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On permanent translation

(We are being translated)

Rada Iveković

Translated by John Doherty

So what is this great drama that always brings childhood to a close, if not a forced departure for a frightening world whose language we are commanded to learn?
Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Brazil Red*

Must the translatability or untranslatability of two terms inevitably be regarded as diametrically opposed? Is there no middle, or queer way to approach this dichotomy[1]? The former option, no less than the latter, has to do with this insurmountable dyad (tandem). But let us think for a moment about translation as a primal condition, or rather a condition *as such* – not that of a place, but that of a primordial move; not foundational, nor inescapable, but preceding us like the language into which we were born without having chosen it. I do not believe that two languages, or two cultures, are mutually untranslatable. But neither would I insist upon the existence of any dichotomy between the two. Nonetheless the problems of translation, and its shortcomings, are clear. Does it not share the insufficiency of language – of every language – and the inadequacy of the human being to itself, along with every institution's inadequacy to its purpose? Translation, in this sense, is

a vital form of resistance (through the *differential* critical expression of differences) to the hegemonic lines of imposition of *the* meaning (of a meaning), as well as a possible vehicle of power (but also its opposite). It is a whole field of degrees, nuances, divergences; a range of (im)possibilities of traversals of meaning. This is why every translation is imperfect and incomplete – but could the same thing not be said of every "original"? In other words, there always remains something untranslated. It is the price and the reserve of comprehension and translation, which is possible in theory but always more or less ruled out in practice. What appears to me to be problematic is to claim that there is such a thing as a principled untranslatability, like a fatality, or indeed translatability. The limits of the sayable can be changed. And the fact of co-conceiving the translatable and the untranslatable, and indeed being unable to imagine either without the other, provides access to the "middle way" that I mentioned above, and also the possibility of getting beyond seeing dichotomy as an ultimate horizon or blockage. Between two terms, two languages or two cultures, there is always the possibility of a relatively successful translation – one that is insufficient but still offers the hope of something better by half-opening the door to a meaning. Translation is no more than an opening-up of meaning, and never a promise of exhaustiveness. And yet one cannot speak of identity between the two terms, languages or cultures in question, even in the case of successful translation. But perhaps this is the price of its success, imperfect (and thus still necessary) as it may be.

Apart from that, translation is complicated by all sorts of circumstances, and in particular by the context, and also the relationship of the two things to be translated, which is necessarily a relationship of inequality in the sense that one of them is translated into the idiom of the other, thus creating a typical

situation of *différend*[2]. There remains something *unsaid* in this situation, or again there is a residue of what has no language; which is more or less the same thing as saying that there is something *unheard*. This basic inequality, which is already political (before there is any such thing as politics), can still be aggravated by historical circumstances that have made one of the two dominant. Since Foucault, at least, but also as a result of work done by anthropologists and psychoanalysts, we know that in the last analysis *it is a question of the body*. And there are other disciplinary, and undisciplined, approaches, such as feminist theory, post-colonial studies etc., which tell us that what cannot be articulated or understood in conventional language also comes from the other, from the subaltern, from the immediate experience of repression, the limit of which is also very much the body.

All of this comes down to the idea that translation involves bodies; and this is the sense, both extended and restricted, in which I am using it here. An instance of organ-transplantation/intrusion-of-another-body would in this respect be no more than an extremely dramatic individual case in point. And it is in this "primary" sense that I will now take up the theme of the *politics of translation*, through our position as (female) mediators, both translators and translated, though without being able to tackle the fundamental question of the more general political circumstances of translation/intrusion. I will also take the opportunity to project another exercise in intermediacy, above and beyond what has just been put forward, namely that which could take shape between Jean-Luc Nancy and certain concepts to be found in Indian philosophies. What is to be translated is not texts, but contexts. And what encourages me to do so is the *crisis*, including, in the examples given below (J.-L. Nancy), the critical situation in which the body finds itself; because the body, finding itself called into question,

heads towards translation, or transformation, as the only way out. It is apparently (above all) the crisis that puts us in a condition of translation and opens us up to a new meaning. On another level, Veena Das, talking about analogous situations, used the term "critical events"3.

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Neither of the two extreme positions, i.e. to say that languages or cultures can be translated, or that they cannot, seems viable. Experience teaches us that translation always takes place, and is always unsatisfactory. The feeling of imperfection or incompleteness that results from every attempt at translation is not confined to this experience alone. More profoundly, it characterises the human condition, the existential paradox of being at once mortal and destined for immortality. No language, no translation, no "inter-pretation" can express this completely. Our condition, our origin, our final state is situated neither in the term to be translated nor in the result of the translation, but rather in this unbearable, intolerable *inter-*, *between*-two that we nonetheless tolerate. It is the paradox of having a body and not being reducible to it, but not being able to live or think without it either. It is true that this condition could change when we (but who is "we"?) get to the point of thinking without bodies4, and it may be that we (?) are approaching that point. But I will not speculate on this ideal identity between the self and (one)self, whose will and effects of violence I have discussed elsewhere5. Translation (life?) takes place in this unconditionality, this imperative of the *animated body*6. As such it is no more than a *relationship*, being nothing in itself; nothingness. It is never "only" a question of the body, but also of the way in which the condition of the being is enfolded by it (without, but also with, organs; anatomy or not), and reciprocally, but not symmetrically, in the way that the prism of the psychical,

social and historical refracts the body. In this sense, we will always have been a graft of ourselves as other. And grafts can add onto others, thus complicating things, as Jean-Luc Nancy shows in *L'Intrus*. Not only is *animated corporality* the condition of translation, but it makes translation necessary: there is no situation other than translation; there is no pure state that is still untranslated. Even total incomprehension demonstrates this. To imagine a state (of language, or civilisation) *before* all translation would be like imagining a body without a soul, a pure nature, or biological sex clearly distinct from gender, outside of all mediation. This would mean falling into the nature-culture, sex-gender, female-male, subject-object, interior-exterior dichotomy. It would also mean imagining that, in the dyad, the two terms could be equal, symmetrical, and without any implicit hierarchy. Culture is first and foremost a matter of translation, even within a given language.

Translation is preceded by many experiences of mediation, and many *intimidating* obstacles. Is the most difficult thing not to translate from the interior to the exterior, in other words to expose oneself to others – to go from the *intimate* dimension to the public dimension? And is it not characteristic of a hegemonistic force to want to keep for itself the codes of exclusive translation, and of all interpretation? One might give as an example the Western will to power (more and more, that of the United States), but also every other attempt to impose a single meaning by force (all totalitarianism, all fundamentalism); which would mean *putting a stop to* translation and displacement, and compressing time: and this is already violence.

Furthermore, *opening* meaning(s) through translation doubtless comes down to resisting such stoppages. It also brings about an enlargement of temporality, and its decompression. Time is

necessary to translation, as it is to life. Instantaneity, like cuts in time, brings about either an gentle leap forward in meaning or, quite simply, a form of violence and a reconfiguration of the same. The time of translation is its quality as *relationship* – as nothing – which Buddhism calls "avidyâ", in other words a lack of knowledge regarding it, which is unavoidably the case since we are within this relationship, and it is the limit of language. In the "act" of translation, on the other hand, as in any other relationship, one begins by knowing directly and without an object7. It is in this spirit that a unique time, halted time, curtails the possibilities and choices of events, as well as eliminating alternative histories (along with alternative readings and translations), reducing them to received history.

To take in other meanings through translation may involve, as in love, desire and sexuality, putting oneself in translation (and in question); coupling, and transforming oneself. If this is the case, one might say of translation what Jean-Luc Nancy says of the (sexual) relationship: "Decidedly, therefore, there is no relationship, in the sense of there being an account, or accounting, of the excess: not because there is any interminable outpouring in the excess as such (which would tend to come down to an oceanic, fusional form of entropy), but because excess is simply, strictly and exactly access to oneself as difference, and to difference as such; in other words, precisely, access to what cannot be challenged or instantiated *as such* unless its 'as such' is exposed as what is never *such* (which would be implied by the idea of an evaluation, a measurement or a consummation of the relationship). Of relationships *as* relationships, there is nothing."8

Translation is thus in itself a *copulation*, i.e. the apposition, the hooking-up and the bond between two (of which each is plural) that will be transformed within the relationship. The result of a

translation cannot but *differ* from the "original", and will *cor-respond* to it only in part: it will respond-in-return-with-it. Translation is this coming and going of meanings, with the impossibility, and sometimes the *inter*-diction, of acceding to meaning, and yet with a meaning or meanings that are at least derived, even if they remain on the boundaries of the incomprehensible; because even the interdict does not completely prevent – it does not make anything impossible, but makes things otherwise-accessible. And, as for the "sexual relationship"9, the "translatory relationship" brings in nothing that can be capitalised on, but chronically, and also acutely, presents oversupply and shortage. Translation is never a calculation with a clear-cut result. It takes account of a difference that it resolves imperfectly and sometimes falsifies (more or less) satisfactorily. It is the act of differing, without there being a definite origin or a definitive culmination. No translation is anything other than a segment of intermediacy in an infinite process. It is creation in the same way that the "original" is creation, and is just as good, or bad, but independently so. The dissimilarity of the thing itself to itself and the impossibility of the identical refer back to the exception that underlies every identity, or at least all that would not already exist if it did not take upon itself an *exception* or a *translation*. And thus it is that the fantasised sovereignty of the original is right away split apart as persistently different, made up of implicit inclusions despite explicit exclusions. What is there on this side of translation, which, in any case, goes beyond the concrete act of translating, and its product? It is the text, translating to and through us, the interpreters, from its author, and translating us by *inscribing* us also *in* the new version. Transforming us. The identities of the authors/translators become blurred. It is not merely by chance that the relationship of telescoping or confusion between me and the other in mystical love (in Sanskrit, *maithuna*)

implies a going-beyond that is trans-subjectal (and, of course, trans-objectal), but also a different type of knowledge, in which "to know" means "to become the other" in a trans-ego and trans-identity jubilation that reveals the weakness of language and the failings of all representation. What the non-perfectibility of translation shows, like the dynamic, which is impossible to pacify, of the sexual relationship (as well as the social relationship between the sexes), is the general inaptitude of the conceptual disposition of the subject-object relation, which is a summating function *(fonction totalisante)*. "One should actually say that sex, essentially, is interpreted: I mean that it plays out and takes place by sexuating itself. It plays like a musical score: it plays its own score, the dividing-up into the several sexes that it actually is."10

The horizon of (the) translation – of each succeeding, or different, translation – recedes like a *kosa*: an orbit or pocket of meaning going from the interior to the exterior (and vice versa)11. The "impossible" nature of translation would then correspond to the impossibility of enjoyment that Nancy talks about, whose solution is to be found each time at another level: "If there is something impossible in enjoyment, it is because there is something of the intimate, in other words the one (or she, or he), that endlessly backs off beyond any possible attribution. The impossibility of enjoyment *[and of translation? R.I.]* signifies that it manages, only, not to lay itself down in a state (as in legal terminology, which talks about the "enjoyment" of a good), and that its fulfilment is its act as such. But in this way, it does so: in fact it does nothing else."12

One hesitates to "intrude". There might be something obscene about taking up and commenting on an account of life under a shadow; for example a dramatic, intimate, moving text. Faced with particular facts about life, and the courage to talk about them,

decency also demands that silence be maintained. But at the same time, the desired exposure of intimacy is first of all polylogical, and conduces to intervention. At times there is an invitation to irruption. Invasions13, intrusions, hybrids14, mêlées15 and other forms of muddle, and sometimes even a certain violence16, have also been a source of life, culture and reflection, beyond their destructive effects. How is the internal, intimate dimension to be translated into an exterior, public dimension?17

This is a painful deflection of the process of learning what one should already know. It is a harsh form of erudition by which one unlearns – so as to know. "By the time you've learned to live, it's already too late..." And so it is also a question of time; because apparently it is only when time becomes short that one learns, or has the clairvoyance of a cinematographic, retrospective view of life. But was there not too little time to begin with? This meeting with time, which comes only to certain people, can do no more than appear like unexpected lightning, like an intrusion – the kind that accompanies moments of ontological disturbance.

It is true that the thresholds of ontological questioning – the sensitivities – can be different, and that they depend on the individual. They can certainly range from mystical enlightenment to poetic transparence and the recursive specularisation of life; or to the encounter with death. But it would seem that this step is always ensured without it being known where exactly it is situated when the body is called into question. This is not necessarily the case with other upheavals18. On the other hand, ontological disturbances of a spiritual or mystical order can also, according to reports, lead to the smooth extinction of the body. All the "therapies" – *yoga*, or techniques of contemplation, of which there is an abundance in the Indian philosophical schools (all of which are concerned, first and foremost, with practical applications) – talk

about this. Nowhere in life can one put one's finger on the distinction between "body and soul" or "body and mind". Neither exists without the other. *The reconstruction of this separation is generally among the strategies of power*. It is also the limit of representation, and that of language. The most common forms of this ontological disturbance *(ébranlement)*, when it has to do with the body, are: for women, certainly, the fact of giving birth (that of producing the other from oneself, and of multiplying oneself); and, for everyone in general, the fact of losing a loved one, or simply that of meeting death in one form or another; that of experiencing violence, for example war; losing one's footing as a result of the collapse of the world that sustained us. But everything points to the notion that the existential challenging of the body, and of life, go beyond this, and only highlight the existential and ontological chasm – the realisation that there is no foundation. Some cultures have always attempted to live with such an awareness.

In this sense, Jean-Luc Nancy tells us nothing that we have not already intuited, while still needing to learn it: that we have all had heart transplants, so to speak. This is an extreme experience that he himself went through in order to be dispossessed of it (liberated from it?), precisely through the account that he gives of it: "*The intruder exposes me excessively. It extrudes me, exports me, expropriates me*."19 Bringing unrepresentable experience under control, in spite of the resistance of language, through his account of it he shares it with us, and something nonetheless comes across; which may not be of the order of the antibody, or of the virus, though in the end it may be almost that – a verbal virus, virtual at the start (who knows?): that of the communicability of the incommunicable, the translatability of the untranslatable. Salman Rushdie has said that though one does of course lose something in translation, one gains something else.

And if none of us is anything other than an intruder, and if we all come into the world as someone's guest, our language, to begin with, is nothing other than translation. We are transliterated. This sudden appearance into someone disturbs, above all, and transforms that person. The newborn child does not retain the conscious memory of the wrenching experience, no doubt so as to be able to live. This exile from the other will have to be the object of a reintegration during a painful apprenticeship called life. And this certainly does not take place in the same way for men and women20.

> "*I (Who is this 'I'? That is precisely the question, the old question: what is this subject of the utterance, always a stranger to the subject of that which has been uttered, in which (s)he is necessarily an intruder, but of which (s)he is also necessarily the motor, the transmission mechanism and the heart) – I received the heart of another person, almost ten years ago.*" (Nancy, p. 13.)

"I am not that. It is not mine. It is not my 'self'", replies the Buddha. This feeling, this experience, this lived existence, this certainty of my "ego" (*aham*) is not my "self", it is not my "essence" (*âtman*). And in any case there is no essence; not because my ego or my own being are something else, but because they are actually nothing as such, or in any case nothing fixed or identifiable; because there is no own-being, because there is no identity other than the one that is constructed, provisional and emergent, as in the five aggregates (*skandha*) which configure the living: the body-form (*rûpa*), the feelings and sense-perceptions (*vedanâ*), the unconscious imprints of consciousness (*samskârâs*), the intuitive and conjunctive consciousness (*samjñâ*), and the discursive consciousness (*vijñâna*). This means that we are not the

same person from birth to death, but a succession, an apparent, fortuitous continuity comprising much discontinuity21. This fluctuating, evanescent reality, this anti-genealogy, is inculcated into a person while they are still children, so that they can unlearn and deconstruct the ego before it becomes entrenched, and thus avoid yet greater pain and disappointment – that of the discovery of the inadequacy of the self to the self. And this is in fact the first lesson. It is not polite to say, "me, I". It would seem that the ego, along with the subsequent perspective of its spatial and temporal centricity, and the consequent metaphysic of the dominant subject, with the projection of a single god and the accompanying forms of servitude and domination, sprang out of a vital interest. Although it is no more than a potentiality at birth, the ego develops its culture, its imperialism, its temporality, its political and social system; and finally it constructs itself in keeping with the state and the ruling power, if there is no cultural "inflection" to dilute it to the maximum possible extent. "*It must simply be said that humanity was never ready for any modality of this question, and that its lack of preparation for death is nothing other than death itself: the blow and the injustice.*" (Nancy, p. 24.) And yet entire cultures have practised the unlearning of the ego, i.e. those which instill into children their status as intruders, not waiting for their meeting with death. In order to do this, they look to the same choices, the same existential experiences as ours; and there is no need to imagine any insurmountable cultural otherness, or the existence of non-communicating universes. But it should no doubt be said that *Western* humanity was never ready for this, given that other humanities anticipated the replies so as not to have to ask the question: their idea was to deconstruct the question *in advance*.

This paradoxical, introspective viewpoint may appear to Western eyes not to be highly political or committed, and thus not one to

be taken very seriously. It starts out from the identification of an injustice or an inequality which is generally seen as "the" political. There is a yawning gap; there is that of which no account can be given. It makes little sense, however, to talk in concrete terms about the "injustice done" as inevitable, fundamental or natural, since this would discourage not only all political activity but also all the theoretical research to which the political actually *extends an invitation*, along with all *yoga*, and every "therapeutic" or contemplative undertaking. There is nothing ineluctable about the forms of injustice. The political is what leads to theory, and to politics, but also, in contexts other than the Western, to practical meditative research. It is rather the "lack" associated with such research, and its supposed renunciation of politics, that creates a problem, at any rate in the eyes of Western philosophy22.

There is thus, in the human condition, something pre-existing of which no account can be given; or, more precisely, *karma*, i.e. the reciprocal solidarity of all the forms of life. From this point of view, humanism is but a very biased "speciesism". If, in the present context, it is not always humans that are being discussed, what is such a subject, and what are the rights of "subjects under certain conditions", or "partial subjects" such as children, sick people, cyborgs and various intruders? The Deleuzian concept of the "pli" (fold) remains, perhaps, the most useful for arriving at an understanding of a non-petrified subject.

There have been ways of thinking that were better than Western philosophies at focussing on the problem of renunciation of/by the possible subject: that of the dispossession of self (and among others, a priori, by a choice of civilisation). Paradoxically, in the assertion of the subject by its own will, there is also the possibility of its culturally-valued abdication. Buddhist culture has succeeded

in giving it value in the social sphere; as has a certain culture of women.

What is brought out by this cultural choice is the *existential paradox*. And a rapid digression must be made at this point on the concept of the subject such as it is understood in Western philosophy: the subject is a process, a hierarchy, a judgement, a volition, an activity, an effort to master the world (its object). The *term* "subject" does not exist as such in Indian philosophy, though there are other terms that embrace it and overlap it23. This does not mean that the concept is unthinkable, as we may have been led to believe24. This is highly paradoxical for philosophy, of course, because it is thereby, in a certain sense, hoist with its own petard. But the paradox applies beyond philosophy to all of Indian society, which, as Richard Lannoy suggests (with a certain amount of exaggeration), treats this intimate wound with a "strategy of despair" that works in a homeopathic way, i.e. it soothes the pain with a related "remedy" raising that same ailment, by the same token, up, above and beyond the individual, into a socially-recognised ideal, so that it ends up permeating society as a whole25. The paradox resides in the simple fact that the dispossession of the self must be approached with a minimum of individual, subjective will, and thus an assertion of the self, in an intimately political act. It is as though evading the tyranny of the social order were possible only by a sidestep, by "ducking" outside the system. In this respect, and in order to represent the concept of a *kosa* (an envelope of subjectivation), let us quote Deleuze and Guattari (who do not discuss the concept as such): "One might just as well say that the fascicled system does not really break with dualism, i.e. with the complementarity of a subject and an object, a natural reality and a spiritual reality: unity is continuously held in check and impeded in the object, while a new type of unity

triumphs in the subject. The world has lost its pivotal point, and the subject cannot even produce any further dichotomy, but attains a higher unity of ambivalence or overdetermination in a dimension that is always additional to that of its object. [...] No typographical, lexical or even syntactical skill can allow it to be heard. The multiple *has to be made*, not by always adding a higher dimension but, on the contrary, in the simplest way, with restraint, respecting the dimensions at one's disposal, always n –1 (it is only thus that the one becomes a part of the many, by always being subtracted). To subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted, to write n –1"26: is this not also how birth takes place – by subtraction
that multiplies and adds on instead of taking away? The *kosa*, like the Deleuzian rhizome, is anti-genealogy. And intrusion is indeed a matter of divesting oneself of genealogy – that which leads to domination. Liberation can only introduce another, unexpected logic and resistance. There is no metaphysical mobilisation here, but rather a preventive demobilisation of the deathly acceleration of the "capitalistic" psychopathology of "credit", including ideological credit as the case may be, or that of the auto-capitalisation of the subject.

But then what about "that which launches thought" (Lyotard) while not allowing one to think – and which thus remains invisible? In Buddhist conditioned becoming, it is said that only two of the twelve links in the chain of general causality are *radical*, namely *avidyâ*, or the ignorance that might also be called the unconscious, and *tršna*, in other words thirst or desire. On their own, these two elements of existence are enough to give us roots in life, to attach us to it, to make it difficult to tear ourselves away from it and divest ourselves of our selves.

These roots go deep into another dimension of what represents the philosophical ideal (*nirvâna*), which consists of deconstructing the ego, then "extinguishing" oneself. *Avidyâ*, as both ignorance and the unconscious, is philosophically very promising. This loss of memory means that we have neither memories nor conscious imprints of previous lives and conditionings, and that we do not know the causes of the effects with which we are confronted, nor the *karma* of which we are made. *Avidyâ* hides something on this side of the threshold *(cache un en-deçà)* of life which is not just temporal (and thus represented in the "wheel of becoming") or structural, but which is also, and in a more complex way, fundamental and structuring. "*As far as this business goes, everything will come to me from elsewhere and outside – in the same way that my heart and my body came to me from elsewhere, and are an elsewhere 'in' me*." (Nancy, p. 22.) In this sense *avidyâ*, with the determinants (*samskârâs*) of consciousness (*vijñâna*), is the clouded-over *karma* of previous existences (or even of the present one), in other words the accumulated debt that has to be discharged in order to be dispossessed of oneself. *Avidyâ* means that we were born in forgetfulness of our status as intruders. To get rid of this involves recognising the obvious fact that we come from elsewhere, and giving up the genealogy of filiation for that of affiliation. It is as if ignorance consisted of an accumulation of subjectivity that needed to be got rid of27.

For Buddhists, as for Wittgenstein, or indeed for any self-respecting poet, language cannot say everything. It cannot do so because it is only a part of the whole. If this is the case, it is because language is preceded and conditioned by life, of which it is just one of the possibilities; which means that it cannot give any explanation of what is its ground, i.e. life itself. And this is where *avidyâ* is situated. Prior to any human institution or activity, there

is birth (life), which occurs through the union of the sexes, the great unthought/unthinkable, but which is the very locus of our vital interest, and also what launches thought28. Philosophy and language are thus *rooted* in a particular interest, and act on the basis of it, starting with the ego. This is the existential paradox. It is thus necessary to avoid getting a toehold if one wants to avoid the suffering that comes from the articulation and integration of the ego-subject. This is in paradoxical contradiction, but also in creative tension, with the will, *as such*, to obliterate oneself. It is a challenge which the Buddhists have taken up in constructing their image of the world, and their culture.

Depending on the code of interpretation, the priority that one ascribes to oneself remains more or less veiled. Its invisibility comes from beyond the screen known as *avidya*, i.e. that of the ignorance of the origin that is embedded in language taken as the unconscious. This ignorance is also the unthinkability of the difference between the sexes. What is unthinkable about it is perhaps not difference as such but above all the fact that it is our origin, or that it is outside us. To have one's origin in the other, to owe one's life to the other, is intolerable when existence is fashioned according to the identity principle and the centring of the self29. The ideal, impossible genealogy (suicidal in the last analysis) is that of being born, and existing, only through oneself (svayambhû), this being linked to the power and history of domination.

"*I come from elsewhere, or else I come no more.*" (Nancy, p. 17.) It is the weaknesses of the heart that reveal this. But was I not coming from elsewhere even before that? And even before coming, or no longer coming? From an elsewhere without which, elsewhere, there would be neither coming nor not coming. Having come from this other which I am no longer, but which I was, or rather was

me, and which produced me by radically transforming itself. Made by casting myself out like a stranger: but through a salutary, amicable banishment – the one that created the in-between *(l'entre-deux)* so as to allow of the acknowledgement of unity. By subtraction. Production of the other without sacrifice or claim. The intruder "extruded", but not pushed aside; sent away but kept close by, tolerated and still welcome – from whom one will never more have to liberate oneself; who remains at hand to create the community that has been given since/by one's arrival in the world, and not just in the face of death. The production of the other who produced me as other of myself in order to be what I am. A whole plan of resistance to monotheism and, once more, its genealogy30. Patriarchal, obviously.

"*Thus, the multiple stranger who intrudes into my life (my thin, out-of-breath life, sometimes sliding into uneasiness on the edge of abandonment, simply astonished) is none other than death, or rather life/death: a suspension of the continuum of being, a scansion with which 'I' has/have little to do. Revolt and acceptance are equally alien to the situation.*" (Nancy, p. 25.) To Jean-Luc Nancy's credit, he points out that it is neither of the order of revolt nor that of acceptance. And if it does not spark off a revolt, neither does it signify acceptance. The register is that of "life/death", which always go hand in hand. And death is not the great other, even if it is the unknown of life. It is not transcendence; it is not the solution. It is of the same family as life. This may be difficult to conceive of, but it is clear to any type of thinking that is not as culturally moulded as ours is by dualisms. In such cases the dividing line between day and night, female and male, life and death, the rational and the irrational, good and evil, is much less incisive, much more uncertain.

"*Life 'as such', which is not in any organ, and yet without them is nothing.*" Where is life to be found? Firstly, in life. Already translated and betrayed. But also in conditions external to it: "*Life which not only survives, but always lives clean, under triple alien command: that of the decision, that of the organ, that of the aftermath of the graft.*" (Nancy, pp. 27-8.) Might it be the case, then, that the "alien" is not as alien as all that?

Gods and demons are of the same origin: they are the "people", given that they are all descendants of Prajâpati, the father of the generations31. There are several episodes in the Upanishads where the point is to reassure oneself as to which of the supposedly vital functions really is so: which is "brahman", supreme, without which life could not be maintained32. A competition is organised, for example, in which it is observed that one can live without language, as a dumb person, or without sight, as a blind person, or without hearing, as a deaf person, or without reason, as an infantile person, or without arms or legs, as a crippled person. But then one observes that it is breath (*prâna*) and the "intelligent self" (*prajñâtman*) that animate the body and cause it to live. When they depart, there is no more life33. And whereas the "intelligent self" is not localised, the *manas* (the "mental"), along with thoughts and their corresponding organ, are located, in general, in the heart – in the "cave of the heart", that microcosm of the inner depths of being, which also allows one, in *yoga* exercises, to pull back, to withdraw into oneself so as to connect up with the universe. Situated in the heart, thought is vital; it is life itself. But it also constitutes a crossroad with the external circuits, and a crossover point between dimensions. The heart/thought is like a navel that never healed, but remains open and connected to the world. It is also "*the possibility of a network in which life/death is shared/divided up (partagée), in which life is connected to death, in*

which the incommunicable communicates." (Nancy, p. 30.) "*I am open closed*", non-identical to the self, not having been able to maintain the principle of identity, which was impossible to safeguard, and yet is held onto in a never-ending attempt at preservation which is sometimes also that of sparing life – and thus contradictory in itself, marking this unsustainable paradox which signifies that we are both mortal and transcendent: mortal in the individual, transcendent in common. "*There is in this an opening through which passes an unceasing flow of strangeness […] all existence placed in a new register, swept through and through.*" (Nancy, p. 35.) But the part that I left out of what Jean-Luc Nancy actually wrote, in this quotation-displacement, is far from being insignificant: "*immunosuppressive drugs*"; the quality of life turned upside down, ruined; *placed in a new register*, in effect. Another existential dimension. We attain another dimension by overturning the previous one. But we are not, for all that, any less caught up in the previous *kosa*, since we retain all the karmic imprints that give us continuity, even if it is in discontinuity with our own identity, and even if this identity is only provisional, evanescent, etc. It is the suffering that comes with life, and which is part of it. "*One arrives at a certain continuity in the intrusions, and at a permanent condition of intrusion.*" (Nancy, p. 40.)

The remedy?

Medicines, as we have seen, come afterwards; they are part of the new configuration, and are its unendurable but indispensable part, ambiguous as any *pharmakon*. There are no good remedies a posteriori. One can try, as certain systems will, to construct a universe configured in such a way as to do the least harm. The best place for this kind of action is the "self", the ego, the subject, the

point of attachment of the individual to the world: "*I can clearly sense that it is much stronger than a feeling: the strangeness of my own identity, vivid though it has always been, never before touched me with such keenness. 'I' has clearly become the formal index of an unverifiable, impalpable concatenation. Between me and me, there has always been space-time; but at present there is the opening of an incision, and the irreconcilability of frustrated immunity.*" (Nancy, p. 36.) The concatenation in question is elsewhere called *pratîtya-samutpâda*, i.e. conditioned becoming, or causality. In the original form of Buddhism, "This being the case, that takes place": all things are in constant becoming, causalities are complex and uncontrollable, and everyting depends on everything else. It is just for this reason that our *karma* is never known to us; it can only be exemplified by what we are or do at each moment, being recalculated instant by instant on the basis of the entire past – and not only "our" own, since, in the passage from one life to another, there is no transmission of individual identity. Thus *karma* is retribution for our actions; it is the complex causality that encompasses all those with whom we are in interaction. It is the general "law" of empathy. In the end, treating it in an almost anecdotal way, it is as if another person's *karma* could rub off on us. *Karma* is also what informs the different degrees of *kosa* (pockets of subjectivation in the process of dissolving). Subjectivation is not tolerated in Indian philosophy (Buddhist or Brahmanic) other than as a provisional, unstable, flexible, or even fluid form of becoming, a coincidence of elements which will in turn be left behind, such as, for example, the five *skandha*, the psycho-physical constituents of the subjectivating identity of Buddhism, which are to be corrected and dissolved. What is sure, in the concatenation of causality, which takes into account the fact that life is shared out, is that its point of departure is ignorance (*avidyâ*): unconsciousness, precisely, of this conditioning, of the *karma*, of the origin and the provisional nature

of all identity; and ignorance of our own intrusion, which has to be found out about painfully, in that it is a question of self-dispossession. The self, fictional[34] and ephemeral as it is, takes its roots in its desire (*tršna*) and self-interest. It bends the world to its perspective. It tries to remain identical to itself as far as possible. When it does not succeed in this, it no longer recognises itself; it loses itself: "*One comes out of the adventure bewildered. One no longer recognises oneself: but 'recognition' no longer has any meaning. Very quickly, one is no more than a fluttering, a suspension of strangeness between ill-identified states, between pains, between powerlessnesses, between breakdowns. To refer to oneself becomes a problem, a difficulty or an opacity: it comes about through pain, or indeed fear; it is no longer anything immediate – and the mediations are tiring.*" (Nancy, p. 39.) This is of course an extreme and arduous form of non-recognition. And yet the non-recognition of self is known to all; starting with the mirror, old photos, or the perception of others. Traditionally, in the Brahmanic aesthetic, (re)cognition has a special status, but it is not autonomous: to get there, an external sign is necessary. More importantly, all cognition is a *re*-cognition. Beyond the instability of the substrata (which is not a question for Brahmanism alone, it is true), re-cognition is something that has to do with communion. It does not take place in isolation, in an identity with the self; it takes place thanks to something else. In Kâlidâsa's classical play, *Abhijñânasakuntalâ*, the king recognises Sakuntalâ by the ring he had once given her, and then forgotten about. For Abhinavagupta, a Kashmiri philosopher of aesthetics who lived around the 10th-11th centuries, it is *re*-cognition that allows identity, or commensurability to self, to be recovered; but this takes place *in another register*, relatively speaking.

> "*The empty identity of an 'I' can no longer lie simply in its mere commensurability (in its 'I = I'), when it enunciates*

> *itself: 'I suffer' implies two 'I's, each of them alien to the other (though they touch each other). […] but in 'I suffer', one 'I' rejects the other, whereas in 'I rejoice', one 'I' exceeds the other. They resemble each other exactly, no doubt: neither more nor less.*" (Nancy, p. 39.)

Everything is predicated upon this condition, which occupies the entire horizon. Is it the only one? Surely not; but it is the most insupportable of them. If not, there are other inalienable conditions which are given. And this is indeed what impels some people to withdraw from the world. But there is an uncrossable threshold and a difference in quality when the condition in question is physical; when it is that of a disease. When the body is the focus, "*The intruder exposes me excessively. He extrudes me, exports me, expropriates me.*" (Nancy, p. 42.)

"*The intruder is not another than myself and the man himself; not another than the same one who never stops changing, at once sharpened and exhausted, denuded and over-equipped, an intruder in the world as well as in oneself, a worrying upsurge of strangeness,* connatus *with excrescent infinity.*" (Nancy, p. 45.) It is not by chance that this passage comes at the end of Jean-Luc Nancy's disturbing little book: it signifies the end of a learning process: the painful recognition of one's own origin in the other, the impossibility of maintaining the principle of identity (except by using violence), and the abandoning of genealogy.

Just as one cannot locate life exactly, except to say where the conditions for it are no longer satisfied, one cannot locate identity, though one can perceive its limits. It is as if the space of identities remained vague and indefinable, except for the interface (the bar) which shows them without being able to define them, and which is nothing in itself but which, through them, can be provisionally

traced out: life/death, identity/non-identity: "*At the very least, what happens is this: identity comes down to immunity; the one is identifiable with the other.*" Does immunity intervene into the question of identity? "*The old viruses that have always been there, lurking…*" (Nancy, p. 33.) They do not necessarily come from outside. They gather momentum from the *karma*: nothing is repeated the same, nothing is maintained identically. Everything is recycled at each instant by the new circumstances; including the viruses.

Jean-Luc Nancy's exposition shows how much translation – that of the intimate dimension of a downward-plunging reverberation before the risk involved in its external unveiling – is itself dependent on the body. It is an attempt to overcome the limits of the latter, in other words those of the datum (whether grafted or "natural"). But everything comes to us from elsewhere: it is this elsewhere in us, constitutive of and traversing our animated body; it is our own otherness that controls the translation and represents its limits. No transcendent recourse is possible any longer, and the "foundations" of reason and unreason are the same. Translation, like comprehension, is thus impossible if one starts from a transcendental position (such as "American *values*" in place of "interests", in Veena Das's example), and the universalisation of the model itself (overarching hegemony). It becomes possible as a participant in a "project" where the issue is also that of the translator, and which is not an object relationship of a subject that masters its object (a text). On the contrary, translation is possible only if the "original" and the translator find themselves transformed by it, and if the result (the translated) coexists with its "original", deferred and transformed in meaning, in a relation of interminable translation or "translative" tension that is constant and constructive of universes.

How then is one to connect a political-public dimension up to, rather than translate it into, an intimate, meditative dimension which would set about changing the world, starting with oneself? How is one to transform it while freeing it of the self and decentring it-/one-self?

In the eyes of the stereotype Westerner infatuated with politics linked to power, there is no possible bridge, since the self, the ego, the subject can never be called in question, other than by dispossessing the citizen and depriving him of political, civil and social influence. Is the political thinkable without a metaphysic of the subject? Can one not imagine a citizenship based on a different configuration of subjectivation? It is true that this has been tried many times, and attempts are still being made to conceive of the subject as diluted and more fairly pieced out, predicated on a communal configuration (Marcos for the Chiapas; various forms of communalism) or vaunted, even, as multi-culturalism (and an *apartheid* of co-existing cultures) – by *recognition*. But in the same way that uneasiness springs up when the intimate is exposed, a certain inadequacy, or even incredulity, is strongly felt when the political dimension of an individual act of self-dispossession is articulated. Yet the adventure that could be described as the translation of one context towards another, one culture to another, has been attempted on occasion to different degrees and in widely varying ways both by individuals (W. Benjamin, M.K. Gandhi and L. Wittgenstein, among others) and movements (liberation theology) whereby the question of secularism, strictly speaking, is rendered obsolete, and that of temporality necessarily revised, since intervention in the political space by intimate meditation also presupposes non-fatal multiple responsibilities and composite time made up of criss-crossing alternative histories: the karmic temporality of non-determination, contrary to what has been attributed in terms of "destiny" to the concept of *karma* and its

conceptual context. It is along this last, vital horizon, as a space of life quite simply, that the ultimate form of expression and the last language – translation – are played out. As regards language, there can be very few that are not already (in) translation, since there is no primal original, unless one were to reinvent a Revelation, which has in any case been useful only in holding back the successive waves of translation that accompany the kind of primal exile of the self that every culture represents35. The reference to tradition has also been used in this way – to recognise that there is always continuity-within-discontinuity within oneself.

It is one thing to claim that all culture is translatable (a democratic point of view), or that all culture is intrinsically untranslatable (clash of civilisation): the two positions are assimilable to a single fundamental dichotomy. It is another to see all language, all culture, as being inherently an attempt at translation, i.e. exteriorisation. It is this form and this dynamic of *permanent translation* alone that can "open up a common, reciprocal future in language"36. A "common future in language" also means the mutual interdependence of all forms of life; it means not placing oneself at the centre; and it also means a shared relationship with death. It will be implemented by the construction of citizenship, and by the type of ego, self and subject to be cultivated.

There is an apparent, though false, resemblance between the thesis of general untranslatability and that of permanent translation. Permanent translation presupposes the exasperating difficulty and non-completion in principle of any attempt at translation. It is the state of being in translation oneself. And this is the cost of translation remaining faithful to life and retaining its gesture: it constantly avoids putting itself in a state of grace; that is to say, exception; that is to say, finitude. Death, for its part, exists in both, though not in the same way. According to the hypothesis of

the untranslatability of cultures and languages, which is also that of inevitable violence, death is not an integral part of the vital cycle, but comes into it as a culmination-result, the only certain outcome of the choice of the untranslatable: the great dualism of good and evil, and an inability to put oneself in someone else's place. According to the hypothesis of permanent translation, which can never be taken for granted – one needs to give it a hand, to work at opening up meaning (one or more new meanings), to allow oneself the necessary time, to accept self-decentring, and to see the other person's point of view37 – death is a part of the cycle, and in general is not inflicted by an inconceivable excess of violence. Between the two (the translatability variant not being logically autonomous), there is an entire gamut; but there is also choice. There are degrees of translation and translatability. Presumably there is no one, no nation that can be inseparably bonded to either, in the same way that no one is immune to (using) violence. Permanent translation also means that no history has been brought to a halt.

But let us be clear about this: *each individual* is a translator forever translated. Translators of the world: just one more effort!

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The part of this text that has to do with Jean-Luc Nancy's *L'Intrus* was published as "La lezione del *karma* di Jean-Luc Nancy" in *Ou. Rifflessioni e Provocazioni*, Vol. X, No. 2, 2000 (Edizioni Scientifiche

Italiane), *Atti del Convegno Invasioni di Filosofia* (Cosenza, 20-22 July 2000), ed. F. Dionesalvi and F. Garritano, pp. 59-67.

"We are in translation" is the title of a text that was published in *Femmes sujets des discours 2*, *CEDREF*, 1990, pp. 37-39. The reason why I refer to it here is because it brings me back to the end of the 1980s, when I started discussing the subject in Berlin with the philosopher Eva Meyer, in Ljubljana with the sinologist-philosopher Maja Milinski, and in Zurich with the writer Ilma Rakusa. The resulting joint work was published in November 1989, in the typewritten East Berlin review *Verwendung*, as "Übertragen, sagt sie. Ein Litteraturkvartett". The text "We are in translation", dating from 1990, was one of the milestones that marked another path in the same direction; and an exchange of epistolary essays subsequently took place, with Ilma Rakusa in particular, in languages which we shared, or which shared us.

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1 This, in any case, is what is suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy's attempt to put himself in translation in *L'Intrus*, Galilée, Paris, 2000.

2 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend*, Minuit, Paris, 1983.

3 Veena Das, *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995.

4 See Jean-François Lyotard, *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, Galilée, Paris, 1988.

5 *Le Sexe de la nation*, unpublished manuscript.

6 I would like to thank Veena Das for having directed my mind back to this subject, which we have talked about informally over the years. See Veena Das, "Violence and Translation", and "The practice of organ transplants: networks, documents, translations" in Margaret Lock, Alan Young, Alberto Cambrosio (eds.), *Living and Working with the New Medical Technologies. Intersections of Inquiry*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 263-287. The text published here is in part a reaction to her ideas and our discussions.

7 This is the real difference between *avidyâ* and *prajñâ*.

8 J.-L. Nancy, *L'"il y a" du rapport sexuel*, Galilée, Paris, 2001, p. 52.

9 Op. cit., p. 17.

10 Op. cit., p. 43.

11 The *Taittirîya Upanišad* puts forward, from the Brahmanic viewpoint, the theory of the *kosa*, or "envelopes" of identity. The inner depths of man, which are both consciousness and knowledge, are identified with the supreme. Between the body and consciousness there is only a difference of degree; each is implicated in the other. The external envelope, which is the coarsest, is corporal, and is also that which, being the material base, is the origin of them all (inversion). Going from the outside to the inside, the *Taittirîya* recognises the following envelopes: *annamaya*, consisting of food (matter, the body); *prânamaya*, consisting of breath; *manomaya*, consisting of the mental, or of thought (*manas*: *mens* [Latin], "mind"); *vijñânamaya*, consisting of consciousness (which has nothing to do with the ego); *ânandamaya*, consisting of *ânanda*, satisfaction-without-needs, or contentment, in a certain sense; this level precedes liberation, *mokša*, of which

nothing can be said, at least on the subjective level. Each *kosa* plays the role of an ultimate horizon of liberation for the previous one, but moves as soon as it is approached, and in both directions. Absolute liberation can be thought of only in relative terms. As we approach the centre of the heart (*yoga* terminology; the heart also being the seat of thought) on the road of deliverance, relative subjectivity is progressively dissolved in nothingness, and disappears. The closer we get to the *mokša*, within the "refuge of the heart", the less we can talk about subjectivity, or *jîva* (the unit of individual life), etc. For the *Taittirîya* and other *Upanišads*, see Carlo della Casa, *Upanišad*, U.T.E.T., 1976, pp. 281-302, or *The Principal Upanišads* (trans. and ed. S. Radhakrishnan), George Allen and Unwin, London, 1953, pp. 525-565. For a part of the translation, see: "Taittîriya Upanisad", in *Le Veda. Premier livre sacré de l'Inde*, Vol. 2, ed. Jean Varenne, Marabout Université, Paris, 1967, pp. 670-683. Also: *Kausitaki Upanishad, Svetasvatara Upanishad, Prashna Upanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad* (trans. L. Renou, A. Silburn, J. Bousquet, Em. Lesimple), one volume, Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris, 1978.

12 J.-L. Nancy, op. cit., p. 45-46.

13 See the special issue of *Ou. Rifflessioni e Provocazioni*, Vol. X, No. 2, 2000 (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane), *Atti del Convegno Invasioni di Filosofia* (Cosenza, 20-22 July 2000), ed. F. Dionesalvi and F. Garritano.

14 Alain Brossat, "Métissage culturel, différend et disparition", in *Lignes*, No. 6, "Identités indécises", October 2001, pp. 28-53.

15 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Eloge de la mélée", in *Transeuropéennes*, No. 1, Autumn 1993, pp. 8-18.

16 R. Iveković, *Autopsia dei Balcani. Saggio di psico-politica*, Cortina, Milan, 1999.

17 Veena Das,"Violence and Translation", *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 75, n. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 105-112, or http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/das.htm

18 Slavenka Drakulić, *Hologami straha*, GZH, Zagreb, 1987, & *Holograms of Fear*, W.W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. This is a fictionalised narration of a particularly drama-laden kidney transplant.

19 Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus*, p. 42. The page numbers of subsequent quotations from this work will be given in the text.

20 R. Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War: 'Make Love Not War'", in *Hypatia*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (autumn 1993), special cluster on Eastern European feminism ed. by Nanette Funk, pp. 113-126.

21 R. Iveković, *Pregled indijske filozofije* ("An Outline of Indian philosophy"), Institut za filozofiju, FF, Zagreb, 1981.

22 Romano Màdera, *L'alchimia ribelle. Per non rassegnarsi al dominio delle cose*, Palomar, Bari, 1997.

23 Some of the ideas presented here first appeared in another context, in R. Iveković, "La violenza della partizione", in *aut-aut* 293-294, 1999, pp. 68-78c.

24 I think that there may be concepts where there are no terms. And the concept in question exists implicitly *(" en creux")* in Indian philosophy, like what has always been an object of attempted repression or avoidance. See R. Iveković, *Orients. Critique de la raison post-moderne*, Blandin, Paris 1992.

25 Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree. A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, London, Oxford, New York, 1971, p. 364.

26 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Minuit, Paris 1980, pp. 12-13.

27 R. Iveković, "Lyotard est-il bouddhiste?", in *Orients. Critique de la raison post-moderne*, Blandin, Paris, 1992.

28 J.-F. Lyotard, *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*.

29 Fabio Ciaramelli, *La distruzzione del desiderio. Il narcisismo nell'epoca del consumo di massa*, Dedalo, Bari, 2000.

30 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait*, Galilée, Paris, 2000.

31 *Chândogya Upanišad*, 1.2 and ff.

32 *Brhadâranyaka Upanišad*, 2.

33 *Kaušîtaki Upanišad*, 3.3 ff., and other passages of the *Upanišads*. The account varies, and sometimes speaks only of breath. The fact of introducing intelligence, as in this case, is interesting. Intelligence is a characteristic of life as such.

34 Would it be going too far to mention Etienne Balibar and Benedict Anderson at this point? With their concepts of "fictional identities" (Balibar) and "imaginary identities" (Anderson) they have contributed the argument we need (allowing for certain adjustments). Every identity is constructed – which does not mean that it has no reality, or that it does not work.

35 Fethi Benslama, *Une fiction troublante. De l'origine en partage*, éditions de l'aube, La Tour d'Aigues 1994.

36 See Veena Das, in the present issue.

37 See I. Wallerstein, America and the World: TheTwin Towers as metaphor / L'Amérique et le monde: les Twin Towers comme métaphore, in: *Transeuropéennes 22, 2002, "Translating, Between Cultures / Traduire, entre les cultures",* pp. 9-29.