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Deconstruction and Philosophy in Translation: The Franco-German Connection

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In 1988 there was a conference in Heidelberg on the philosophical and political dimension of Heidegger's thought, with contributions from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. This article considers a number of interchanges between French and German philosophers in the late twentieth century, focusing on the theme of translation. Taking Derrida's intervention as a starting point, the article moves on to explore Victor Klemperer's analysis of the German language under Nazism, Derrida and Maurice Blanchot as readers of Heidegger, Paul de Man and Derrida's interpretations of Walter Benjamin's 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', in the context of the post-war French reception of German thought. The article concludes with a discussion of 'untranslatability', as developed by the Greek philologist and philosopher, Barbara Cassin, in her Dictionary of Untranslatables *(2014), taking the history of the concept and word 'subject' as a way of reflecting on Europe's identity, past, present and future.*

Keywords: Derrida, Gadamer, Heidegger, Benjamin, Barbara Cassin, Deconstruction, Philosophy in translation, Europe.

One of the more intriguing but relatively neglected events in the recent history of Franco-German philosophical relations took place in 1988 at a conference in Heidelberg — held entirely in French — on Heidegger, more precisely, on 'la portée philosophique et politique de sa pensée' (the philosophical and political dimension of his thought). This gathering brought together three of Heidegger's most attentive readers and commentators: Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. It followed on from an earlier conference in Paris in 1981 which brought Gadamer and Derrida face to face for the first time, at which Gadamer spoke in German. That meeting highlighted the lines of difference between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as it applies to language and aesthetics,

deeply influenced by the dialectical approach he had learned from Heidegger, and Derrida's deconstructive critique of the 'logocentrism' which for him was at the heart of the entire Western metaphysical tradition, and from which he did not exempt Heidegger.[1] In contrast, Gadamer, who had admired Derrida's reading of Husserl in *Voice and Phenomenon*, argued that Heidegger's thought was important precisely because it identified logocentrism as 'le destin de l'Occident' (the West's destiny).[2] Gadamer's own hermeneutic method emphasized the importance of dialogue, communication, and shared understanding. As he puts it, 'l'herméneutique qui fonde ma réflexion insiste sur la communication et s'intéresse moins aux sous-entendus des mots et du discours' (the hermeneutics which is the basis of my reflection emphasizes communication, and is less interested in the hidden meanings of words and discourse, *CH*, 47). As in the 1981 conference in Paris, it was evident that any attempt to arrange a critical dialogue 'between' hermeneutics and deconstruction would always run up against a fundamentally different approach to the place that language and communication have in contemporary philosophy, aesthetics, and politics, and that this would be crystallized in Gadamer's and Derrida's competing readings of Heidegger.[3]

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[1] Terry Eagleton defines 'logocentric' as the belief 'that discourses can yield us immediate access to the full truth and presence of things.' Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 164.

[2] Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La Conférence de Heidelberg (1988). Heidegger: Portée Philosophique et politique de sa pensée*, présentation de Mireille Caille-Gruber, note de Jean-Luc Nancy (Abbaye d'Ardenne: Lignes/IMEC, 2014), p. 47. Subsquently abbreviated to *CH*, with page references immediately following quotation in parentheses.

[3] For an interesting reflection on their two 'encounters' in 1981 and 1988, see Gadamer's interview with Carsten Dutt in *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. and trans. by Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 61–77. Gadamer states bluntly that 'Derrida's incapacity for dialogue was once again manifest. Dialogue is not his strength' (p. 62). I have retained Derrida's and Gadamer's French original

The 1988 event was held in the same amphitheatre of the University of Heidelberg where Heidegger had delivered a lecture on 'Die Rolle der Universität im neuen Reich' in 1933, echoing what would become his infamous 'Rektoratsrede' as newly appointed Rector of the University of Freiburg. The 1988 debate was held a year after the publication of Victor Farias's controversial book on Heidegger's links with National Socialism, *Heidegger et le nazisme*.[4] There was also controversy about Paul de Man and Maurice Blanchot, whose work was influenced by Heideggerian thought, and whose early anti-Semitic journalism was seen by many to discredit their later writings.[5] The gathering of 1988 was a notable instance in the

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(with my English translation) from the 1988 conference in order to respect Gadamer's own set of ground rules in organizing the event, which is that the language of presentation and debate should be French, in spite of the confessed limitations of his own French. This was a conscious act of reciprocal linguistic hospitality, since in the previous meeting at the Goethe Institute in Paris, Gadamer spoke in German.

[4] Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Paris: Verdier, 1987). English edition: *Heidegger and Nazism*, ed. by Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore, trans. by Paul Burrell and Gabriel Ricci (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

[5] Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe have each written at length on Heidegger. See Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1987). English translation by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), in which he allies Heidegger's political crisis to a crisis 'of the mind' (*l'esprit*), a theme he takes up in *L'autre cap* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1991). English: *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992). For Lacoue-Labarthe, see *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. by Chris Turner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Lacoue-Labarthe and his collaborator Jean-Luc Nancy were also both importers of German idealist philosophy into French theory. The literature on Paul de Man and Maurice Blanchot is too extensive to go into here, but see, for example, *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. by Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), and *Lignes 43*, 'Les vies politiques de Maurice Blanchot 1930–1993' (2014).

French 'translation' and reception of German thought which has shaped contemporary European philosophy since World War II. This article takes the encounter between Gadamer and Derrida as the point of departure for consideration of language and translation. It examines Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger as an example, and extension, of the 'untranslatables' project developed by the Greek philologist and philosopher, Barbara Cassin, in her *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (2004), translated into English recently as the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014).[6] Cassin is by no means an incidental character in this sweeping narrative, since as a student in her early twenties she was invited to participate in one of Heidegger's small, private seminars hosted by the French poet René Char, in Le Thor, in the south of France in 1969.[7] As well as being an authoritative commentator of Greek philosophy, and in particular the Sophists, it was Cassin's subsequent work as a translator of Hannah Arendt (a student of Heidegger) into French which drew her to the importance of translation, and the inexhaustibly productive energy of what she termed 'the untranslatable', within the history of European philosophy. This article concludes with a look at Cassin's discussion of the word 'Subject', and arguing that the question of the European subject as a philosophical subject has implications for how we understand the European project in general.

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[6] *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. xvii. Original French text: Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil, 2004). Further references to the English edition of the *Vocabulaire* will appear in the text abbreviated as *DU*.

[7] For a comprehensive account of Heidegger's influence on post-war French intellectual thought, see Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2015). See also David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (eds.), *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008).

At the 1988 Heidelberg conference, Gadamer, Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe, each with differing emphases, observed the need to confront squarely Heidegger's unquestionable relationship with National Socialism, and the nature of his anti-Semitism, but at the same time they also stressed the need to engage with the intellectual challenge that Heidegger's philosophical thinking represents. Derrida spends a considerable amount of time during the discussion nuancing, one might even say finessing, Gadamer's account of Heidegger's 'deconstructive' method, in particular around the notion of *logos*, and logocentrism, to which I will return. Gadamer takes Heidegger's methodologically systematic critique, what he terms *Abbau* or *Destruktion*, of Kantian transcendental idealism, and his return to the hidden truth of Greek Pre-Socratic philosophy, as being consistent with an affirmation of *logos*. A considerable part of the seminar is spent trying to suggest that this is not fundamentally dissimilar from Derrida's deconstructive approach. Derrida is, as ever, vigilant about the dangers of resolving difference via hermeneutic dialogue. One of the points he makes, in response to Farias's book, and the hostile contemporary reactions to its revelations about Heidegger's political sympathies, is the risk of falling into precisely the kind of reductive, totalising, not to mention totalitarian, thinking which it claims to discredit. As he says: 'Je soutiens que, dans un champ de problèmes aussi graves, tout geste qui procède par amalgame, totalisation précipitée, court-circuit d'argumentation, simplification d'énoncés, etc., est un geste politiquement très grave qui rappelle, selon des formules de dénégation qui mériteraient le détour de l'analyse, cela même contre quoi nous sommes censés oeuvrer' (I would maintain that, when we are dealing with such serious problems, any gesture which develops through a process of amalgamation, or hurried totalisation, or by short-circuiting arguments, or simplifying statements, and so on, is a very serious political gesture that echoes, using certain formulations of denial which it would be worth taking the time to analyse in greater detail, the thing itself against which we are supposedly working, *CH*, 58).

Derrida takes a similar tack in a text that comes a few years after the Heidelberg conference, *L'autre cap* (*The Other Heading*), first published in French in 1991, in response to the seismic shifts in Europe taking place in relation to the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Amidst the political discussions about a 'new Europe', Derrida argues that any opening up of Europe and its identity, and any discussion of old and new orders, always runs the risk of returning to what is in fact a very old rhetoric of 'the new Europe', one which was of course appropriated most brutally and uncompromisingly by the Nazi party in the 1930s, and which clearly had a powerful fascination for many other nations across Europe. Indeed, the questions Derrida poses at this point in European history ring with a terrible prescience as Europe again, today, is in the grip of perhaps an even more profound identity crisis, and uncertain future: 'Is there a completely new "today" of Europe, a "today" whose novelty would not resemble — especially not — what was called by another well-known program, and one of the most sinister , a "New Europe"? […] beyond all of the exhausted programs of *Eurocentrism* and *Anti-Eurocentrism*, these exhausting yet unforgettable programs?'[8] For Derrida, the question of Heidegger's political responsibility becomes a broader question of intellectual responsibility, and the meaning of 'responsibility' itself, a theme he will also develop at length in his own 'response' to the Paul de Man affair.[9]

Unlike Gadamer, Derrida was fascinated by the hidden meanings of words, and the effects on philosophical thinking of intralingual and interlingual translation. *The Other Heading* discusses Paul Valéry's meditations on Europe's intellectual crisis between the wars, and the threat this posed to its status as the cultural capital of the world. Derrida advances his argument not by a process of hermeneutic dialectics, but through a subtle series of plays on the polysemy of 'capital', and its associated terms (cape, captain, *caput* and so on,

[8] Derrida, *L'autre cap*, p. 18; *The Other Heading*, p. 12.

[9] Jacques Derrida, 'Like the Sound of a Shell Deep Within the Sea: Paul de Man's War', trans. by Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), 590–652.

for which terms revolving around head, heading, and so on in English generate a good but not quite equivalent semantic family). Derrida is turning hermeneutic method on its head here, reversing the direction or priority between meaning and language. The question of Europe and its future could be formulated as a question of the possibility or impossibility of translation itself; indeed, the notion of idioms, national or otherwise, and of translation is what he terms an ‘enjeu critique’ (‘what is critically at stake’). As Derrida puts it:

> The word ‘capital’ is a Latin word. The semantic accumulation that we are now highlighting organizes a polysemy around the central reserve, itself a capital reserve, or an idiom. By giving cause to remark upon this language […] we are focusing attention upon the critical stakes: the question of idioms and translation. What philosophy of translation will dominate in Europe? In a Europe that from now on should avoid both the nationalistic tensions of linguistic difference and the violent homogenization of languages through the neutrality of a translating medium that would claim to be transparent, metalinguistic, and universal? [10]

This is the point of departure for Barbara Cassin’s *Untranslatables* project, which places translation at the heart of a new way of thinking and reflecting on European philosophy, in order to navigate what she identifies as the twin pitfalls of articulating a history of philosophical language in translation: on the one hand, logical universalism (in the analytic tradition) which ignores languages, and on the other, the inherent essentialism of linguistic or philosophical nationalism. The *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*: *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* was originally published in French in 2004 by Robert/Editions du Seuil, as an encyclopaedic dictionary of close to four hundred philosophical, literary, and political terms.

[10] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 58.

The entries for each term describe its origins and meanings, its translations into other languages, and the history and context of its usages through illustrative commentary of well-known philosophical and literary texts. The terms — such as *Dasein* (German), *logos* (Greek), *pravda* (Russian), *saudade* (Portuguese), or *stato* (Italian) — come from over a dozen languages, spanning the classical, medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary periods, and the entries are written by more than one hundred and fifty European philosophers and scholars. These are all terms which have had a profound influence on thinking across the humanities. The *Vocabulaire* is thus a volume unlike any other in the history of philosophy, in that it considers concepts not just as words, but words that enter into all sorts of problematic exchanges with other words in other languages, in a kind of vast multilingual performance that Cassin calls 'philosopher en langues' ('philosophising in languages', with the accent emphatically on the plural). The dictionary also includes historical surveys of the major modern European languages: English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Cassin herself provides a useful shorthand definition of 'untranslatable' in her preface:

> To speak of *untranslatables* in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating [*l'intraduisible, c'est plutôt ce qu'on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire*]. But this indicates that their translation, into one language or another, creates a problem, to the extent of sometimes generating a neologism or imposing a new meaning on an old word. (*DU*, xvii)

Clearly, of course, translation takes place, and has taken place, often very successfully, as shown by the many linguistic histories that are narrated with such extraordinary philological erudition and attention to detail, but also by the fact that the *Vocabulaire* itself is now being gradually translated into a dozen other language editions, most notably the 2014 Anglo-American one published by Princeton University Press as the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. The *Dictionary*, and its many translations, are thus a very deliberate counter-gesture to the intellectual impoverishment of 'violent homogenisation', whether through linguistic nationalism, or the suppression of linguistic difference, the effects of which she traces in many contexts.

Take an apparently harmless word like 'organization', for example. This is one of the terms analysed by Victor Klemperer in *LTI: Lingua Tertii Imperii*.[11] Klemperer, a professor of French literature at the University of Dresden who was removed from his post in 1935, kept a clandestine journal that helped him to live between 1933 and 1945. Like Arendt and Celan, he was acutely aware of the way in which Nazism infiltrated and poisoned the German language. As he says: 'Worte können sein wie winzige Arsendosen: sie werden unbemerkt verschluckt, sie scheinen keine Wirkung zu tun, und nach einiger Zeit ist die Giftwirkung doch da' (LTI, 24). This is why, according to Klemperer: 'Man sollte viele Worte des nazistischen Sprachgebrauchs für lange Zeit, und einige für immer, ins Massengrab legen' (LTI, 25). For Klemperer, 'organisieren' was one of those words.

In chapter 17 of his book, 'System und Organisation,' Klemperer explains why Nazism preferred 'Organisation' to 'System':

[11] Victor Klemperer, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1947) (Frankfurt a.M.: Röderberg, 1975). Subsequent references are abbreviated to LTI and immediately follow quotations in parentheses.

> Ein System ist etwas 'Zusammengestelltes', eine Konstruktion, ein Bau, den Hände und Werkzeuge nach Anordnung des Verstandes ausführen. […] Wenn aber 'System' verpönt ist, wie nennt sich dann das Regierungssystem der Nazis selber? Denn ein System haben doch auch sie und sind ja stolz darauf, daß absolut jede Lebensäußerung und -situation von diesem Netz erfast wird; weswegen denn 'Totalität' zu den Grundpfeilern der LTI gehört.
> Sie haben kein System, sie haben eine Organisation, sie systematisieren nicht mit dem Verstande, sie lauschen dem Organischen seine Geheimnisse ab. (LTI, 119–20)

Klemperer shows, with diminishing powers of resistance, how the allusion of linguistic naturalization gradually takes hold:

> Schon 1936 sagte mir ein junger Autoschlosser, der ganz allein mit einer kniffligen Notreparatur an meinem Vergaser zu Rande gekommen war: 'Habe ich das nicht fein organisiert?' [...] 'organisieren' war ein gutartiges, überall in Schwang befindliches Wort, war die selbstverständliche Bezeichnung eines selbstverständlich gewordenen Tuns... Ich schreibe nun schon eine ganze Weile: es war... es war. Aber wer hat denn gestern erst gesagt: 'Ich muß mir ein bißchen Tabak organisieren?' Ich fürchte, das bin ich selber gewesen. (LTI, 123–24).

The point Cassin is making, using Klemperer as an example, is the ease with which ideologically loaded meanings can quickly become naturalized, not to say nationalized. One might assume that philosophy could function as a meta-physical and meta-temporal guarantor and guardian of meaning, and that there are core terms which have 'stood the test of time', despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that such consensually agreed meanings have been

hard-fought and hard-won over the last few centuries. Take the term ‘Subject’, which not surprisingly produces a lengthy entry in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (*DU*, 1069–90). Like many of the longer entries in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, it is the work of several hands, or minds: Etienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin, and Alain de Libera, with Cassin covering the Greek period. As she explains, in ancient Greece, where the story begins, there was no single term corresponding to the three semantic fields covered by *sujet* in French (or subject in English). The Greek word *hupokeimenon* was originally, in Aristotelian philosophy, both a physical subject (whether in the classical distinction between substance/essence and accident, or between matter and form) as well as the logical subject, understood as the support of predicates, that which is predicable (and this is equally true of logical and well as grammatical propositions). *Hupokeimenon* thus conveys the sense of a material subject, and a logical subject. Philosophically, the question of the essence of truth implies the idea of a subject, understood as a kind of unchanging support, basis, foundation, or *suppositum* (to which *hupokeimenon* is closely linked). The determining moment in the emergence of modern philosophical, political, and psychological concepts of the subject and subjectivity comes with the translation of *hypokeimenon* into Latin, as *subjectum*. As those familiar with Heidegger’s philosophy know, this translation from Greek to Latin is a crucial moment, indeed the event, in his rethinking of the Western metaphysical tradition. According to his analysis in his 1942–1943 *Parmenides* lectures, the Latinisation of Greek thinking is the event in which ‘the essence of truth originally assigns itself, and transmits itself, to beings’, and involves a fundamental shift from one régime of signification to another. The weightiest burden of proof in Heidegger’s account falls on the translation of *aletheia* as *veritas* (and its associated links to a whole range of other philosophical terms, such as *ratio*, and *adaequatio*).[12]

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz

According to Heidegger, there is a connection between the Latinisation of Greek thinking, and *imperium*.[13] For him this event of translation precedes shapes the new order. The Latinisation of Greek opens the way for imperial expansion, along with its political self-justification in all its forms, from Christianity onwards.[14] So the *imperium* folded within subjection in a sense accompanies the transformation of *aletheia* into *veritas*, of *hupokeimenon* into *subjectum*, and for Heidegger the founding historical, epochal event is a forgetting of being, which 'seals' henceforth the question of truth as one of correctness (as opposed to falseness), or *adaequatio*. At the same time it initiates the covering over of this event by Western philosophers.

There are then, as Cassin, Balibar, and Libera note, two related etymological strands, which become confused and intertwined over time: that of subject as subjectivity (derived from *subjectum* in Latin, and which sets itself against the object and objectivity); and that of subject implying an idea of subjugation or dependency (derived from *subjectus* or *subditus* in Latin: *subjection*, *sujétion*, or *assujetissement*). This latter strand opens up an entire juridical and political lineage, starting with Imperial and Christian Rome, which is extended through to the French Revolution, once the question of the subject is transformed politically into the question of citizenship. For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, Descartes inaugurates the modern philosophical concept of the subject (that is, the moment when the subject becomes an active, thinking subject, insofar as it perceives itself as subject), and the Cartesian 'je pense, donc je suis' — which Heidegger rephrases as 'I think myself thinking', *cogito me*

(Bloomington, NI: University of Indiana Press, 2009), p. 41.

[13] See Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 40: 'The realm of essence decisive for the development of the Latin *falsum* is the one of the *imperium* and of the "imperial"'.

[14] The religious aspect is essential. Derrida in *Foi et Savoir* coins the term 'mondialatinisation' (translated as 'globalatinisation') to underline the inseparability of Christianity and Western imperial and epistemic dominance. See *Foi et savoir* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 48.

cogitare — is the invention of the transcendental subject. Heidegger thinks that Kant's emphasis on Descartes, and the Cartesian *cogito* in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, subsequently determines Western philosophical thinking of the subject as a question of 'self-constitution'. From this point on the two genealogies of the subject (the logico-grammatical one, in which ontology and transcendental metaphysics are rooted, and the juridical, political, and theological one, that is *subjectum* and *subjectus*), are in effect, as Cassin, Balibar and Libera suggest, pulled together and become inseparable. Kant's thought thus prefigures not only the Hegelian dialectics of self-consciousness, but also most modern concepts of subjectivity, ego psychology, and all of their subsequent transformations. It also means that the question of the subject is marked by the tension between theories of subjectivity (*subjectum*), and theories of subjection (*subjectus*), through what Cassin, Balibar and Libera term a 'historial pun' (*DU*, 1087), an unintentional linguistic confusion that is not so much historical as historial, or epochal.

However one takes Kant's and then Heidegger's assigning such an inaugural role to Descartes in the history of the modern subject (and as the *Vocabulaire* says it is 'contestable'), there is an unquestionably French dimension to this history, which it assumes with Rousseau, who plays a key role, and who becomes the point of departure for much of the critical reflection on the subject in the twentieth century. The most astonishing fact, or event, though, is that this happens as a linguistic play on words. History in effect becomes subjected to etymology, but then much of the force of Heidegger's philosophy comes precisely from the etymological privilege and poetic power it accords to the German language. This turn to etymologism does not go unnoticed by Maurice Blanchot, who follows

through its philosophical implications in *The Writing of the Disaster*.[15] Blanchot wonders what is at stake in Heidegger's etymological return to pre-Socratic Greek philosophy. He describes the faith placed in etymologism as an epistemological method more generally as follows: 'Learned etymology is very, or not very different from so-called popular etymologies – etymologies by affinity and no longer solely by filiation. It is a statistically probable science, dependent not only upon philological research that is never complete, but also upon the particular tropes of language that at certain periods come to dominate implicitly' (*WD*, 93–94). A little later on, commenting at length on the translation of *logos* as *a-letheia* in Heidegger's philosophy, Blanchot describes one other danger of etymology, which is that it imposes 'a certain conception of history' (*WD*, 97). As he goes on to say: 'This conception is far from clear: the necessity of some provenance, of successive continuity, the logic of homogeneity, the revelation of sheer chance as destiny' (*WD*, 97). One of the core terms for Heidegger in his philosophical etymologism, as Blanchot points out, and indeed another major term in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, is of course *logos*.

This is also one of the main early targets and objects of Derrida's reading of Heidegger in *Of Grammatology*.[16] One might say that Derrida was wrestling with a similar question to the one the authors of the history of *logos* in translation had to confront (*DU*, 581–93), namely: is it possible to step back from, or step outside, the history of *logos*, and can one do so without repeatedly (and inevitably) falling back into the logocentrism which

[15] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 94. Subsequently abbreviated to *WD*, with page references immediately following quotation.

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, revised trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). Originally published in French as *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967).

has been the unquestioned foundation of Western metaphysics?[17] Derrida's response to this question was clearly profoundly indebted to Heidegger's engagement with Husserlian phenomenology, and as Derrida himself pointed out, *Of Grammatology* was indissociable from his own early reading of Husserl. In this respect, *Of Grammatology* was perhaps the key text of the post-war reception of Heidegger in France, and offered 'grammatology' as the 'science of writing' that would tease apart the conceptual structures and underlying logocentric assumptions of all the other '-ologies' Derrida brings into play: metaphysical ontology, medieval theology, — as well as his neologism connoting their common ground, 'metaphysico-theology' — anthropology, semiology, and historical genealogy. Derrida argues that each of these various epistemologies belong to a genealogical chain that is traceable back to *logos*. He regards the semiological distinction between signified and signifier, as well as the presumed priority of the former over the latter, as the most recent manifestation and consolidation of such assumptions. In *Of Grammatology* he deconstructs the claims upon which these epistemological systems are founded, by showing how each system of knowledge cannot avoid having at its very origin the very term it has located as a secondary, supplemental derivation (e.g., writing) of that origin (e.g., voice). If Heidegger takes us back to *logos* through a similar historical genealogy of Western metaphysics, his poeticizing method relies on an intimate attention to etymology, understood as the story of the slow erosion over time of its original meaning. Heidegger's intent is not, of course, to give us a more 'truthful' account of *logos*, but rather to rethink the very idea of 'truth' in its historical alignment with *logos*, thereby bringing to light, or uncovering the truth (*a-letheia*) of the Being of phenomenology.

[17] This is another multiply authored entry, with Barbara Cassin again lead author, in collaboration with Clara Auvray-Assayas, Frédérique Ildefonse, Jean Lallot, Sandra Laugier, and Sophie Roesch.

One might object that Derrida's own etymological tracing of *logos* as 'presence' and 'speech' is itself a semantic homogenization, indeed totalization. As the entry *logos* in the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* tells us, it is in fact an extraordinarily polysemic and 'disseminated' term: a non-exhaustive list of meanings would include 'discourse', 'language', 'speech', 'rationality', 'reason', 'reasoning', 'intelligence', 'foundation', 'principle', 'proportion', 'count', 'account', 'recount', 'thesis', 'tell', 'tale', 'tally', 'argument', 'explanation', 'statement', 'proposition', 'phrase', 'definition' (*DU*, 581). This in itself does not of course invalidate Heidegger's ontological emphasis, or Derrida's point that *logos* is associated with speech, but rather lends weight to their respective arguments. In both cases, the point they are making is that the gathering together (one of the core meanings of the Greek *legein* from which *logos* is derived) into one term of this infinitely scattered series of meanings is the very operation of *logos*. In this sense, the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, and its confrontation of philosophy with untranslatability, could be read as a 'Derridean project' to the extent that his deconstructive reworking of Heidegger's ontological rethinking of phenomenology, his re-invention of grammatology as a 'writing science' (along with all the other neologisms he will later invent) is perhaps the first attempt at a philosophy that radically and insistently challenges the assumed priority of conceptual architectures and networks of meaning over the effects of language (both intralinguistic and interlingual).

This rather complex intellectual history converges, perhaps unsurprisingly, on the figure of Walter Benjamin, whose celebrated translations of the *Tableaux Parisiens* section of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* led to his even more celebrated essay on translation, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', which originally served as an introduction to this translation. Derrida wrote at length on this essay,[18] but I would like to turn to a contemporary of Derrida,

[18] Jacques Derrida, *Des Tours de Babel*, trans. by Joseph Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, ed. by Joseph Graham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 165–

Paul de Man, and his reading of Benjamin's text, originally delivered as a lecture at Cornell University in 1983, which at the same time completes something of a circle back to Gadamer.[19] The lecture was the last in a series of six he delivered at Cornell, in which he read key texts by a number of the important German philosophers — notably Kant, Hegel, and Schiller — and tested the overt conceptual claims made by these philosophers against what the texts revealed through rhetorical close reading. De Man starts his discussion of Benjamin with a reference to Gadamer's articulation of those aspects of the subject of modernity which set it apart from the transcendental subject of German idealism. In a series of essays, *Aspekte der Modernität*, published originally in 1960, and in particular one article, 'Die philosophischen Grundlagen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts,' Gadamer says that our modernity is in essence characterized by a critique of the subject and subjectivity in its various forms, and the means whereby this has been accomplished has taken the form of going beyond three different types of 'naiveté'. Firstly what Gadamer terms *Naivität des Setzens*, insofar as our modern subject, given the various ways in which it has been decentered by advances in understanding in psychoanalysis, anthropology, phenomenology, the neurosciences, and so on, is no longer able to fully posit (*setzen*) and dominate its own discourse, or the objective world.[20] In Gadamer's terms, what is lost is this decentering, and the blindness of the subject to its own discourse, can be recovered by the dialogical process that is the hermeneutic circle. Secondly, what Gadamer calls *Naivität der Reflexion*: we now have a much greater understanding of the historicity of understanding, which will lead in turn to a fully developed Aesthetics of Reception by theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss. And

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248. Jacques Derrida, 'What is a "Relevant" Translation?', trans. by Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (2001), pp. 174–200.

[19] Paul de Man, 'On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 73–105.

[20] de Man, 'On Walter Benjamin', p. 75.

finally, *Naivität des Begriffs*: modernity no longer thinks of conceptual and ordinary language as separable, or rather the advance that modernity has made over a Hegelian spiritualizing dialectical negation is that philosophy is increasingly focused on language, communication, and the place of the reader within the hermeneutic circle.

This presentation of Gadamer's understanding of philosophical modernity initially provides de Man with an enlightened contrast to Benjamin's apparently naïve, messianic, regressive language in his discussion of the place of translation and the translator in relation to the original work of art. This is nowhere more evident than in the famous opening lines of Benjamin's text, where the cryptic dismissal of the reader, or receiver, could not be further from Gadamer's own insistence on the central role of the reader in any philosophical or literary hermeneutics:

> Nirgends erweist sich einem Kunstwerk oder einer Kunstform gegenüber die Rücksicht auf den Aufnehmenden für deren Erkenntnis fruchtbar. Nicht genug, daß jede Beziehung auf ein bestimmtes Publikum oder dessen Repräsentanten vom Wege abführt, ist sogar der Begriff eines 'idealen' Aufnehmenden in allen kunsttheoretischen Erörterungen vom Übel, weil diese lediglich gehalten sind, Dasein und Wesen des Menschen überhaupt vorauszusetzen. So setzt auch die Kunst selbst dessen leibliches und geistiges Wesen voraus – seine Aufmerksamkeit aber in keinem ihrer Werke. Denn kein Gedicht gilt dem Leser, kein Bild dem Beschauer, keine Symphonie der Hörerschaft.[21]

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[21] Walter Benjamin, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' (1923), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972–1989), IV.1, 9.

Paul de Man argues that Benjamin understands with great lucidity how radically disruptive translation is to hermeneutic assumptions about language and communication, and indeed to the received understanding of the priority of original over translation in a literary context. The key tension de Man turns to in order to exemplify this in Benjamin's text is the distinction he makes between 'das Gemeinte' (or *le vouloir-dire*, in French), that is, what is meant or intended) and the 'Art des Meinens' (*le dire*) or the linguistic or rhetorical means by which one conveys that intention.[22] More than simply a statement about the arbitrary nature of the signifier over against the signified, what it reveals is a radical incompatibility between the way language functions, independently of human intention (this is de Man's reading of the opening lines of Benjamin's essay quoted earlier), and the way a subject (whether phenomenological, transcendental, or political) can articulate that meaning or intention in linguistic terms, a disjunction which could be formulated, as he says, 'between the hermeneutics and the poetics of literature'.[23] As de Man puts it:

> When you do hermeneutics, you are concerned with the meaning of the work; when you do poetics, you are concerned with the stylistics or with the description of the way in which a work means. The question is whether these two are complementary, whether you can cover the full work by doing hermeneutics and poetics at the same time. The experience of trying to do this shows that it is not the case. When one tries to achieve this complementarity, the poetics always drops out, and what one always does is hermeneutics. One is so attracted by problems of meaning that it is impossible to do hermeneutics and poetics at the same time. From the moment you start to get involved with problems of meaning, as I unfortunately tend to do, forget about the

[22] de Man, 'On Walter Benjamin', p. 86.

[23] de Man, 'On Walter Benjamin', p. 88.

> poetics. The two are not complementary, the two may be mutually exclusive in a certain way, and that is part of the problem which Benjamin states, a purely linguistic problem.[24]

De Man articulates this incompatibility elsewhere in a number of different ways (for example, the tension between syntax and semantics, or between rhetoric as trope and rhetoric as persuasion).[25] His reading of Gadamer's hermeneutics would thus echo Derrida's own, to take us back to the Heidelberg conference we began with, and exemplifies the difference between the two different modes of critical reading, hermeneutics and deconstruction. It is clearer now why the two are perhaps inevitably destined to be at odds, and are perhaps yet another in a series of inherently incompatible tensions which de Man teases out in his discussion of Benjamin, and in his other works. What translation does, as Benjamin understood, is to lay bare the these tensions, precisely because language acts independently of human intention, and yet these unintended interlingual effects, as we have seen with the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, can have very real political and philosophical consequences.

It also provides a broader context to think about the place of translation within modern Europe. One might say that the subject of philosophical modernity is inextricably bound up with the history and self-constitution of Europe as such, that is, not only the Enlightenment and democratic ideals which have shaped Europe's political modernity, but also Europe as a subject, in its capacity to think and represent itself. *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* began life in its French original — *Dictionnaire européen des philosophies* — as a project whose centre of gravity was, for evident reasons, European. It was also from

[24] de Man, 'On Walter Benjamin', p. 88.

[25] The most fully developed examples of de Man's rhetorically-inflected deconstructive readings are to be found in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

the outset a profoundly political project, exploring the foundational origins of political philosophy in the city-state in Ancient Greece, and including many entries which address this explicitly, for example, 'Polis', 'Politics', 'Civilization', 'Civil Rights', 'Community', 'Government', 'Lex', 'Liberty', 'Rule of Law', 'People', 'Race', 'Nation', Stato'. It is also political because of the proliferating connections now emerging out of the translation of the *Dictionary* into other languages. The effect of this is to shift the focus away from Europe, or from Europe as a kind of philosophical headland, as Derrida might say, towards postcolonial perspectives, and more importantly, non-European languages, This can be seen in the case of the Arabic edition, in which Ali Benmakhlouf, the editor, maintains an explicit focus on political terms such as 'People', 'Law' and 'State', and challenges contemporary shallow understandings of terms such as 'Sharia', as a means to professionalize the act of translation itself in the Arab world. As Cassin points out, the most intense historical pressure points in terms of the relationship of politics to language occur, not surprisingly, during times of political upheaval and trauma, of which she provides a number of poignant examples, but the need for attention to translation, for this very reason, has never been more urgent than it is today.[26] Derrida says much the same in *The Other Headland* in the early 1990s, another 'today' (recalling Valéry's 'today' of 1939, itself echoing other resonant 'todays' in European philosophy and culture of the past), in the process challenging the self-evidence by which Europe claims its own philosophical and political identity. This is not in any sense to be confused with contemporary forms of anti-Europeanism or Euroscepticism, since Derrida's argument, entirely consonant with the logic of the 'Untranslatables' project, is that to think Europe — in the past, present, and future — requires a double affirmation of Europe

[26] See Barbara Cassin, 'Entre' in *Eloge de la traduction: compliquer l'universel* (Paris: Fayard, 2016), pp. 227–39.

and its other, simultaneously holding on to its most cherished political ideals, and leaving it open to a radical otherness:

> it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading, or the heading of the other, indeed — and this is perhaps something else altogether — toward the other *of* the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.[27]

In a broad discussion that has taken in Gadamer, Derrida, Heidegger, Benjamin, de Man and Cassin, I have argued that Franco-German philosophical relations are very much at the heart of Europe's modernity. Within this perspective, translation plays a central if radically decentring role, and as Cassin's 'Untranslatables' project demonstrates, it allows for a far more nuanced understanding of the past, present and future of Europe and its others, or the other of Europe, as a self-constituting subject of modernity. What Europe as a political and economic project may look like in ten or twenty years' time is anyone's guess, but a strong relationship between France and Germany is clearly still central to that future. I would contend that as long as that relationship holds, and the kinds of philosophical exchanges it has produced continue, we have good reason to hope.

Notes on Contributor

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[27] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 29.

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