and sacked as a result of anti-Jewish fervour whipped up by San Vicente Ferrer (1350–1419), a brilliant and effective orator dedicated to the conversion of the Jews. As a result of Ferrer’s preaching, the building was appropriated for the Church and was then officially converted in 1411, receiving the name of Santa Maria la Blanca. This event presaged further anti-Jewish acts that would result in the official expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims from Spain in 1492 (Smoller 2014).

While Spain’s translated past remains to a large extent obscured by official history, a rich counter-narrative cultivates the memory of “crypto-Jews”, “crypto-Muslims”, “Marranos” or New Christians who played important roles in the history of Spain after 1492. Many celebrated Spaniards, in the Old and New Worlds, are today thought to have been “conversos”, the most famous of these being Cervantes (c.1547–1616). A strand of criticism now reads *Don Quixote* through the lens of Cervantes’s possible identity as a “nuevo Cristiano”, finding in the fantastical illusions of Don Quixote the symptoms of the author’s marginalization and alienation (see McGaha 2004). The fact that the novel presents itself as a found manuscript, as pages discovered in an antique shop and translated from the Arabic, takes on new significance if this “foreign” language were to be considered a coded form of Hebrew (Reichelberg 1999, 6). The celebration, rather than the denigration, of uncertain and mixed identities has led some to declare that modernity has made Marranos of us all.

Translation and conversion, then, become keys to Spanish history – as alternating forms of suppression and rehabilitation. The forced conversions of non-Christians

to Christianity could be understood as both an *a-version*, a turning *away*, and a *con-version*, a turning *to*. All conversion, according to Gauri Viswanathan, chosen or forced, involves such a double process of “interweaving and disentangling”. For Viswanathan, conversion “meshes two worlds, two cultures and two religions, only to unravel their various strands and cast upon each strand the estranged light of unfamiliarity” (1998, 4). So, too, do the buildings of Toledo receive the light of the present, intermingled with the shadows of the distant past.

Though Santa Maria la Blanca has been a church for some six hundred years now, one might imagine a moment when its past would be named once again, when it might recover its vocation as a synagogue. With time come movements of redress that redirect or reverse past designations. The modern Spanish state, through a law passed in 2015, has begun to try to attract the Jewish population to return, by offering Sephardic Jews (Jews who can trace their origins back to the expulsion of 1492) the opportunity to acquire Spanish nationality and European citizenship. Such a reverse flow of citizens would create pressure to retranslate Jewish religious buildings. While both the Jewish and Muslim communities have asked the Spanish Church for the symbolic return of their buildings, this has not yet occurred.

But such translation has already begun, if we consider that the languages that resonate inside Santa Maria la Blanca today bring a renewed polyphony to the building. As with many other sites of a destroyed history (and as was noted in relation to the city of Lviv), the tongues of tourists bring to monuments the memories and idioms of an annihilated past.

Translation, too, has been revived as an activity that expresses the core identity of the city of Toledo. If the medieval school was a loose alliance of scholars and

patrons, today's Escuela de traductores de Toledo is a formal institution, founded in 1994, and located in the Palacio del Rey San Pedro, a fourteenth-century Mudéjar palace. It is a creation of the Spanish university system, founded on the legacy of Toledo's rich intellectual history. It is not surprising that the school specializes in Arabic, reflecting not only the historical presence of that language in the city, but also the current influx of North African migrants to the Iberian Peninsula. The mandate of the school is more than technical. By emphasizing on its website that the role of translation is a "labour of mediation among citizens, peoples and societies", the school recognizes translation as an instrument of redress and reparation. And in so doing, it honours the most luminous moments of Toledo's history.

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52 *Architectures of memory*

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Part II

Transit



4 THE HOTEL Between place and non-place, difference and indifference

The Grand Budapest Hotel and the Tokyo Park Hyatt

Cees Nooteboom's favourite hotels have an air of bygone times: old-fashioned taps, cracks in the porcelain, rickety elevators, an air of tranquillity. For the Dutch essayist, language plays its part in creating this atmosphere. At the Ritz in Barcelona, for instance, the safety regulations, printed in Catalan, seem to be addressed to people of another era, stoic in their attitude towards fate. "Non perdeu la serenitat" – do not lose your serenity. "No correu, ni crideu" – do not run, do not shout. In the event of heavy smoke, "gategu" – crawl like a cat (2007, 90).

The Austrian novelist Joseph Roth (1894–1939) also wrote with affection of hotels. Roth travelled extensively as a journalist in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, and then spent his last years in exile in France. He was temperamentally drawn to hotels and turned them into an alternative version of the family. "Other men may return to hearth and home, and wife and child; I celebrate my return to lobby and chandelier, porter and chambermaid". This love was also a kind of defiance. In a time of rising nationalism, Roth swore an oath of allegiance to his version of "fatherland" (2015, 157).

Like Nooteboom, Roth savours the languages that flow through his hotels. The *patron*, born in the Levant to Greek

parents “is fluent in very many languages. There is not one in which he can write an error-free letter” (182). The staff are drawn from across Europe and speak in all its tongues. One understands that this unruly jumble is part of the joy of the place.

That writers should be drawn to hotels is hardly surprising. As homes to people on the move, they combine features of rootedness and transience. Nootboom and Roth provide colourful illustrations of the hotel as a polyglot place. Their old-world accommodations are communities of strangers coming together through prescribed codes of conversation and ritual. This nostalgic version of the hotel is a prominent feature of Wes Anderson’s visually extravagant and witty film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014). Based on the Grand Hotel Pupp in Karlovy-Vary, the Grand Budapest represents many of the most endearing aspects of the twentieth-century European hotel. By contrast, Sofia Coppola’s 2003 film *Lost in Translation* introduces through the Tokyo Hyatt what could be considered the polar opposite of European charm and *gemütlichkeit* – an impersonal and cold space of hypermodernity.

These hotels represent opposite poles on the spectrum that Marc Augé calls “place” and “non-place”. At one extreme are sites which are culturally embedded; on the other are anonymous and identical spaces associated with purely functional consumerism. The two movies and their corresponding hotels invite us to consider translation as an additional variable. Wes Anderson’s enthusiastic engagement with historical and linguistic otherness defines his hotel as translational, in contrast with Coppola’s depiction of melancholic *in-difference*. Christine Brooke-Rose’s (1923–2012) experimental novel *Between* (1968) helps us understand the idea of the hotel as a site of *in-difference*, as the very materialization of the process of translation, one exemplar replaced by another, simultaneously identical and not.

The Grand Budapest

Joseph Roth was notoriously profligate . . . and impecunious. His correspondence with Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) is full of entreaties for cash. All the same he would probably not have stayed at a hotel anywhere as sumptuous as the Grand Budapest Hotel, the site of Wes Anderson’s movie, loosely based on Stefan Zweig’s stories. The movie is a rare example of an English-language popular film resonant with accents and echoes of a meticulously reconstituted past. Much of its humour comes from the comic echoes of the fancy-dress Austro-Hungarian days and fantastical palace-like hotels such as the Hotel Pupp in Karlovy-Vary. The movie is an operetta-farce, indulging in the old-world backdrops of luxury spas and Alpine scenery, and the writerly characters who observed them.

The Grand Budapest Hotel presents a translational feel. It begins with a voice-over:

A number of years ago, while suffering from a mild case of scribe’s fever, a form of neurasthenia common among the intelligentsia of that time, I decided to spend the month of August in the spa town of Nebelsbad, below the Alpine Sudetenvatz and had taken up rooms in the Grand Budapest, a picturesque, elaborate and once widely celebrated establishment. I expect some of you will know it.

(2014)

With the term “neurasthenia”, the archaic “taking up rooms” and the somewhat comic ring of German-sounding places, these words call up an old-world sensibility and the vacation spas all over Europe, including the beach hotels in Ostend recalled in Volker Weidermann’s chronicle of the summer of 1936, when a group of intellectuals and writers



Figure 4.1 The Karlovy-Vary Palace Bristol Hotel was one of the models for Wes Anderson's fantastical *Grand Budapest Hotel*. The artefacts in the film were the result of meticulous research.

exiled from Germany gathered there. The central characters are Zweig and Joseph Roth, whose troubled friendship is a product of their very distinct brands of genius, and who each, in their different ways, bear witness to the decline and fall of pre-war Europe (Weidermann 2017).

The Grand Budapest Hotel takes place in the fictional republic of Zubrowka, a thinly disguised Czechoslovakia. Though it combines several time periods, it engages with very specific historical aesthetics – resulting in a creative pastiche of Central Europe, its cities, hotels, and its admiration for Alpine backgrounds inspired by the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840).

This sensibility connects to a mythology of the Grand Hotel, which begins with the German-language novel *Menschen im Hotel* (1929) by Vicki Baum, turned into the 1932 American film *Grand Hotel*. Thomas Mann's Venice Lido Palace in *Death in Venice* (1912) was very much in the same tradition, as is the recent nonfiction book *Shanghai Grand* by Taras Grescoe (2016). In the light of nostalgia, the hotel conjures up a community of wanderers united in their differences, of "unacknowledged acquaintanceships", where "you brush against someone in the elevator; you meet again in the dining room, in the cloakroom, and in the bar; or you go in front of him or behind him through the revolving door" (Baum 2016, 190). These acquaintanceships are also moments when languages "brush against one another" and finally enter into conversation.

The outlandish dimensions of Anderson's Grand Budapest Hotel and its whimsical decoration, its years of glory and then the indignities inflicted by the Communist era, are evoked through precise and authentic detail. The artefacts in the film were inspired by reference materials collected by the designer and the director as they travelled through Eastern Europe. Letters and newspapers are presented in "genuine" versions, though they are offered in translation. The director, Wes Anderson, designed fictitious newspapers with titles like the *Trans Alpine Yodel*, the *Continental Drift* and *The Daily Fact*, and wrote stories for these papers . . . in English. There are other plays on words: a gas station is called "Fuelitz"; the forest, the Sudetenwald.

Monsieur Gustave's elegant, formal diction and sense of declining standards of decorum echo the nostalgia of Zweig's *World of Yesterday* (1942). Where the film does not attempt historical accuracy is in the accents and speaking style of its minor actors. The characters playing the criminals who help Monsieur Gustave escape from prison speak

in the slang of their own native language: Harvey Keitel, for instance, speaking with an Australian twang. What this does is to introduce an unusual kind of diversity into the film, echoing (through parody) the multilingualism of the spas of Central Europe.

Wes Anderson's hotel is a site of translation, then, from several points of view. It is the filmic representation of a text translated from Stefan Zweig's German, and it uses both visual and linguistic devices to remind the viewer that it is engaging with a distant, but historically precise reality. Though venturing into the realm of the madcap and the fantastical, the film remains attentive to the evidence of history.

Tokyo Park Hyatt

Sofia Coppola's 2003 movie starring Bill Murray and Scarlet Johansson occupies an entirely different kind of terrain. The film takes place in the luxurious Park Hyatt Hotel in Tokyo. The spaces are often empty and impersonal, and the characters are filmed gazing out over a city they do not understand. In contrast to the beloved stopping places of Nooteboom, Zweig or Roth, with their old-world feel and array of familiar faces, the Park Hyatt shares the attributes of the hotel as a non-space – anonymous and impersonal. Like shopping malls, airports or service stations, these are infinitely reproducible in their sameness. They strip their visitors of individuality and reduce them to the role of consumer. Communication, too, is simplified, limited to utilitarian forms of expression.

The film gave new life to the tired phrase, itself become a cliché, “lost in translation”. Once associated with Robert Frost's lament about the essence of poetry disappearing in the transfer across languages, it is now, thanks to the film, most often connected with cultural disorientation.

Lost in Translation tells the story of an aging Hollywood actor who has been invited to Tokyo to perform in advertisements selling whisky to the Japanese. He meets a young American woman, staying at the same hotel. She has been abandoned by her husband who is busy with a photo shoot of a Japanese rock group. The loneliness of both is exacerbated by their feeling of alienation from the city they find themselves in, Tokyo. They fall into a romance, which may or may not continue as they return home.

On the ground, the city is a labyrinth, and the characters are often alone, isolated from the crowds around them. The script is crowded with miscommunication between languages. For instance, though the Bill Murray character is given an interpreter, he is deprived of any real understanding of his Japanese hosts. When the director gives him directions that include a reference to American film culture, hoping that Bill Murray's character will infuse his simple line "Suntory time" with feeling, the interpreter opts for an abbreviated message. What the director had said, in Japanese, was: "Look slowly, with feeling, at the camera, and say it gently – say it as if you were speaking to an old friend, just like Bogie in *Casablanca*: 'Here's looking at you, kid' – 'Suntory time' ". What the translator says is simply: "He want you to turn, looking at camera. OK?" (2003).

This is translation played as a gag. In his wide-ranging commentary on the film, Michael Cronin calls this "a well-established Anglophone comic routine of decent chaps encountering Funny Foreigners" (2008, 85). Could this advertisement for Japanese whisky ever contain the kind of feeling that Humphrey Bogart brought to his exchange with Ingrid Bergman in the 1942 American movie? Surely the interpreter is aware of the irrelevance of the director's cues and chooses not to translate them at all. What this means, though, is that the American is excluded from this

bit of input from his Japanese host – input that shows that the Japanese director is speaking with American cultural references in mind. The failure of translation has an impact, then, on the character’s ability to play his role according to the director’s (Americanized) Japanese expectations.

Cut off from effective communication with those around them, the Americans retreat further into their isolation. This sense of exclusion reinforces their apathy. Both characters give the impression of being so distanced from the city around them that they have little desire to connect. They see only the incomprehensible surfaces of neon signs and hear only an opaque babble. The affect of loss dominates the film; in fact, a kind of depression seems to keep them from trying to cross the barriers separating them from those around them. Theirs is a melancholy of disorientation, a condition nourished by ignorance and indifference.

Indifference

It is useful here to consider the broader implications of the notion of indifference. What if the ability to feel compassion, empathy and interest for others were related to the capacity to engage with difference? Surely one of the most brilliant explorations of these questions is an experimental novel by Christine Brooke-Rose called *Between* (1968). The protagonist is a professional conference interpreter, who travels across Europe to attend high-level international congresses on lofty themes. The relentless travel, and the repetition of the high-minded phrases she must translate, make her world into a succession of similar events – in some ways the same, in some ways different. “What difference does it make?” is a phrase that punctuates the novel. What difference from one hotel to another, from one language to another, from one cliché to another?

Brooke-Rose was a novelist who enjoyed imposing invisible constraints on her work. *Between* is written without the verb “to be”, making the quality of language more active, maintaining a sense of movement. More importantly, the novel is written across languages. While English ensures the syntax, many other languages, especially French and German, but also Greek, Romanian, Turkish, are integrated into the text. There are Joycian resonances to the invented, blended languages. But rather than wandering the streets of a city like Dublin, the protagonist, a conference interpreter, moves from one aeroplane and hotel room to another.



Figure 4.2 The novelist, essayist and journalist Joseph Roth spent much of his adult life in hotels, where people could be “on holiday” from patriotism. He favoured the Bristol for his stays in Vienna.

Each new journey brings the narrator into contact with people and things that are both the same and different. Her travel companions are called Signor Ingegnere Giovanni-Battista di Qualcosa, Erich von Irgendetwas or Comrade Pan Bogumil Somethingski (respectively Italian, German and fake Polish words for “something”). Speakers at international conferences on different topics proffer the same banalities.

Evoking the post-war years of the 1950s and 1960s, Brooke-Rose’s hotel rooms are modern, yet filled with small differences of language and personality.

At any minute now some bright or elderly sour no young and buxom chambermaid in black and white will come in with a breakfast-tray, put it down on the table in the dark and draw back the curtains unless open the shutters and say Buenos dias, Morgen or kalimera who knows, it all depends where the sleeping has occurred out of what dream shaken up with non merci nein danke no thank you in a long-lost terror of someone offering etwas anderes, not ordered.

(1968, 2)

In each hotel room, there will be a bottle of mineral water, whose labels detail the origin, chemical composition and benefits of its contents. Vichy État in France, Sariza in Greece, Eau du Kiém in Luxembourg, Vidago in Portugal. In each hotel room, there will be instructions for leaving the building in case of emergency.

In her hotel room at night, the interpreter is obsessed with the jumbled tongues she has heard during the day, including the stock phrases of advertising, phrase books and international conferences. She is consumed by these differences in expression, by the fact that waitresses in

German ask her if she has “noch ein Wunsch”, yet another desire. “What difference does it make?”

Sometimes, however, these fragments of language dissolve into one another. They form a layered, fragmented language:

Und even wenn man thinks AUF Deutsch wann man in Deutschland lives, then acquires it a broken up quality, die hat der charm of my clever sweet, meine deutsche madchen-goddess, the gesture and the actions all postponed while first die Dinge and die Personen kommen.

As if languages loved each other behind their own facades, despite alles was man denkt darüber davon dazu. As if words fraternised silently beneath the syntax, finding each other funny and delicious in a Misch-Masch of tender fornication, inside the bombed out hollowed structures and the rigid steel glass modern edifices of the brain.

(53–4)

Brooke-Rose’s collage defines a consciousness which cannot guarantee separate language realities. The character cannot keep her two languages distinct, just as she cannot maintain the distinctness of her surroundings. Each hotel room blends into the last – the same but different. Like translation itself, each new iteration (of language, of place) produces a same which is not identical. There can be no exact sameness, because the second language is made up of differently shaped networks of meaning. Brooke-Rose’s hotel rooms are indeed translations of one another: the same, yet different, materializing what Roman Jakobson called “equivalence in difference” (2013, 233). The relentless movement of her existence ends up, however, driving the protagonist into a state of melancholy. Her love affairs

are unsatisfying; the dizzying multiplication of languages produces no real novelty.

Between cliché and parody

Between was published in 1968, at a time when internationalization was still a goal to be achieved rather than a nightmare of uniformity. But genuine difference seems to be elusive for the protagonist. When various languages become simply another way of expressing cliché, they provide little stimulation. Hotels are not much better, becoming a focus of her disappointment. They are clichés, a repetition of sameness: same bed, bedside table, bottle of mineral water, waitress enquiring after her wishes. And, so, paradoxically, the abundance of languages, the proliferation of experiences, undermines the possibility of real engagement with cultural specificities. Translation cannot guarantee separate realities.

Can too much difference, or the repetition of trivial differences, induce a state of indifference? Indifference can be a neutral attitude, apathy or passivity, a not caring; but it can also suggest a much more negative quality – an active lack of engagement and empathy, a hardening of oneself to the plight of others. Both these attitudes are pathologies of empathy. They arise out of an incapacity to measure: too close, too far from others?

Brooke-Rose's character anticipates something of the flat affect that will characterize the characters in Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*. Translation fails them mainly because they don't try; they are indifferent. They lack the desire to penetrate the veneer of flashing lights beyond the hotel walls. Neither the aging actor nor the photographer's wife has come to Tokyo to learn about Japan. They are in Tokyo only by happenstance. Another city, another country, would have been the same. The aging actor is himself

his own source of symbolic capital: he has come to Japan to portray himself as an American whisky drinker. The whole movie is constructed around the affirmation of sameness: the characters have been set up to fail in any attempt to disturb the cocoons they inhabit. The fact that the movie was released in Japan with its English title confirms the film's lack of concern with translation.

The Tokyo hotel fully fits the definition of the impersonal, anonymous non-place. By contrast, Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* gets as close as can be to the opposite pole: to a historical *place*, translated into the fantastical colours of comedy, pastiche and an exploded English. From this contrast, it becomes clear that the impulse that drives translation is the desire to engage with the risk of difference.

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5 THE MOUNTAINTOP

Translation changes you

The language of heptapods

Certain kinds of translation require climbing. When the military translators in Denis Villeneuve's 2016 movie *Arrival* rise weightlessly upwards, they are re-enacting the ascension of myth. Moving in a "floaty slow-motion leap" from a mechanical lift, they are on a mission to make contact with otherworldly beings (Heisserer 2016). Moses, climbing Mount Sinai to receive the tablets from God, was making a similar journey.

Seizing the heights to make contact with the divine is a feature of many religious stories. Gothic cathedrals reached as high as possible; the Romantics secularized the idea through their worship of the sublime. The tower, the mountaintop, the alien space vessel, these are sites of elevation and pivots to a higher realm of communication.

With its vertical tower-like spaceships and its linguistics-based plot, *Arrival* is a brilliant retelling of the biblical Tower of Babel story, with allusions to the story of Moses thrown in for good measure. Like Moses, the translator in *Arrival* accepts only reluctantly the mission she is given and, like Moses, will see her life profoundly affected by her work. Both must make several voyages upward before they grasp the nature of the message they will convey to the people. And both explode in anger at the treachery

wrought by the populace on the ground when their backs are turned.

In both of these episodes from Genesis, attempted contact with the divine involves stakes of the highest order – world harmony or global disorder. But *Arrival* approaches



Figure 5.1 Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog (1818), painting by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). The summit offers special access to the languages of the beyond.

its theme with unusual attention to the mechanics that allows cross-species communication to occur. And it adds an unusual twist. The conversation that is established with aliens has important effects not only for continued life on the planet, but also for the personal existence of the translator. Cracking the alien code turns out to have life-changing consequences. The person who ascends to the space of translation is not the same as the one who comes down.

The language of heptapods

Denis Villeneuve's film begins with a *War of the Worlds*-like invasion by twelve alien spaceships arriving at different destinations across the globe. When the lovely oblong spacecraft tip into a vertical position in order to get closer to humans, they look like suspended towers. A team of linguists is conscripted by the military and charged with interpreting the alien language. The translators enter the base of the alien ship and float up to a glass barrier. The heptapods, who resemble giant squid, move in and out of a fog behind a glass partition; this slightly opaque glass becomes a screen onto which they project their graceful calligraphic signs.

The jets of ink sprayed onto the glass are strikingly original and hauntingly beautiful. But the squirting of ink patterns bears a resemblance to another, more famous, cinematic moment. This is the classic scene in Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments* when lightning bolts chisel out the letters of the Ten Commandments. Like the words of the heptapods, these letters are a message from the beyond that must be deciphered and interpreted.

Somehow the linguist Louise Banks manages to read the squiggles. She extracts from them a series of concepts distilled into single words: human, instrument, gift. But

it is not only the vocabulary of the language that Banks learns – it is the grammar and the logic. These will be imprinted onto her consciousness.

The grammar of time

What is imagined in this movie is a kind of contagion theory of language contact. Once you have been exposed to the structures of another language, once you have grasped their meaning and their import, your sense of reality will be permanently changed. This is what happens to the linguist Louise Banks, who deciphers heptapod grammar and its very particular relationship to time – in particular the ability to see one's life both forwards and backwards.

To learn the heptapod language is to participate in a grammar that reads time differently, to enter into a logic of reversibility. As if infected by this knowledge, Louise Banks begins to read her own life backwards. She sees the end of her daughter's life just as it begins and experiences each event as a confirmation of what she already knows. What she has translated, then, are not only words, but the abilities they permit, the obligations they impose. Banks sees her world in a new way.

The stunning impact of the film comes from the coupling of two narratives, one public and one private. On the one hand, there is the very noisy evocation of a world in crisis: military vehicles converging on the spaceships, the gathering of news media, the confusion of the authorities. On the other, there is a quiet narrative of mourning. Louise Banks is remembering, and grieving, the death of her daughter. The visual syntax of the film is perturbed by the overlap of two temporalities, one that advances from start to finish, the other that confuses past and future, that brings knowledge of death into the moment of birth.

The short story that inspired the movie, *Story of Your Life* by Tom Chiang (1998), makes this confusion visible in the very grammar of the story. The tenses are scrambled in Louise Bank's "recollection" of the past. Future and past are intermingled in the sentences which both predict and recall, see into the future and hear voices from the past. The film viewer takes some time to realize that what seems like a flashback is in fact a vision of the future.

The gift of language

Arrival's take on language is explained by a few sentences casually dropped into the plot. One of the linguists refers to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the idea that grammars are "hard-wired" into the brain. The hypothesis originated in the American southwest in the 1930s, when linguists studying the language of the Hopi Indians became convinced that – because their language was so different in structure – the Hopi lived in a mental universe light years from that of their neighbours. The linguists concluded that one had no choice in the matter – the boundaries of your universe are set by the language you speak.

The hypothesis continues to exercise a certain attraction, though it has been invalidated – in particular by Roman Jakobson who showed that all individuals live with a variety of modes of expression (1960). While structures and expressions in specific languages call up emotional or cognitive perceptions that may exist in others, still individuals are not locked by their language into fixed mind-sets. There are always ways to translate, both within and across vocabularies. But *Arrival* puts a distinct spin on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by suggesting that learning a new language can change the hard-wiring of the brain. In other words, the structures of your language can be invaded by those of another. Or, to put this more positively, there



Figure 5.2 The linguist Louise Banks was magically able to translate these symbols of the heptapod language. In turn, she would be transformed by the act of translation.

may be defects or absences in your language that cause it to welcome the logic of another. Translation, then, enters into an economy of reciprocity. By engaging with another language, will mine be confused, modified, enriched? But also: will I become a different person?

A translator heavy of tongue

This question takes us back to Moses, whose most surprising attribute – considering that he was chosen by God to be a spokesperson for the people of Israel – was his difficulty with speech. He was God’s chosen interlocutor and yet he is “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). Moses was a reluctant spokesperson, chosen for reasons he could not fathom. Would Moses be transformed by this encounter with the divine?

For Marc Shell, Moses was, like himself, a classic stut-terer. He had to rely on his brother Aaron to communicate

with the people – creating yet another relay in the passage of the Word of God to his people (2006, 166). His stutter was a symptom of his self-doubt, and perhaps also of the double allegiance he had forged in his childhood. Moses grew up as an Egyptian, and therefore spoke at least two languages. Whatever the reasons for his language defect, he was surely chosen, suggests Avivah Zornberg, precisely because of his self-doubt, “for these qualities become a metaphor for a people in exile”. His difficulties mirror the difficulties of reaching divine truths. The stammer, here, is part of the message; the hesitation, the halting delivery, the fundamental inhibition of expression convey the excess of revelation: the Revelation must not be travestied by easy utterance (2017, 36).

It is not despite his handicap but because of it that Zornberg calls Moses “translator of God’s message” (7), a mediator between the ineffable and the effable. Moses shows that the role of prophet (or poet, adds Zornberg) “holds at its heart the paradox of speaking the unspeakable” of conveying the indirect truths of the divine, the gaps and the silence they contain (34).

It is possible that Zornberg’s characterization of Moses as a translator is rooted in a commentary by the revered medieval rabbi known as Rashi. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 1:5 (in the King James Version: “On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying”), Rashi adds that Moses declared (or explained or elucidated) *in the seventy different languages* (1973). This remark by Rashi has in turn given rise to a lively tradition of debate. Why should Moses have spoken in seventy languages to the children of Israel? Is Rashi referring to the diversity of individuals that make up the people and therefore to an obligation to explain for each individual? Is Rashi anticipating the moment when the Bible will be translated into the languages of nations,

each of those translations coming to represent a separate commentary? Or do the seventy languages refer to the traditional concept of the seventy “facets” of the Torah, each suggesting intended or possible meanings?

The idea that Rashi might be thinking of the future versions of the Bible in the languages of the world (versions which would have already been plentiful during Rashi’s own lifetime), and that these refractions come to constitute a huge and ongoing companion to the original, is a compelling idea. Translations in the Jewish tradition are in fact considered not substitutes for the original (as is the case for Christians), but rather aids to comprehension of the authoritative text which is written in Hebrew. Muslims have this same relationship to the primacy of the Qur’an in Arabic.

Moses is a translator both in relation to the divine (the mountaintop transmission of the Tablets of the law) and to the people (the explainer of laws). Was Moses transformed by his experiences? Not in relation to his stuttering, says Marc Shell. In the Qur’an, Moses asked to be cured and Allah cures him. “Some Christian interpreters likewise expect that God’s presence ought to cure Moses of his speech defect. (The Easy-To-Read Translation thus has Moses say, ‘And now, even after talking to you, I am *still* not a good speaker’ [Ex. 4:10]).” But, in the Hebrew Bible, Moses does not ask explicitly to be cured. And Shell adds: “The Knox Translation of 1955 even emphasizes that the appearance of God, while not the cause of the stutter that Moses has already apparently had for years, is a factor that ‘exacerbates’ it. Says Knox’s Moses at Exodus 4:10, ‘I am more faltering, more tongue-tied, *than ever*’ ” (2006, 153).

But Moses is transformed in a broader and more fundamental way. His story is that of the unlikely prophet, who becomes the leader of his people. Though he is prevented

from entering the Promised Land, Moses is the very archetype of the individual transfigured by a mission of mediation.

How does translation change you?

The film *Arrival*, like biblical commentaries, responds to a question that has haunted centuries of thinking about translation. How does translation change you? Walter Benjamin (1968/1923) believed that the best versions are those that change our own language by imprinting their logic on ours. They make us read differently, challenging our sense of what is from here and what is from elsewhere. Benjamin's translators stand on unstable terrain, where the line between self and other is unsure. And so the translator risks being undone by the task.

Kate Briggs meditates on the various kinds of risks that arise when the translator accepts the "invitation" of writing to be translated. The work says: "Come here, sit down and attend for a while to this, to someone else's work, and let's see *what it does*" (2017, 192). Briggs's emphasis is on this *doing* and the *being done to*. One of the most compelling aspects of the power of translation is the way it can transform the translator's mode of thinking and writing. This power is evident throughout Briggs's splendid essay on translation. Her loving relationship with the work of Roland Barthes, whose lectures she translated, informs not only her thinking but the very texture and rhythm of her words.

Arrival's take on the effects of translation is somewhat more mechanistic. But the story of Louise Banks and her interaction with alien tongues can be included in the long history of reflection to which Walter Benjamin and Kate Briggs belong. That the film's director Denis Villeneuve would be sensitive to the effects of language interference is not pure chance. Villeneuve was born and educated in Quebec, an intensely language-conscious place. In his previous

movies, language and translation have been important. This is especially true of *Incendies* (2010), a French-language film in which Arabic played a large role – as a set of twins from Quebec travelled to Lebanon in search of a lost family. In this film, as in *Arrival*, a drama of communication across languages takes on mythical – and transformative – dimensions.

Arrival has an improbably happy ending. The language of the heptapods is deciphered, and global harmony is achieved. The catastrophe of Babel has been reversed. Where the destruction of the tower resulted in the fragmentation of language, the visit of the heptapods has brought about the reconciliation of mankind. “Many become one” is the final message of the heptapods, as translated by the Russians.

But this triumph has not occurred without effects on the translator. She has had to expose herself, physically and emotionally, in order to grow close to the heptapods. We see this in one of the very first scenes where she takes off her layers of protective gear, in the presence of the heptapods. She is making herself vulnerable, but also signalling her absence of fear. She will receive the gift of their language in return. While the gift is of great value to mankind, it is of doubtful benefit to Louise Banks herself. She is forever altered by the threshold which she has crossed.

As a futuristic fable evoking ancient questions, *Arrival* is a compelling film. But it is especially effective as it evokes the intimacy of the act of translation. To seek entry into other worlds is to risk seeing your own transformed.

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6 THE TOWER From ziggurat to spiral, from Brueghel to Primo Levi

Polytropos is the very first adjective Homer applies to Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. It says literally that Odysseus is a man of many turns. Robert Fagles offers “the man of twists and turns”. But most translators have not been content to simply mirror the Greek structure. They have seen the word as a puzzle to resolve, wanting to make clear at the outset what kind of a man Odysseus was and why these turnings were crucial to his character. They have declared him “prudent”, “crafty”, “ingenious”, “adventurous”, “shifty”, or, most recently, in Emily Wilson’s version, “complicated” (Mason 2017).

Henry Alford (1810–1871) proposes what at first sight seems a puzzling choice. The nineteenth-century churchman declares Odysseus to be “much-versed”. Only a reader with Latin would understand his decision. *Vertere* is the Latin for turn, and so Alford’s “much-versed” was a translation of *polytropos* from Greek to Latinized English.

“Much-versed” is a clever *trouvaille* for those in the know, especially as it can be seen as an allusion to Alford’s own intellectual journey as a translator. *Vertere* in Latin means to translate. For the Romans, one language was turned into another. The usage continued into the Middle Ages, with *tourner* in French and, in English, *wendan*,

to turn, and *awendan*, to turn into (Tymoczko 2007, 72). These terms were later abandoned in favour of cognates of *translatio*, part of a shift in humanist thought across Europe. The new term traced a more expeditious path as a form of transfer, a carrying across – from the verb *transfero*, its past participle *translatus*. But we still speak of translated texts as “versions”, words that have been turned.

Odysseus’s adventures, like translation itself, advance through turns. These turnings reflect what happens as a translator moves through a text, considering various solutions, circling back to the original, rather than advancing along a mechanistic, linear path.

Is it for this reason that the best-known representation of translation in the Western world is made up of spirals? The climbing turns of the Tower of Babel carry the powerful suggestion of an unending quest. These seem to express a hopeful message, despite the fact that the episode from Genesis ends in disaster. Brueghel’s emblematic painting of the tower is brilliantly ambiguous, showing the structure both in growth and decline. Perhaps the success of the painting is its remarkable double message – good and evil, innocence and guilt in equal measure. This is in contrast to most retellings of the Babel story, which tend to favour a wholly negative interpretation of the events.

Juan Benet and Babel

Images of the tower have existed since the very earliest days of Christian iconography, but it was towards the middle of the sixteenth century that the tower gained popularity – mostly due to the 1563 painting, known as the Vienna version, by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c.1525–69). The looming structure, with its Roman coliseum arches superimposed on the Babylonian ziggurat, is represented in a

state of semi-completion, with several edges not yet constructed or else already falling into ruin. Of the two images that Brueghel made of the tower (a third one was lost), it has become the more celebrated – for its dramatic shapes and colours, as well as its ambiguities (Morra 2007, 200).

Why is the tower usually represented as a conical structure with an encircling spiral staircase? This is largely due to the account by Herodotus, who claimed to have visited the site of the original Babel, taking note of an outside stairway (Dugdale 2016, 33). But, as archaeologists know, this original tower was a ziggurat, that is, an angular, stepped temple, intended as a gateway for the gods to come to Earth, and therefore literally a stairway connecting Earth to Heaven. The Etemenanki ziggurat is generally considered to be the historical source for Babel, its fate closely linked to colonialist looting of sites like the Ishtar Gate, today in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (37). The ziggurat is not a spiralling structure and looks more like what we think of as an Aztec or Maya rising platform. An early fifteenth-century painting illustrating the Duke of Bedford's *Book of Hours* is a square tower with a spiralling staircase (32). This confusion of shapes is only one of many mysteries that surround the theme of Babel.

Another important confusion concerns the word *Babel* itself. The Babel story is constructed around one of the Bible's characteristic examples of wordplay, the words *babel* and *balal*. "Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth (Balal)" (Genesis 11:9). Babel (the place), it is said, was named for Balal, the confusion that reigned in this place. Yet the name (*Bab-El*, gate of god) and the idea (*Balal*, confusion) have neither an etymological nor a causal relationship. Babel rather received its name because of its "false" resemblance to the word for "confuse" or

“confound”, which is a word with Akkadian roots (Kaufmann 1997, 107). A confusion of meanings and a confusion of tongues are inscribed, then, into the very letter of the text, and, because of this unruliness, Derrida explains, *Babel* cannot be translated. The mixture puts into question the possibility of equal restitution demanded by translation (Derrida 2002, 118).

Brueghel seems to have inscribed the idea of confusion in his tower through the contrast between building and decay, between the optimistic spectacle of human ingenuity (the thousand different tasks being accomplished at various levels of the construction) and the damage already apparent in the structure. In a quirky, illuminating essay published in 1933, the Spanish writer Juan Benet (1927–93), who was also an engineer, provides detailed observations of this doing and undoing. He calls Brueghel a vivisectionist. The building is a body that is destitute of life, “even as its entrails conserve the vigour, freshness and palpitations that permit a study of their constitution and the functions they carry out” (2017, 11–12). From far away, the viewer sees an unfinished monument falling into ruin. But, from close up, it is “a hive where each individual carries out his own particular task according to a rigorous and perfectly analyzable order” (9).

The contrast between construction and destruction, life and death, brings together in a single image the beginning and end of the Babel story – the confident collective building and the catastrophic collapse. On the one hand, the painting provides a “comprehensive course” in sixteenth-century construction techniques, with building materials in the foreground (with stones being split and shaped by quarrymen, ceramics and wood arriving by sea, sand and lime being hauled upward), then a tollway where duties are collected and materials catalogued, then various pulleys and lifts, treadmills and flywheels, derricks, swivel



Figure 6.1 Detail, *The Tower of Babel*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (the Vienna version), 1563. The tower is growing and dying at the same time, illustrating in a single image the entire arc of the Biblical episode.

cranes, block-and-tackles, all sorts of apparatus to raise the heavy stones (23–24).

But, on the other hand, according to Benet, the building also displays the structural flaws announcing the collapse to come. The long building process has caused orders to lose their way. There are increasing deviations from the initial paradigm as the building rises. The upper floors are off balance, and there are desolate stretches of the façade on the fifth and sixth floors that are provided with stone cladding, but seem to be empty inside. The decorative stone exterior seems to have progressed further than the supporting brick. Benet guesses that work on the tower has been entrusted to different architects and work crews, “one of which has progressed in parallel radiating galleries while another has done so in concentric circles”. Because the process of construction has taken so long, the spirals have turned into conflicting arcs, and these will result in disaster (36).

Against Rome

Benet moves his attention from the fine detail of the painting to a broader question: why is the basic structure that of the Roman coliseum? This is a reference not only to the power and authority of imperial Rome, but to the “debased luxury” of Papal Rome in the sixteenth century, the Rome reviled by Martin Luther as a new Babylon. Benet sees Brueghel’s depiction of the gorgeous but unhealthy structure as a critique of “Caesaropopism” (53). Its collapse would hopefully herald the end of the unified ideology of the Church and its defence of a single language – Latin – as the basis for religious authority.

Benet’s counter-reading is sustained by a philosophical preference for “small communities with their vernacular languages, with their divinity lodged in the individual

conscience, a thousand times higher than the cupola in Roma” (54). This is a call for a return to local and more responsive gods. Here, he joins Barbara Cassin, Jacques Derrida and others, who read the collapse of Babel as a boon for humanity. Rather than showing the fall as a tragedy, it tells a positive story of the collapse of unitary religions and languages.

Benet also joins those who see the tower as expressing the “politics of architecture’s material presence” (Dugdale 2016, 51) and in particular the power politics related to the building – and destruction – of towers. It is not insignificant to learn that Saddam Hussein was preoccupied in the 1980s with reconstructing the Ziggurat of Ur in an attempt to reconnect his regime with the glory of Babylon. He restored the façade and staircases by adding a layer of modern bricks to protect the original ones, but he also used the ziggurat as a shield for his own fighter jets, assuming that US bombers would spare the ancient monument (Glancey 2002).

Retellings

The spirallings of the tower also replicate the many retellings of the Babel story, in text and image, each arc a new layer of interpretation. As the medievalist Paul Zumthor has emphasized, the story is constructed around a host of opposing elements: wandering and settlement, land and sky, space given and space to be conquered, union and dispersion (1997, xii–xiii). But while the narrative has an easily understandable structure, the few short verses of Genesis 11 have been shown to be a composite of historical sources. And the ambiguity of the actual wording has led to many interpretations, often in contradiction with one another. For instance, Zumthor reminds us that

the fragmentation of human language has been a much more prominent theme than the coda of the story which speaks of the fate of peoples dispersed upon the face of the earth (67).

Dante, for instance, gave the story his own idiosyncratic spin. Adopting a widespread medieval embellishment, Dante pinned the blame for the catastrophe of Babel not on the ambition of humanity, but on the arrogance of one individual, the Babylonian King Nimrod. Dante punishes him by making him speak an incomprehensible tongue. In Canto 31 of



Figure 6.2 *Dante and The Divine Comedy*, fresco by Domenico di Michelino, 1465. In Dante's version of the Babel story, King Nimrod bears the responsibility for the catastrophe of Babel. Dante's *Inferno* has a layered structure, similar to the tower of Babel.

Inferno, Nimrod shouts out these strange and untranslatable words: “Raphél maì amèche zabì almi” (Barolini 2018). Nimrod’s punishment is exile from human communication. The interwoven fragments of babble resemble the collage of fragments in the 1547 etching by Cornelis Anthonisz (c.1505–53), showing the tower at the moment of collapse.

Nimrod is to be found, too, in Brueghel’s painting. This is a Nimrod in period garb, understood to represent the Spanish King Philip II (1527–98), whose reign of repression was threatening the cosmopolitanism of Brueghel’s city, Antwerp. Antwerp had been a centre of international publishing and, in particular, between 1523 and 1545, the main international centre for the printing of vernacular Bible translations into many languages (Arblaster 2004, 9). One of the most famous publishers in Europe, Christophe Plantin (1520–89), published his Polyglot Bible in Antwerp (1568–73), and Brueghel was part of the humanist circles frequented by Plantin. It was feared that the reign of Philip II would put an end to the tolerance that had characterized the city.

In their depictions of Nimrod, both Dante and Brueghel suggest that the overweening ambition usually attributed to humanity as a whole in the Babel story is in fact more properly ascribed to individuals – ambitious and power-hungry men. In surely the most powerful telling of the Babel story in the twentieth century, Primo Levi also interprets the building of the tower as the work of arrogant individuals. His reading of Genesis, however, introduces a new element, a tripartite division among the protagonists in the story. Rather than pitting humans against God, Levi introduces humans who take themselves for gods. Babel becomes a narrative about monsters who – hoping to take the place of God – give up their very humanity.

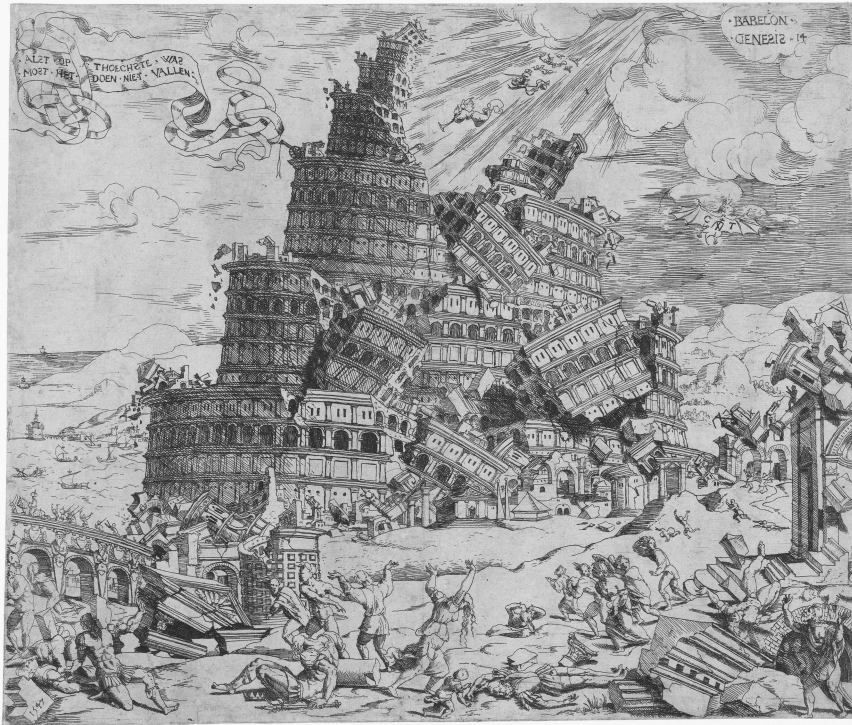


Figure 6.3 *The Collapse of the Tower of Babel*, etching by Cornelisz Anthonisz, 1547. A rare image of Babel in fragments.

The Babel of Hell

Se Questo è un Uomo (If This Is a Man) by Primo Levi was published in Italian in 1947. Unlike many other testimonies by Holocaust survivors, Levi's emphasizes the numerous languages spoken in the camps and the terrible confusions that might result. Levi's attention to language was in part due to his identity as an Italian speaker. Italians were a very small minority of Jews in the camps, compared to the large number of Yiddish-speakers. Because most Italians knew neither Yiddish (the language of their fellow

Jews) nor German (the language of their masters), they were liable to misinterpret the orders of their taskmasters and were therefore particularly vulnerable to punishment.

The Holocaust accounts – memoirs, films, historical reconstitutions – that give due attention to the multilingualism of the camps are rare. But some explorations of the Holocaust experience are remarkable for their focus on language, and first among these is Claude Lanzmann's landmark documentary *Shoah* (1985). In interviews with survivors and with the populations of Polish townspeople, Lanzmann ensures that a diversity of languages are heard and that interpreters became part of the action on screen. They are shown on camera, serving as a “first witness” of the terrible testimonies that are recounted. The 2015 Hungarian film *Son of Saul* by Lazlo Nemes is indebted to Lanzmann's ethics of translation. The Oscar-winning movie introduces the spectator to a chaotic jumble of languages (Hungarian, German, Yiddish, Russian, Polish, French, Greek and Slovak) which magnifies the confusions of the camp experience – and like *Shoah* emphasizes voice over image.

But can the language transactions which took place in the camps be called translation? Both the formal processes of interpretation written into the mechanisms of the camp administration, and the many informal and improvised activities of exchange necessary to the survival of individuals have come under the scrutiny of researchers like Michaela Wolf (2016). Investigations into the archives of the camps reveal strategies of language transfer that were specific to the organization of camp life. Yet one might feel an instinctive resistance to the use of translation in this context. Can language interactions in the situations of the camps – and indeed of any place that treats people as non-humans – be treated under the conventional rubric of translation?

Primo Levi makes this question explicit in his story of the Tower of Babel. Levi worked in the Auschwitz sub-camp of Buna. This camp was in fact an IG Farben factory and was, according to Levi, “as large as a city”. Besides the managers and technicians, there were some 40,000 foreigners working there, and fifteen to twenty languages were spoken.

In an oft-quoted moment in his memoir, Levi evokes the Carbide Tower, a huge chimney in the centre of the slave labour camp:

The Carbide Tower, which rises in the middle of the Buna and whose top is rarely visible in the fog, was built by us. Its bricks were called *Ziegel, briques, tegula, cegli, kamenny, bricks, teglak*, and they were cemented by hate, hate and discord like the Tower of Babel. And this is what we call it: Babelturm, Bobelturm. And in it we hate the insane dream of grandeur of our masters, their contempt for God and for men, for us men.

(2008, 68)

Levi’s story echoes the Bible episode in many ways, only its elements are turned upside-down. The men who are forced to build the tower have different names for the bricks they are forced to lay and are therefore multilingual as the tower takes shape. They are not motivated by hope; they are forced to become builders. The discord that prevails among them is caused by the harsh conditions of their servitude. The name of the tower is their own creation – both German and Yiddish.

Bringing together these elements of the traditional Bible story, Levi adds an important distinction. What the workers see when they contemplate the work of their hands is something hateful. The tower has been built for the camp bosses – the Nazis and their henchmen. Taking themselves

for gods, vying for the powers of the heavens, they have disqualified themselves from being considered human. They are the modern-day descendants of Nimrod, but the magnitude of their arrogance far surpasses his. The blasphemy of this Babel is not transcendental and divine, adds Levi, but immanent and historical. The tower is an “insolent assemblage”, challenging the heavens, like a “stone curse”. Only the slaves, those tasked with building, are *noi uomini*, “we humans”.

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7 THE BRIDGE Across small spaces

Where is the “Between”? The bridge of Mostar and the Øresund bridge

On September 20, 2008, an unusual open-air performance took place on the banks of the River Neretva, in Bosnia, with the famous bridge of Mostar as a backdrop. A troupe from South Africa staged the play *Truth in Translation* to a large audience. Telling the stories of the interpreters who worked with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996–98), the play with its lively performances and stirring music had a stunning impact.

Mostar was just one of the many locations where the play had been staged since its premiere at the Edinburgh Festival in 2006. Taken on the road, it had been performed in a series of conflict zones from Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Northern Ireland to the Balkans.

There could hardly be a more eloquent site than the Mostar Bridge, however, for a performance on the combined themes of conflict and translation. The Mostar Bridge (or Stari Most – Old Bridge) has become a powerful symbol of the Bosnian War and the difficulties of post-war reconciliation. Used as a surface on which images and subtitles were projected, the bridge became a character in the play.

“The bridge” is often a cliché lauding the benefits of translation. Here, however, there is no romantic soft focus. The

stories of South Africa and Bosnia combine to give stark outline to narratives of violence. *Truth in Translation* is a powerful exploration of the personal costs that interpreters experience when faced with testimonies of victims and perpetrators. The choice of location for the performance intensified the questions it raised.

A magnificent structure dating back to the sixteenth century, the bridge was destroyed in 1993 during the Bosnian War and reconstructed with the aid of the European community from 2001 to 2004. But the bridge stands today less as a sign of successful reconciliation than as a confirmation of the distances that yet prevail.

The foregrounding of the voice and body of the translator in the play puts the lie to the invisibility and neutrality of mediation. To see the translator as an individual in pain is to understand the necessary entanglement of the mediator.



Figure 7.1 The South African play *Truth in Translation* was performed at the Mostar Bridge, with subtitles projected onto the very structure.

It is to refute the image of a translator as alienated and isolated, inhabiting a neutral space outside any cultural or political affiliation, unaccountable and free. Similarly, the bridge is not empty space. The in-between space of translation is crowded with emotions and thoughts. The inclusion of the Mostar Bridge in the 2008 performance of *Truth in Translation* brings this lesson into vibrant visual clarity: the translators are actors, the bridge is *part* of the action.

Truth in translation

Conceived by director Michael Lessac, with music by the legendary South African musician and composer Hugh Masekela, *Truth in Translation* is based on the real stories of interpreters who worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was developed through a process of workshopping and interviews with the interpreters. The play focuses on the emotional difficulties of translating testimonies of violence and cruelty. The often young and untested interpreters were obliged to become the voices of both victim and perpetrator. The interpreters recalled painful moments in which they were obliged to react as professionals and yet also had personal emotional responses at odds with the task of neutrality. Though professional ethics prevented them from becoming involved, they were nevertheless forced to say “I”. As one of them says, “The interpreter was the sponge who absorbed all the pain throughout the entire process”. “You have to assume that voice, you have to assume that pain”. “There is no way to walk away from the ‘I’ in interpreting . . . once you have to say it with your own voice”. They show that there can be no emotional neutrality in the face of the bitter and tragic narratives they must listen to and reproduce.

The hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 attracted global attention, as it was the first commission to hold public hearings in which both victims and perpetrators were heard. All of the public testimony were recorded, and a large part of it was broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Testimony could be given in any of the eleven newly official languages of South Africa. The target language was mostly English, and much of the translation was done via English into or from other languages. But lesser-used languages were used, and interpreters were therefore faced with technical issues of translating into languages which have very different histories from English and Afrikaans.

The play discusses these linguistic issues, but especially focuses on the memories and life stories of the actors who play the roles.

The performance in Mostar was part of a series which included other zones of conflict. The touring project aimed at documenting the reactions of audiences in some twenty-six cities, using each new context to highlight its own process of healing. Discussions and workshops followed every performance, organized at each site with community groups and NGOs. The result of this process was an award-winning film entitled *A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake* (2014), produced out of the hundreds of hours of footage that had been gathered through the touring process.

Suleiman's magnificent bridge

What is the story of the Mostar Bridge? Michael Ignatieff gives the following account. In 1557, when Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566) ruled in Constantinople, and the influence of the Ottoman Empire extended as far north as Budapest, an Ottoman engineer named Hajrudin began construction of a bridge across the Neretva River. Completed in

1566, its role was to solidify the link between Ottoman possessions and the hinterland of Ragusa, a wealthy city-state on the Adriatic coast, now known as Dubrovnik. The stone was quarried nearby, cut it into shape with saws, and solidified with iron clamps and molten lead. The resulting “thin, soaring structure of exceptional beauty” was saved from destruction when the Ottomans were driven out of Bosnia in the 1870s, even though it was no longer wide enough for big loads and certainly not for the automobiles that began to penetrate this remote part of Europe. The bridge survived both the First and the Second World Wars, despite furious combat in the region, and, by the 1960s and 1970s, tour



Figure 7.2 The bridge of Mostar, according to Michael Ignatieff, “a thin, soaring structure of exceptional beauty” is the symbol of a still unresolved conflict between “small differences”.

buses would bring people from all over southern Europe to see it (Ignatieff 2002).

When it was blown up by the HVO, or Croatian Defense Council, on November 9, 1993, the act was widely perceived as a direct assault on a symbol of multicultural coexistence, of a link between East and West, Muslim and Croat. The eighteen-month siege of Mostar and destruction of the Stari Most became an exemplary event in the 1992–95 Bosnian War. Images of the siege and destruction of the bridge captured the imagination of many. The notion that the former Yugoslavia was being forcibly “unmade” found graphic representation in the final collapse of the bridge into the river it had spanned for more than four hundred years (Coward 2002).

The bridge had already gained notoriety through the novel by Nobel Prize laureate Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge Over the Drina* (1945), as well as through a later novel by the Albanian Ismail Kadare, called *The Three Arched Bridge* (1978, translated into English in 1997). Though Andrić’s bridge is situated many kilometres away, the story in some ways eerily foretells the fate of the Mostar Bridge and has contributed to the myth of bridges in multiethnic Bosnia.

Andrić’s novel is an epic whose protagonist is the bridge itself, from its construction to the end of the Ottoman presence in Bosnia. Much violence is associated first with the building of the structure and then with its function as a checkpoint – the forced abduction of Christian children to serve the Turks, an accident leading to the burial of an “Arab” into the very substance of the bridge, the grotesque impalement of an enemy on the ramparts. The bridge played an important political and economic role until the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival of the Austrians. The railway reoriented commercial and military traffic, and so “this bridge which was the pride of the town and ever since its creation had been so closely

linked with it, was now suddenly broken in the middle . . . for the bridge no longer linked the two banks and every man had to remain on that side where he happened to be at this moment” (Andrić 2007, 123).

But the purpose of the bridge had never been limited to the sole function of passage. The author draws attention over and over to the feature of the bridge called the “kapia”, an apron-shaped stone bench that draws all kinds of idlers to spend their time there. As the geography of the region changes, and the bridge is less and less a space of transit, the “kapia” continues to attract its populations of habitués who gather there to chat and to pass the time. The bridge has two vocations, then. It is both a conduit and a space of habitation.

West Mostar/East Mostar

When the Mostar Bridge was destroyed during the Bosnian War, there was considerable international pressure to rebuild this symbol of the region. It was indeed rebuilt at a cost of \$15 million, with the help of UNESCO and with funding from the European Union, and officially inaugurated in 2004. But was the symbolic value of the bridge overestimated? Many foreign observers believed that the reconstruction of Mostar’s fallen Old Bridge would “heal social wounds by physically reuniting former antagonists and literally stitching together a divided city”, but “that project proved to be relatively unimportant in relation to the ongoing process of long-term social reconciliation in Mostar” (Calame 2009). In fact, once the siege had lifted, the city was divided into two camps. West Mostar was run by the Army of the Republic of Croatia, and East Mostar was run by the Bosnian government. The 1995 Dayton Accords brought the conflict to an end, yet the situation in Mostar to this day remains strained. Mostar is still

a divided city – a caricature of a city in fact – with separate administrative authorities for ambulance services, with contradictory street directions given on either side. Different curricula are used in the schools, contrasting interpretations of the same facts are taught.

Although the bridge has been rebuilt, the trust between the various communities in Mostar remains damaged. As Rita Kothari writes about the Nehru Bridge in her own city of Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat, after the riots of 2002, “The bridge does not ‘bridge’ as bridges are supposed to; it is another division in a city divided along the lines of caste, class, religion and gender” (2007).

Small differences

Both the play *Truth in Translation* and the Mostar Bridge put into question assumptions about the effects of translation. Does it always contribute to empathy and communion? The case of Mostar and that of divided cities in general (Nicosia in Cyprus, East and West Jerusalem, Belfast, and more recently the partitioning of Baghdad neighbourhoods between Shia and Sunni) highlights the dramas that arise in relations of exchange that are proximate, that are characteristic of movement *across small distances*. Translation across small distances can be more difficult than across continents or oceans.

The question of small or minor differences was most famously expressed by Freud in his “narcissism of small differences” in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). Speaking of the human capacity for aggression against others, he mentions the case of communities with adjoining territories who are engaged in constant feuds, like the Spaniards and Portuguese, the North and South Germans, the English and Scots. He calls this rivalry “the narcissism of minor differences” and notes how it provides “a convenient and relatively

harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression, by means of which cohesion between the members of the community is made easier". The rejection of the other (a relatively similar other, one that lives just next door) allows the group to strengthen its ties to each other. Someone must be left out so that there can be a bonding process: "It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness" (1961, 62).

And Freud adds a note that is chilling in retrospect. The Jews, he says, have been of great service to humanity, because they have provided the model for the outsider group. "In this respect the Jewish people, scattered everywhere, have rendered most useful services to the civilizations of the countries that have been their hosts" (62).

Written in 1930, this text foreshadows the atrocities of World War II. Sander Gilman and others have proposed the idea that it was the "small difference" of the assimilated Jew, who could not be distinguished from the non-Jew, that caused the panic of Hitlerian anti-Semitism. The very difficulty of identifying the Jew was one that was intolerable to anti-Semites (2006, 88–89).

For Michael Ignatieff, the most useful element of Freud's idea is

the perception that as external differences between groups diminish, symbolic differences become more salient. As less and less distinguishes you from anybody else, the more important it becomes to wear the differentiating mask. Croats and Serbs drove the same cars; they worked in the same German factories as *Gastarbeiters*; they longed to build the same folkloric Swiss chalets on the outskirts of town and raise the same vegetables in the same back gardens.

(1998, 57)

One of the differentiating masks that have recently appeared in the Bosnian context is the newly legitimized Bosnian language. Its reappearance could be interpreted as the enforcement of a small difference. The Dayton Peace Accord recognized Bosnian as a distinct language spoken in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Bosniaks. Bosnian is now one of the three official languages spoken in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The language, like the state, demanded its place on the linguistic currency market at par with Serbian and Croatian. Before the breakup of Yugoslavia, Bosnian was included (as well as Croatian and Serbian) in a language called “Serbo-Croatian”. After Yugoslavia split up into separate and independent states, the Serbo-Croatian language was replaced by three languages known as Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian – and later Montenegrin. The main difference seems to be the pronunciation of certain words, as well as some words which are typically Bosnian, especially Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Persian loanwords, largely due to the language’s interaction with those cultures through Islamic ties. Croatian has been subjected to purist reforms, while Bosnian retains Turkish and oriental influences often with dialect and archaic forms that are no longer in general use.

Where once the former Yugoslav languages were considered mutually intelligible, translation is now called for. When Susan Sontag arrived in Sarajevo to direct *Waiting for Godot* in 1992, she had to wait for a new version to be prepared, a translation into Bosnian, because the former version in Serbo-Croatian was considered inappropriate. The text was prepared by Nermina Kurspahic, herself a playwright and novelist, who became a close friend of Sontag’s. Though irritated by the waiting, Sontag understood the power conferred on language when it acquires what she calls the “right to translate” (Sontag 2000, 345). In an entirely different register, another startling illustration of the right to translate comes with the warning message that appears on today’s

cigarettes packages, with two identical Roman spellings of the message followed by the same words written in Cyrillic letters. What look like identical phrases (Smoking is dangerous) are understood by members of the three language groups to represent separate linguistic communities.

What seem to be small differences – between languages, for instance – often turn out to be large ones. To the eyes of a visitor in Barcelona, the differences between signage in Spanish and Catalan can at times appear maddeningly minor. The difference of one vowel, of a double l rather than a single one in the word “novella”, for example. Yet this small difference stands in for an entire literary tradition reaching back to the Middle Ages, as well as a political struggle with very real consequences.

And so, the Mostar Bridge finally comes to stand for the way translation highlights and even creates barriers, bringing into existence entities that will have to be joined. It separates before it joins; the bridge “gathers” difference, to use Heidegger’s words, it has an active role in creating and reinforcing borders, not only in unmaking them. Rather than assuming that the bridge tells a single story, we might better reframe the structure as a mechanism of what Sandro Mezzadra calls bordering – the active and provisional inscription of boundaries (2013, 9).

The bridge sharpens awareness of the stakes in the passage across languages. *Truth in Translation* highlights the full implication of the translator in the process of mediation. Using the Mostar Bridge to make this point is highly appropriate, transforming the tourist’s image of the bridge as reconciliation into a much more poignant and accurate image of a site of struggle.

The bridge of translation, then, is fully implicated in negotiations across culture and language, noisy with memories and projects. It is not empty, but inhabited, just as bridges

in European cities were once covered with shops and houses. New York would have had one of these, had the 1920s Art Deco skyscraper designed by Raymond Hood been built. It was intended to sit on a Manhattan bridge.

Commonplaces: from one bridge to another

The bridge is a classic *topos*, as defined by classical Greek and Latin rhetoric: a thought assumed to be widely shared and therefore the object of uncritical consensus. The bridge is the proverbial partner of translation, making good news (a connection) out of bad (the distance that separates). “The bridge” is a commonplace, a figure of rhetoric, a shortcut to optimism. For the Classical era, such shortcuts were encouraged. But the moderns have been less kind to *topoi*. In his nasty *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Flaubert took pleasure in collecting trite thoughts in order to denounce the “bêtise” of the bourgeois who thoughtlessly proffered them. For instance: “*LANGUES VIVANTES: Les malheurs de la France viennent de ce qu’on n’en sait pas assez* [MODERN LANGUAGES: France’s misfortunes come from the fact that we don’t know enough of them]” (1966, 62).

Why were these ideas called places? The connection to place (*locus communis*, *lieux communs*, *commonplaces*) in classical rhetoric is based on the idea that, to remember things, it suffices to “place” them in a recognizable spot. A *topos* is a place where the orator may go to locate arguments appropriate to a given subject. This idea will contribute to the construction of elaborate memory palaces during the Renaissance, structures one could actually enter in order to retrieve arguments (Yates 1966, 129–59).

Building bridges through translation: this thought has today become a commonplace. And, without a specific architecture, without a specific configuration of stone or

steel, arc or tangent, it remains a cliché. But, once the bridge is given shape and situated on a map, and once it is differentiated from other bridges, it can be richly informative.

With its elegant arch rising over a deep chasm and backdrop of dramatic mountains, the Mostar Bridge is much more than a means of transit across the Neretva. It is a structure admired for its beauty and for the sweeping perspectives it offers. It has an entirely different feel from more modern and utilitarian bridges, such as, say, the Øresund Bridge that connects Copenhagen and Malmo. This bridge was completed in 1999 and stretches eight kilometres across the Strait of Øresund in a monotonous if graceful line until it disappears into a few final kilometres of tunnel.



Figure 7.3 The Øresund Bridge, a crucial landmark in the successful Scandinavian television series called *The Bridge*, is a vector of pure mobility. Here, the small differences between languages seem to pose no problems at all.

While the bridge of Mostar embodies the weight of history, the Øresund Bridge evokes effortless mobility. Chosen as the symbol and backdrop for a long-running and wildly successful television series called *The Bridge*, it evokes the effortless transfers of modernity.

The Scandinavian crime television series was created in 2011 and has inspired a number of remakes around the world. A dead body is discovered exactly midway along the bridge, at the precise border between the two countries, causing a problem for the police forces. Which of them does the case belong to? Because the body is exactly on the border, they are obliged to work together, and they do this reluctantly. The unenthusiastic collaboration between a Danish and a Swedish investigator becomes the theme of the series, as the drama of relations between the two detectives is interwoven into the investigation of crimes.

Because the series takes place in two cities, in two different countries, the writers opted for an unusual language strategy. The Danish characters speak Danish, the Swedish characters speak Swedish. These languages are to some extent mutually intelligible, but a more realistic rendering would reveal many moments of incomprehension. The series, however, functions on the premise that the characters understand one another. Television viewers in Scandinavia are given subtitles all the same. On Danish television, the Swedish dialogue is subtitled in Danish, while on Swedish television, the Danish dialogue is subtitled in Swedish.

The doubleness of the film is visually highlighted from the start, with mirrored lists of credits that play off the bridge motif. The opening credits show the Øresund Bridge that joins the cities of Copenhagen in Eastern Denmark and Malmö in Southern Sweden, with the Danish title of the series on one side and the Swedish on the other. The bridge is a constant presence in the show, looming in the distance

in misty daytime scenes or viewed from above at night as it carries innumerable travellers to their destinations on either side of the strait that shares its name.

A smooth ride

Paradoxically and despite the visual clues provided by the mirrored halves of the credits, many viewers outside Scandinavia might well not pick up on the languages being spoken. For the unadvised spectator, the precise locations of the events and the languages being spoken are not clear. In fact, the revelation that the Swedes are speaking Swedish and the Danes speaking Danish comes as a total surprise to most English-speaking viewers. The subtitles in English take no note of the different languages being spoken (as they do in other versions, such as Israeli series which indicate Hebrew and Arabic) and with no clues to alert them to the double languages, the viewer misses this dimension of the series entirely.

One critic notes:

Some different shading in the subtitle might have helped us poor Brits. But aside from feeling stupid, I felt like I was missing out on jokes in the Swedish station at the Dane's expense and, I suspected, the dramatic meaning of moments when characters switched languages. . . . But without differentiation and with my language-averse brain, all the nuances of cross-border tension blended into one indistinguishable Scando-blur.

(Woods 2012)

Many of the in-jokes and cultural mix-ups will be missed by foreign audiences.

The immense popularity of the series has resulted in a number of moderately successful spinoffs, each exploiting

stereotypes of national character and using two languages to help drive these points across. But, in addition to the British-French and the Mexican-American series, *The Bridge* bears a great resemblance to a Canadian film released in 2006. This film begins with a similar opening episode, a body discovered at the border between an English-speaking and a French-speaking province, one half suspended on each side. *Bon Cop Bad Cop* was a runaway hit in Canada. The movie is a farcical story of two policemen fully embodying the stereotypes of their respective origins – the devil-may-care Francophone talking at madcap speed and the buttoned-up Anglophone, always calm and measured.

In *Bon Cop Bad Cop*, language is also front and centre. In fact, more than anything the movie is about the comedy of language differences, mainly about the difficulties of translating the Francophone's colourful slangy talk into terms acceptable to the Anglophone. One of the funniest scenes is the Franco explaining to the Anglo the subtleties of the ecclesiastical terms used as common swear words in Quebec, accompanied by an attempt to stuff a common enemy into the trunk of a car. In the movie, each cop has to speak the other's language when on his territory, and, like *The Bridge*, the movie was subtitled according to the target audience.

The Swedish-Danish version of *The Bridge*, however, is unique in its understated simultaneous use of two languages. The Øresund Bridge stands for a dedramatized form of communication. Like the traffic allowing cars to pass at great speed, conversation across languages is a fluid process. There is no friction halting communication; there are no obvious mediators facilitating dialogue. There is rather a suggestion that daily life might be lived in this fashion of cross-communication. A new kind of language is born in the dialogue between Danish and Swedish. In sharp contrast to the Mostar Bridge, the Øresund Bridge invites us

to imagine such augmented repertoires of communication across languages characterized by small differences. While the Mostar Bridge stands as a reminder of the difficulties that block passage, the Øresund Bridge proposes a pleasant fiction: frictionless surfaces of communication.

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8 THE WAR HOTEL The Holiday Inn, Sarajevo

CNN international correspondent Christiane Amanpour lived in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo for weeks at a time as she covered the Bosnian War. “Many times it was shot at by artillery fire, mortars were fired that landed on or near it, windows were broken regularly”, Amanpour told CNN Travel. Despite that – and the lack of hot water or electricity – journalists grew fond of the place. “It was where we woke up, where we went to sleep, where we visited each other, sometimes in each other’s rooms. It was where we worked, it was where we escaped death. It was really everything to many of us” (in Porter 2017).

The Holiday Inn in Sarajevo occupied a strategically vital location during the Bosnian conflict. It was a “press hotel” (Morrison 2016), a new role for hotels which first emerged during the Spanish Civil War, most famously the Hotel Florida in Madrid frequented by the foreign correspondents Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn. It was also a war hotel, a structure that provides protection *from*, but – most importantly – access *to* scenes of urban violence.

The artist and researcher Emanuel Licha (2017) includes the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo on the list of world hotels that have been on the front lines of conflict and which

have literally framed the space of conflict in journalists' coverage. Others are the Mayflower and the Commodore in Beirut, the Al Deira in Gaza, the Hyatt in Belgrade, the Ukraine Hotel in Kiev, the Al-Rasheed in Baghdad, the Serena in Kabul, the Peace Hotel in Mogadishu.

The Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, a modernist landmark built for the 1984 Olympics, was on the front lines of the conflict, situated directly on what became known as Sniper Alley – the long boulevard stretching through to the inner city and accessible to sniper shooting from the hills above. The hotel was designed as a modernist take on an old Ottoman-style Sarajevan house, and given a yellow colour. Bosnian architect Ivan Štraus had intended to reference the many styles of the city – the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Communist-era architectural styles that sit alongside each other. In fact, it stands in rather sharp contrast to historic buildings like the opera house (its square now named in honour of Susan Sontag) and the neo-Moorish City Hall (today's National Library).

The height of the hotel gave it a strategic advantage in viewing the war, but this advantage extended to its role as a communications centre. The Holiday Inn was also a prized location for journalists because of the technological resources it offered. It had powerful generators that were necessary for communications technology, and the hotel was able to obtain enough fuel to run its generators. Satellite phones at the time were still big and heavy, and access to the phones was vital. Journalists staying at the hotel were able to have privileged access to those phones. Only towards the end of the war did new technology (lighter generators and more compact phones) make it possible for journalists to set up in other sites around the city (Licha 2017).

During wartime, all communication carries risk, and translation is equally fraught with danger. Conflict does



Figure 8.1 The Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, built for the 1984 Winter Olympics, but today known mainly for its role as a war hotel.

not make translation impossible – it raises the stakes of communication.

The press activities carried out in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo were reliant on translation. The journalist was in many ways a war interpreter or, more likely, relied on mediators and fixers as relays. Mediating between the violence on the street and the readers and television viewers around the globe, journalists were dependent on ad hoc mediators to make sense of the havoc around them. The activities of interpreters during the Bosnian War, during the peace process and in the course of trials for war criminals at the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague, are at the heart of crucial research into the processes of communication essential to conflict and to reconciliation.

Ellen Elias-Bursać shows how the very viability of an international criminal prosecution depends in no small part on the massive amounts of translation and interpretation required in order to run lengthy and complex procedures. Translated testimony, translated evidence, translated debates – these were essential to the process of judgement. More than one tenth of the people working at the Tribunal were interpreters (2015, 1).

Death in Sarajevo

The Bosnian director Danis Tanović attained international renown with his 2001 Oscar-winning first movie, *No Man's Land*. This is a powerful exploration of conflict, with Beckett-like overtones, where warring soldiers unexpectedly find themselves face to face in the small space of a trench. In 2016, he released a new film, *Death in Sarajevo*, which is based on a one-man play by the French thinker Bernard-Henri Lévy. In the play, an aging diplomat rehearses his speech in front of the mirror in a Sarajevo hotel room, preparing for a commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 and the start of World War I.

The hotel, called Hotel Europa, is where the film takes place. Though there is a Hotel Europa in Sarajevo, a comfortable old-style nineteenth-century establishment, it is the Holiday Inn that was chosen. The reason for this choice is certainly the role which this hotel played during the Siege of Sarajevo.

Action takes place on three separate floors of the hotel. On the roof, a journalist is interviewing a man who bears the same name as the assassin of the Archduke, Gavrilo Princip; on the main floor, the manager is preparing to receive a delegation of European diplomats; in the basement, shady dealings are unfolding among gangsters,

while the employees are preparing to cause havoc by striking during the meeting of international dignitaries.

Issues of conflictual communication are conveyed through several of the plot threads in the film. The most obvious is in the relationship between the European diplomat and the rest of the hotel. As the Bernard-Henri Lévy character rambles on in French about the nature of Europe and its many catastrophes, and about Sarajevo as the moral centre of Europe, the hotel around him threatens to explode into chaos. The diplomat is preoccupied both with serious moral issues and with his own image. He is alternately praiseworthy and ridiculous. The high-minded blustering of the diplomat (so similar to the posturing of Lévy himself) is at a distance from the issues of the hotel, where gangsters in the basement and principled workers' organizations fight it out with an impotent management. The diplomat is entirely isolated from the hotel and its realities, lost in the mighty rhetoric of his own words. His language is not simply "foreign": it inhabits a different sphere from that of the others who are struggling on the ground to understand their past and negotiate their future.

The disconnect between the diplomat and the rest of the hotel's inhabitants recalls a comment by Lisa Smirl in her discussion of humanitarian aid operations. She defines the "grand hotel" as a setting for political acts and performances. The hotel provides the backdrop (the SUV is another) for pageant-like rituals that are crucial to formal politics as well as the politics of the everyday. Here dignitaries meet, handshakes are photographed, informal discussions take place over lunch and around the pool. Translation is, of course, a vital aspect enabling such discussions. The Holiday Inn corresponds to Smirl's definition of the "grand" hotel which is like an indoor city, with facilities including a hair salon, travel agency, tobacconist and discotheque. As a place where luxury

is available, as an enclave providing protection against the chaos outside, it is implicated in relations of unequal power. By inhabiting such structures, “the international humanitarian community may be seen as turning its back on its constituents” (2015, 109).

The front lines

The most poignant discussion in Tanović’s movie is that between the journalist and the modern Gavrilo Princip. She questions the mythification of the figure of Princip, while he defends his namesake as a hero of the nationalist struggle. When she asks who would be the appropriate



Figure 8.2 A photo of Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, was given pride of place in a Sarajevo bookstore on the occasion of the centenary of that act in 2014.

target of such an assassination attempt today, whose death would contribute to advance social and political progress, they are both stymied. They agree at least on this one point, that there is no one individual whose death would significantly alter the course of history. Though arguing across the distance of class and principles, they are able to establish – at least for a moment – a significant connection.

The allegorical space of the hotel for Tanović is essentially a deeply fragmented terrain, representing different ways of understanding the origins of the Bosnian conflict and the dissensions which continue to operate there. The voices and discourses on separate floors are parallel; there is no convergence. The experience of the hotel for the French diplomat is entirely different from that of the Mafiosi in the basement. The stakes are highest for the employees organizing in the laundry room – they will assert their rights at the risk of losing their livelihoods.

The hotel, more precisely the war hotel, becomes a metaphor for Bosnia today. What Tanović is showing is meeting without connection. Like the Mostar Bridge, which has been restored, but which does not ensure communication across the spaces of that city, like the remarkable Sarajevo National Library, which has also been restored, but cannot reproduce the texture of multiplicity that once reigned in the city, the hotel offers hospitality to its guests, but cannot guarantee a successful outcome to its language transactions.

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Part III

Crossroads



9 THE MARKET Urban translanguaging Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong

Walking through the shopping area of Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong, with its giant pulsing advertising signs, one might become aware of an array of faces not commonly seen in the city. Clustered in groups, talking or standing about, these groups of people are described by the anthropologist Gordon Mathews as “African entrepreneurs, Indian temporary workers, African and South Asian asylum seekers and penurious travelers from across the globe” (Mathews 2011, 1).

Hong Kong has always been a cosmopolitan city, and so diversity itself is hardly remarkable. But there is a special buzz on this bit of street, different in feeling from the surrounding streets of tourists and shoppers. The reason is the presence around the corner of Chungking Mansions, a “dilapidated seventeen-story structure full of cheap guesthouses and cut-rate businesses in the midst of Hong Kong’s tourist district”. Mathews calls it “the most globalized building in the world” (7).

The building, given international prominence in Wong Kar-Wai’s 1994 film *Chungking Express*, is the headquarters of traffic in all kinds of goods as they transit between mainland China and Hong Kong and destinations such as Dubai, Lagos, Mombasa, Nairobi, Bangkok and Kolkata.

The Mansions opened in November 1961 during an age of rapid growth in industry, immigration and tourism to British Hong Kong. This was still a time of exponential expansion for Hong Kong as its population nearly doubled in the years following the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1947. The building is now relatively old, in an area where the high value of real estate puts pressure on investors and merchants to continually renovate and glamourize their buildings.

Chungking Mansions is multilingual. English dominates as a lingua franca, but a host of other East Asian, South Asian and African languages are heard. The mix of voices, which the outsider captures as Babelian, is in



Figure 9.1 Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong, according to Gordon Mathews, is a “ghetto at the centre of the world” and a spectacular example of “low-end” globalization.

fact a chorus of conversations, whose nature will change just as the wares of the building are renewed. The interactions in the market are translational and best described by the notion of translanguaging – that is, as a weave of language exchanges enabled by the multiple competencies of individuals. The idea of a single native tongue is replaced by mixed public expression, adapted to specific needs.

Low-end globalization

The Mansions contains shop after shop of cell phones, gems, kitchen products, clothing, furniture; it also houses a maze of apartments, cheap tourist rooms and restaurants. Mathews calls it a centre of “low-end globalization”, indeed a microcosm showing patterns of trade and migration, highly sensitive to changes in the economy (most importantly the demise of the counterfeit cell phone trade with the arrival of the iPhone) and revealing of patterns of translation.

Mathews analyses the economy of the site and shares the conversations of his many years as an observer, telling the stories of those who carry goods back to their homes, like “the camel caravans or the merchant ships of yore” (150). The model trader might be a Tanzanian who travels to Hong Kong for a week to source a few hundred used phones imported from Europe, “refabbed” over the border in Shenzhen, specially packed to disguise their counterfeit batteries and then brought back to Africa as extra luggage. His tiny room costs less than \$20 a night and the trip nets him \$400–1,300 if nothing goes wrong. He makes multiple trips a month. But the long-term prospects of such commerce are fragile – for many reasons, including the possibility of mainland Chinese buying out the building and the changing technologies of cell phones. (151)

Chungking Mansions is a place whose meaning is constructed through the commercial exchanges that take place there, but also through the narratives that nourish them: the trajectories of the traders, their motivations, their implication in specific communities, the circuits of exchange which they choose to engage in. While the building projects the image of a “free” market, a haven of unbridled capitalism, in fact the traders are trapped in a web of constraints that range from the channels imposed by the historical routes of colonial trade, to Hong Kong’s visa regulations, to the changing trade relations between China and Hong Kong. The inhabitants are also “trapped” in the building physically, because of the strange configuration of the Mansions – a nest of five towers each with separate elevators but with no possibility of interconnection on the upper floors. This configuration adds to the danger of the place as a fire-trap and stands as a material representation of the relative isolation of communities one from the other – as well as the isolation of the building from the larger Hong Kong community.

English is the lingua franca of the Mansions, but many other languages swirl through this giant market. There are vehicular languages such as Hindi-Urdu for South Asians or French and Swahili for Africans. But, as Mathews notes, “Language usage is fascinatingly nested in Chungking Mansions, with different speakers finding the closest and most intimate language in which they can speak” (96) – Africans delighting when they find another speaker of Hausa or Luo, just as speakers of Punjabi and Bengali communicate, while to some extent ignoring their fellow South Asians. Occasionally a common language among traders could be Japanese or Swedish – if they have both spent some time in these countries.

Many of the traders operate in several languages. Those Africans who don't speak English tend to congregate not at Chungking Mansions, but in Guangzhou's Tianxiu Building, among other areas, where French as well as Mandarin prevail. Mathews notes that he has seen Japanese tourists communicating with Chinese merchants and guesthouse proprietors by writing in the Chinese characters that they share.

A foreign space

The inscription on the front of Chungking Mansions is first in Putonghua (or Mandarin), 重慶大廈, then in English. This bilingual inscription situates the building within the framework of pre-handover Hong Kong, the time before 1997 when English was the language of the colonial authorities. The Chinese language inscription can be pronounced in either Mandarin or Cantonese. These languages have a conflictual relationship in the post-handover city, as the power of mainland China increases. The widespread presence of English in Hong Kong long made the city preferable to the mainland as a place of trade for foreign merchants, but shifting power relationships have already begun to change this.

The building holds an unenviable place in Hong Kong culture: it has long inspired fear. It is an island of strangeness, a universe not accessible to the otherwise frenetic flow of exchange and consumption in the city. Mathews calls it a "ghetto" at the centre of the world. Located right in the very heart of the glitziest part of Hong Kong, some of the most expensive property in the world, it is coded *foreign*.

And, so, while Chungking Mansions is part of an immense circuit of exchange and commerce worldwide, it

is paradoxically cut off from the very place of which it is a physical part. It is both within and outside the culture of Hong Kong. The atmosphere of strangeness is made evident in Wong Kar-Wai's movie *Chungking Express*, where a shifty Hong Kong woman tries to outwit some Indian immigrants, only to be outsmarted by them. For a long time, Chungking Mansions lay outside the conversation of Hong Kong – as a rogue space. Highly relational and transactional as a node in a network of trade, the building remained apart from its immediate civic community. For this reason, the building is sometimes compared to the now demolished Kowloon Walled City, the once densely populated and unruly enclave of Kowloon.

Chungking Mansions might well be understood as a “counter-space”, a heterotopia, as defined by Michel Foucault (1998). This is not a place exempt from rules, standing outside of normality, but a kind of negative, mirror image of conventional spaces. For the outsider, it suggests a place that is mysterious, open to lawlessness. This identifies the Mansions as a particular kind of translation site – one whose temper is interpreted as celebratory for some (for example Mathews himself), but menacing for others. The building functions as a neighbourhood and a border zone – one situated not at the edge of a political territory, but right in its centre. The fact that the Mansions is considered a haven for migrants who do not always have legal status in the country marks the building as a temporary refuge, not always safe from incursions by law enforcement.

The building illustrates the way that political and economic borders can be displaced from the edges of a territory into the centre. The border, as Sandro Mezzadra has shown, is best understood as a verb rather than a noun: bordering (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). The political economy of migration puts borders into movement across and into the very heart of national territory.



Figure 9.2 Though it blends into the city skyline, Chungking Mansions was long coded foreign. It was considered to be a kind of “heterotopia”, standing outside the norms and familiar idioms of the city around it.

The language of the marketplace

Chungking Mansions is a giant market and is, as such, defined by “metrolinguistic” practices. Rather than seeing multilingual practices as a deviation from a monolingual norm, “metrolingualism” sees language use as drawing on various repertoires of expression, depending on the context of communication – shifting the focus away from discreet single languages to a view of everyday, ordinary multilingualism (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015, 16).

The idea of “superdiversity” is also relevant here, as it confirms paradigm shifts in thinking about language. “Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns” (Bloomaert and Rampton 2011, 3). Therefore, notions like “native speaker”, “mother tongue” and “ethnolinguistic group” are increasingly irrelevant. Once these categories are abandoned, the fluidity of language interactions becomes more evident, and translation itself—as an activity that depends on the boundary of single languages—must be redefined (5).

Metrolingualism, superdiversity and translanguaging together seek new ways of describing communication practices based not on individual identities but rather on the demands of place. They show individuals to be flexible and creative. Observation shows that translation is one aspect of translanguaging, called upon at various moments as a strategy in spoken, written or gestural means of communication.

In particular, as its name suggests, “metrolingualism” studies multilingual communication in urban space. Restaurants, markets, shops – these all involve specific forms of language use. The city and language are co-dependent. Urban space is not a simple backdrop but actively solicits

language, just as language activities contribute to the production of space. “Language does not just happen against an urban backdrop, it is part of the city, the barber shop, the market garden, the networks of buying and selling” (33).

Cultural geographers have done away with the idea of space as a container, to propose ever more precise accounts of the active, shaping and mobile attributes of space. Space is never an “already-there”, but the ongoing product of interconnections. Language activities are interactions that define, for instance, the nature of the market. The Mansions serves, then, as an example of the ways in which public spaces are produced through language and in particular “by the specialized work enacted by migrants and by migrant labour, by what can and cannot be said, by how things are said and by the way they are heard” (85).

Logics of circulation

From the logics of circulation dictated by neoliberal capitalism to the postcolonial language rivalries of the island of Hong Kong, from the nesting of language choices to the translanguaging strategies of speakers, languages are embedded in the commercial activities of Chungking Mansions. Like all markets, the Mansions defies rules of linguistic uniformity, favouring instead a rough-and-ready pragmatics of communication. Translation is one form of exchange within a vast repertoire. And it generates the possibilities for the many forms of fair and unfair exchange that go on there.

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10 THE STREET Activist translation

The streets of Montreal and Cairo

The street is a bountiful mix of language systems – a visual landscape of script and an oral environment of speech performances. Ato Quayson's *Oxford Street* (2014), a tribute to a main thoroughfare of Accra, Ghana, describes the profusion of language forms that populate this street – the messages, slogans, joking and insults, the vast “discourse ecology” that evolves according to the rhythms of local culture but also according to the dictates of transnational commerce.

In Accra, the street is also a landscape of continuous translation, the billboards mediating between global and local markets, and especially the slogans in English issuing from popular culture sources in Twi, Ga, Ewe or Hausa. Quayson mentions these African languages in passing, for the most part treating the inscriptions in their English forms. The slogans are ubiquitous, inscribed on lorries and carts, and encompassing every imaginable aspect of urban and social life from “witchcraft and the evil eye, to wry social observations on gender wars, family conflicts, political chicanery, the celebration of the lives of drivers and motor vehicles . . .” (129).

Rather than specifying that these speech forms are translated, Quayson uses “entextualization” to refer to the

way that bits of language travel from one form to another. Urban African language comes to life in the mediations between and among local languages and European tongues. “Everything that touches on the life of Africans as they make their way through change, transformation, and transition is amenable to the process of entextualization in the form of a slogan or saying” (135).

As the process through which elements of social discourse migrate across forms of expression, entextualization is a broad form of translation. It includes but also exceeds what we understand as language transfer. And as such, it takes its place within an expanded concept of translation. To recognize that translation embraces “the mediation of symbols, experiences, narratives and linguistic strings across modalities and cultural spaces” (Baker 2016, 4) is to widen the opening through which translation looks out on the world.

As Ato Quayson so spectacularly demonstrates, the street is one of the richest sites of such processes of mediation. And these take on particularly volatile forms when the street becomes a place of protest.

Shouts from the street

The late spring and summer months of 2012 saw the streets of Montreal filled night after night by student protesters and their supporters. The Quebec government had threatened to raise university fees, and the issue had mobilized huge numbers of demonstrators, unrelenting in their opposition. What was being challenged was a short-sighted attempt by the government to damage Quebec’s public institutions and the progressive, collectivist principles on which they had been built. Following close on the heels of the Arab Spring (“le printemps arabe”), the

movement became known as “le printemps érable” – the maple spring (the maple leaf appears on the Canadian flag and figures prominently in Quebec popular culture).

Conceived and carried out almost exclusively in French (Quebec is a Francophone province with an English-language minority), the actions of the students were often misread by the English-language press, both within and outside of Quebec. While much of the French-language media was supportive of the students’ opposition to an unpopular Liberal government, the English-language media saw only unruly behaviour.

When street actions kicked off in February, the news filtered through to the rest of Canada in brief hits and with little context: Perhaps you heard something about pepper spray and riot police, a stock exchange surrounded, a vital bridge shut down in the middle of rush hour. For most of us, the bulletins were easy to dismiss, since we were told at every turn that protesters were fighting tuition increases which, if successful, would still leave Quebec students with the lowest tuition in the country. . . . In time, the reports grew longer but they still focused overwhelmingly on the protesters’ violence and sense of entitlement.

(Houpt 2018)

The gap in reporting became especially egregious on May 18, 2012, when Premier Jean Charest’s government passed its controversial anti-protest Bill 78, effectively prohibiting the continued demonstrations. Quebec’s independent daily *Le Devoir* roundly condemned the law (as did much of the Quebec population), but media in English supported it.

And so, two Montreal activists Anna Sheftel and Patricia Boushel decided to take action. Realizing that English-language readers needed to have access to French-language

news, they decided to translate the *Le Devoir* editorial and publish it on a Tumblr blog.

Translating le printemps érable

This was the start of an initiative Sheftel and Boushel called *Translating the printemps érable*, a volunteer translators' collective whose goal was to counteract the dismissive coverage of the student conflict by the English press by making available articles from French. The first translation was followed by hundreds of others: in five months, according to Raúl Colón, there would be some 541 texts translated by a large number of volunteers (2018, 79). The site included not only dozens of articles from the mainstream outlets,



Figure 10.1 The summer of 2012 saw huge demonstrations nightly in the city of Montreal. Collective activist translation, from French into English, became an integral part of the protest movement itself.

but also translations of statements made by student leaders, accounts of arrests and demonstrations, and a few editorials by the members of the collective. These attempted to convey some of the feeling on the streets of Montreal, the sense of neighbourliness and solidarity which sprang up – rather than, as reported in the English press, that the protests were a nuisance and fomented by marginalized groups.

Translating the printemps érable has become a model for what Colón calls “collaborative activist translation” (1). This is transmission resulting from popular movements, often using social media and drawing on leaderless forms of organization. Translators are conscious of their role as participants in struggles for social change and see their role as much more than pure mediation. At the same time, there is increased emphasis on the way translation and mediation are integral to the very actions and effects of protest movements. Mona Baker’s collection of essays on the *Dissenting Voices of the Egyptian Revolution* is devoted precisely to bringing “translation, interpreting, subtitling and other form of mediation to the centre of the political arena” (2016, 1).

This means showing how translation is essential to the diffusion of messages worldwide, how it is part of the personal experience of many protesters and also how local movements of resistance are embedded in engagement with previous movements. It means highlighting the specific ways through which translation comes to take place – the rapid time frame, the reliance on non-professionals and the “values of horizontality, non-hierarchy and pluralism” which sustain all aspects of the work. For Baker, if networks of solidarity are to become more effective, translators must “be repositioned as full participants within non-hierarchical, solidary activist communities” (1).

When it is a place of protest, of unruly words, the street gives rise to activist forms of mediation. With the emergence of new forms of popular expression comes the need to question traditionally minor voices. The attention given to translators is a reflection of a broad critical programme.

The participant-translator

What marks translator-activists is their position within the acts of communication. This is not mediation from afar, but translation that emerges from the ranks of demonstrators, from the halls of noisy assemblies. This proximity to events reverberates through the entire process, especially when sensitive political vocabulary is concerned. Participants in social movements are aware of the political nature of terms and of the ideologies involved in levels of language – standard written Arabic and spoken Egyptian, for example (Baker 2016, 7). In the context of the protests of Tahrir Square, Samah Selim comments, “Working with the radical video collective Mosireen through 2012 and 2013 deepened and honed my understanding of translation as a kind of toolkit of revolutionary practice and consciousness” (2016, 79). She notes the continuity between witnessing and the work of transmission (83).

The choices of equivalents for terms are very much influenced by the translator’s position. For Anna Sheftel, when translating for the *printemps érable* in Quebec, rendering the term *manifestation* from French required making an interpretive decision, to choose between “demonstration” (with its connotations of order and dignity) and “protest” (more unruly and disruptive). *Manifestations* were the most visible events of the strike, the repeated nightly parades that often took on a festive nature, as citizens of all stripes took to their pots to clang in solidarity – a ritual happening in

the city during that spring and summer. A defining element of the 2012 student strikes was indeed the widespread support from ordinary citizens, most often signalled by the pots and pans “casseroles” in French. And, so, the meaning given to these words was crucial. As Sheftel comments:

Reading the mainstream English media’s understanding of what happened here in the spring and summer of 2012, the gulf between a demonstration and a protest appeared enormous. . . . What happened in this movement was far more complex, dynamic, creative and all-encompassing than a *manifestation*, a “demonstration” or a “protest”. We even invented new words to convey what we were doing; my English-speaking friends and I talked about going “casseroling” (in French, the equally made up *casseroler*), for example. How to translate the word used in French to convey this joyous participation – “les casseroles”.

(Sheftel 2016, 73–75)

Another translator, Margaret Fraser, explains her difficulties with the term *casseur*, literally someone who breaks things. Fraser explains that this was a figure regarded with ambivalence by participants in the demonstrations, someone who initiates violence in order to attract attention. When Margaret’s mother hears this term, she immediately reacts: “They are rioters”. Margaret knows that these are people who “break things”, but won’t agree with “rioter”.

“It’s difficult to explain”, I told her, “let alone translate. . . . I explain it to other Anglophones like this: a rioter is and can only ever be part of a riot but a *casseur*, well, a *casseur* is part of a *manif*”.

(Fraser 2016, 101–2)

Part of the motivation for translating, she explains, is trying to get at the unspoken connotations of words and the atmosphere in which they are circulated: to try to understand the unpredictability of the actions of the crowds, under threat of potential violence from the police (102). These are hardly technical discussions, related to equivalences that can be found in dictionaries, but questions about the nature and interpretation of political action.

Saying/making public space

Activist translation is not limited to situations of crisis. Architectural and planning practices can also be the site of activist interventions – especially as they relate to efforts to promote democratic ideas about public space. Sherief Gaber describes the efforts of planners in Egypt to transform Arabic by proposing terms that are not given equivalents from European models or repetitions of state-dictated models, but are rather excavated from popular or historical use to go hand in hand with concrete efforts to transform the city. This is activist translation in the service of transforming public space. For Gaber, translation is not finding an equivalent for some agreed-upon pre-existing idea of public space, but rather the creation of new terms to evoke the kinds of material spaces which will benefit city dwellers.

The vocabulary of space, and in particular public space, has been the subject of debate within the Western tradition since Plato. *Topos* and *chôra* were both used by Plato with different meanings in the *Timeaeus* (Vidler 2014, 134). The distinction regained pertinence in the 1970s in relation to questions of subjectivity and embodiment – *chôra* being understood to refer to the possibility of space, the conceptual and phenomenological underpinnings of space. This historical

reference nourished the collaboration of philosopher Jacques Derrida with the architect Peter Eisenman in 1985, involving long hours of discussion about the design of a garden for Parc de la Villette in Paris. Eisenman's goal was to create a space which evoked several layers of time. A reactivated concept of *chôra*, of space traversed by different temporalities, was the basis for the design. "In this way, a word, long-forgotten in the footnotes of Plato translation and exegesis was launched into a veritable, architectural discourse" (Vidler 2014, 135).

But, as Gaber emphasizes, ideas of public space are deeply political, and most prominent in relation to colonialist practices of occupying the territory. The divided spaces of colonial cities testify to conflicting meanings of public space. Separate conceptions of public space led to the "uncanny" nature of the city of Calcutta in the nineteenth century (Chattopadhyay 2005, 3). While the British-imposed city planning schemes based on techniques of mapping, for the Bengalis, "there was no pre-defined public space in the nineteenth century to step into" (227). Indeed the term *public space* does not simply refer to residual space outside the home, but to this *outside* as a carefully meditated physical and social construction. Physical public spaces like bazaars, streets, ghats, parks, theatres, temples and places of worship, libraries, educational institutions, cafés, teashops, the Town Hall – these offered different modes of access and differing views of what *being in public* meant in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Calcutta. These differences are reflected in terminology, for instance the Bengali words used to denote *public* – *prakashye* (in public), *prakashya sthan* (public place); *janasadharan* or *sarbasadharan* (the public as a collectivity) – were nineteenth-century inventions to accommodate the notion of a political public (227).

Planners in Egypt similarly had to deal with terms whose history was coloured by imported vocabularies of American or European urban planning. Direct translations of “public space” are unwieldy and lack resonance:

The fact that urban issues and activism increasingly became part of social and political consciousness, coupled with the extensive changes to the city itself, have required activists, academics and professionals to develop a new language to document new phenomena as well as advocate for change.

(Gaber 2016, 97)

Gaber suggests that what is needed is an “aspirational terminology”, one that will evoke “the spaces we desire, spaces we want to bring into existence” (99). The “aspirational terminology” of civic planning and design, like the slogans of demonstrations, attempt to give material form to collective desires. The language used to imagine forms of public space is crucial. Whether shouted on the streets, reported in the media or used as the basis of an architectural project, words give life to public space.

And translation plays its part in expanding the vocabulary. Translators do not just spread the word, they do not just share information. Acts of mediation can correct misperceptions, can argue for larger ideals. They propose as-if equivalences, terms or phrases that bring about changes in perception, that call for new forms of attention.

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11 THE MUSEUM Displaying Indigenous languages

The National Gallery of Canada

In June 2017, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa opened newly renovated galleries with a special exhibition called “From Time Immemorial: Canadian and Indigenous Art”. As part of Canada’s 150th anniversary celebrations, the event had unusual symbolic importance. The exhibition and its setting were to be the latest word on what “Canadian art” is and means.

The novelty of the new displays is easy to summarize. Rather than relegating Indigenous art to the ethnographic museum, they integrated Indigenous works into the fine art collection. The art is arranged chronologically, beginning with ancient Indigenous objects and examples of the religious art of New France, and ending with modern Inuit sculptures and geometric abstract paintings. Much of the Indigenous work on display in this show had to be borrowed from ethnography museums, where Indigenous art has traditionally been conserved.

Though the changes are easy to summarize, they are the outcome of decades of debate about the nature of museums and their public mandate. The show tells a new story about Canadian art – one that was precipitated by the conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015)

encouraging museums to be more responsive to Indigenous culture. The arrangement claims to provide a more “complete”, “meaningful” and “representative” display of Canadian diversity (National Gallery of Canada 2017).

While the new show received a great deal of press coverage, one of the most innovative aspects of the exhibition was given little attention. This was the role of translation. Government policy obliges the museum, like other federal institutions, to provide bilingual (English-French) labelling. In the case of this exhibition, third languages were also added. Fifty-three labels (referring to 145 Indigenous items in the collection) included the language of the community from which the objects originated. As of June 2017, the languages included were Anishinabemowin, Inuktitut (six different dialects), Haida Masset, Blackfoot, Michif, Kanyen’keha (Mohawk), Ojibwe, Gwich’in, Kwak’wala, Western Abenaki and Naskapi.

The presence of these languages within the museum enhanced the reach of the exhibition. The labels opened the exhibit to voices rarely heard in the museum context and were authored by experts from the communities of origin of the artworks. The intention of the labelling was to provide an extended explanation of the work from within the culture.

Labels in indigenous languages

“From Time Immemorial” displays the characteristics of what historian and curator Ruth Phillips calls the Second Museum Age. New museological practices are designed to make museums more inclusive by encouraging a culture of shared power with diverse communities. This culture is enacted in all aspects of museum life, including curating, research and policy (2011). New Zealand, for instance,

had already instituted innovative forms of curation with regard to the inclusion of Indigenous cultures, altering the power relations between creators and consumers of museums (Neather 2018, 365).

In Canada, the Vancouver Museum of Anthropology has played a pioneering role, making the voices of contemporary makers of Indigenous art very present in their displays. No Indigenous object is presented without an author, whether the maker be an individual or a community.

Another important national museum, the Museum of History (formerly the Museum of Civilization) across the river from Ottawa in the town of Gatineau, introduced a new Canadian History Hall in the spring of 2017 with an introductory panel telling the creation story of the Anishinaabe people, the people upon whose traditional territory the museum sits (McCue 2017). Visitors are greeted by this striking illuminated panel, in which a creation story is recounted orally entirely in Anishinaabemowin. Subtitles are provided at the bottom of the screen in French and English. As an introduction to the story of Canada in which the First Nations are now given a foundational role, the attractive starry display and accompanying narrative is wonderfully effective. However, the effect is undercut by the fact that this is the only instance in the entire exhibition spanning some five centuries in which First Nations languages are prominent.

At the National Gallery, by contrast, the new labelling throughout the exhibition had unusual visual impact. While Indigenous languages may have been present in museums before, their role was as an object of knowledge; here they figure as subjects – as interpretive voices. The languages have an interpellative effect. They salute those readers of the language who find themselves in the space of the museum. They create a widened community of participants, changing the distribution of voices through translation (Sturge 2007, 97). Translation becomes an

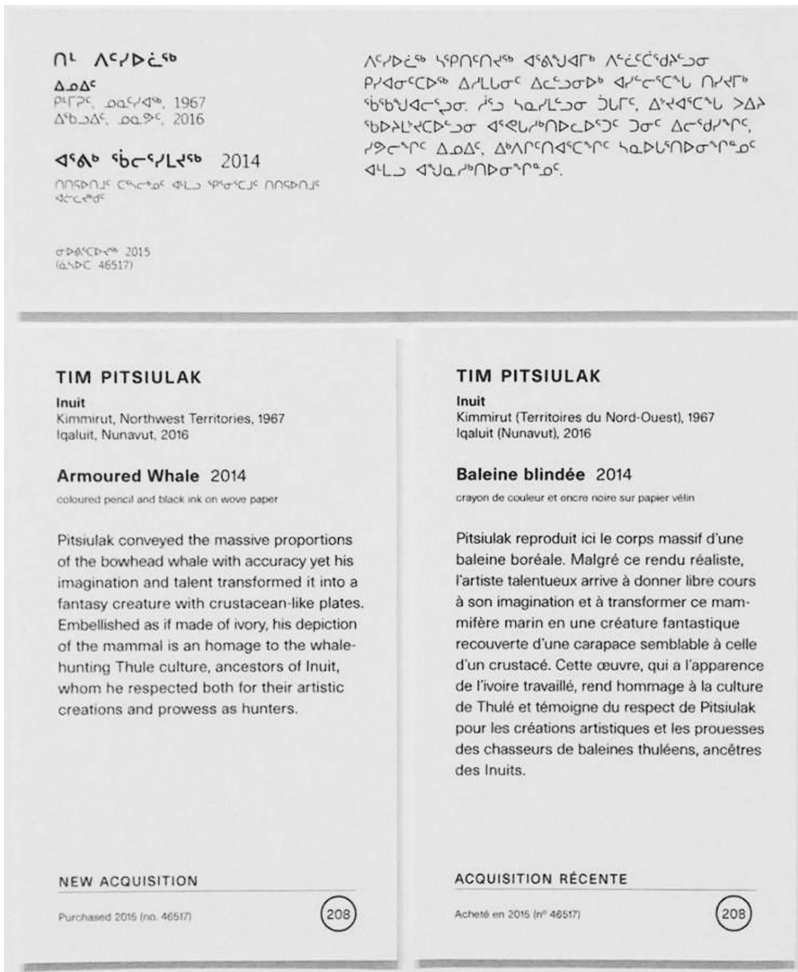


Figure 11.1 Labelling in the Inuit language for the work of Tim Pitsiulak, National Gallery of Canada. While translation for this exhibition was *into* Indigenous languages, further iterations of the project may one day see translation in the other direction.

invitation, or a summons, requiring the presence in these museum spaces of individuals able to read and appreciate these messages in their own tongue.

This redistribution involves relinquishing physical space to the presence of different languages, as well as a change

in the relative weight of authority granted to original and translation.

In terms of an ethics of translation this implies a demand on the majority target language to cede some of its power to the originating language, holding back and allowing the source language more space to speak.
(Sturge 2007, 97)

In a discussion of an exhibit at the Horniman Museum in London in the late 1990s, Sturge draws attention to the immense symbolic importance of the presence of African languages such as Yoruba – as a means of saluting the immigrant populations of London but also as “an intervention into the city’s political and social texture via translation – translation in a panoramic and politicized version, which is driven on by the presence of a vocal and active diasporic community in the city” (98). Sturge gives importance to the sheer fact of a language taking up space in a public place. Where marginalized languages are concerned, the mere presence of the language becomes a rhetorical intervention. Translation expands the range of voices seen and heard. Also, by placing diverse modes of expression side by side, it encourages viewers to take note of the gaps between them. It exposes their conflictual claims on public space.

At the same time, the labels bring into existence forms of expression (the description of artworks) which may not have existed as such in the written form of the language, essentially because Indigenous languages have been transmitted principally in oral form (the written forms mainly used in educational settings, in programmes of language revival for instance). Rather than finding an equivalent for a reality “already there”, the written form of the language elicits something new, a not already existing utterance about the role of the artwork within the community.

How it works

The public information provided on the process of translation is limited to a few sentences on the National Gallery of Canada website:

As part of the planning process for the new Galleries, the Gallery established two Indigenous Advisory Committees of curators, academics, knowledge keepers and other recognized authorities to provide expertise and guidance on interpretation, display protocols and community engagement. Gallery staff also reached out to authors and translators to produce more than 50 gallery texts in 17 Indigenous languages from across the country and consulted with local Algonquin Elders on how to officially welcome the various objects from Indigenous communities.

(2017)

The presence of the three languages side by side gives no clue, however, as to the actual direction of translation. Which is the original, which is the new version? The symmetrical blocks of English and French text which are a feature of official government communication in Canada perpetuate a fiction of equivalence which obscures the direction of communication. While the two languages have absolute legal equality, they are not equal in number of speakers or in local and global importance. At the level of the Canadian federal government, the vast majority of translations go from English into French, reflecting the dominance of English. To understand the direction of translation in relation to Indigenous languages is to understand the relative strength of specific spheres of expression across languages.

When the consultation first began, the members of the education department responsible for translation of

Indigenous languages expected that translation process would be from the Indigenous language into French and English. That is, they expected that the knowledge about the artwork would be provided by the person who was part of that community in their own language. In the end, the translation happened in the other direction (Gillanders 2017–18). In every case, the authors wrote their texts in English or French. Because of the fragile state of these languages today, after decades of cultural repression, the community members did not have the vocabulary in their own languages to provide the information.

The ambiguity about the directionality of translation reflects the situation of Indigenous languages within the context of First Nations political and cultural struggles today. Because of the Canadian government policy forcing young Indigenous children to leave their families and attend Residential Schools (a system begun in the 1880s and lasting until the 1990s), most young Indigenous people in Canada were forcibly cut off from their languages and actively prohibited from speaking them. Some spoken languages were maintained, but written forms were much more unusual – only today slowly reappearing in the context of language revival programmes. And, so, translation into an Indigenous language can sometimes result in the invention of forms of expression perhaps never used before.

This process can be compared in some ways to activist translation or to the kind of “*as if* equivalence” through which marginalized groups revive a neglected past. Unlike versions that have a purely informative function, activist translations have a more proactive intention where – if the equivalent form does not yet exist – it is created through neologisms or through unusual uses of syntax or rhetorical effects. Sherief Gaber (see “The Street”) has proposed the term *aspirational terminology* to describe the active

creation of words to describe the spaces we desire, that we want to bring into existence (2016, 105). We might extend *aspirational translation* to ways of making words occupy spaces of knowledge as well as institutional spaces.

The labels

The labelling information provided for the works in “From Time Immemorial” is quite diverse – sometimes technical, sometimes narrative. This diversity corresponds to the very loose idea of “context” that guided the composition of the labels. Community members were free to provide the information that seemed most relevant to them. For instance, the label accompanying a war scene painted by the Blackfoot artist known as White Wolf editorializes, “Today’s generation fights a different battle but still advocates for the protection of land and water”.

Labelling can include first-person explanations, as in the commentary on a drawing by Inuit artist Helen Kalvak. The label reads:

I was then taking practical lessons in the Eskimo language from a superb grandmother, Helen Kalvak, collecting stories of the past. Sometimes to explain, she would make a drawing. One day I asked her to make me an Eskimo parka out of caribou hide and, contrary to Eskimo fashion, she drew a design of it. She was on her way to becoming a remarkable artist, with many designs to her credit.

The author of this commentary is Father Henri Tardy, referring to the early 1960s and was presumably first written in French. There is a lovely interconnection in this story between language and drawing. The language lessons she was giving to the priest resulted in her taking up the pencil to draw. It is

particularly fitting, then, that the drawing that resulted be accompanied by the language through which it came into existence. Tardy was a Roman Catholic priest who spent forty years in the North and is credited with establishing the first Inuit printmaking and lithographic cooperative in the North in 1965. The cooperative remains active today.

A poignant text in Michif accompanies the acrylic entitled *Sainte-Madeleine* (2006) by David Garneau, a member of the Métis community. It explains the tragic events which saw the forced displacement of the Métis population, first from the Red River area after the Rebellion of 1869–1870, and then again in 1941 from their new location in Ste. Madeleine, because they were considered squatters. Michif is a hybrid language, a mixture of French and Cree. The question of whether this mixed tongue is in reality a “language” is given here an emphatically affirmative response.

A very different kind of information, more conventionally art historical, is provided for the work of acclaimed abstract artist Rita Letendre. The label for her oil on canvas from 1963 explains that:

Letendre’s unique artistic vision draws on her interest in Zen teachings, her French and Abenaki heritage, and an intuitive exploration of the gestural application of paint. This turbulent mix of red and black evokes a wound, creating tension and suggesting brooding violence. Although she later explored hard-edge abstraction, the themes of light and energy have remained constant in her work.

This text is translated into French and Abenaki.

Language acts

Translation is generally understood as an act of replication. But sometimes it can enact change. Against the backdrop



Figure 11.2 As part of an effort to reclaim aboriginal history, Toronto has begun to return Anishinaabe names to the streets of the city.

of centuries of colonialism, when the translation of Indigenous languages was conducted entirely in the interests of anthropologists (Cardinal 2014) or government administrators, the new labels of the National Gallery count as acts of redress. Like the restoration of Anishinaabe street names in Toronto and increasing numbers of cultural activities which give solid representation to First Nations languages, like the increasing recognition of Indigenous languages in the Canadian national language policy (2019), they are signs of irreversible change.

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Part IV

Thresholds



12 THE TRANSLATOR'S STUDY

Picturing translation from Saint Jerome to Nurith Aviv

Sometime in the early fifteenth century, somewhere between the Low Countries and Italy, Saint Jerome was given a makeover. For medieval Christians, Jerome was an ascetic exposed to the rigours of the desert. By the Renaissance, he had turned into a comfortably clothed scholar, spending his days in a well-equipped study. In the heady atmosphere of Renaissance humanism, Saint Jerome's taste for penance had lost its attraction and he was revered instead as a philologist and translator.

This metamorphosis had important consequences for the history of visual art. While Jerome the penitent did not disappear entirely, an especially rich iconographic tradition was born, which includes paintings by many of the best artists of the Renaissance – Dürer, Cranach, Ghirlandaio, Da Messina, Van Eyck, Caravaggio. The genre is called “Saint Jerome in his Study”. It shows Jerome at work at his desk, accompanied by the customary accoutrements of his sainthood, including his lion and his scarlet cardinal's hat.

On the face of it, this is a subject with little dramatic potential – tame in comparison with the agonies of self-mortification. But it attracted many artists, including the most distinguished. They found meaning in the image

of a scholar absorbed by his task, surrounded by the objects and symbols necessary to the job. The genre becomes an iconic representation of a space of translation. The most famous translator in Christendom is shown at work, in the place that defines his relationship to the world.

Jerome (347 – c. 420) led a colourful life, which included stints in Rome, and many years of travel and life in Palestine. He first arrived in Rome from his native Dalmatia as a young student, climbing the rungs of papal service only to leave and spend a period of twenty years travelling. He returned to Rome for three years to become the secretary of Pope Damasus I, but then left definitively for Palestine, where he lived for the rest of his life. Though embracing the monastic life, he had close relationships with the Roman women who accompanied him to Palestine. He also had a spirited correspondence with Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who was his contemporary.

Painted language

The Renaissance adored both Jerome and Augustine. But Jerome was the more frequent recipient of painterly tributes. He was a more accessible model of religious and scholarly aspirations, of learning in the service of belief (Gill 2012, 62). And the fact that he was best known as the translator of the Bible earned him special favour during a period when translation was hardly a minor activity. It was at the beginning of the fifteenth century that Leonardo Bruni introduced the new term “tradurre”, as a replacement for the medieval term “translatio”. Translation was at the very core of Renaissance secular and religious thought, as the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classics created an appetite for versions in the new vernaculars and Bible translation was also revived as new versions were crafted in all the new European

languages. Bruni's manual on the correct methods of translating the classics was the first new lesson on methods since Jerome's own *Letter to Pammachius* and served as a kind of manifesto for the new humanism, as translation became the task of every scholar. The treasures to be uncovered ranged from the recognized Greek and Latin masters to the Neo-Platonist tradition recovered by Marsilio Ficino, but also Kabbalistic thought as investigated by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Lamy 2019).

As an integral part of humanist learning, translation "looks like" any other kind of reading and writing. But the many scenes of Jerome in his study are tributes to this particular form of scholarly activity. As we will see later in this chapter, this same focus appears in a very different art form many centuries later. The contemporary translator's study is explored in a remarkable film by the French-Israeli director Nurith Aviv, *Traduire* (2011), which begins with a site of translation that predates Jerome – the isle of Pharos, where the Seventy gathered to translate the Bible from Hebrew into Greek. What clues, then, does this very deliberate emphasis on the spatial aspects of the workplace offer about the place of the translator in the world?

Architecture with figure

In the classic version of the genre, Jerome is shown at his desk, in a space which ranges from the austerity of a monastic cell to the comfort of the Renaissance *studiolo*. While most of the portraits of Jerome show a sage at work, a few images explicitly foreground the linguistic aspects of his scholarship. An early and unusual image (1415) by Taddeo di Bartolo (1362–1422) shows Jerome seated at his vertical medieval writing desk. Standing in front of him

is Saint Luke with a ribbon of Hebrew in his hands. This is a rare Renaissance acknowledgement of the original language of the Bible from which Jerome has translated. The Council of Trent would declare Jerome's Vulgate an "original" in 1546, officially cutting off the Christian Bible from its provenance. But, in 1415, Bartolo could still show, in this lunette from the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, that Jerome was not only a Saint divinely inspired by God but a philologist who had done the work of learning the Hebrew language.

Another form of acknowledgement to the original is given when Jerome is shown translating at a vertical lectern which has an upper and a lower shelf. A little-known painting by Giovanni di Paolo (c.1403–82) shows the original on the top (the text is illegible) and the Latin on the bottom. Similarly, the well-known image (1480) by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448–94) shows Jerome with the open original behind him and the translation spread open on the desk in front of him. These examples may be as close as painters or engravers have ever come to representing the act of translation.

Antonello da Messina's (c.1430–79), painting of Jerome (c.1475) suggests a less literal enactment of translation, yet is a strikingly meaningful addition to the iconography of Jerome. He is again seated at a vertical style desk, but now the desk is situated in a vaster space, part of a raised workspace itself in the middle of a large palace courtyard. The outer wall of the study space is missing, allowing the translator a view of the world outside, as well as of the grand spaces of the palace. Windows and doors, of different styles – Venetian, Catalan, Flemish – open onto the landscape beyond, showing the everyday activities of peasants on the land. Rather than sitting at Jerome's feet, his lion is roaming the corridors of the palace – giving movement to the painting and accentuating the emptiness of the halls.

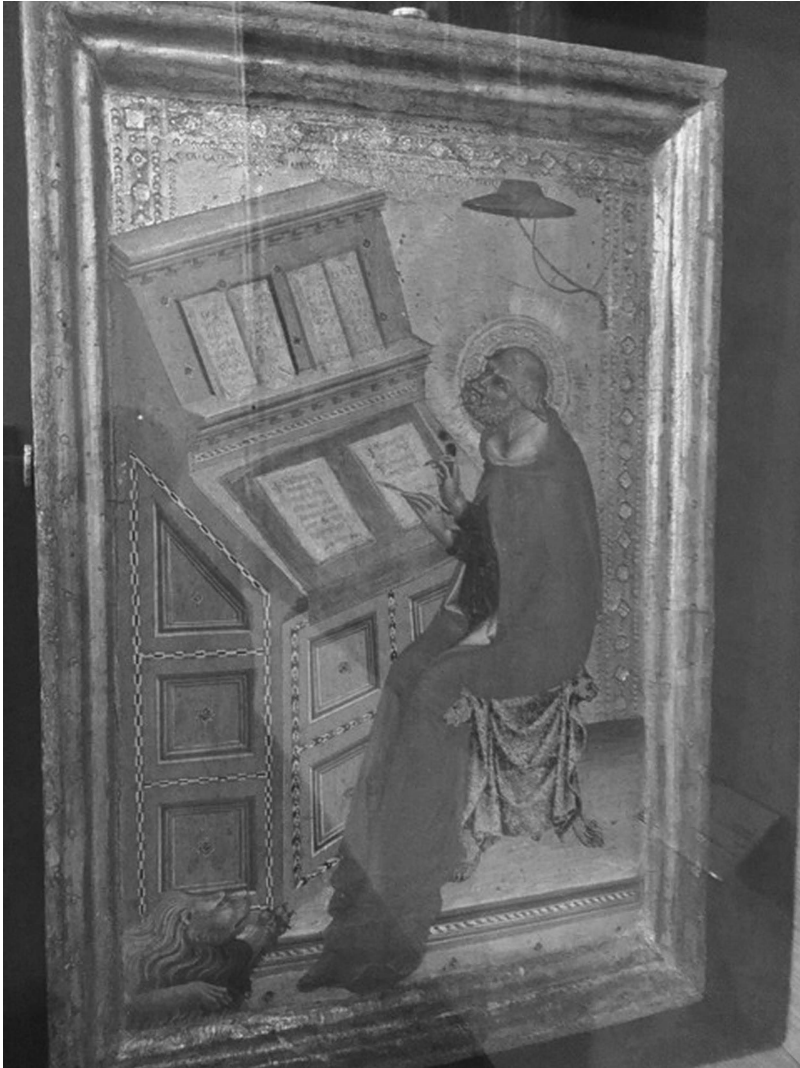


Figure 12.1 *Saint Jerome in his Study*, by Giovanni di Paolo, 1426. The double lectern displaying the original and the work in progress makes clear that Jerome is indeed translating.

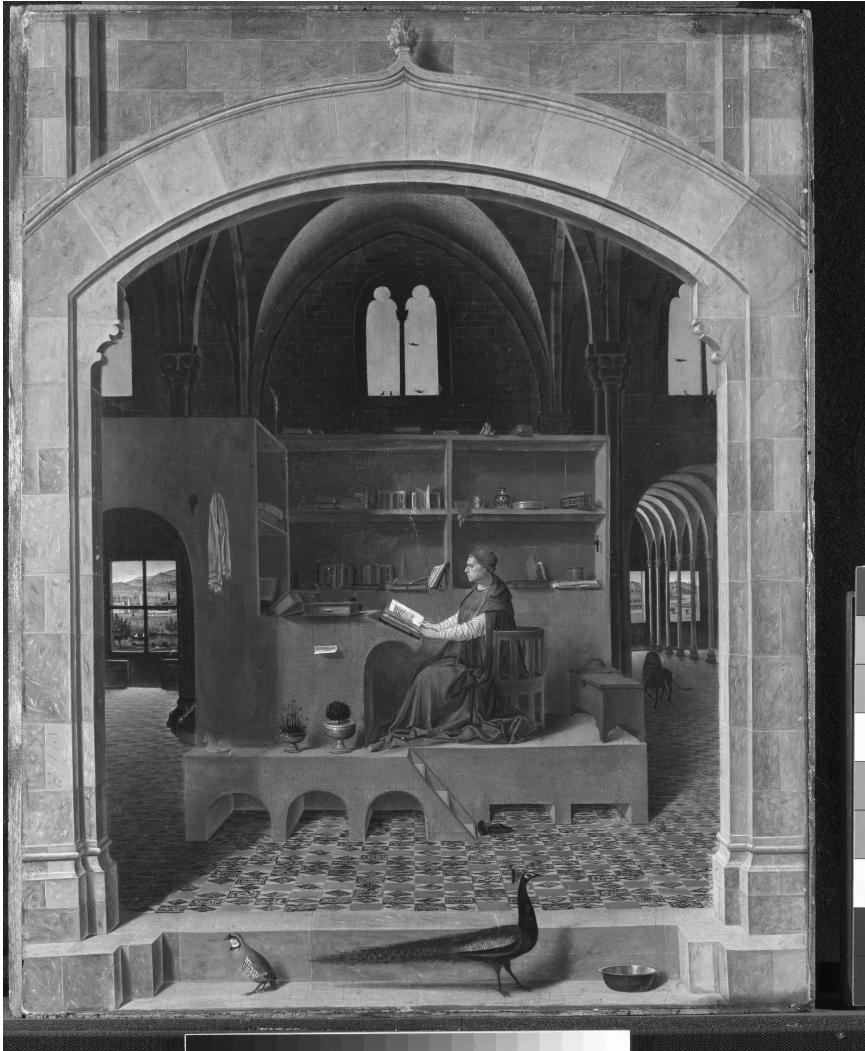


Figure 12.2 *Saint Jerome in His Study*, by Antonello da Messina, c.1475. The architectonics of this painting make for an outstanding representation of translation as movement between an inner and an outer world. The many-shaped windows prefigure Nurith Aviv's 20th century cinematic portrayal of translators.

It is a theatrical picture, and it is a painting about space. The degree of architectural detail (the veins of the stone archway, the vaulted colonnaded passage) points to Flemish influences. It seems fitting that this iconic representation of Jerome the translator be the product of the encounter between two pictorial traditions – Flemish and Italian.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the painting, for our purposes, is that it includes a number of thresholds, of passages between the inside and the outside world. Apertures, arches and frames lead the viewer into the picture, and all the lines of perspective converge on the figure of the translator at the centre of the work. Jerome is seen as through the lens of a telescope, a small figure surrounded by a rich variety of architectural shapes: the large vault that frames the entrance to the building, the colonnade, the arches that frame the doorways and the windows. The painting could be called *Architecture with Figure*.

The contrasting symbols on the left and right sides suggest a split between the spiritual and secular (Liebenwein 1977, xxiii), but equally important is the contrast between the intimate space of the translator and the wide spaces beyond. This contrast points to translation as both a textual activity, relying on the skills of the philologist, and a worldly act of connection across landscapes.

The studiolo

The extreme preoccupation with spatiality in da Messina's painting points to the Renaissance's emerging interest in personal space. Innovative designs for studies were becoming newly fashionable in the late fifteenth century, and most famously built for scholar princes like the Duke of Montefeltro in the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino (between 1474 and 1483) and for Francesco I de' Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence in 1572. The studiolo completed in 1482 in the

Ducal Palace in Gubbio (today transferred in its entirety to the Metropolitan Museum in New York) is a complex work of inlaid wood patterning with *trompe l'oeil* images of cabinets filled with books, with all the apparatus of scientific and scholarly investigation, and even songbirds in their cages.

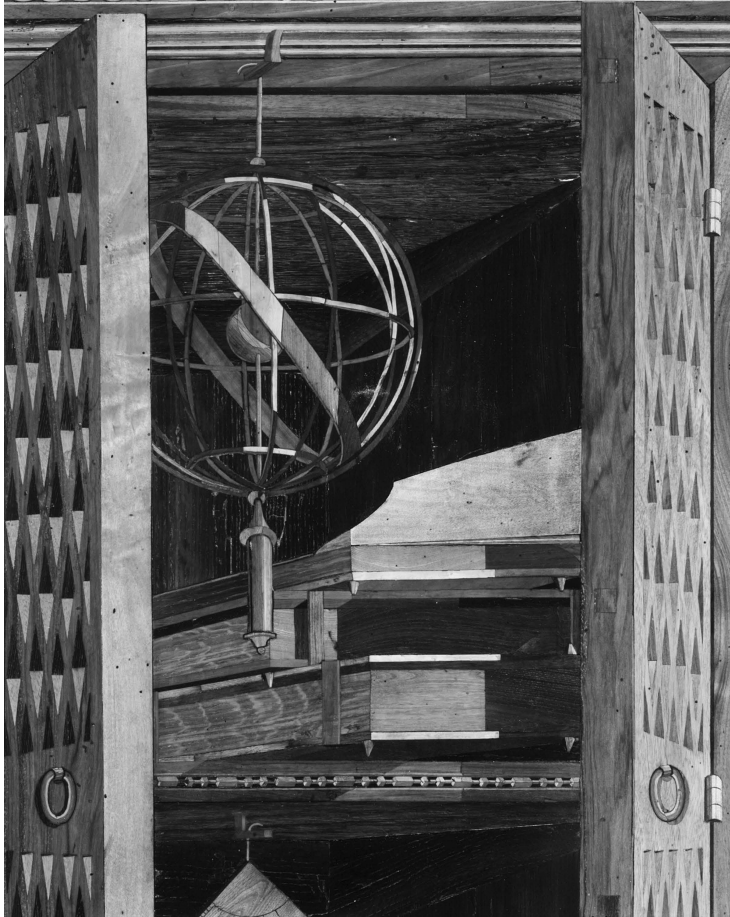


Figure 12.3 Detail of *trompe-l'oeil* intarsia in the Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio, reconstituted in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. For Renaissance humanists, the studiolo was a place of contemplation where they could converse with the learned spirits of Antiquity.

The studiolo was construed as a space that stood outside of time, a place of contemplation and of intellectual enrichment – a place where the nobleman could find peace away from the bustle of his household. The studiolo combined features of the private library, the cabinet of curiosities and the theatre of memory where, in solitude, the Renaissance noble could converse with the learned spirits of Antiquity, and where the activities of reading and writing acquired higher meaning. It was an idealized refuge of the mind, a place of peace and harmony.

But the studiolo was conceived as more than a setting for learning. It was an “associative engine”. Its marvellous visual character was designed to “assist an occupant to forge new constellations of meaning from a set of carefully selected and arranged figures” (Kirkbride 2009). Its aim was to activate the imagination and exercise the memory as an inventive agency for knowing. It would have been, like da Messina’s hutch, a space where translation was cultivated as a connection between the modern and the ancient.

The messenger and the message

With its emphasis on reading and architectural form, da Messina’s painting can be seen to refer to another popular representation of space in Renaissance painting. The Annunciation also brings together architecture and reading.

The Annunciation typically portrays the archangel Gabriel conveying to Mary the words which tell her that she will become the mother of God. She is usually reading a book, within some kind of protected arcade or alcove. The words are both message and act. In some understandings of the Annunciation, the words perform the work of insemination and it is through Mary’s ear that the act is performed.

The Annunciation (1433–34) by Fra Angelico is one of the most celebrated of these images. And what is especially remarkable is the way that the message is written.



Figure 12.4 Detail from *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico, 1433, in the Diocesan Museum in Cortona. Gabriel's message and Mary's answer take on an unusual spatial configuration. Mary's words are sandwiched between Gabriel's two sentences. His words (right-side up) are addressed to the woman who will become the mother of Jesus; her answer (upside-down) is addressed to God.

The words of the archangel and the response of the Madonna are written in Latin, in the space between the two figures. But the configuration of the message – in a kind of sandwich form – is striking. The two outer lines come from the mouth of the angel. The middle line is horizontal and it is the response of the Virgin. While the archangel's words go from left to right, hers return from right to left – and her words are upside down.

The reason for this is embedded in Christian theology. While the outer words from the archangel are addressed to Mary, Mary's response is not directed back to him, but rather to God, who reads them from above. The text is from Luke 1.33. The archangel announces that the “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee/and the power of the highest shall overshadow”, and Mary responds from Luke 1.38.: “Behold the handmaiden of the lord; be it unto me according to thy word”.

As in Jerome's work as a Bible translator, the Divine spirit intervenes to ensure effective translation between the tongues of Earth and Heaven.

Gourd or ivy?

One final image must be included in this discussion. This is the 1514 engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). Rather than evoking the metaphysical dimensions of the translator's workspace, it actually gives an example of a translation problem – one of the controversies Jerome faced in his legendary debates with Augustine (Parshall 1971, 400).

In the engraving, Jerome is hunched over his writing table (no longer the medieval raised desk, but a horizontal table) in his study. There is a large pear-shaped gourd hanging from a rafter and it turns out to be a reference to a dispute between Jerome and Augustine. The object of the

argument is a phrase in the Book of Jonah. Jonah sits in the shade of a rapidly growing plant. What kind of plant would that be? In current English versions of the Bible, it is variously given as gourd (King James), leafy vine or ivy (Jonah 4:6–10).

The positions of both Augustine and Jerome are given in full in their exchange of letters. For the contemporary reader of this discussion, it seems evident that Jerome is by far the better-informed. Augustine is concerned not with philological accuracy, but with the perpetuation of tradition. He simply prefers the Septuagint version into Greek and is worried about any new words or ideas a Latin version might produce. He thought that the traditional translation already in use by Christian communities was just fine, and objected to the fact that the congregations would have to get used to something new.

Jerome produces a detailed defence of the term he has chosen (“ivy”), even if it differs from the Septuagint (“gourd”). He displays his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and his familiarity with the previous translations, including the early Syriac version with which he aligns himself. These were precisely the qualities for which Jerome was revered by the Renaissance. In 1514, the date of Dürer’s engraving, Jerome’s reputation as a scholar was attaining new heights. Erasmus (c.1466–1536), in collaboration with eminent classical scholars and Hebraicists, was completing the publication of Jerome’s works, which appeared in 1516. Jerome was honoured as a true humanist scholar, his writings stimulating and reflecting the philological orientation of biblical study during the Renaissance. Despite Augustine’s objections, Jerome’s translation became authoritative.

The cult of Jerome would wane as the Counter-Reformation drew to an end, but not before some spectacular pictorial



Figure 12.5 The 1514 engraving by Dürer is an illustration of a translation conundrum. Dürer and his contemporaries venerated Jerome for his philological scholarship. A complete edition of Jerome's works in nine volumes, edited by Erasmus, was published in 1516.

salutes by Caravaggio and Georges de la Tour. It is the person of Saint Jerome who now takes centre stage. Less defined by his scholarly trappings, he is a luminous human presence.

Back to Pharos

Like other sites of translation in this book, Jerome's study dramatizes the encounter of near and far. And some five centuries after Antonello da Messina, the French-Israeli director Nurith Aviv, in her film *Traduire* (2011), similarly proposes a reflection on distance and proximity. Her film is all about thresholds and windows.

The film opens with a long still shot of a distant island, with a voice-over recounting the legend of the creation of the Septuagint. This event took place on the island of Pharos, near Alexandria. Here, according to the Letter of Aristeas (second century BCE), the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek. The translators, it is said, were taken to an island, to a house by the seashore, "magnificently built in a secluded situation", equipped "with all the necessary appliances. . . . They assembled every day in this spot, which the peacefulness and brilliant light rendered so delightful, and carried on their appointed task" (2009, 307). Each night they would compare their versions and agree on "an appropriate rendering" (302). The translation was finished in seventy-two days.

When Philo of Alexandria retells the story, he adds some embellishments, emphasizing the miraculous nature of the translation and its divine inspiration. The translators were inspired and "every one of them employed the selfsame nouns and verbs, as if some unseen prompter had suggested all their language to them" (Judaicus 1855, 82). The fact that the translators were given separate houses is a detail that appears to have been added somewhere around the

second century CE (Dines 2004, 73) – giving even more miracle value to the unanimity of the translations.

Aviv begins her film with an evocation of Pharos, then goes on to a series of portraits of contemporary translators from Hebrew, living around the world. *Traduire* shows the place of translation as both a physical context and a landscape of words.

Traduire unfolds as a series of tableaux which all begin with the image of a window. In front of an immobile camera, a figure slowly appears next to the window, gradually emerging into the light. This slow transition into existence is repeated each time a new person is introduced – ten in all. Only after the person has been fully revealed does the camera introduce us to the rest of the space. We find ourselves in a room lined with bookshelves and see a desk, often messy with books. We discover that the person we have met is a translator, and this is their study.

Traduire is the third in a trilogy of films devoted to language, following 2004's *Misafa Lesafa* (From Language to Language) and 2008's *Langue sacrée, langue parlée* (Sacred language, Spoken Language). Space and language are artfully intertwined in all these films. In Aviv's interviews with Israeli writers, for example, the writers are first seen immobile in front of their houses, then inside.

Traduire visits the translators of Hebrew in their homes across the world – in Brest, France, Sandrick Le Maguer is working on the Midrash, a Jewish commentary on biblical texts, in an effort to throw new light on the Gospel. In Boston, Massachusetts, Angel Saenz-Badillos is investigating the Iberian sources of medieval poets of the Spanish golden age. In Malakoff, west of Paris, Itskhok Niborski is compiling a dictionary of Hebrew idioms in Yiddish. Meanwhile in Tel Aviv, Sivan Beskin is translating the work of the poet Lea Goldberg (1911–70), a native of Lithuania, back into her mother tongue. In Barcelona, Manuel Forcano, who

has translated the poet Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000) into Catalan, acknowledges that the writer has influenced his own poetry. In Acre, Ala Hlehel, the Palestinian translator of the playwright Hanoch Levin (1943–99), explains how he must “murder the language of the father” to render the concise Hebrew wording into classical Arabic.

Hélène Cixous calls Aviv’s film a meditation, where the spirit of translation is evoked through the mysterious signs that move fleetingly across our field vision. Like a text to be translated, the viewer has to be attentive to even the most subtle cues, sometimes obtained through the grace of the moment, as when the sails of boats on the ocean in Brittany turn into Hebrew letters (2011).

Aviv insists on the intimate space of translation, the four walls that bound that place where translation work happens. That space includes, however, a window. And Aviv makes much of the contrast between walls and window, the room within and the city without. These contrasts, as in the portraits of Jerome in his study, explicitly show the translator as inhabiting a liminal space between dark and light, between the obscurity of a first-read text and the clarity of a final rendering.

The last images of the film show a collage of windows – accompanied by the superimposed voices of the translators, and then a question, repeated in many languages: “What does God see out of the window?” This invocation of the divine echoes back to the opening images of the film and the divinely inspired translators of the Septuagint. What did they see out of their windows? The blurry image of the island is the only view we have of that place. Indeed, the mythical dwellings of the Island of Pharos have been ignored by painters. In contrast to the many scenes of Saint Jerome’s study, we have only our imaginations to call up those delightful houses on the luminous sea.

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13 THE LIBRARY Near and far

Chicago and Czernowitz

Mysore to Chicago and back

“It all started with Ramanujan stumbling on two texts in the University of Chicago Library. One ordinary afternoon, in the fall of 1962. . . two great books literally fell into his hands” (Daniels-Ramanujan 2004, xi). This is the way A.K. Ramanujan’s widow begins an account of the Indian poet and translator’s creative life. She explains that the connections initiated by this chance encounter with two long-forgotten classics of Tamil literature – *Kurun-tokai* and *Tolkappiyam* – would occupy much of his scholarly life. That it was an American library that brought him closer to Indian culture was a paradox that he would savour and exploit.

Ramanujan (1929–93), called AKR, was a distinguished linguist, poet and translator known for his important volumes of poetry in English, especially *Speaking of Siva* (1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) and *Poems of Love and War* (1985), which were translations from the medieval bhakti devotional tradition of Tamil and Kannada. A collector and translator of Indian folktales, Ramanujan also translated the modern classic novel *Samskara* (1965) by U.R. Anantha Murthy from Kannada.

As an immigrant to the United States in the late 1950s, Ramanujan was cut off from the living culture of India. With the discovery of these two books – which might otherwise have slept unnoticed on the shelves of the library, just as they had been neglected in India itself – he recovered treasures of Indian learning. It is precisely because of Ramanujan’s migration to the United States that the volumes were rediscovered. This very material meeting of book and body, of learning and learner, of distant mysteries and intimate secrets, would not only provide the substance for his scholarly and poetic career, it would furnish the terms with which he would describe it. The scrambling of near and far illustrated in what we might call the “parable of the falling books” becomes source material for one of AKR’s best-known stories, *Annaya’s Anthropology*.

AKR’s story will serve as the point of departure for this discussion of the library as a site of translation. A second library will also be discussed, this time in a small bookish city in Central Europe. It is the personal book collection of a certain Rosa Roth Zuckerman, an elderly Jewish resident of the city of Chernivtsi (Czernowitz) in today’s Ukraine. Both locations underscore elements of the library as a site of translation – but from contrasting perspectives. AKR’s relationship to the library is that of a person who has moved across continents and regimes of knowledge, from India to America in the 1950s. Rosa Zuckerman in Czernowitz, by contrast, has not moved. She has remained in this city, though political and linguistic regimes have transformed the landscape around her. In both cases, the library crystallizes the shifting relationships of proximity and distance that link language and knowledge.

Libraries, like bookstores, are places where translated works are to be found. But they are sites of translation in a broader sense. They are places of discovery, where



Figure 13.1 The University of Chicago Harper Memorial Library in the snow. To learn the “dark secrets” of his own culture, the poet, scholar and translator A.K. Ramanujan travelled to this cold place, Chicago.

readers experience books as material presences on the shelves as well as gateways to imaginative adventures. The great libraries of the world are repositories of learning, organized by systems of classification that reveal themselves as tentative and flimsy. Borges was the master of the library’s mysteries, with Alberto Manguel his worthy disciple.

But in naming AKR’s and Rosa’s libraries as sites of translation, what is investigated here is a more specific aspect of the library experience. This is the blend of intimacy and distance which translation makes visible, but which sustains all processes of culture-making.

The mixed messages of the library

Ramanujan drew on key aspects of the library incident in writing the short story called *Annaya's Anthropology* (1994). It was written and first published in the Kannada language. Annaya, the narrator, is a South Indian student of anthropology in Chicago. He is astonished by the wealth of information on Indian culture that he has discovered in American libraries, much of it written by non-Indians. One day in the library, he comes across a particularly rich recent book on Indian culture and, as he examines the photos, he discovers that members of his own family are pictured – in one image his father a corpse, his mother a grieving widow. The book turns out to contain a message: his father has died. As he further pores over the photos, the narrator notices that the mourning rites are far more elaborate than normal in his community and he begins to suspect that they have been staged for the benefit of the visiting anthropologist. He identifies his cousin as the culprit. Only he would have concocted this travesty of a funeral in return for payment.

The story questions the gift of knowledge the narrator thought he had received. The “knowledge” is in reality manipulated information. The narrator knows that his mother is not a devout Brahmin, but that she has been persuaded to adopt the trappings of ritual for the benefit of the camera. Indianness is performed for the anthropologist. Public knowledge about India is fabricated at the expense of private grief.

Annaya's vision of the library turns out to have an affinity with another trope – that of the “poisoned manuscript”. Umberto Eco's fable of the library, *The Name of the Rose* (1983), shows that traps can be laid to protect secret knowledge. The poisoned manuscript stands for learning which is protected from view and which – once

discovered – can be a source of mortal danger. Though it belongs to the realm of fiction, this idea shares with post-colonialism a suspicion of the library as a source of knowledge, warning that it can also be a source of appropriation and misprision.

Living the lifestyle of Americans, Annaya has become obsessed with the traditions of home. “How do these white men learn all our dark secrets? Who whispered the sacred chants into their ears? Take, for instance, Max Mueller . . . who taught the Vedas to the Indians themselves”. When he lived in Mysore, the narrator says, much of what he read had to do with Western subjects and was in English. “If he read anything at all in Kannada, rare as it was, it would probably be a translation of *Anna Karenina* or a book on Shakespeare by Murthy Rao, or ethnographic studies by scholars who were trained overseas, in America” (Ramanujan 1994, 86). And, now, to learn about the “dark secrets” of his own culture, he has travelled to this cold place, Chicago.

The story of the library contains the terms that will nourish the thought of Ramanujan and that will become the mainstay of theories of hybrid identities. No category of affiliation is self-sufficient, no identity is complete and entire. The Kannada-speaker longs for the knowledge of English, the traveller abroad yearns for intimate knowledge of home. Culture on the home terrain is gathered partially in translation; knowledge of home is mediated through the intervention of foreign scholars.

By taking note of the fault lines that crisscross all traditions, Ramanujan makes no single distinction between the outsider and the insider. His own position in relation to the ancient Kannada or Tamil classics is analogous to that of the anthropologist who discovers a body of learning in distant parts of the world or in obscure corner of the library stacks. Intermediaries play a role in

preserving and maintaining traditions, as the Jains, for instance, were important in preserving classical Tamil poetry (Ramanujan 1999, 186–89). Ramanujan takes pleasure in frequently recalling the importance of Pound, Donne and Shakespeare for his versions from Tamil and Kannada.

The ideal of internationalism that is implicit in AKR's version of the library is underlined as well by the Bengali writer Amitav Ghosh in his homage to his grandfather's bookcase – an essay informed by the spirit of Ramanujan. He marvels at the fact that the disparate collection of books on the shelves is united by a notion of “universal literature, a form of artistic expression that embodies differences in place and culture, emotion and aspiration, but in such a way as to render them communicable” (Ghosh 1998, 16). And he goes on to define all literary forms, indeed all creativity, as necessarily involving forms of displacement. Like Ramanujan, he sees in the library an unceasing confrontation between here and there.

The bookish city of Czernowitz

A glimpse into another library, this time in Eastern Europe, offers similar insights into the encounters of near and far. The place is the small, bookish city of Chernivtsi (formerly Czernowitz), and what is at stake is the meaning of a language once considered universal. There was a time when a flourishing literature existed in German here, but today the language is to be found only on a few scattered, dusty bookshelves. What was once the language of a large world has here become a remnant.

In *Ghosts of Home: Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (2010), Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer accompany Hirsch's parents on a return to the city they left at the

end of the Second World War. Their return is a personal voyage into the past, but also an attempt to reconstitute the historical events of the war and the Holocaust in this easternmost region of the Habsburg Empire. Along the way, they evoke the singular culture of a city known for its bookishness and for its allegiance to a German-language international literary culture. Though citizens of a rather small city, long considered by newcomers a kind of colonial outpost, the population of Czernowitz considered themselves cosmopolitans, as Aharon Appelfeld (2001, 36) recalls, and judged their city to occupy a rank almost on a par with its more famous sisters Vienna, Prague and Budapest. In the many descriptions of the “Vienna of the East” is echoed this same sense of participating – from a small corner at the edge of empire – in the greatness of a large universe.

The visit to Rosa comes at the beginning of Marianne Hirsch’s stay. In the course of narrating her first encounter since childhood with her ninety-year-old cousin Rosa, Hirsch takes a moment to describe the bookshelves that occupy a prominent space in the apartment (Hirsch and Spitzer 2011, 14–19). The largely German-language contents of the shelves speak of the rich intermixture of Jewish and German cultural experience in the Bukovina, the easternmost possession of the Habsburg Empire for some 150 years.

Hirsch provides a detailed description of the contents of the bookcase, defining three broad categories of books. The first is by Czernowitz authors, the most famous among them Paul Celan, but including Rose Ausländer, Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, Viktor Wittner, Alfred Kittner, Eliezer Shteynberg and Itzik Manger. A second category is that of the German classics, the beloved volumes that could be found from one end to the other of the



Figure 13.2 The Yiddish-language name of Czernowitz written into the pavement of today's Chernivtsi.

German-language lands, and were especially treasured by the German-Jewish bourgeoisie:

Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Rilke, Mann, Hauptmann, Keller, Storm. . . . “Those volumes”, Rosa indicated, pointing to the classics, “were the books of my youth. My mother knew poetry by Heine, Schiller, and Goethe by heart, and she and my father introduced me to their poems as a young girl. They only had four grades of formal schooling, but they were very well read”.

(16)

And the third category are mainly non-German writers, many in translation: Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian titles – by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Bakunin, Kobylanska – as

well as late-twentieth-century German, English, American and French novels. The bookshelves also hold testimonies on the wartime concentration camps (17).

The library is a representation of what Marianne Hirsch calls “Deutschtum” – the enduring loyalty of Czernowitz Jews to an idea of Germanness which persisted in the city even after it passed into Romanian hands in 1918. This ideal was centred in a reverence for the great literary masterpieces of the German language, but extended to the rich and varied German-language literature produced in Czernowitz itself. Unlike other Eastern European cities where Polish, Russian or Ruthenian were dominant, German remained until the beginning of the 1920s the major language of expression in the city and was even, for many, until the 1940s (despite Romanian occupation) the undisputed tongue of high culture.

Rosa, in 1998, was herself a remarkable survivor, one of the few German-language speakers still living at that time in what had become the Ukrainian-language city called Chernivtsi. She remained immobile, while the literature of her city had spun into movement, shifting around her. In Stefan Chwin’s novel called *Death in Danzig* in English (2004), the protagonist, Hanemann, lives out his life as a phantom German speaker in a city which has become Polish. So, too, Cousin Rosa and her library are vestiges in a city which has been translated out of German.

Most of Czernowitz’s surviving German-language writers went into exile at the end of World War II. And some of Rosa’s books are a result of that exile – the poetry of Paul Celan (1920–70), who moved from Czernowitz to Bucharest to Paris; the verse of Rose Ausländer (1901–88), who spent parts of her life in the United States and then chose her final exile in Germany; and the novels of Aharon Appelfeld (1932–2018), who became an Israeli writer in Hebrew.

Rosa's bookshelves construct a form of belonging in a city whose past is fragmented and elusive. Language, home, the world: these terms do not align. Like Ramanujan's library, Rosa's bookshelves materialize the imbrication of near and far. Both the library in Chicago and the bookshelves in Czernowitz illustrate the complications of belonging, when the contours of a language will not stay fixed, when the meanings to be found in a linguistic identity are always on the move.

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14 THE GARDEN Replication

The Japanese garden in Ireland and the German garden city in Turkey

Several meanings of translation converge on an odd patch of land in County Waterford, Ireland. A singular garden in the town of Tramore has been created in tribute to a writer and translator called Koizumi Yakumo, born in Greece and educated in Ireland, and more commonly known as Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904). The garden recreates Hearn's life journey, retracing his colourful life in Europe, America, the Caribbean and finally Japan – the place where he earned his greatest celebrity as a writer and translator. There are Victorian, American and Greek gardens, each representing significant episodes of his life. And, of course, there is a Japanese garden featuring many typical plants and architectural features.

The idea for these gardens was conceived in 2012 when the great-grandson of Lafcadio Hearn, Professor Bon Koizumi, and his wife, Shoko, visited Tramore to rediscover the seaside town where Hearn had spent his childhood summers. The local community enthusiastically took up the suggestion that they create a garden. Opened in 2015, the gardens are run by the town.

A network of translational relations is materialized in the garden. The garden was not only inspired by Hearn's journeys, but also by his important essay on Japanese gardens

published in 1892. This essay was already a translation of concepts and stories that Hearn learned in Japanese, often from his Japanese wife. And the Japanese garden itself, as it is experienced and adapted both in Japan and elsewhere, relies on concepts which are rooted in the Japanese language – concepts such as *shakkei* or “borrowed landscape”, which are integral to this Irish iteration of the Japanese garden. These many interconnections, as well as the fact that Japanese gardens have now become a genre of landscaping influenced by Western interpretations (such as the association of the garden with Zen Buddhism), contribute to the translational nature of the garden.

The many Japanese gardens created abroad, as exemplified by the Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Garden in Ireland, illustrate the general theme of replication. Replication is a literal form of physical translation. A model is lifted from its original site and placed elsewhere. Here, translation takes on one of the most important dimensions it acquired from the Latin term *translatio* – that is, a transfer across physical space, like the carrying of the relics of a saint. Besides the example of the Japanese garden, other forms of replication include theme parks, with their copies of famous buildings, or cities like Dubai, which copy architecture from elsewhere, or more broadly the habit of mind which sees echoes of one place in the site of another, for instance Shanghai as the Paris of the East.

This idea of replication as translation will be considered here, first with the example of the Japanese garden, then in relation to Ebenezer Howard’s early twentieth-century model of the “garden-city”.

A garden of legends

Lafcadio Hearn was a prolific translator and writer. Having left Ireland, he began his writing career in the United States

with translations of the French writer Théophile Gautier. He also became a journalist, making numerous contributions to *The Atlantic*. It was this magazine that sent him to Japan in the spring of 1890. Hearn decided to stay, took up work as a professor and married. “In a Japanese Garden” is an essay he wrote for the July 1892 edition of *The Atlantic* – a long piece in which he explained the principles of the Japanese garden and detailed the charms of his own garden in Matsue. It provides a detailed interpretation of the Japanese philosophy of gardening.

What is most striking about his description are the many stories and legends he includes, the tales of ghosts and spirits, the dreams and hauntings that infuse the trees and rocks.

The trees, like the shrubs, have their curious poetry and legends. Like the stones, each tree has its special landscape name, according to its purpose and position in the composition.

(Hearn 1892)

He quotes bits of poems in Japanese transcription and translation, songs of praise to the plants and trees. The essay, in turn, was a major source of inspiration for the reimagined garden in Ireland.

Hearn was never able to master Japanese and he transcribed many of the stories his wife told him. He adopted a somewhat mystical tone, in accordance with the strong emotions that he was trying to convey. He was influenced by the great exoticists Pierre Loti and Rudyard Kipling, and, as is often the case with admirers of traditional ways of life, he was actually exalting practices that were disappearing (Richie 2011, 9–16).

The tone of the first pages of his book on Japan gives an idea of the *frisson* that he was attempting to elicit from his readers.

As first perceived, the outward strangeness of things in Japan produces (in certain minds, at least) a queer thrill impossible to describe, – a feeling of weirdness which comes to us only with the perception of the totally unfamiliar. You find yourself moving through queer small streets full of odd small people, wearing robes and sandals of extraordinary shapes; and you can scarcely distinguish the sexes at sight.

(Hearn 1904, 5)

Food is of “unimaginable derivation”; utensils are “enigmatic” in form; emblems, masks, toys, signs and hangings, all are “incomprehensible”.

This sense of utter estrangement is enhanced by the opacity of the language itself. To translate any ordinary phrases into Western speech makes for “hopeless nonsense”, as a literal rendering of any Japanese sentence can scarcely be understood. Even learning the words of a Japanese dictionary wouldn’t help. Because you would have to learn to think like a Japanese, “that is to say, to think backwards, to think upside-down and inside-out”. The only way to learn the language is to be born again . . . as a Japanese! (Hearn 1904, 8).

The rest of Hearn’s book, which he modestly calls *An Attempt at Interpretation*, in fact refutes assumptions about an unbridgeable cultural chasm. But there is no doubt that, for Hearn, part of the attraction of Japanese culture is precisely the thrill of opaque otherness.

Borrowed scenery

Hearn would certainly have been surprised to see how popular the Japanese garden has become in the West over the course of the twentieth century. Many traits and ideas he considered untranslatable in Japanese culture have been

assimilated by the West, and the garden is one of the most spectacular of those exports. Christian Tagsold's imposing survey (2017) of the many Japanese gardens all over the world is vivid proof.

Strikingly, the spread of replicas of Japanese gardens abroad has not only spawned unusual variations, but helped to modify the original itself. Observers agree that the notion of the "Zen garden" was very likely first applied to certain kinds of Japanese gardens by an American. Though Zen was recognized as integral to Japanese art, and the influential philosopher Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966) in his many books emphasized the importance of Zen, it was Loraine Kuck, in her 1935 English-language book *One Hundred Kyoto Gardens*, whose interpretation of Japanese gardens as Zen gardens became the most influential. The Japanese term for "Zen garden" (*zen-teki teien*) did not appear in Japanese-language literature until 1958. But, by the 1950s, the concept of a garden as an expression of Zen and the term "Zen-like garden" (*zen-teki teien*) would appear extensively and most commonly applied to the Ryōan-ji garden (Kuitert 2002). Before the 1930s, the Ryōan-ji was rather neglected and run-down; today it is one of the most celebrated and visited gardens in Japan (Tagsold 2017, 38). Western architects like Bruno Taut and Frank Lloyd Wright, hugely influenced by Japanese gardens, likewise had their own effect on Japanese art and helped certain Japanese artists legitimize a certain kind of sparseness in art, against more baroque models of beauty.

One of the key concepts of the Japanese garden is that of *shakkei* (借景), borrowed scenery. This is a gardening technique in which scenery outside the garden is utilized not merely as background, but as one of the essential elements of the structure of the garden itself (Ono and Edwards 2010). The website of the Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens in Ireland specifies that this Japanese concept



Figure 14.1 The Ryōan-ji garden, Tokyo. This “Zen” garden became the iconic representation of the Japanese garden in part as a result of Western translations. The Japanese garden has been replicated across the globe, but it has also been reinterpreted on its native soil.

is applied there in the form of twin vistas which extend the visual boundaries of the garden. One is a view of densely planted trees in a nearby woodland area, the other the Bay of Tramore (Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens 2017).

The term could be used to encompass the many ways in which scenery, like words, is traded across borders – sometimes stolen, sometimes merely borrowed. *Shakkei* demonstrates the way in which the Japanese language permeates the understanding of the garden, just as the term *wabi-sabi* has also been influential in the understanding of Zen aesthetics. In fact, the Ryōan-ji garden’s tiles were

replaced with shingles in 1978 in order to give it a more *wabi-sabi* appearance (Tagsold 2017, 116). For Tagsold, this is an illustration of the ways that the gardens are simulacra, copies that have surpassed their originals. And of the ways that the original can change to conform to its translations.

The garden city

The garden city was an idea born in England at the turn of the twentieth century, largely under the influence of Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902), translated into German as *Gartenstädte in Sicht* in 1907. The book inspired much thinking about the urban experience and is credited with leading to the emergence of city planning as a modern discipline. As an alternative to the crowded and unhealthy workers' housing of European cities, as residential housing open to nature and fresh air, the garden city idea was taken up in Germany, the United States, France, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Russia, Australia and, the example that will be considered here: Turkey (Akcan 2012, 98).

Few political regimes have given translation as exalted a role as the Turkish Republic of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (President from 1923 to his death in 1938). Kemalism placed great hopes in the "smooth translatability of Europeanness into Turkey" (45), and this project, which lasted over two decades from the founding of the republic in 1923 to the 1940s, took an astonishing variety of forms. One of the most prominent was the Translation Office established in 1938, whose mandate was to provide Turkish translations of European works of literature. Atatürk's Turkish Revolution was perhaps the most radical example of a regime which consciously used translation as a vehicle of modernization (85). This importance was given

scholarly confirmation in 1935 when the philosopher Hilmi Ziya Ülken published *The Role of Translation During Ages of Reawakening*. In it, he provided examples across historical periods to argue that the human mind owed intellectual progress to translation.

When the new Turkish Republic adopted modernization programmes and in particular a plan to build a new capital in Ankara, it turned to Germany. The model of the garden city, developed in Germany through dialogue with British architects, was the key to a master plan applied all across Turkey. Esra Akcan tells the story of “architecture in translation” – the transfer of German-inspired modernity to Turkey during the 1930s (23). Akcan tells of a programme inspired by modernist and socially progressive programmes of thought in Germany, carried out by multiple agents, including invited foreign professionals, their clients, state officials and Turkish architects, resulting in houses which were – like all translations – at once the same and different from their German counterparts.

Indeed, Akcan shows that the meanings of architectural forms can change during the process of transfer. A form that expressed affordability, efficiency and functionalism in German could end up symbolizing state power in Turkey. “The exact meanings of forms are seldom transported from one context to another” (183). In addition, the temporal gaps in the transfer process would result in skewing. The socialist models of neighbourhood architecture were devised to counter the negative effects of industrialization. But this model would be transferred to Ankara, even though Turkey had not experienced the problems of industrialization which was responsible for the garden city in the first place.

Two episodes stand out in this fascinating episode of cultural history. One is the Turkish sojourn of the German architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), who

is best known as the designer of the revolutionary kitchen known as the Frankfurt kitchen. This was a rectangular efficiency kitchen designed to make cooking easy for women, to make appliances easy to use and to reduce walking space. “Between 1926 and 1930, the Frankfurt kitchen was installed in every dwelling of the Das Neue Frankfurt program, culminating in approximately 10,000 units” (426). Schütte-Lihotzky was welcomed as a political exile from the Nazis in Turkey (as were many others) and she contributed to designing new villages for the refugees of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in the late 1930s. Contrary to her colleagues, however, she advocated more use of local materials. (This contrasts, for instance, with Clemenz Holzmeister who, in designing Atatürk’s Presidential palace, brought in from Vienna all of the fixtures – lighting, fittings, wallpaper, ceramics – for the new residence.) And she devised variations in the styles of the houses which would allow villagers to have some choice in their homes. She was exceptional during this period in highlighting the importance of local participation in all aspects of design and construction. Had she not returned to Germany and been imprisoned by the Gestapo, she might, according to Akcan, have transformed for the better the models of architectural development in Turkey.

Another moment of note is Akcan’s epilogue, when she returns to Berlin to visit Turkish immigrants living in the “originals” of the garden city housing projects. This is a story of reverse translation, begun in 1961 when German-Turkish relations entered a new phase and Turkish labourers were invited to West Germany. Today German citizens of Turkish descent live in many of the original *Siedlungen* which were later replicated in Turkey. Akcan concludes her book with a visit to a Turkish woman in an apartment block named for the influential architect Bruno Taut who died in Istanbul in 1938. Watching the children play in



Figure 14.2 The Frankfurt kitchen designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. This extraordinary architect was among those who translated models of progressive housing from Germany to Turkey during the 1930s. She was a refugee from the Nazis in Turkey and helped design housing for the displaced people of the Greek-Turkish population exchange.

the courtyard, the woman refers to *Siedlung* using a newly coined Turkish word, *site*. The reciprocity is complete.

The to-and-fro of translations of both the Japanese garden and the German residential housing project trace out complex maps of provenance and destination. While some might characterize these movements as a history of mis-translations, Akcan argues, as does Barbara Cassin in her *Vocabulaire de la philosophie européenne* (2004), that deviations in meaning are precisely where thought takes new turns. Akcan says of the iterations of the travelling garden cities: “I call them translations that make world history” (Akcan 2012, 24).

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15 THE PSYCHOANALYST'S COUCH The Schizo body and translation as self-defence

Can the body be a site of translation? Freud thought so. He saw the psyche as divided into zones, each expressing itself with a different vocabulary. Freud referred to negotiation across these zones as translation.

On the Freudian couch, the patient is encouraged to let down conscious barriers and allow the idiom buried in the unconscious to emerge. Slips of the tongue, uncontrolled word associations: these allow repressed thoughts to escape from the depths. Language disorders can also be an unexpected boon. One of the first cases analysed by Freud (along with his colleague Breuer) was that of Anna O., whose symptoms took the form of disorganized speech. She sometimes used English to “mask” German words she could not bring herself to pronounce. The mysteries of her case nourished the embryonic field of psychoanalytic research.

It is ironic to discover that part of Anna O.’s recovery may have been due to her own activities of translation. Anna O. was in reality Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936), an exceptionally accomplished German intellectual, feminist and translator. As Naomi Seidman explains, Pappenheim was the author of several important translations into German, such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of*

the Rights of Women. Her troubles with language seem to have found resolution in the contributions she made, at least in part as a translator, to Jewish-German intellectual history (Seidman 2017).

Anna O.'s symptoms, in particular the fact that she used one language to mask another, resemble those of a later celebrated psychoanalytic case. Born in New York in 1931, Louis Wolfson is the author of *Le Schizo et les langues* (1970). When it was published in Paris by Gallimard in the newly created collection *Connaissances de l'inconscient* (Knowledge of the Unconscious), the book and its author became internationally celebrated. The preface was by Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), a French philosopher who, along with Félix Guattari, promoted a progressive, liberating form of psychoanalysis.

Deleuze was, like many other French intellectuals at the time, fascinated with deviant language practices. Michel Foucault wrote about the psychotic philology of Jean-Pierre Brisset and the homonymic follies of Raymond Rousset; the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and theorists like Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous put wordplay and sound association at the heart of their writing and thinking life. With his Joycean multilingual oeuvre, Wolfson was, like these writers, taking the *signifiant* seriously.

Wolfson would walk around New York wearing earphones and listening to the early version of a portable cassette player, in order to protect himself from hearing English. His book, *Le Schizo et les langues*, was a further effort to distance himself from English, while at the same time telling the story of his hatred for his mother. Translation was his principal weapon of self-protection.

Written largely in “French” (that is, a French which is largely invented by Wolfson), *Le Schizo et les langues* describes how Wolfson devised methods of translation to protect himself from his hated mother and the English

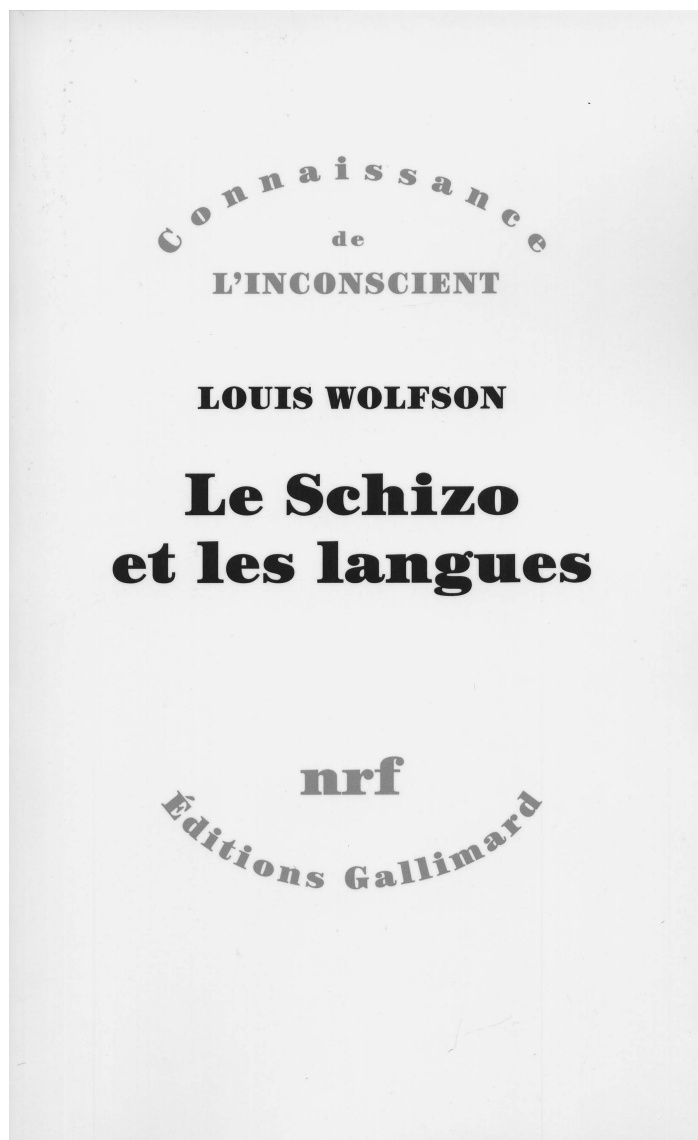


Figure 15.1 Louis Wolfson's *Le Schizo et les langues* was given prominence in the new Parisian collection, *Connaissance de l'inconscient*, published by Gallimard, with a preface by Gilles Deleuze. The book was an extraordinary example of the mad, invented languages so admired by Deleuze and Foucault.

language she spoke. He taught himself several languages, including Hebrew, German, Russian and especially French, and “translated” English into his own idiosyncratic forms of French. This he did largely by replacing each word, phoneme by phoneme, and replacing it by a foreign equivalent. For Wolfson, the procedure had to be done quickly, in order to erase the hated English word as quickly as possible. Only by this method of transcription could he dissolve the painful English language into another.

Decomposing the word he heard into its phonological properties and the signs of their written notation, the New York psychotic could alter one of the atoms, so to speak, of its sound shape and carry the entire term out of the terrible language of its original utterance and into another (or, to be exact, into several others).

(Heller-Roazen 2005, 185)

Wolfson was only incidentally translating himself *into* French. His main goal was to translate himself *out of* English. The process did not cure him of his language disorder, but allowed him to construct an alternative self which was safe from English. Self-protection is surely an unusual motive for translation. But Wolfson was trying to protect himself from language breakdown. Though the idiom he invented was idiosyncratic, at the limit of intelligibility, it was the result of a coherent strategy. Translation came to the rescue of a man at war with his immediate milieu. It provided a form of therapeutic estrangement.

There is a family resemblance between the Freudian talking cure and the Christian confession. Both are forms of discipline, frameworks for truth-telling and rules for redemption. Both are “technologies of the self” that probe the most obscure pockets of the resistant psyche, seeking to tame unruly wills and deviant languages. A translation

breakdown can be a form of resistance to these techniques and a way to save the fragile self from imposed languages.

Yes Sir! Madame . . .

An unusual film by the quirky and prolific Quebec filmmaker Robert Morin similarly dramatizes a breakdown of and by translation. This is a 1994 film, called *Yes Sir! Madame . . .*. Directed by and starring Morin, the film chronicles a schizophrenic crisis in a series of three-minute home movies, accompanied by a running commentary in English and French. The character's name, Earl Tremblay, is a clue to the satirical intentions of the movie. His English first name and French last name point to his supposed "perfect bilingualism" – the trait which will give him access to various career opportunities including that of bilingual commentator at the race track, used car salesman . . . and member of the Canadian Parliament. But, in the course of the film, Earl's two personalities begin to find themselves at odds. As he spirals downward into confusion, we see the character inflicting horrific wounds on himself. One part of himself is attacking the other. This breakdown is reflected in the bilingual commentary. While Tremblay's narrative at first moves seamlessly from English to French and vice versa, with idiomatic and accurate translations of each sentence, the translations begin to move farther and farther apart as Tremblay himself gets closer to hitting bottom.

There are nineteen rolls of film in all. The war of the two linguistic selves begins at around roll number five when Tremblay first uses the pronoun "we" to describe himself. Then the mistranslations begin: "salut!" (cheers) becomes "up yours!", and "opportunity" turns into "opportunism". A good used-car salesman in English is a thief in French; in English, "that dog fucked up everything for

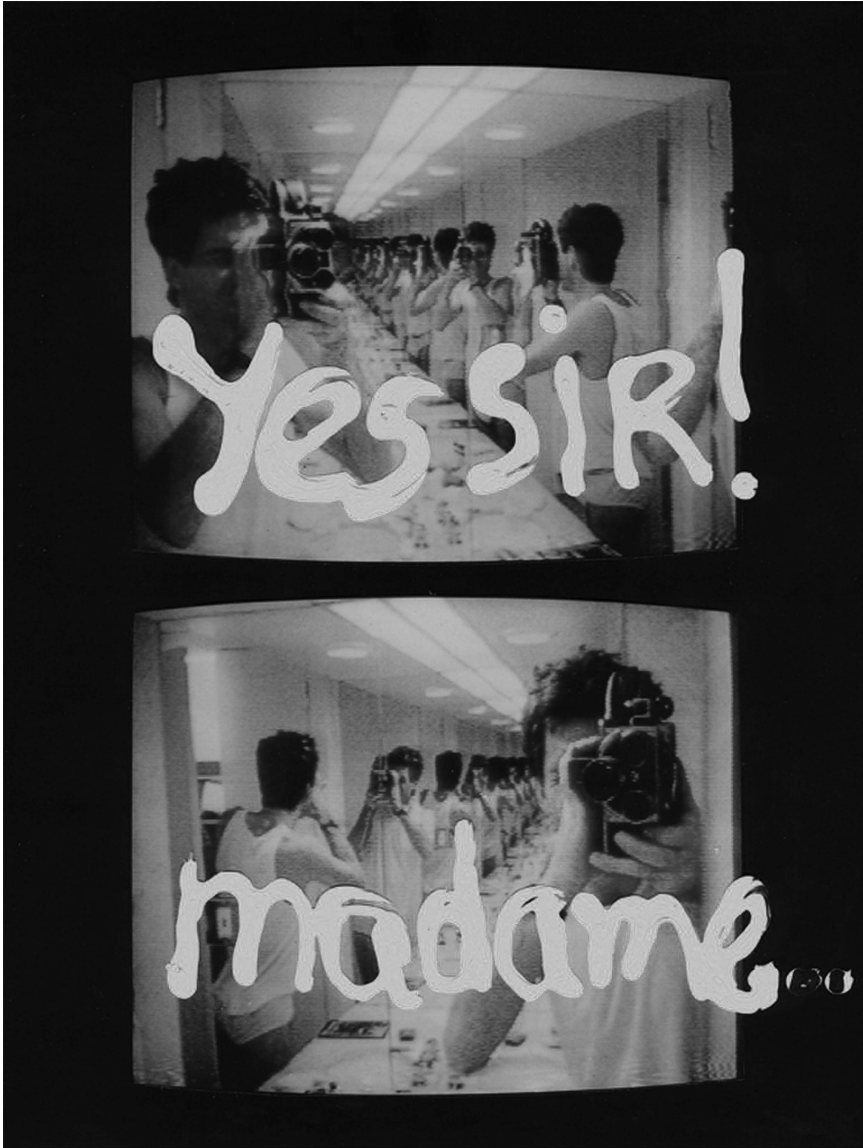


Figure 15.2 Poster from Robert Morin's 1994 film, *Yes Sir! Madame. . .* In this tragicomic film, the breakdown of translation is the manifestation of a trauma which is both individual and collective. The increasingly dramatic symptoms of the disorder are meticulously enacted by the narrator.

me”, but in French, he was “saved” by the dog. When Earl Tremblay wins the elections he says, “We won”, but the perverse Franco opines: “On les a fourrés comme faut” (we sure screwed them).

The film is not only a portrait of language breakdown. It is a precise and rigorous account of a translation disorder. Earl Tremblay progressively loses the capacity to identify equivalent expressions across languages. There is another aspect, though, to this lack of symmetry. The lack of equivalence progressively reveals the gaps in the cultural realities of English and French. The mistranslations might be considered erroneous only in relation to the surface meanings. They are in fact revealing of the two very different language selves that gradually make themselves known. They are accurate in revealing Earl Tremblay’s true state of mind and his perception of the unequal standing of the two languages. The slow disintegration of equivalence, the increasing struggles, escalates to the white heat of violence.

Yes Sir! Madame . . . is a grotesque sendup of an idealized model of the Canadian bilingual. It draws on a rich vein of cultural critique in Quebec, especially virulent in the 1960s when bilingualism was touted as a sign of a superior education by Anglophones, but viewed with suspicion on the French side. As citizens of a “bilingual” city where French was constantly threatened by the economic and institutional power of English, Francophones were justifiably wary of the effects of bilingualism in a context where their language was the weaker partner. *Yes Sir! Madame . . .* is effective in showing translation as a process that can reveal unsettling truths.

Translation as symptom

Morin draws attention to the suffering of the bilingual body. This is a theme that has been abundantly exploited

in Quebec, where the status of the French language is often tethered to collective self-esteem. One particularly affecting story of psychic pain related to language is told by Jean Forest on the psychoanalyst's couch.

Jean Forest's disturbing account of growing up "bilingual" in Montreal insists on the unwelcome interferences from English that mean that he is never sure what language he is in fact speaking when he speaks French. *Le mur de Berlin P.Q.* (1983) is Forest's linguistic autobiography, describing a landscape of mixed messages where the dominant emotion is humiliation.

In the child's world, everything important happens in translation, but he discovers this truth only when the harm has already been done. He only gradually comes to understand that two languages are lurking in his own. How could he have known? His grandfather is as ignorant as he is; he doesn't know that when he says "téléphone" or asks for the "gâzette" to be put in his wet shoes that he is speaking English. The boy doesn't know that when he reads the "comics" or asks for a chocolate "barre" that he is speaking English. Despite his efforts, words are constantly catching him by surprise. When he carefully asks the grocer for VESTON bread, because his teacher has taught him that "W" is pronounced "V" in French, he is laughed at. Why didn't he know that everybody pronounces Weston the English way! When he is given a bicycle for his birthday and waits in a fever of expectation for the delivery truck, he is shocked to receive a Thistle when his parents had promised a "Téseul". He has been duped by his parents' mispronunciation. His every attempt to conquer language is undermined by the dark, uninvited presence of the other tongue.

The story advances by riffs of word associations. It is an energetic run-on tale, with aggressively capitalized English words peppered throughout the text. These English words stand out in his narrative like so many undigestible lumps.

Ironic and self-deprecating, the tale has tragic undertones, since it concludes on the psychiatrist's couch, the mongrel soundscape of Montreal now turned into a talking cure. Tinged with neurosis and sometimes veering into the grotesque, Forest's outburst shows how this devious bilingualism destroyed his linguistic confidence.

The dangerous spots of the city – and its language – are those places where separations fail. The problem is not that there is a figurative Berlin Wall separating east from west, but that the wall does not do its job adequately. If the Berlin Wall, P. Q. could indeed guarantee the separation of French and English, Jean would be out of danger. But there are seepages everywhere.

What Forest observes is that translation is impossible in zones where languages are already collapsed into one another. They become danger zones, perilous for the young child growing up in a city and in a language he cannot negotiate with confidence. The only solution is to make war on his own bastard language, to counter-attack and drive out the agents of impurity. The neurotic body is a site of warring tongues. Self-translation is for Forest, as for Louis Wolfson and Earl Tremblay at once a symptom of breakdown and a weapon of self-defence.

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Part V

Borders, control, surveillance



16 NO MAN'S LAND The step-mother tongue and the Dead Zone, Cyprus

Poets in No Man's Land (2012) is a vivid account of a poetry translation workshop that took place in Nicosia, Cyprus. Poet Stephanos Stephanides and his colleagues film participants (from Catalonia, Portugal, Turkey, Poland, Lithuania and Cyprus) in a space called the Dead Zone. This is a desolate area of several blocks running through the centre of the island of Cyprus. It was sealed off and unapproachable for some thirty years, from 1974 until 2003 – a militarized buffer zone separating the Greek from the Turkish sides of the city. Since 2004, some traffic has been allowed to pass, and so the area has become somewhat accessible. But the Dead Zone remains filled with the pockmarked ruins and rusty debris of the conflict following the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island. In the film, the poets wander these derelict spaces, stopping to take note of the piles of garbage, the rusted barbed wire, the blocked entrances to streets.

The poets discuss the ways in which poetry and translation create new paths across difference, shift the boundaries between self and other, create and transform meanings. “Every time we cross this space”, poet Stephanos Stephanides says, “there is something going on in the way we translate this meaning”. Translation is about “exploring

places in between” – just as Cypriots are doing on their island, “engaging in a process of translation and transformation and negotiation of meaning” (Nugent and Stephanides 2012).

The choice of this conflict zone to discuss translation is a reminder that conflict is not the antithesis of exchange, but that mediation which takes place in such a zone will inevitably be shaped and coloured by the context. In particular, poets from places with a history of violence inevitably engage with translation from the standpoint of this history, either to acknowledge, maintain or transform it. This means that, over and above the literary value of the work itself, there must be an acknowledgement of the circumstances under which translations of poetry from Arabic to Hebrew in the divided Jerusalem, for example, are undertaken. Similarly for the passage of Greek to Turkish.



Figure 16.1 A still from the film *Poets in No Man's Land* (Nugent and Stephanides 2012). Two translators are exploring the derelict spaces of the Dead Zone of Nicosia.

The divides out of which translations emerge, and the special role of translators as go-betweens, cannot be ignored.

One of the tactics available to translators and writers in such a situation is to challenge the very categories they are dealt. Rather than accepting the intractability of the space between us and them, between our language and theirs, they question the conditions of exchange. In the Cypriot context, this means questioning the often-fictitious purity of mother tongue that sustains official histories. In the case of the poet Mehmet Yashin (Yaşın), it means proposing the category of “step-mother tongue” instead. This means defiantly occupying the middle space, in the hopes of chipping away at the certainties that keep the two sides apart. This is the significance, then, of the meandering of the poets through the streets and alleyways of no-man's land. They occupy this middle ground not as a safe place outside of transactions between opposing tongues, but as a space that can unsettle the terms of engagement.

The last divided capital

Nicosia is known as “the last divided capital in Europe”. The Green Line, drawn in 1974, separates Greek from Turkish territory, making Nicosia one of a handful of cities around the world that have been physically partitioned: Berlin, Jerusalem, Gorizia, Mostar, Beirut, Belfast. When cities had walls, these were protections from attack without. But partitions are barriers within, creating perverted versions of cities.

The impact of translation is a theme deeply embedded in Cypriot history. Since ancient times, Cyprus has been annexed by one empire after another – conquered by the Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Lusignans and Venetians, and then in 1571 by the Ottomans. The position of dragoman (translator-diplomat)

held great power under Ottoman rule. Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios was a legendary Christian dragoman (1750–1809) who represented the empire in Cyprus from 1779 to 1809. A street bears his name, and his mansion is one of the most impressive residential buildings left from the Ottoman era. In 1878, British rule introduced a new period of translation, with an opening towards European literatures, as well as Arabic and Persian.

Modern-day translators recall Cyprus's heritage as a meeting place in the Mediterranean, and as a place where learning was preserved and promoted through exchange. Today, in cultural centres on both sides of the divide, artists and writers meet to perpetuate the translating tradition of their city and their island – and to revive the memory of distinctively Cypriot forms of language and identity. Despite the bell jar of political pressure, they struggle to maintain lines of linguistic mobility, to reanimate the texts and memories of a time when languages could move freely across the territory.

One of these translators is Yiannis Papadakis, who gives the title *Echoes from the Dead Zone* to his first-person narrative of travels across languages. He journeys from his home in Nicosia, first to Istanbul to learn Turkish and then to Northern Cyprus, before returning to his point of origin. What happens in the course of his time abroad is that he comes to realize that the rigid linguistic separation of Cyprus came about artificially, through the political hardening of boundaries. In fact, the varieties of each language that were long spoken in Cyprus were quite close to one another. When he goes to Turkey to learn Turkish, he realizes that he was more at home in this language than he could have imagined:

Speaking Turkish felt like a welcome liberation to my mouth. . . . In Cyprus we mostly spoke the local Greek

dialect. I now realized that it was full of sounds similar to the sounds of Turkish, ones that the Greeks from Greece had trouble with, as I confirmed with a touch of malicious glee . . . Back in Cyprus, we had been for years scolded and punished at school for using our dialect. The sounds of our dialect that resembled Turkish sounds, sounds like sh, ch, and j, were said to be wrong and vulgar. . . . We were told endlessly that we should speak “cleanly”, meaning that we should speak like Greeks in Greece, and that we should not put “dirty” words in our mouths, meaning, as I was coming to realize, that we should not use many words of Turkish origin.

(2005, 14)

What he realizes is that the “contaminated” Greek he spoke growing up in Cyprus is in conflict with the code of the mother tongue, the pure national standards by which local conduct was judged. Papadakis wants to exchange the ideologies of language and nation for the impure and mixed vernaculars of Cyprus, to replace the politics of nationalism with the hybridity – architectural, linguistic, culinary – that were long the hallmark of Cypriot culture.

Step-mother tongue

Turkish Cypriot poet Mehmet Yashin shares this scepticism about language purity. He calls for the adoption of a “step-mother tongue”, one that breaks its bonds with enforced national communities. Turkish is Yashin’s mother tongue and this language still remains the main vehicle of his literary writing. Yet, throughout Yashin’s work, both in his literary works and in his essays, he shows how language is always breaking out of the barriers of artificial borders.

Language is step-mother by its very nature. Individuals are born into languages they have not themselves created and which cannot express human beings totally. . . . The “step-tongues”, which have enforced themselves as so-called “mother tongues”, partly through literary works, on particular communities, are the primary forces that attach individuals to a modern sense of national belonging, re-creating an imaginary notion of “us”.

(2000, 1–2)

He argues, rather, as Papadakis does, for a revival of a long tradition of cultural and linguistic contact between the multiple Turkishes and Greeks of Cyprus.

Yashin enumerates the different Turkishes that members of his family spoke – the Istanbuli Turkish of his father, the hyper-correct Turkish of his mother, the much more porous Turkish of his aunt, “accepting Ottoman Turkish ‘openly’, Greek and English ‘indirectly’ and Arabic and Latin ‘secretly’, as well as her natural tendency to resort to each one of these languages according to the different circumstances” (D’Amora 2013, 106).

Yashin therefore avoids pure forms of Turkish, seeking out variations that are in some way marginal to the patriotic norm. In some of his poems Yashin goes so far as to use the language form called Karamanlidika (Greek) or Karamanlica (Turkish), in which Greek characters were employed in writing Turkish (107). This was a form of spoken Turkish written in the Greek alphabet and used for many centuries as an unofficial language by Turkish-speaking Orthodox Greeks living in central Anatolia, which eventually fell into disuse by the early 1930s, when most of the members of this community were resettled in Greece as a result of the exchange of population that took place between Greece and Turkey in 1923. The adoption of the

Roman alphabet in Turkey no doubt played a part in this, but the practice continued in Cyprus until 1933. Yashin also draws inspiration from another example of contamination to be found in Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot folk poets who use as their literary language the Greek dialect of the island, constantly interweaving it with Turkish words and loanwords of French, Italian and Arabic origin.

In using these cultural forms, Yashin seeks out elements of pre-national traditions. Using a mixture of Turkish and Greek linguistic and cultural elements, including oral forms of mixed language folk poetry, he positions himself in a linguistic no-man's land.

Post-conflict zones

The Dead Zone illustrates the kinds of constraints that operate in spaces where there is an acute consciousness of borders and translational relationships. In a situation like



Figure 16.2 The Dead Zone is a space of translation between “step-mother tongues”.

that of Cyprus, language is a vehicle of memory. Translations retrieve, reconstruct and reinscribe traces of the past.

Translation can be seen to express two kinds of social interaction: *distancing* (as the expression of the gulfs which separate languages and cultures) and *furthering* (as the vehicle of aesthetic interactions and blendings). Distancing is what happens when translations serve to underscore the differences that prevail among cultures and languages, when authors are treated as representatives of their origins, of their national or religious traditions – whether the motivations be antagonism, generosity or simply politeness. Furthering, by contrast, involves a loosening of boundaries, through mingling and contamination, through forms of “incomplete” translation. Through their concepts of “contaminated language” and “step-mother tongue”, Papadakis and Yashin propose forms of *furthering* that put pressure on the categories that define separate languages. Their positions avoid alignment with national norms. To write in these step-mother forms of Turkish is to step outside of the zone of confrontation. It is to challenge the terms of engagement and to avoid forms of distancing. This makes translation a more complex task.

With its powerful visuals of the Dead Zone, Stephanides’s and Nugent’s film evokes what the anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin calls the “affective geography” of post-conflict Cyprus. These are the emotions – expressed, contained, repressed – that fill the abandoned and derelict spaces of border areas. The ruins, rust, dust and garbage that proliferate there, the abandoned houses of those who were forcibly relocated – these have an undeniable effect on today’s Cypriots, as well as on the poets and translators who engage with this affect as they move through Nicosia’s streets and alleys. Like the poets in the film, they dispute both the linguistic borders of translation and the political borders of the Dead Zone.

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17 THE CHECKPOINT The Shibboleth and Ellis Island

Visitors entering the huge space of the Turbine Hall at the Tate Museum in London expect to see some spectacular work of art. But those who visited in the summer of 2007 would at first have seen nothing. Then they would have noticed a jagged crevice at their feet. The artwork by Doris Salcedo was not a construction or a painting: it was a fracture in the concrete floor of the hall, both enigmatic and beautiful. The crack seemed to move forward through electric bursts of destruction.

The title given to the work, *Shibboleth*, turns the meandering fissure into a story of language. “Shibboleth” is a Hebrew word from Judges 12:4–6 which refers to a test the people of Gilead devised to allow them to distinguish insider from enemy. They had captured the River Jordan and wanted to let only their own people across. Their enemies, the Ephraimites, who were unable to pronounce the word correctly (they pronounced the “sh” as “s”), were identified and killed.

A shibboleth is a password. And so the title *Shibboleth* suggests that the gash in the floor is a division separating one territory from another. Crossing will be allowed to some and refused to others. The “language test” calls up the vulnerability of the stranger in a foreign land, the powerlessness of the migrant.



Figure 17.1 Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* in the Tate Modern, 2007. Salcedo's fissures recall the many borders which can only be crossed by those in possession of the correct passwords.

A shibboleth creates a checkpoint – a physical barrier that can be crossed only on condition that correct language is provided. Whether it be the wooden crossbars of far-flung imperial borders, medieval city gates, the sanitation centres or reception points of the late nineteenth century, or today’s electronic forms of surveillance, passage across borders requires correct language. Increasingly, the barriers to be crossed are no longer situated only at the edge of political territories, but also deep within them.

Transit stations

For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the checkpoints allowing passage for immigrants to European and North American cities took the form of “sanitation centres” or “reception points”. Two of the best-known of these structures are the Sanitary Station of Marseille and the reception centre of Ellis Island (both today turned into museums). These buildings illustrate Michel Foucault’s understanding of containment – they are spaces through which individuals are constituted as objects of governmental power. The buildings are designed as a kind of gauntlet, through which the outsider must pass, all the while being submitted to a series of medical and linguistic tests, undergoing the process of disciplining that shapes the modern citizen.

Ellis Island was designed in the French Renaissance style and was meant to impress newcomers with its grandeur – its arched portals and copper-domed towers; the tall, vaulted ceiling of its main hall. It stands out on the watery horizon and, like the nearby Statue of Liberty, legendarily offered the promise of a new life in a welcoming country. For many immigrants fleeing persecution in the Old Countries of Europe and arriving after months of difficult travel, the experience was indeed one of hope and renewal.

The actual experience of transiting through Ellis Island was often less uplifting. Immigrants were herded through the building and its various procedures in a Babel of tongues and in a mood of fear. Failing the medical tests would mean getting right back on the ship and returning to the point of origin. Elements of surveillance were integrated into the sumptuous design. A stairway from the ground floor to the Registry Room was conceived so that observers might weed out sick immigrants who were too weak to complete the climb. Doctors waited at the top to check the physical fitness of people on the stairs. Those feeble from sickness or old age could be marked for rejection at that point (Inghilleri 2012, 42).

Language processing

Ellis Island was also a linguistic switching station. Passage through the centre was a first step in leaving behind the “old” languages and taking on English. One familiar Jewish joke tells of the newly arrived Jew who was advised to give himself a better name than the complicated one he came with. A friend had recommended “Sam Cohen”. (Or, in a variation, the immigrant has chosen the name Rockefeller, on advice from the baggage handler). When the immigration officer calls out “Name!” the little man replies in Yiddish, “Schon vergessen” – I’ve forgotten. “John Ferguson!” shouts the clerk, and the new immigrant enters his American life with an Irish name.

Interpreters were provided by Immigration Services to help the newcomers negotiate their way through the facility. One of these interpreters was a man who would later leave his imprint on New York as a congressman and most famously as mayor from 1934 to 1945. Fiorello La Guardia (1882–1947), the son of Italian immigrants, worked as an interpreter on Ellis Island from 1907 to 1910 while studying

for a law degree. He was certified (there was a qualification exam) for three languages – German, Italian and Croatian. He actually spoke several others as well, having spent a number of years in consular service in Europe, in the region of Trieste, and he also famously spoke Yiddish (probably having picked it up in his youth on the streets in New York since his Triestine Sephardic Jewish mother’s family would likely not have known Yiddish). During his time as a consular official in Fiume (1903–1906) La Guardia arranged for emigrants to receive medical checkups *before* they sailed. This was not a procedure followed in other exit ports, and the strategy was successful in ensuring that fewer migrants were sent back for health reasons (Stone 2010).

In his autobiography, La Guardia noted that the verdict which led to the refusal and deportation of potential immigrants often arose out of incomprehension and the “inability on the part of doctors to understand the particular immigrant’s norm, or standard”. He deplored the kind of insensitivity that could have terrible psychological effects on newcomers, such as male doctors examining young girls who had no experience of this (1948, 65 cited in Inghilleri). In some cases, immigrants were treated as lacking in intelligence if they could not speak English. A young Jewish immigrant from Macedonia tells of having been given a test with a pegboard where she had to place correct shapes in the holes. She did it perfectly.

They said, Oh, we must have made a mistake. This little girl . . . naturally she doesn’t know English, but she’s very bright, intelligent. So they took the cross (chalk-mark) off me so we were cleared.

(Permanent Exhibit, Ellis Island)

Even if many of the interpreters were “softhearted people” who “hated seeing people being deported” and who would

“interpret in favour of the immigrant” (Ferro, 1968, in Bial 2009, 35), the role of the interpreters was one of surveillance. One story tells of the Ellis Island Greek interpreter Antonio Frabasilis (1854–1927), who was able to decipher a letter for the police written in an odd mixture of Armenian, Turkish, Polish and three dialects of Russian. This letter had withstood the efforts of many other experts. The information contained in the letter enabled the police to thwart a ring of illegal importers (National Park Service 2015).

New linguistic requirements were added with the Immigration Act of 1917 which imposed a literacy requirement on immigrants sixteen years or older. They had either to

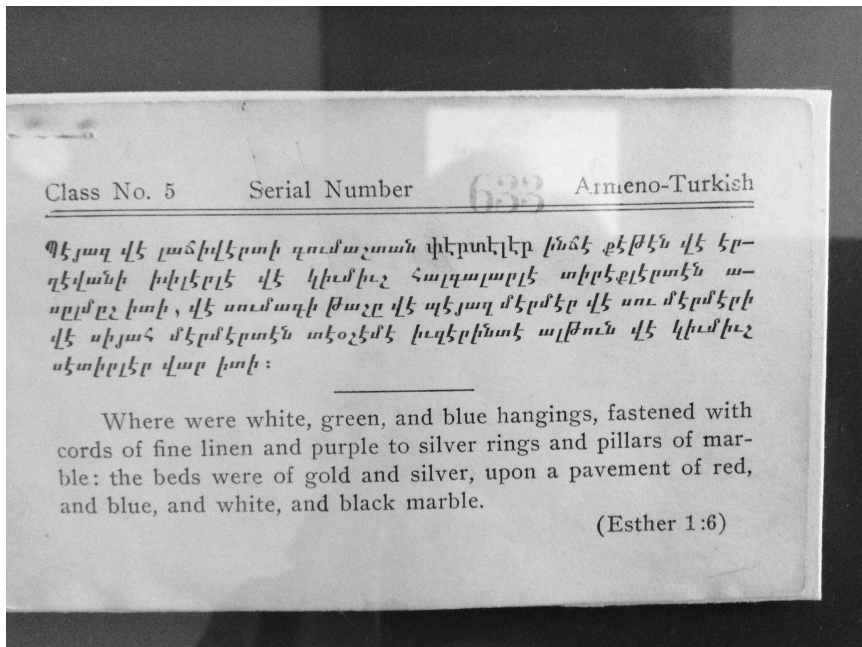


Figure 17.2 The Ellis Island reading test obliged immigrants from vastly different religions and cultures to engage with the Bible in order to gain entrance to America.

read out loud (a selection from Proverbs in the Bible) or follow a set of instructions (such as picking up a pencil and handing it to the immigration inspector). The excerpts from the King James version of Proverbs – with its archaic diction and often obscure references – make, today, for comically ethnocentric test material. One wonders how a passage from Esther describing a luxurious bedroom reads in Armeno-Turkish.

Meanwhile, on the west coast

The mandate of Ellis Island was in stark contrast to the procedures and atmosphere of another twentieth-century entry point to the United States, this one on the West Coast. Ellis Island was a transit station whose function was to weed out undesirable newcomers (not only the medically unfit, but suspected Communists were deported from Ellis Island in 1919), while accepting the vast majority of those who turned up on America's eastern shores. The mainly Chinese immigrants arriving through Angel Island, near San Francisco, were given much harsher treatment. The facility, established in 1910, was more a “prison-like detention centre”, where detainees were treated with hostility and suspicion. Even the interpreters were discriminated against – forced to provide “white” referees to vouch for their probity and, once hired, not permitted to be alone with immigrants for long periods of time. Sometimes the testimony was broken into chunks, translated by different interpreters, to guarantee impartiality (Inghilleri 2012, 53).

The practices at Angel Island were an expression of the “unabashed” racism of the administrators and lawmakers. These included medical inspections and interrogations which went far beyond those inflicted on those who arrived at Ellis Island. In her detailed study, Inghilleri

refers to numerous oral histories written by those who passed through Angel Island, but most moving are the poems inked on or carved into the walls of the detention barracks – expressing despair and anger. Texts include: “America has power, but not justice”. “In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty”. “The low building with three beams merely shelters the body. It is unbearable to relate the stories accumulated on the Island slopes” (Lai in Inghilleri 2012, 56). Today, translation of these verses into English is an act of redress, enabling a more just passage of Chinese cultural identity into English-language America.

Refugee camps, refugee claims

Both Ellis Island and Angel Island show how passage through border checkpoints includes language as an element of control and surveillance. Contemporary surveillance includes forms of control that Emily Apter, in her analysis of the work of artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan, calls “technologically sophisticated versions of the shibboleth test”. In “forensic listening”, for example, accents are identified by linguists, who report on deviant sounds that are supposedly at variance with the declared linguistic origins of the applicants. In response to Hamdan, Apter concludes: “Translation and aural screening form part of a larger apparatus of injustice integral to human triage, misattributed citizenship, internment in holding pens, imprisonment and deportation. Viewed through the lens of Abu Hamdan’s work, the translation of natural languages into digitized voice-maps appears weaponized as forensic evidence and made ready for mobilization in a manhunt” (113).

Another level of language-testing comes with the hearing of refugee claims. Robert Barsky’s pioneering work on



Figure 17.3 A triage centre for immigrants, Ellis Island was also meant to impress newcomers with its grand architecture.

refugee hearings in Canada emphasized the performative nature of testimony and the crucial role of translation. He showed how translators had to do more than translate the words of their clients in order to be successful. They had to frame the narrative to correspond to the criteria which would trigger a response of compassion. If translators were not sensitive to the expectations of Hearing Board members, they could unwittingly sabotage the claims of applicants (2001, 58).

Barsky continues to argue for the complexity of translation with regard to marginalized and, especially, undocumented populations in the United States. He urges translators once again to be attentive to the effectiveness of words, to be aware of the layers of social discourse that surround legal procedures that involve Latin American

illegal immigrants in the United States. From the start, he shows, these claimants are battling demonization. This demonization he compares to the definitions of “filth” which once characterized obscenity laws (2016). This idea of filth – which was so strongly and moralistically defended in trials such as the literary obscenity trials of the nineteenth century – today appears to us clearly as a construct, a fiction created in order to maintain an atmosphere of fear with regard to languages of difference. The demonization of marginal communities, he claims, must be contested with the same rigour. To translate effectively is to translate against the pressure of social discourse and to neutralize its negative presuppositions.

Translation is present at every hot point of contact between migrants and authorities in the recent list of global outrages represented by names like Lampedusa, Calais or Lesbos. The work of interpretation faces many obstacles – from the weaponization of language surveillance as identified by Abu Hamdan to the false ideas and repressive laws that work against the free flow of migrants. Language mediators are key players in the struggle for movement across borders.

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18 THE EDGE OF EMPIRE Far from where? Joseph Roth and Brody

The edge of empire often lies in a metaphysical landscape. As a line separating civilization from barbarity, it relies on the work of the imagination – on fantastical images of far-flung garrisons, outposts and ramparts. These forbidding shapes were powerfully evoked in Dino Buzzatti's classic novel *The Tartar Steppe* (1952), in which a soldier spends his entire life in pointless exercises anticipating the arrival of the barbarians. Or, more recently, by the novelist Coetzee who, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), tells the haunting story of a world-weary and cynical observer at an imperial outpost.

For the Ancient Greeks, the edge of the world was not so much a military frontier as a line drawn in the sand of language. Only those who spoke Greek were on the right side of civilization: the others were *barbaroi*. Constantine Cavafy's famous poem *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1904) can be read in this light. Cavafy (1863–1933) describes a day spent by the citizens of the capital, as they anticipate an imminent attack by the barbarians. Nevertheless, as evening comes: “Some of our men just in from the border to say, there are no barbarians any longer” (1992, 18). What happened to the barbarians? Could it be that, after years of coexistence in the borderlands, they

have learned the language of their enemies and blended into the soundscape?

The image of the borderlands that is most prevalent in Cavafy's poetry is indeed that of a noisy, polyglot place. For Cavafy, the cities at the margins of empire were places of commerce among peoples and ideas, where rival rituals and gods lived side by side. This representation of the border as a place loud with mixing is confirmed by writers as diverse as the Italian Claudio Magris and the Bulgarian Kapka Kassabova. Translation is common in such zones, where it carries a special weight. Kassabova writes about the Bulgarian border, at the edge of the Soviet empire, which for a time was a "soft" border permitting relatively good chances of escape from the Soviet Union. Prohibition against border crossing was posted in two languages there, she says, as if such translation were sufficient to cover the entire range of potential transgressors at this extreme south-east edge of the Soviet empire (2017, xvi).

From one empire to another

The borderlands at the edge of empire exert a special fascination at moments of historical transformation – and they famously stimulated an author born at the edge of yet another empire, Joseph Roth (1894–1939). Roth was born in Brody, a town in the province of Galicia, at the easternmost edge of the Habsburg Empire. Like Cavafy, he understood border regions as places where values are tested and where a special knowledge is to be gained. Cavafy's palace windows and boisterous procession-filled streets correspond to Roth's taverns, casinos, garrisons and tawdry hotels – where dramas of seduction and betrayal unfold.

Far from Where? (1975) is the English version of the title of the book that Claudio Magris devoted to

Joseph Roth and to Eastern European Jewish culture. The title comes from an old Jewish joke: “You’re going all the way there?” asks a man. “You’ll be so far away”. “Far from where?” is the reply (Gruber 2002, 37). For Magris, the exchange is revealing of the Jewish condition, that of a diasporic people whose homeland is not to be found on a map but rather within a community, wherever that might be. But the question applies to any border culture – defined by its distance from the capital and by its proximity to alien languages and beliefs. Joseph Roth was drawn to the contaminations of the border and to the moral dilemmas that sprung from the temptations of life far from cultural centres. Questions of language and translation are prominent in these polyglot regions, distant also from the undisputed authority of imperial German.

Languages were an obsession right across the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early years of the twentieth century. Language debates were at the centre of intellectual life, just as they were top billing in parliamentary struggles for increased recognition of national languages (Janik and Toulmin 1973, 67–91). Newspapers were filled with reports on demands and accommodations. Once the Empire fell in 1918, language issues continued to be paramount. German was no longer the administrative language that bound together the many language groups of central Europe. The new nations emerging after World War I now promoted their own tongues.

The borderlands of the Empire would be especially affected by these changes. Joseph Roth’s novels and stories, and especially his great novel *The Radetzky March*, shed light on these zones. Roth’s affection for the borderlands was rooted precisely in their incapacity to enforce divisions.

Brody and its twin

Brody was a small city in Galicia which gained commercial prominence as a result of its status as a “free city” for some hundred years (1778–1880). It had a close relationship with Radzivilov, a similar Russian city situated just ten kilometres across the border.

For almost a hundred years, writes the journalist S. Ansky (1863–1920), the two shtetls, Radzivilov and Brody, were “like enemy camps that faced each other”, and yet each was dependent on the other.

Each of them was armed with a strong defence system and they were separated by ropes, custom houses, barriers, and wooden border gates. And yet they had close relations and were heavily dependent on one another – their physical separation united them and was the source of their economic well-being, for the main trade route between Russia and Austria ran through the borders of both shtetls.

(2013)

The life of Brody was intimately intertwined with that of Radzivilov through trade, but also through smuggling and the flow of refugees from Tzarist Russia. Brody saw the arrival of masses of Jews, as many as 12,000 in the early years of the twentieth century, hoping to find refuge in America or Western Europe.

Roth would have grown up with a strong awareness of both the power and the fragility of borders. Born into a Yiddish-speaking family, Roth attended one of only two German-language high schools in Galicia and went on to study in German at Lemberg University. He moved to Vienna to become one of Europe’s best-known and most highly regarded journalists, and a prolific fiction writer.

Brody remained a strong imaginative presence for Roth, and the source of his lifetime fascination for the borderlands and borderlands people (*Grenzmenschen*). Among the characters that reappear in his fiction are many border types:

Lonely and adulterous wives, migrant hucksters, unscrupulous moneylenders, border traders or smugglers, aristocrats living on borrowed time, idling and dissolute soldiers, refugees, Jewish innkeepers, matronly brothel-keepers and idealistic men soon corrupted.

(Robinson 2007, 67)

The border tavern is a favourite spot. Lying outside the limits of the city and outside of bourgeois order, it brings together a cast of disreputable characters, just as it brings together languages (Beug 1991).

Weights and measures

One of Roth's saddest stories, *Weights and Measures* (first published in 1937), is a story of the border. It tells of the former soldier Anselm Eibenschütz who is sent out to a border town as an Inspector of Weights and Measures. Gradually, the inspector loses his hold on the correct measures (literal and figurative) as he is caught up in the seedy world of illicit cross-border traffic and erotic temptation. The bureaucrat finds himself lost between two systems of values and he dies a lonely and broken man.

The tale highlights the contrast between the inflexible bureaucratic system, bent on applying the letter of the law, and the community of the border that sees the world through tradition, solidarity . . . and flexible measures. Smuggling, drinking, and illicit love flourish in the dark forest taverns.

From the start, we are led to understand that the drama will be one of language. There are chasms of incomprehension between Eibenschütz and his new environment. The landscape, like the people, speaks in opaque tongues.

For the first few days, Eibenschütz went about like one who has suddenly been struck deaf. True, he understood the language of the country, but what mattered was to understand not so much what the people said as what the land itself uttered. And the land spoke a terrifying language: it spoke of snow, darkness, cold and icicles, even though the calendar said it was spring.

(Roth 2002b, 13)

Eibenschütz does not understand the codes of this District of Zlotogrod. He lives alongside the people of the district, hearing but not understanding.

Eibenschütz falls afoul of the locals either by applying his standards too strictly or abandoning them altogether. He is betrayed by his wife and, in his grief and bewilderment, discovers the border tavern, where Euphemia speaks not so much with her voice as with the swirling of her gypsy skirts and the tinkling of her jewellery. The foreign tongues of women are often erotic for Roth, whether it be the Countess Walewska in *Stationmaster Fallerayer*, who spoke German in a strange, low voice, with a harsh and strange Russian accent: “All the splendour of distance and the unknown were in her throat” (2002a, 186), or the exciting Russian revolutionary Natasha of *Flight Without End*. But Eibenschütz cannot keep his hold on Euphemia’s elusive music, and is finally assassinated.

This story, more than any other, shows Roth’s border as a place of contradictory knowledges and untrustworthy translations. The “people of the border”, in the end, are a shifty lot. For instance, while they will suffer enormously

from the devastation of war when it comes, they also know that they have a chance to profit from it. They “sense things early” and “they could read the signs of the impending catastrophe with their own eyes”. But, adds Roth, in case we think the border people have special virtue, “Also they profited from these preparations” (2003, 141).

Towards the end, Eibenschütz abandons the anguish of deciphering languages and codes, and settles for companionable silence and the sound of the rain.

Eibenschütz had long since ceased to listen. But it did him good that a man was speaking beside him, just as it sometimes does one good when the rain is pouring down, even if one does not understand the language of the rain.

(Roth 2002b, 122)

The Radetzky March

The Radetzky March, Roth’s best-known work, is similarly a story of decline that plays out at the edge of empire. Joseph von Trotta, descendant of the illustrious von Trotta family – of the hero of Solferino – is drawn into the darkness that lurks at the border, dying to the sound of a salute in a Slavic language from the peasant farmers.

Like Eibenschütz, von Trotta is dispatched to the border as part of his imperial duties, but, in *The Radetzky March*, this assignment is clearly marked as a demotion. “Any strangers who came to this part of the world were slowly but irresistibly doomed. No one was a match for the swamp. No one could stand up to the border” (Roth 2003, 141). Imperial troops assigned to the border were overcome by a sense of disaffection. This sense of distance and gloom extended even to language. Though German was a minority language in these regions, it remained the

administrative tongue and the language of the army. Still, Roth notes that “cut adrift from the ways of home, from their German mother tongue”, the soldiers fall into “a kind of *militarese*” – in the same ways as they “had fallen prey to games of chance, and the powerful *schnapps* that was produced locally” (144). Their language is degraded through isolation, but also through exposure to the many tongues around them.

Nevertheless, this sense of distance can create relationships which would have been impossible in Vienna. The Russian and Austrian garrisons actually fraternized across the border.

The respective garrisons even kept up reciprocal comradely relations. Sometimes it was the Austrians who crossed the border in little canvas-topped baggage carts, to watch the riding skills of the Cossacks and to drink Russian *schnapps*. . . . There the Tsar’s officers gave the officers of His Apostolic Majesty a lesson in Russian hospitality.

(144)

Conversely, on the Austrian side, the Count Chojnicki organized frequent parties in his home, where the aristocratic officers of the Russian dragoons regiment and the middle-class officers of the *Jägers* “formed lifelong emotional ties” (148).

In fact, it seems sometimes that there is more hostility between the local gentry and the Austrians than with the Russians. This hostility is expressed in a scene of comic translation toward the end of *The Radetzky March*. Count Chojnicki is hosting a party at his home when the rumour of Franz Ferdinand’s assassination in Sarajevo first begins to percolate through the borderlands. The count decides to assemble a few of the higher-ranking guests in a

separate room to share the news. The drunken Count Batyani reacts by beginning a long harangue to his compatriots in Hungarian. As this speech goes on for some time, and the guests who cannot understand show increasing impatience, someone asks him to continue the conversation in German. “Benkyo who had just been speaking stopped and replied: ‘All right, I can say it in German too: we were just agreeing, my compatriots and I, that it’s a good thing if the son of a bitch is dead!’ ” (327).

The irreverence of the translation is a clear sign of what the assassination means: the end of the empire and Austrian dominance. The withholding of translation and the shocking words prefigure the breakdown of imperial solidarities.

The social theorist Richard Sennett makes a distinction between boundaries and borders, the first being sheer obstacles, hermetic divisions, and the second being places of enhanced contact and interactions, “active edges”, such as the shoreline dividing ocean and land, that stimulates “intense biological activity” providing nutrition for animals and plants (2012, 79). A road will be a boundary if it takes the form of an eight-lane highway; it will be a border if it is a narrow, mixed-use street friendly to pedestrians. Roth’s border towns are very much of the second sort.

Roth grew even fonder of mixed border identities as he witnessed the rise of nationalism across Europe during the 1930s. He was uncannily prescient in his fears of the excesses of nationalism. And, looking back to the moments when nations had gained their independence after World War I, he came to see the national “liberation” of subject peoples as so much pathetic theatricality. In a story fragment that takes place in Brunn (Brno), but might have applied to any of the myriad cities of Central Europe, he acidly observes the Czech transformation into nationhood. The Revolution is represented by “the procession

of the army band dressed in its old Imperial uniforms and playing a new nationalist anthem, the Czech soldiers who went about plucking the old cockades from the officers' hats, the whole foolish glee of the liberated nation" (Roth 2002a, 66–67).

New national anthems, national uniforms, national languages – Roth understands that these are not guarantees of progress. Defiant and fractious, Roth has only scorn for “foolish glee of the liberated nation” (66–67). He flouts the temper of the times and calls for a return to the disorderly multilingual Empire.

Language afterlife

To be a German-language writer in the first decades of the twentieth century was to write for a huge public, both in the German-language nations and in the entire territory of Central Europe for which German was the *lingua franca*. Roth's celebrity as a journalist and his almost-constant travels across Europe resulted in the early translations of his novels into English and French. They were also translated “back” into the languages of the border zones he came from, notably into Polish by his friend Józef Wittlin (1896–1976), and even into Yiddish.

This suggestion of an immediate, almost spontaneous reception for Roth back at the edges of empire conjures up an image of circulation across vast terrain. It evokes an audience eager to bring Roth's work back to his roots. It points to the creative power of Polish and Yiddish to engage with German modernity. Translation was indeed one of the mechanisms through which the many “minor” languages of the empire fortified themselves and established their legitimacy. In some cases, language conversions on the part of writers were a more direct path to the same goal. And, so, Czernowitz author Olha Kobylanska took

to writing in Ukrainian, after being educated in German; Itzik Manger, also from Czernowitz, chose Yiddish; Wittlin, like Roth, raised in Brody, chose Polish. Translating Roth “back” into Yiddish, his mother tongue, recast his work in the language in which he chose not to write, but which is in a sense his source language. Had the Holocaust not put an end to Yiddish-language culture, this translation would have been part of an expanding response to the great German-language literary tradition in Central Europe.

Sunday at the border

Today, the former site of the border between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Romanov Empire at Brody has disappeared into the grasslands that sweep across the monotonous Ukrainian steppe. A small panel marks the point, with the fanciful addition of the historical striped crossbar. A text in English (there is neither German nor Russian) recalls that this place, Kordon Brody, served as a border centuries before the creation of the Austrian and Russian Empires, separating the ancient Ukrainian lands of Galychyna and Volyn, and then, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Polish Kingdom and the great Lithuanian principality.

An image on this same panel reproduces part of a well-known postcard – a festive scene showing officials and their families posing at the open crossbar. Probably taken in the early years of the twentieth century, the photo shows uniformed guards, accompanied by civilian officials, women and children in Sunday dress. One wonders what might have been the occasion for such an event. What kind of celebration would bring together the border guards and their families? Would it have been fresh coats of paint applied to the border marker or the visit of a photographer



Figure 18.1 Nineteenth-century postcard image of the border crossing between two empires – the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian – in Brody. What might have been the occasion for this celebration?

looking for picturesque sites? The caption on the postcard simply says “border” in three languages: Polish, Ukrainian and German. The fact that Russian and Yiddish are missing indicates that the postcard was to be sold on the Habsburg side of the border and that Jewish purchasers were assumed to speak German.

This postcard represents the border at its most benign, the site of a picnic on a sunny Sunday afternoon. The border zone, however, would see scenes of the most intense violence during both world wars. The writer S. Ansky was a witness to the destruction when he visited Brody at the outbreak of war in 1914.

Ansky describes visiting a town that has been completely destroyed, “From both sides, as far as the eye could see,

there were broken chimneys and burned walls” (2002, 63). Walking through the ruins, he notices something odd:

In every corner of the burnt street, on the walls and on the destroyed houses, there were newly affixed signs on which street names were written in Russian letters. The Russians had given all the streets new, highly literary names: Pushkin Street, Gogol Street, Lermontov Street, I think there was a Turgenev Street, too.

(63)

Ansky is appalled at the cynicism which allowed the names of great writers to appear on the “horribly disfigured, fire-gutted streets” (63)

He is also terrified at the sight of a strange Jewish beggar woman of about sixty, who “stood before me, grinning, her nasty, hungry eyes glaring at me” and “in a hoarse voice, mangling the language, began warbling a sentimental Russian song, ‘Ptichka Kanareyka’, dearest little canary, about a young man who sends out a canary with a greeting for his beloved”. She thought she could impress this outsider with her knowledge of Russian, but succeeded only in frightening him away (66–8).

The victory of Russian in Brody would be short-lived, however, as the town returned to Poland in 1918 and was shifted to Ukraine in 1945. Russian would not entirely disappear from the region, however, and even today maintains a significant presence.

What the cemetery says

Brody no longer lies at the edge of empire. And it is no longer unruly in its multilingualism. Both the German and the Yiddish languages have disappeared from this place, the



Figure 18.2 The Jewish cemetery of Brody. The unusually tall and ordered rows of stones give an impression of continued life.

Jews murdered and the Germans expelled. The information for tourists posted on buildings in the town is in English and Ukrainian.

One or two kilometres away, there stands one of the most compelling monuments to Brody's past. This is the Jewish cemetery, which extends the length of a football field, on the north-east edge of town. It is a breathtaking sight of some five thousand stones, almost all standing upright and unusually tall, often reaching six feet. They are elaborately inscribed, with elegant decorative motifs and an abundance of Hebrew text filling the length of the stone. Some of the stones carry translations on the back, inscriptions in Yiddish or German with the name of the

deceased and perhaps a short text: “Friede Ihrer Asche” (peace to her ashes). The cemetery is bordered by a forest whose trees are also unusually tall and slim, providing an elegant edge of upright trunks whose leaves begin high in the sky.

The full force of the paradox of remembrance emerges here, in this quiet, abandoned but densely peopled site. This is a thriving community of the dead. These are not victims of Nazi crimes but rather the remains of normal civic lives brought to a predictable end. The stones, aligned in orderly columns and rows, attest to the decorum of respectful burial. Pages and pages of script unfurl from these tablets – prayers, testimonies, invocations. The letters chiselled in stone are as numerous as rain drops, waiting for the reader who will make sense of them.

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Conclusion

What is the opposite of a translation site? One answer to this question might appeal to the idea of *stabilitas loci*. Essayist Cees Nooteboom (2007) evokes the rules of certain monastic orders who imagine a way of life cut off from the world and opposed to all change. *Stabilitas loci* (immobility of place) ensures that an individual will remain in the same place, accomplishing the same rituals, over and over in the same ways, for an entire existence. It binds the devotee to a single language and a place of immutability, with the understanding that this existence best serves the spiritual life.

As a young man, Nooteboom was briefly attracted to a monastic vocation, but his career took him in a different direction, towards a life filled with movement and travel. Instead of the monk's cell, the nomadic Nooteboom chose the hotel room as his space of inspiration.

These two spaces participate in radically different narratives. The rooms might have similar dimensions, might even look the same, but they invite stories drawn from entirely different vocabularies. Immobility as represented by *stabilitas loci* is more than an absence of movement. It represents an ideal of perfect sameness: of place, of routine, of language. Each day should be

spent in an identical fashion, should include the same silences and the same single language of prayer. Were this ideal to be completely realized, it would indeed stand as an icon of non-translation, the opposite of a translation site. The monk's cell resists dissonance while the hotel room invites language disturbances. In this book, sites of translation stand for vivifying difference and values of plurality. They embody histories of mobility, mutability, critique or in Clifford Geertz's words an "entanglement" of sensibilities and forms of life (2003, 30).

The fact that the monastic cell and the hotel room might occupy the same physical location (and the former have occasionally been turned into the latter) is an important clue in the identification of translation sites. It is not the physical structure which defines the site but rather the languages that tell its story.

Cross-translations

How formidable are the distances between one language and another? How difficult is it to negotiate the passage across? This guided tour of translation sites has perhaps offered some clues. It has become clear that differences across languages cannot be measured by any objective technical criterion but are the results of historical interactions. The Mostar bridge and the Øresund bridge give very different accounts about the possibilities of negotiating across the small differences of similar languages. Where differences between Bosnian and its neighbouring languages were inflated by conflict, so that Bosnian was confirmed in the separateness of its identity, the differences between two Scandinavian languages, Danish and Swedish, could be perceived as entirely irrelevant.

In the passage across the Dead Zone separating Turkish from Greek Nicosia, another kind of measure fixes the distance between languages. Rather than accepting the separations of nationalism, Mehmet Yashin's "step-mother



Figure 19.1 In the Gallery, photograph by Semyon Fridlyand (1927).

tongue” chooses an oblique avenue to translatability. The “step-mother tongue” sidesteps standards of purity, preferring modes of expression that convey the mixed identities of contact zones. The Dead Zone offers itself to the wanderings of translators. It extends hospitality to those engaged in the tentative linkings of translation, those like Joseph Roth’s Inspector Eibenschütz who have lost the capacity to impose the authority of imperial weights and measures and who find themselves caught up in the unruly spirit of borderlands.

Translatability issues from a crucible of past relations and present desires. The power to translate successfully is not to be found in dictionaries but rather in routes and connections.

Sites of translation foster exchange, but they also license transformation. The mountaintop allows passage into otherworldly domains, and to consider such commerce is to risk losing the self one knows. The mountaintop is a special kind of border, one where the dangers and the payoffs are especially intense.

The different intervals that translation creates can be understood as a kind of folding, “a bringing together, a joining and a repetition”, where “crumples, pleats, gathers, creases, falls, twists and billows” create a “regular irregularity that is like the surface of water, like channels of air” (Cole 8).

The conversations that take place in translation sites are often arguments. They militate for redress, for re-conversion, for “as-if” equivalences. They show translation as an activity with effects, with the potential to enact change. This is the case, for instance, when languages previously considered minor or marginal are granted translational equivalence.

Sites of translation are frames of “againness” (Briggs, 231), where repetition comes with a shift in perspective. Against apathy, inertia and indifference, they enhance

engagement with the vital energies of difference. They are places of “unlearning”, which foster the disruptive ways of thinking so important to the exiled and translated philosopher Hannah Arendt. Whether it be Arendt’s New York apartment in which she carried out her intellectual project of negotiating new “thought-paths” across traditions and languages (Knott 2014, 32–39), or one of the innumerable hotel rooms from which Cees Nooteboom “sets off down the long staircase towards the shadows of memory” (93), translation sites are only apparently immobile. They come to life in the connections they make. The conversation between near and far, between difference and indifference, never comes to a full stop.

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Acknowledgements

Writing this book was an exceptionally rewarding experience, and I am grateful to many for their support.

I offer special appreciation to the Faculty of Arts and Science, Concordia University, for the Sabbatical leave that allowed me to let my curiosity roam free for six precious months.

I am grateful to the friends and colleagues who responded to this book as it was taking shape. For their generosity I thank Esther Allen, Chandrani Chatterjee, Brian Baer, Craig Moyes and Ruth Kircher, Denise Merkle, Florence Lautel-Ribstein, Elizabeth Tutschek, Siri Nergaard, Carolyn Shread, David Bellos, Katia Pizzi, David Auerbach, Lydia Liu, Lucia Quaquarelli and Myriam Suchet. Thanks to David Gillanders at the National Gallery of Canada. For continued encouragement I am truly grateful to Denis Liakin and Maria Trigueiro of the Département d'études françaises at Concordia and, as always, to the Interlibrary loans service at the Webster Library. Catherine Aubé introduced me to the documentary films of Nurith Aviv and identified for me a crucial way of viewing translation sites. She and Kathryn Henderson were of great help along the way, contributing their considerable research, writing and organizational skills. Thanks as

always to Robert Schwartzwald for loyal friendship and to Vanamala Viswanatha for boundless hospitality.

Anastasia Llewellyn's editorial help and permission-seeking skills were hugely useful and she offered both with good humour under pressure. It was a real pleasure to work with her. Carmen Ruschensky and Judith Woodsworth kindly read the manuscript and offered wonderfully helpful comments. I owe special thanks to Judith Woodsworth, friend, colleague and office neighbour, for affectionate support.

Thanks to Louisa Semlyen, Eleni Steck and Michael Cronin for including me, once again, in the Routledge list and for smoothing out the wrinkles of the publication process. And thank you to the team, especially Autumn Spalding, for allowing me to have input into the design process. Marta Braun kindly offered help with photo rights.

In a few cases, I have drawn on some of my work that has appeared in other publications:

“A.K. Ramanujan: What happened in the Library”, *Decentring Translation Studies: India and Beyond*, ed. Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 2009, pp. 161–174.

‘German, Translation and the World in Czernowitz’, *Translation and World Literature*. Ed. Susan Bassnett, Routledge 2018, pp. 92–107.

Language Edges: Reading the Habsburg Border City’ in *Speaking Memory. How Translation Shapes City Life*, ed. S. Simon, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016. (87–99)

Translating Montreal. Episodes in the Life of a Divided City. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006. (Chapter 1)

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Liamis Briedis's Vilnius didn't make it into the book, though the five-day tour he spontaneously offered has remained an inspiration. Noémi's Dakar and Tobie's Quito didn't make it either: I'm waiting for Avi, Clara and Juliette to be my guides.

Eleanor came along for this journey too. The book and its author are much the better for it.

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- Figure 18.2 Brody Jewish cemetery. Author photo.
- Figure 19.1 *In the Gallery*. Photograph by Semyon Fridlyand. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Permission via Art Resource.

Index

Note: page numbers in *italics* indicate illustrations.

- Abu Hamdan, Lawrence 229, 231
- Accra (Ghana) 134–5
- Akcan, Esra 195–6, 198
- Alfonso VIII, king of Spain 44
- Alfonso X, king of Spain 48
- Alfonso XIII, king of Spain 42
- Alford, Henry 80
- Amanpour, Christiane 112
- Amichai, Yehuda 173–4
- Anderson, Wes (dir.): *The Grand Budapest Hotel* 6, 56, 57–60, 67
- Andrić, Ivo: *The Bridge Over the Drina* 99
- Angelico, Fra: *The Annunciation* 167, 168, 169
- Angel Island (California), immigration entry point at 228–9
- Anishinaabe (people):
creation story of 146;
language of 145, 146;
- Toronto geographical name of, on street sign 153, 153
- Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) 200–1
- Ansky, S. 236, 244–5
- Anthonisz, Cornelis: *The Collapse of the Tower of Babel* 88, 89
- Antonello da Messina: *Saint Jerome in His Study* 5, 159, 162, 164, 165–7, 172
- Appelfeld, Aharon 183, 185
- Applebaum, Anne 17
- Après Babel, Traduire* (exhibition) 1–2, 10
- Apter, Emily 229
- Arabic 33, 78, 103, 216;
in Cyprus 216, 218, 219;
in Egypt 138, 140; as
flourishing in Toledo 42,
45–8, 49, 51; and Hebrew
45–7, 48, 49, 108, 174, 214;
as scriptural language 76

- Arab Spring 8, 134, 137, 138
 architecture of memory 7–8;
 church 42–51; monument
 15–28; opera house 30–40;
 as “stones that speak”
 30–1; *see also specific
 architectural types*
- Arendt, Hannah 254
- Aristeas, Letter of 172
- Aristotle 48
- Armeno-Turkish reading test,
 for Ellis Island arrivals 227,
 227–8
- Arrival* (Villeneuve film)
 69–78; language of
 heptapods in 71–3, 74;
 and Moses as translator
 69–70, 71, 74–7; public/
 private narratives of 72–3;
 and Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
 73–4; and Tower of Babel
 69, 78; and transformative
 power of translation 72, 73,
 76–8
- Ashendorf, Israel 25
- Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal
 194, 196
- Augé, Marc 56
- Augustine of Hippo 160,
 169–70, 171
- Auschwitz 7, 88, 89–92
- Ausländer, Rose 183, 185
- Austro-Hungarian Empire *see*
 Habsburg Empire
- Averroes (Ibn Rushd) 48
- Avicenna (Ibn Sina): *The
 Canon of Medicine* 48
- Aviv, Nurith (dir.): *Traduire*
 5–6, 161, 164, 172–4
- Babel, Tower of 7, 9–11,
 80–92, 124–5; in *Arrival*
 69, 78; Benet on 81–3,
 85–6; Bible wordplay
 and 82–3; Brueghel’s
 painting of 81–3, 84, 85,
 88; Coliseum and 81, 85;
 collapse of 10–11, 83,
 85–6, 88, 89; Dante on
 87, 87–8; etymology of
 82–3; exhibition based on
 1–2, 10, 86; Holocaust
 experience of 7, 88,
 89–92; spiral shape of 7,
 80–1, 82, 85, 86; Tatlin’s
 reimagining of 9, 10; as
 ziggurat 81–2, 84
- Baker, Mona: *Dissenting
 Voices of the Egyptian
 Revolution* 137
- barbarians, at “edge of
 empire” 233–4
- Barsky, Robert 229–31
- Barthes, Roland 77
- Baum, Vicki: *Menschen im
 Hotel* 59
- Beckett, Samuel: *Waiting for
 Godot* 103
- Bedford, John of Lancaster,
 First Duke of: *Book of
 Hours* owned by 82
- Benet, Juan 81–3, 85–6
- Benjamin, Walter 77
- Beskin, Sivan 173

- Bible: Hebrew 76, 161–2, 172–4; as used in Ellis Island reading test 227, 227–8; wordplay of, in Babel story 82–3; *see also entry below*
- Bible texts, translations of: from Greek to Latin 161–2; from Hebrew to Greek 161–2, 172–4; Moses and 75–6; as printed in Antwerp 88; *see also Jerome, and entry following*
- Bon Cop Bad Cop* (film) 109
- border/transition zone 3–4, 9; bridge and 104, 107, 108–9; checkpoint as 222–31; Chungking Mansions as 128; “edge of empire” as 6, 233–47; as faced by recent migrants to Europe and U.S. 230–1; mountaintop as 253; “no man’s land” as 213–21; *see also specific border/transition zones*
- Borges, Jorge Luis 179
- Bosnian War 94–5, 99–101; linguistic legacy of 103–4, 113–15, 118; *see also Holiday Inn (Sarajevo); Mostar Bridge*
- Boushel, Patricia 135–6; and *Translating the printemps érable* 135–40
- Breuer, Josef 200
- Bridge, The* (television series) 6–7, 106, 107–10, 251–2
- bridge 94–110; as commonplace/*topos* 94, 105–6; differences “gathered”/reinforced by 6, 101–5, 109–10; and divided city 100–1; frictionless communication enabled by 6–7, 108–10; *see also Mostar Bridge; Øresund Bridge (Denmark/Sweden)*
- Briggs, Kate 77
- Brisset, Jean-Pierre 201
- Bristol Palace Hotel (Karlovy-Vary) 58
- Brody (Ukraine): as border city/“edge of empire” 6, 233–47; German in 235, 236, 238, 239–40, 241–4, 245–7; Jewish cemetery of 245–7, 246; postcard image of 243–4, 244; and relations with Russians 236–7, 240–1, 243–5; Roth’s depictions of 234–43; wartime devastation of 244–5
- Brooke-Rose, Christine: *Between* 56, 62–6
- Brueghel, Pieter, the Elder: *The Tower of Babel* (Vienna version) 81–3, 84, 85, 88
- Bruni, Leonardo 160–1
- Buna (Auschwitz sub-camp) 89–92
- Buzzatti, Dino: *The Tartar Steppe* 233

- Cafavy, Constantine: *Waiting for the Barbarians* 233–4
- Cairo: Arab Spring
demonstrations in 8, 134, 137, 138
- Calcutta: public space in 141
- Caravaggio 159, 172
- Carson, Anne 3
- Casablanca* (film) 61
- Cassin, Barbara 1–2, 10, 86, 198
- Catalan 33, 55, 104, 162, 173–4
- Celan, Paul 183, 185
- Cervantes, Miguel de 20;
Don Quixote 49
- Charest, Jean 135
- checkpoint 222–31;
immigration reception centre as 224–9;
interpreters/language processing at 225–8;
racism at 228–9; refugee claim hearing as 229–31;
shibboleth (password) for 222, 223, 224; *see also* Angel Island (California), immigration entry point at; Ellis Island (New York immigration reception point)
- Chernivtsi (Ukraine) 3, 6, 178, 182, 185; *see also* Czernowitz
- Chiang, Tom: *Story of Your Life* 73
- Chungking Express* (Wong film) 123, 128
- Chungking Mansions (Hong Kong) 1, 8, 123–32, 129; bilingual entrance inscription of 124, 127; as border zone 128; description/history of 123–4; economy of 125; as film setting 123, 128; as foreign space/“counter-space” 127–8; interior configuration of 126; as low-end globalization hub 123, 125–7; Mathews on 123, 125, 126–7, 128; “metrolingualism” of 130–1; multilingualism of 123, 124–5, 126–7; translanguaging at 8, 125, 130–1
- church 42–51; and translation of forced conversion 2, 43, 44–5, 46, 49, 50; *see also* Santa Maria la Blanca (Toledo); Toledo (Spain)
- Chwin, Stefan: *Death in Danzig* 185
- cities, divided 101, 214, 215; *see also* Cyprus; Mostar Bridge; Nicosia (Cyprus)
- cities, as named/renamed 3–4, 7–8, 39, 241; Czernowitz 3, 39, 182–6; Lviv 3, 4, 15–17, 39
- Cixous, Hélène 174, 201
- Coetzee, J.M.: *Waiting for the Barbarians* 233

- coexistence, linguistic/cultural
see Cyprus; Toledo (Spain)
- Cole, Peter 45–6
- Cole, Teju 4, 253
- Coliseum (Rome) 81, 85
- Colón, Raúl 136–7
- concentration camps 185;
 multilingualism of 7, 88,
 89–92
- “contaminated language”
 (Papadakis) 9, 216–20
- conversions, forced, of
 Spanish Jews and Muslims
 42–4, 48–50; translation of
 43–5, 46, 49
- Coppola, Sofia (dir.): *Lost in
 Translation* 6, 56, 60–2,
 66–7; *see also* Tokyo Park
 Hyatt
- Cordoba (Spain), Great
 Mosque of 44
- counter-translation 3–4, 8
- Croatia: language of 103;
 and Mostar Bridge 6, 99,
 100–1, 104
- crossroads 8; market 123–32;
 museum 144–53; street
 133–42; *see also specific
 types of crossroads*
- Cyprus: Dead Zone of 2,
 213–21, 251–3; divided
 capital of 101, 213, 215,
 216, 251–3; history of
 translation/inclusion in
 215–16; poetry translation
 workshop in 213–15, 214,
 219, 219–20; post-conflict
 division of 213–17, 219–20;
 rejection of linguistic
 purity in 9, 215, 216–19,
 220, 252–3; translation
 furthering *vs.* distancing in
 216–20
- Czech nationalism 32–3, 35;
 Roth’s opposition to 241–2
- Czech National Theatre
 (Prague) 34; and national
 renaissance 32–3, 35;
 performances at 35–6
- Czernowitz 182–3; German
 in 39, 182–6; and naming/
 renaming process 3, 39,
 182–6; personal library in 6,
 178–9, 182–6; writers of 185,
 243–4; Yiddish in 184, 243
- Daniels-Ramanujan, Molly
 177
- Dante Alighieri: *The Divine
 Comedy* 87, 87–8
- Dead Zone (Cyprus) *see*
 Cyprus
- Deleuze, Gilles 201, 202
- DeMille, Cecil B. (dir.): *The
 Ten Commandments* 71
- Derrida, Jacques 83, 86, 141,
 201
- Le Devoir* (Montreal) 135
- difference *vs.* *in-difference* 56,
 59–67; *see also* hotel
- dragoman, of Ottoman
 Cyprus 215–16
- Dunash Ben Labrat 45–7
- Dürer, Albrecht: *Saint Jerome in
 his Study* 159, 169–70, 171
- Dvořák, Antonín 36

- Eco, Umberto: *The Name of the Rose* 180–1
- “edge of empire” 6, 233–47; barbarians and 233–4; German at 35, 235, 236, 238, 239–40, 241–4, 245–7; *see also* Brody (Ukraine); Roth, Joseph
- Eisenman, Peter 141
- Elias-Bursać, Ellen 115
- Ellis Island (New York immigration reception point) 224–8; architecture of 224, 230; frightening experiences at 225; interpreters at 225–7; language processing/testing at 225–8, 227; naming/renaming at 225; surveillance measures at 225, 226–7, 229, 231
- Erasmus 170, 171
- Escuela de traductores de Toledo 51
- Fagles, Robert 80
- Fellner, Ferdinand 35
- Ferdinand and Isabella, king and queen of Spain 43
- Ferrer, Vicente 49
- Ficino, Marsilio 161
- Flaubert, Gustave: *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* 105
- Fliess, Wilhelm 31
- Forcano, Manuel 173–4
- Forest, Jean: *Le Mur de Berlin P.Q.* 207–8
- Foucault, Michel 9, 128, 201, 202, 224
- Frabasilis, Antonio 227
- Francesco I de’ Medici, studiolo of 165
- Frankfurt kitchen (Schütte-Lihotzky) 196, 197
- Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria: assassination of 115, 117, 117–18, 240–1
- Fraser, Margaret 139
- Freud, Sigmund: on archaeology of psychoanalysis 30, 40; on Prague 31; on “small differences” 101–2; on translation and psychoanalysis 200–1, 203
- Fridlyand, Semyon: *In the Gallery (GUM, State Department Store, Moscow)* 252
- Friedrich, Caspar David 58; *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* 70
- “From Time Immemorial: Canadian and Indigenous Art” (National Gallery of Canada), Indigenous languages on labels of 1, 144–53; background of 145–8; examples of 147, 151–2; languages included in 145; process of 149–51
- Gaber, Sherief 140–2
- Gabriel (archangel) 167, 168, 169

- Galicia 17, 234, 236; *see also* Brody (Ukraine); Lviv (Ukraine)
- garden 22, 141, 188–98; *see also entries below*
- garden, Japanese 188–94;
Hearn on 188–9, 190;
Ryōan-ji (Tokyo) 192, 193,
193–4; *shakkei* (borrowed
scenery) in 189, 193–4; as
tribute to Hearn (Ireland)
1, 2, 188–9, 192–3;
worldwide replication of
188–9, 191–4, 198; and
Zen aesthetics 192, 193,
193–4; *see also* Hearn,
Lafcadio
- garden city, in Germany
194–8; as borrowed from
Howard 189, 194; as
replicated in Turkey 194–6,
197, 198
- Garneau, David: *Sainte-
Madeleine* (National
Gallery of Canada) 152
- Gautier, Théophile 190
- Geertz, Clifford 251
- Gellhorn, Martha 112
- Gerard of Cremona 48
- German language/culture
57–8, 200–1, 203, 226;
allegiance to 6, 39, 182–6;
at Auschwitz 89–90, 91;
vs. Czech, in Prague 31–2,
35–6, 38–40; at “edge of
empire” 35, 235, 236, 238,
239–40, 241–4, 245–7; in
Lviv 16–17, 18, 20–1, 23
- Ghirlandaio, Domenico
159, 162
- Ghosh, Amitav 182
- Gilman, Sander 102
- Giovanni di Paolo: *Saint
Jerome in his Study* 162,
163
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang
von 39, 184
- Goldberg, Lea 173
- Grand Budapest Hotel (film
setting): as endearing/
old world “place” 56, 67;
inspirations for 56, 57,
58; as translational 6, 56,
57–60, 67;
see also hotel
- grand hotel: cultural
mythology of 59; political
acts/performances at
116–17; *see also* hotel
- Grand Hotel* (film) 59
- Grandhotel Pupp (Karlovy-
Vary) 56, 57
- Grescoe, Taras: *Shanghai
Grand* 59
- Grimmelshausen, Hans
Jakob Christoph von:
Simplicissimus 19
- Guattari, Félix 201
- GUM department store
(Moscow) 252
- Habsburg Empire: border
regions of 233–47; fall of
3, 235; German language/
culture and 38–40, 182–6;
nationalist movements

- within 30–40, 55, 117–18, 235, 241–2; *see also* Brody (Ukraine); Czernowitz; German; Lviv (Ukraine)
- Hadjigeorgakis Kornosios, dragoman of Cyprus 216
- Hajrudin (Ottoman engineer) 97
- Hašek, Jaroslav: *The Good Soldier Švejk* 19
- Hearn, Lafcadio 188, 189–91; *An Attempt at Interpretation* 190–1; Irish garden honouring 1, 2, 188–9, 192–3; on Japanese food/culture 190–1; on Japanese gardens 188–9, 190
- Hebrew 185, 203, 222; and Arabic 45–7, 48, 49, 108, 174, 214; Bible written in 76, 161–2, 172–4; poetry in (Toledo) 45–7; as scriptural language 45, 76; in Space of Synagogues (Lviv) 23, 24; translations of 48, 49, 161–2, 170, 172–4, 214
- Heidegger, Martin 104
- Helmer, Hermann 35
- Hemingway, Ernest 112
- Herodotus 82
- Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer: *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* 182–6
- Hlehel, Ala 174
- Hoffman, Eva 28
- Holiday Inn (Sarajevo), as war hotel 1, 112–18; design of 113, 114; as film setting 115–18; press/translation activities at 112–15
- Holocaust: language/translation and 7, 88, 89–92; in Lviv 17, 24, 27; Yiddish culture and 243
- Holzmeister, Clemenz 196
- Homer: *The Odyssey* 80–1
- Hong Kong 123–4, 127, 131; *see also* Chungking Mansions (Hong Kong)
- Hood, Raymond 105
- Hopi (people) 73
- Horniman Museum (London) 148
- hotel 6, 55–67; and difference *vs. in-difference* 56, 59–67; as place and “non-place” 6, 56, 67; writers’ affection for 55–6, 57, 58, 60, 63; *see also* Grand Budapest Hotel; grand hotel; Tokyo Park Hyatt; *entry below*
- hotel, war 112–18; famous examples of 112–13; *see also* Holiday Inn (Sarajevo)
- Hotel Bristol (Vienna) 6, 63
- Hotel Florida (Madrid) 112
- Howard, Ebenezer 189; *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* 194
- Hussein, Saddam 86
- Ibn Ezra, Moshe 45
- Ibn Gabirol, Shelomo 45

- Ibn Shoshan synagogue
(Toledo) 2, 43, 44–5, 46,
49, 50
- IG Farben (company) 91
- Ignatieff, Michael: on
Freud's concept of "small
differences" 102; on Mostar
Bridge 97–9
- Immigration Act (U.S., 1917)
227–8
- Indigenous languages, of
Canada: in residential
schools 150; on Toronto
street signs 153, 153;
see also entry below
- Indigenous languages, on
labels at National Gallery
of Canada 1, 4, 8, 144–53;
as aspirational translation
8, 150–1; background of
145–8; compared to other
museums 145–6, 148;
examples of 147, 151–2; as
harbinger of change 152–3;
languages included in 145;
process of 149–51
- International War Crimes
Tribunal (The Hague)
114–15
- Ireland, Japanese garden
in *see* Lafcadio Hearn
Japanese Gardens (Tramore,
Ireland)
- Ishtar Gate (Babylon) 82
- Jakobson, Roman 65, 73
- Janáček, Leoš 36
- Japanese garden *see* garden,
Japanese
- Jerome 48, 159–60; and
Latin Bible 161–2; *Letter
to Pammachius* 161; and
translation dispute with
Augustine 169–70, 171; *see
also entry below*
- Jerome, depictions of, in
his study 5–6, 159–65,
169–72, 174; in act of
translating 161–2, 163; by
Antonello da Messina 5,
159, 162, 164, 165–7, 172;
by Caravaggio 159, 172; by
Dürer 159, 169–70, 171;
by Ghirlandaio 159, 162;
by Giovanni di Paolo 162,
163; by La Tour 172; by
Taddeo di Bartolo 161–2
- Jews: in Brody 234–7, 244,
245–7; in Czernowitz 6,
178–9, 183–6; at Ellis Island
225, 226; Freud on 102;
Italian, at Auschwitz 7, 88,
89–92; in Lviv 1, 4, 16, 20–8;
in Toledo (Spain) 42–51
- Johansson, Scarlett 60
- Joyce, James 63, 201
- Kadare, Ismail: *The Three
Arched Bridge* 99
- Kalvak, Helen, artwork
of (National Gallery of
Canada) 151–2
- Kannada (language):
Ramanujan's work in 177,
180–2
- Karamanlidika, or
Karamanlica (Turkish written
in Greek characters) 218

- Kassabova, Kapka 234
 Katz, Inka 24
 Keitel, Harvey 60
 Kipling, Rudyard 190
 Kittner, Alfred 183
 Kobylanska, Olha 184,
 242–3
 Koizumi, Bon and Shoko 188
 Koizumi, Yakumo *see* Hearn,
 Lafcadio
 Kothari, Rita 101
 Kuck, Loraine: *One Hundred
 Kyoto Gardens* 192
 Kurspahic, Nermina 103
Kuruntokai (Tamil literary
 classic) 177
- Lacan, Jacques 201
 Lafcadio Hearn Japanese
 Gardens (Tramore, Ireland)
 1, 2; as replication/
 translation 188–9; *shakkei*
 (borrowed scenery) in 192–3
 La Guardia, Fiorello 225–6
 Lanzmann, Claude (dir.):
Shoah 90
 La Tour, Georges de 172
 Lauterpacht, Hersch 15, 24
 Lechner, Ödön 33
 Le Maguer, Sandrick 173
 Lemberg 3, 15, 16–17, 18,
 39, 236;
see also Lviv (Ukraine)
 Lemkin, Rafael 15
 Lessac, Michael: *Truth in
 Translation* 94–7, 95
 Letendre, Rita, artwork
 of (National Gallery of
 Canada) 152
- Levi, Primo: *Se Questo è un
 Uomo (If This Is a Man)* 7,
 88, 89–92
 Levin, Hanoch 174
 Lévy, Bernard-Henri 115–16
 library, as intersection of near
 and far 6, 177–86; and
 allegiance to older literary
 culture 6, 182–6; and
 discovery of native culture
 6, 177–8; intermediaries
 of knowledge in 181–2;
 “poisoned manuscript”
 in 180–1; *see also*
 Czernowitz; Ramanujan,
 A.K.; University of Chicago,
 library of
- Libuše, Princess (mythical
 founder of Prague): opera
 based on life of 35
 Licha, Emmanuel 112
Lost in Translation (Coppola
 film) 6, 56, 60–2, 66–7; *see
 also* Tokyo Park Hyatt
 Loti, Pierre 190
 Luiselli, Valeria: *Translation
 Spaces* 5
 Luther, Martin 85
 Lviv (Ukraine) 15–28, 50;
 and naming/renaming
 process 3, 4, 15–17; as
 polylingual 18, 18–20,
 23–8; Space of Synagogues
 in 1, 4, 16, 20–8, 21;
 Yiddish language/literature
 in 17, 18, 20, 22, 23,
 24–8; *see also* Space of
 Synagogues (Lviv); Vogel,
 Debora

- Lwów (Poland) 3, 15–16;
 Vogel as poet of 26, 26–8;
 Wittlin's depictions of
 18–20, 28; *see also* Lviv
 (Ukraine)
- Lyubas, Anastasiya 27–8
- Magris, Claudio 234; *Danube*
 39; *Far from Where?* 234–5
- Maimonides 48
- Manger, Itzik 183, 243
- Manguel, Alberto 179
- Mann, Thomas: *Death in*
Venice 59
- market 8, 123–32; as border
 zone 128; economy of 125;
 as foreign space/“counter-
 space” 127–8; as
 globalization hub 123,
 125–7; multilingualism
 of 123, 124–5, 126–7;
 translanguaging at 8, 125,
 130–1; *see also* Chungking
 Mansions (Hong Kong)
- Marranos (Jewish/Muslim
 converts to Christianity) 49
- Marseille: Cassin exhibition
 in 1–2; Sanitary Station
 of 224; Tatlin monument
 displayed in 9, 10
- Mary, annunciation to: Fra
 Angelico's painting of 167,
 168, 169
- Masaryk, Tomáš 38
- Masekela, Hugh 96
- Mathews, Gordon 123, 125,
 126–7, 128
- Meerbaum-Eisinger, Selma 183
- memory, architecture of *see*
 architecture of memory
- Métis (people) 152; language
 of 145, 152
- Mezzadra, Sandro 104, 128
- Michelino, Domenico di:
Dante and The Divine
Comedy 87
- Montefeltro, Federico da,
 studiolo of: at Gubbio
 165–6, 166; at Urbino
 165
- Montreal, student protests
 in 8, 134–40, 136; activist
 translation project of
 135–40; as “maple spring”
 134–5, 136–8
- monument 15–28; cemetery
 as 245–7, 246; and
 language of inscription(s)
 20–5, 28; polyphony of
 visitors to 50; tower as
 83, 86; *see also* Space of
 Synagogues (Lviv)
- Morin, Robert (dir.): *Yes Sir!*
Madame 204, 205, 206,
 208
- Moses 69–70, 71, 74–7;
 Rashi's commentary on
 75–6; speech impediment of
 74–5, 76; transformation of
 69, 76–7
- Mostar Bridge 1, 94–110,
 98; construction/history
 of 97–100; destruction/
 rebuilding of 6, 99, 100–1;
 differences “gathered”/
 reinforced by 6, 101–5,

- 109–10; and divided city
 100–1; kapia (stone bench)
 of 100; languages spoken/
 translated at 103–5; as
 symbol of postwar trauma/
 reconciliation 6, 94–5,
 99–101, 104; *Truth in
 Translation* staged at 1, 6,
 94–7, 95
- mountaintop 2, 70; and
 ascension/contact with
 higher being(s) 69–78, 253;
 journey of Moses to 69–70,
 71, 74–7; translator's
 doubts/fears about 69,
 75, 78; translator's
 transformation at 72, 73,
 76–8, 253; *see also Arrival*
 (Villeneuve film); Moses
- Mozart, Wolfgang
 Amadeus 39
- Mudejar architecture (Toledo)
 44–5, 51; modern revival of
 42, 43
- multilingualism 60, 201; of
 Auschwitz 7, 88, 89–92; of
 Chungking Mansions 124,
 126–7, 130–1; at “edge
 of empire” 241–2, 245–7;
 of Lviv 18, 18–20, 23–8;
 translation sites and 4–5
- Murray, Bill 60–1
- Murthy, U.R. Anantha:
Samskara 177
- museum: and Indigenous-
 language curation/
 labelling 1, 4, 8, 144–53;
see also National Gallery
 of Canada, Indigenous
 languages on labels of
 Museum of History (Ottawa)
 146
- naming/renaming: of cities
 3–4, 7–8, 15–17, 39,
 182–6, 241; of opera house
 38–40; of newly arrived
 immigrants 225; of streets
 17, 31, 39, 153, 153, 245;
 of synagogue 43, 46, 50
- National Gallery of Canada,
 Indigenous languages on
 labels of 1, 4, 8, 144–53;
 as aspirational translation
 8, 150–1; background of
 145–8; compared to other
 museums 145–6, 148;
 examples of 147, 151–2; as
 harbinger of change 152–3;
 languages included in 145;
 process of 149–51
- nationalism: and Cypriot
 rejection of linguistic purity
 9, 215, 216–19, 220,
 252–3; in Habsburg Empire
 30–40, 55, 117–18, 235,
 241–2; Roth's opposition to
 55, 241–2
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael 220
- Nazi regime, in Germany
 38–9, 91–2, 102, 196, 247;
see also Holocaust
- Nehru Bridge (Ahmedabad)
 101
- Nemes, Laszlo (dir.): *Son of
 Saul* 90

- Neretva River 94, 97, 106;
see also Mostar Bridge
- Neues Deutsches Theater
 (Prague) 1, 2, 32, 37,
 38–40; under Nazi/
 Communist regimes 38;
 performances at 35–6;
 postwar de-Germanization/
 renaming of 38–9; as
 Prague State Opera House
 32, 39–40
- Neumann, Angelo 36
- New Zealand: Indigenous
 museum curation in 145–6
- Niborski, Itskhok 173
- Nicosia (Cyprus): as divided
 city 101, 213, 215, 216,
 251–3; poetry translation
 workshop in 213–15, 214,
 219, 219–20; *see also*
 Cyprus
- Nimrod 87–8, 92
- Niranjana, Tejaswini: *Siting
 Translation* 5
- “no man’s land” 213–21;
 2, 213–21, 251–3; and
 divided city 101, 213,
 215, 216, 251–3; poetry
 translation workshop in
 213–15, 214, 219, 219–20;
see also Cyprus
- Nooteboom, Cees 55–6, 60,
 250, 254
- opera house 30–40;
 and linguistic/cultural
 duality 31–2, 35–6; and
 nationalism *vs.* imperialism
 32–3, 35; and postwar
 political upheaval 38–40;
see also Czech National
 Theatre (Prague); Neues
 Deutsches Theater
 (Prague)
- Øresund Bridge (Denmark/
 Sweden) 106, 106–10,
 251–2; frictionless
 communication enabled by
 6–7, 108–10
- Palacio del Rey San Pedro
 (Toledo) 51
- Palazzo Ducale (Gubbio),
 studiolo in 165–6, 166
- Palazzo Ducale (Urbino),
 studiolo in 165
- Palazzo Vecchio (Florence),
 studiolo in 165
- Papadakis, Yiannis: *Echoes
 from the Dead Zone*
 216–17, 218, 220
- Parc de la Villette (Paris) 141
- Pecková Černá, Martina 33
- Pharos, island of: translation
 of Bible on 161, 172–4
- Philip II, king of Spain 88
- Phillips, Ruth 145
- Philo of Alexandria 172
- Pico della Mirandola,
 Giovanni 161
- Pitsiulak, Tim, *Armoured
 Whale*: label for (National
 Gallery of Canada) 147
- place *vs.* “non-place” 6, 56,
 67; *see also* hotel
- Plantin, Christophe 88

- Plato: *Timaeus* 140–1
- Poets in No Man's Land*
(Stephanides/Nugent film)
213–15, 219–20; stills from
214, 219
- Prague, opera houses of
30–40; and city's linguistic
duality 31–2, 35–6,
38–40; *see also* Czech
National Theatre (Prague);
Neues Deutsches Theater
(Prague)
- Prague State Opera House
32, 39–40; *see also* Neues
Deutsches Theater (Prague)
- Princip, Gavrilko 115;
mythification of 117,
117–18
- Prokhasko, Yurko 27
- psychoanalysis, and crises of
language/self-translation
200–8; in Forest's account
of bilingual breakdown/
humiliation 207–8; in
Freud's case of Anna O.
200–1; in Morin's film
of bilingual breakdown
204, 205, 206, 208; in
Wolfson's translation as
self-protection 201, 202,
203–4, 208
- public space, vocabulary
of: in colonial cities 141;
Egyptian activist translation
of 140–2; Plato on 140–1;
see also Montreal, student
protests in; Tahrir Square
(Cairo)
- Quayson, Ato: *Oxford Street*
133–4
- Quebec 77–8; police comedy
set in 109; satires of
bilingualism in 204–8;
see also Montreal, student
protests in
- Radzivilov (Russia) 236;
see also Brody (Ukraine)
- Ramanujan, A.K. ("AKR"):
Annaya's Anthropology
178, 180–2; *Hymns for the
Drowning* 177; importance
of library to 6, 177–9, 179,
180–2, 186; *Poems of Love
and War* 177; *Speaking of
Siva* 177; translations from
Tamil and Kannada by 177,
180–2
- Rashi (medieval rabbi) 75–6
- replication, as translation
189; garden and 188–9,
191–4; garden city and
194–8
- Reschke, Franz 23
- Ritz Hotel (Barcelona) 55
- Roth, Joseph 6, 20, 233–47;
and affection for hotels
55–6, 57, 58, 60, 63; anti-
nationalist stance of 55,
241–2; *Flight Without End*
238; *The Radetzky March*
235, 239–42; *Stationmaster
Fallerayer* 238; *Weights and
Measures* 237–9, 253; *see
also* Brody (Ukraine)
- Roussel, Raymond 201

- Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor 33
- Ruskin, John: *The Stones of Venice* 30
- Russia, Habsburg border with *see* Brody (Ukraine)
- Russian 90, 184, 185, 203, 227; in Brody 243–5; in Lviv 16, 17, 20, 23
- Ryōan-ji garden (Tokyo) 192, 193, 193–4
- Saenz-Badillos, Angel 173
- Salcedo, Doris: *Shibboleth* (art installation) 222, 223, 224
- San Cristo de la Luz (former mosque, Toledo) 44
- Sands, Philippe 20, 28; *East West Street* 15–16, 24
- Santa Maria la Blanca (Toledo) 1, 43–5, 46; as former synagogue 2, 43, 44–5, 46, 49, 50; Mudejar architecture of 44–5, 46
- Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistics 73–4
- Sarajevo: assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 115, 117, 117–18, 240–1; language/translation challenges in 103, 113–15, 118; National Library in 113, 118; war hotel in 112–18; *see also* Holiday Inn (Sarajevo)
- saxa loquuntur* (“stones speak”) 30–1
- schizophrenia, and language breakdown: Forest on 207–8; Morin on 204, 205, 206, 208; Wolfson on 201, 202, 203–4, 208
- Schütte-Lihotzky, Margarete 195–6; Frankfurt kitchen designed by 196, 197; *see also* garden city, in Germany
- Sebald, W.G. 4
- Seidman, Naomi 200–1
- Selim, Samah 138
- Sennett, Richard 241
- Septuagint (translation of Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek) 161–2, 172–4
- Serbo-Croatian (language) 103
- Sheftel, Anna 135–6, 138–9; and *Translating the printemps érable* 135–40
- Shell, Marc 74–5, 76
- Shmuel HaNagid 45
- Sholem Aleichem 22
- Shteynberg, Eliezer 183
- Smetana, Bedřich: *Libuše* (opera) 35
- A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake* (film) 97
- Sontag, Susan 103, 113
- South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 94–7; *see also* Mostar Bridge; *Truth in Translation* (play)
- Soviet Union 17, 22–3; escape from 234; Tatlin’s monument to 9, 10

- Space of Synagogues (Lviv) 1, 4, 16, 20–8; as civic project 22–3; language as memory in 20–5, 28; quotations engraved on monuments in 21, 23–8; translations of absence in 23–5
- Spanish Civil War 112
- stabilitas loci* (“immobility of place”) 250–1
- Starovoyt, Iryna: “Landscapes of Guilt, Landscapes of Rescue” 22
- Stephanides, Stephanos, and Stephen Nugent (dir./prod.): *Poets in No Man’s Land* 213–15, 219–20; stills from 214, 219
- “step-mother tongue” (Yashin) 9, 215, 217–19, 220, 252–3
- Štraus, Ivan 113
- Strauss, Richard: *Elektra* 36; *Der Rosenkavalier* 36
- street 8, 133–42; activist translation and 135–42; Arab Spring demonstrations in (Cairo) 8, 134, 137, 138; student protests in (Montreal) 134–40; and vocabulary of public space 140–2; *see also* Montreal, student protests in; public space, vocabulary of
- studiolo, Renaissance 161, 165–7; in Palazzo Ducale (Gubbio) 165–6, 166
- study/reading room 159–74; in *The Annunciation* 167, 168, 169; of Jerome 5–6, 159–65, 169–72, 174; Renaissance studiolo as 161, 165–7, 166; in *Traduire* 5–6, 161, 172–4; *see also* Jerome, and entry following; translator’s study
- Šubert, František A. 36
- Suleiman I, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire 97
- surveillance/control: at Ellis Island 225, 226–7, 229, 231; *see also* border/transition zone; checkpoint; “edge of empire”; “no man’s land”
- Suzuki, Daisetsu 192
- synagogue(s): as converted into church 2, 43, 44–5, 46, 49, 50; former site of, as memorial 1, 4, 16, 20–8; ornamentation of 33
- Taddeo di Bartolo: painting of Jerome as translator 161–2
- Tagsold, Christian 192, 194
- Tahrir Square (Cairo): Arab Spring demonstrations in 8, 134, 137, 138
- Tamil (language/literature): classics of 177; Ramanujan’s translations from 177, 181–2

- Tanović, Danis (dir.): *Death in Sarajevo* 115–18; *No Man's Land* 115
- Tardy, Henri 151–2
- Tatlin, Vladimir: monument to Third International (proposed) 9, 10
- Taut, Bruno 192, 196
- threshold 8–9; garden 188–98; library 177–86; psychoanalyst's couch 200–8; study/reading room 159–74; *see also specific types of threshold*
- Tianxiu Building (Guangzhou) 127
- Tokyo: Ryōan-ji garden in 192, 193, 193–4
- Tokyo Park Hyatt (film setting): failure of translation in 61–2, 66–7; isolation/indifference in 6, 56, 60–2, 66–7; as “non-place” 6, 56, 60, 67
- Toledo (Spain) 42–51; in age of religious freedom 42–8; and forced conversions/expulsions of Jews and Muslims 42–4, 48–50; Hebrew poetry of 45–7; historic synagogue of 2, 43, 44–5, 46, 49, 50; medieval translators of 47–8; modern translators of 50–1; train station of 42, 43; *see also* Santa Maria la Blanca (Toledo)
- Tolkappiyam* (Tamil literary classic) 177
- Toronto: Anishinaabe street sign in 153, 153
- tower 80–92; as symbol of translation 7, 80–1, 82, 85, 86; *see also* Babel, Tower of
- Traduire* (Aviv film) 5–6, 161, 164, 172–4
- transit sites 8; bridge 94–110; hotel 55–67; mountaintop 69–78; tower 80–92; war hotel 112–18; *see also specific transit sites*
- translanguaging 8, 125, 130–1
- “translate” and “translation” (terms) 80–1, 160
- Translating the printemps érablé* 135–40; *see also* Montreal, student protests in
- translation: aspirational 8, 142, 150–1; authorship of 8, 145, 149–50; Babel story and 1–2, 7, 9–11, 80–92; and counter-translation 3–4, 7–8; as furthering *vs.* distancing 216–20; inside *vs.* outside/near *vs.* far of 4–7, 8–9, 22, 127–8, 162, 165, 177–86; naming/renaming and 3–4, 7–8, 15–17, 38–40, 182–6, 241; psychological breakdowns of 200–8; religious conversion as form of 2, 42–5, 46, 48–50;

- as transformative 72, 73, 76–8, 253; translanguaging and 8, 125, 130–1; and types of translation sites 7–9
- translation sites 1–11, 250–4; argument/confrontation at 4–5, 254; recollection/ repetition at 3–4, 254; *vs. stabilitas loci* 250–1; types of 7–9
- translator's study 159–74; Jerome as depicted in 5–6, 159–74; Renaissance studiolo and 161, 165–7, 166; in *Traduire* 5, 161, 172–4; views from windows of 162, 164, 165, 172–3, 174
- travel *see* transit sites
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Canada) 144–5
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (South Africa) 94–7; *see also* entry below
- Truth in Translation* (play) 96–7; on pain of translation process 95–7, 101, 104; on postwar trauma/ reconciliation 6, 94–5, 97, 101, 104; as staged at Mostar Bridge/other conflict zones 1, 6, 94–7, 95
- Tsim Sha Tsui (Hong Kong shopping area) 123
- Turkey: garden city in 194–6, 197, 198; translation as modernization in 194–5
- Turkish, as spoken/written in Cyprus 214, 216–19, 220; various forms of 218–19
- Ülken, Hilmi Ziya: *The Role of Translation During Ages of Reawakening* 194–5
- University of Chicago, library of 179, 180–2, 186; Ramanujan's discovery of Tamil classics in 6, 177–8
- Vancouver Museum of Anthropology 146
- Verdi, Giuseppe 33; *Otello* 36
- Villeneuve, Denis (dir.): *Arrival* 69–78; *Incendies* 78; language/translation, as themes of 77–8; *see also* *Arrival* (Villeneuve film)
- Vilnius (Lithuania) 3, 18, 27
- Viswanathan, Gauri 50
- Vogel, Debora 26, 26–8; poetry of, in *Space of Synagogues* 26–7; translation of works by 27–8
- Vulgate (Latin Bible) 161–2
- Wagner, Richard 33; *Lohengrin* 36; *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* 36; *Parsifal* 36
- war hotel 112–18; famous examples of 112–13; *see also* Holiday Inn (Sarajevo)
- Weidemann, Volker 57–8

- White Wolf, artwork of
(National Gallery of
Canada) 151
- Wilson, Emily 80
- Wittlin, Józef 18–20, 242,
243; *My Lwów* 19, 28; *Salt
of the Earth* 19–20
- Wittner, Viktor 183
- Wolf, Michaela 90
- Wolfson, Louis: *Le Schizo
et les langues* 201, 202,
203–4, 208
- Wollstonecraft, Mary: *A
Vindication of the Rights of
Woman* 200–1
- Wong Kar-wai (dir.):
Chungking Express 123,
128
- Wright, Frank Lloyd 192
- Yashin (Yaşın), Mehmet 215,
217–19, 220, 252–3
- Yehuda HaLevi 45
- Yiddish: in Auschwitz
89–91; in border areas/
transition zones 225, 226,
236, 242–3, 244, 245–7;
in Czernowitz 184, 243;
literature/scholarship in
22, 25, 26–8, 173, 242–3;
in Lviv 17, 18, 20, 22, 23,
24–8; Vogel's poetry in
26–8
- Young, James 25
- Yugoslavia 99; languages of
103; *see also* Mostar Bridge;
Sarajevo
- Zemlinsky, Alexander 38
“Zen garden” 192, 193,
193–4
- ziggurat: Etemenanki 82;
Tower of Babel as 81–2, 84;
of Ur (Iraq) 86
- Zornberg, Avivah 75
- Zuckerman, Rosa Roth:
library of 6, 178–9, 182–6
- Zumthor, Paul 86–7
- Zweig, Stefan 57, 58; *World
of Yesterday* 59–60