S A M O   T O M S I Č

C O M P L I C A T I N G   T H E   U N I V E R S A L

The Lessons of Barbara Cassin's "Logology"

Complicating the universal is a formulation that appears in the subtitle of Barbara Cassin's book on translation.[1] It pointedly summarises the fundamental lessons that traverse her decades long work, and perhaps most notably her complicating relation to philosophy. Cassin's engagement is most known for her ongoing attempts to rehabilitate sophistry, to distinguish sophistry as an "historical fact" from its negative philosophical image. In this framework, the endeavour to "complicate the universal" can be read as a fundamental philosophical project, comprising a clear ethical and political stance, which must today necessarily accompany such problematic and disputed concept like the universal. "Complication" on the one hand affirms the universal and, on the other, acknowledges the necessity to undertake a rigorous critique of this classical philosophical notion – particularly in light of its ongoing feminist and anticolonial critique, which still lacks proper acknowledgement in the academic institution of philosophy.

Instead of rejecting the universal, Cassin thus speaks of its complication. This immediately suggests that the universal is not exclusively the realm of abstract neutrality, an ontological, epistemological and political register, in which all differences become pale or are simply abolished. To complicate the universal means that its abstraction is replaced by its inner conflictuality, but it also means that the universal is not something pregiven; it is a matter of invention. A truly complicated universal is structurally open – Lacan would say "not-all" –, unstable and processual. Aiming for a complication in the universal, or simply a complicated universal, must be distinguished from two other predominant contemporary attitudes toward universalism and the notion of the universal, the abolitionist and the affirmationist. The former stance denounces universalism as the ultimate expression of Eurocentrism and even a justification of European colonialism, thus calling for a thorough critique and ultimately the rejection of this problematic concept. The latter, in turn, continues to insist on the necessity of a universalistic outlook in the field of politics in order to construct a framework, in which emancipation will be possible beyond fragmentation of subjectivity in

the inconsistent multiplicity of particular interests, tendencies and identities. Both stances toward the universal are necessary, but the work of Barbara Cassin nevertheless seems to contain an additional turn of the screw.

In this conflicted situation, a complication of the universal first and foremost implies that we expose the dependency of the universal on language without therefore relativizing its efficacy. This is where a major problem comes in, the fragmentation of the field of language, the multiplicity of languages and finally their confusion. The field of language is incomplete, not-all, to put it again with Lacan, a field marked by semantic chaos, which sustains constant proliferation of misunderstandings and failed communication. Indeed, this field is marked by the confusion that is addressed in the old Biblical metaphor of the tower of Babylon (to which I will come toward the end). There is no One-Language, no universal and/or unifying language, in other words, no metalanguage, in which it would be possible to speak equally about other languages and, in doing so, totalise their field in a more or less unproblematic manner. Because no such totalisation is possible, this very impossibility suggests that there is no language of the universal, no language, in which an actual universal could be articulated.

Still, European philosophy has always reserved itself the right to speak the language of the universal, and more precisely, the language of the abstract universal, from which singularity was necessarily excluded, delegated onto the figure of the other: slave, woman, sophist, child, madman etc. Ever since her sharp and well-pointed criticism of the Aristotelian foundation of philosophy – as a discourse, which attributes to itself the ultimate right to construct the universal – Barbara Cassin never fails to remind one that the main ambition of European philosophy consisted of inventing a language, which will not only speak in behalf of all, but which will moreover be the language of being itself, a language of segregational universalism and divisive ontological univocity (grounded on the clear-cut distinction between being and non-being, hence on the rejection of negativity). It is no coincidence that in Aristotle's foundation of philosophical discourse, the entry point in science of being *qua* being, once the predecessors have been first acknowledged and then refuted, consists in a *coup de force*, in which a normalisation and disciplining of language takes place.[2] This presumably universal language, in which the essence of human being as a being of *logos* comes forward, is at the same time something like an immense prosopopoeia of being *qua* being – a language, in which being itself unveils itself in language.

But the language of ontology is grounded on a division, by means of which a figure of the other is constructed: the "other" language comes in the guise of incomprehensive babbling, verbal impenetrability and opacity, speaking for the sake of speaking (as Aristotle puts it in a famous passage of *Metaphysics*, the passage that Cassin translated as "speaking for the pleasure of speaking"). For the ancient Greeks, barbarians, these paradoxical speaking beings, which are no subjects of (Greek) *logos*, certainly speak some kind of language. The opacity of their language serves as living proof that their speech is introverted and detached from production

of meaning. It is this detachment that makes babbling the perfect negation of the universal language of being – a language of non-being. For Aristotle, these features of "barbaric" language are shared by the language of sophistry.

The problematic obtained a specific twist in the 20th century with the invention of psychoanalysis. The detachment of language from external reality and from the orientation through meaning exposes a linguistic singularity and a language of the singular, for which one can only conclude that "it" enjoys. There is no universal language of enjoyment. When Lacan, whose work resonates with Barbara Cassin's critique of normative philosophies of language, and particularly of Aristotle, occasionally claimed, "there is enjoyment of being", he implicitly declared being to be something like enjoyment of philosophy. In its discourse on being, philosophy overlooks its own embedding in discursive enjoyment. Perhaps no other philosopher exemplifies this link between being and enjoyment better than Heidegger, whose vehement poetisation of philosophical language certainly introduced a radical break with the predominance of Aristotelianism in philosophy of language. But the Heideggerian turn also unknowingly demonstrates that being itself stands for a peculiar, poetic surplus-product of linguistic action.

What would the attempt of complicating the universal then stand for in this situation in which language seems to be torn between the abstract and exclusivist universality of the language of being, and the concrete and corporeal singularity of the language of enjoyment? It would mean above all deconstructing and rejecting this very opposition. The assumption that there is, outside the true language of being, the linguistic perversion, the false language of enjoyment, is indeed the founding myth of logic. By rejecting this opposition, language appears internally redoubled, conflicted and self-opaque. According to Barbara Cassin, the practice of translation exemplifies this rejection. Cassin refers, among others, to an occasional remark by Lacan regarding metalanguage: "What does it mean, metalanguage, if not translation? One cannot speak of a language except in another language."[3] This remark may sound puzzling if we place it next to another Lacanian slogan: "There is no metalanguage." Metalanguage is not a reality; it is marked by strong inexistence that Lacan marks with the expression *il n'y a pas*, "there is no". Lacan makes only one further use of this strong inexistence, when he describes the ontological status of sexual relation. Here, too, *il n'y a pas* is mobilised in order to make the point that sexual relations are constituted on the background of a radical absence, inexistence or hole, and moreover, that these relations are economisations of a fundamental non-relation. The same point can be extended to the multiplicity of languages. They are embedded in a failed relation, or non-relation, and this non-relationality is exemplified through the fact that they need to be mediated by the labour of translation – which, as metalinguistic activity, accounts for the fact that there is no such thing as metalanguage. Translation is economisation of the radical inexistence of a metalanguage. For this reason, translation is an impossible, albeit necessary task, one that can never truly succeed working through the non-relation and the discrepancies between languages.[4]

On the other hand, one could equally say that there is only metalanguage as an ongoing activity, insofar as the practice of translation – as well as the weak inexistence, for which Lacan uses the conventional negation of the verb *exister* – concerns every language in particular. This means that every language virtually does not exist as a completely constituted field or object, an abstract universal, which would be concretised in a multiplicity of dialects. Moreover, within each particular language there is non- or misunderstanding, which requires the metalinguistic activity of translation. The inexistence of metalanguage is correlated to the inexistence of language.

In her focus on the Aristotelian rejection of sophistic speech and the consequences of this rejection throughout the history of European philosophy, Cassin seems to leave no doubt that her work concerns not simply language, but moreover the real of language. In this respect, Cassin indeed remains faithful to Lacan's preoccupation with the link between the signifier and enjoyment, hence with the productivity of language. In the psychoanalytic framework, the realisation of language can be brought down to two central products, the already mentioned enjoyment and the unconscious. Another way of grasping the real of language in a manner that challenges the traditional orientation of philosophies of language – the Aristotelian "decision of sense" – consists in highlighting its paradoxical mode of existence. To put it with Aristotle's own vocabulary, language is an activity, *energeia*, which does not amount to a result, *ergon*.[5] With Lacan's insistence that "the big Other does not exist" in mind we can say that the activity of speech unfolds on the background of the inexistence of language. To complicate things further, Lacan adds that this inexistent big Other nevertheless has a body; its mode of existence entirely depends on the speaking body and the link between speaking bodies, the externalisation of speech and the social bond.

This link between corporeality and inexistence inevitably implies a critical distance from classical ontology, which – in accordance with Cassin's account of Aristotle's foundation of the "science of being" on a preceding normalisation of speech – rejected the ontological scandal of language from its own field. One could say that a more fundamental oblivion from the "oblivion of (the originary sense of) being" (as Heidegger would have put it) is at stake in the foundation of philosophical discourse: the oblivion of speaking. To put it bluntly, philosophers forget that they speak and, more specifically, they forget that the signifier affects their body – and that "thinking" is the result of this affection.[6] It is this affective dimension of language that Aristotle ultimately rejected from the field of philosophy, and Cassin's constant returning to the problem of the "pleasure in speaking" (*plaisir de parler*) explicitly reintroduces the problematic surplus-product resulting from the activity of language in the living body, hence from the problematic nexus between the bodily and the symbolic.[7]

The "decision of sense", by means of which Aristotle attempts to normalise language and reject the sophistic experience of speech, ultimately comes down to the restriction of the activity of speaking to apophantic speech – a speech, in

which the "unveiling of being" takes place, to put it again with Heidegger (the meaning of *apophainein* is "to show", "to reveal", "to make known"). As soon as we shift the perspective and observe language from its "marginal" phenomena, its productivity and performativity, ontology must be supplemented with what Cassin calls "logology", whose main task is to account for the autonomy and the causality of language, as well as to conceive language as a specific type of disturbance or disequilibrium in the living body. Needless to add that at this point logology overtly intersects with psychoanalysis. Whereas for ontology language ultimately comes down to *organon*, a tool-organ of communication and representation of reality, one could argue that for logology language appears more like an "organism", endowed with specific life, which exceeds the life of the speaking subject or a community of speaking beings.[8]

The quarrel between ontology and logology evolves around the question, whether language stands for equilibrium or disequilibrium. It was Plato who set the terrain for this dilemma by contrasting two forms of language, mathematics and poetry. According to Plato, the privilege of mathematics is that it does not deceive, whereas poetry not only deceives but, moreover, causes turbulent affective states, a loss of control and, precisely, the fusion of thinking, being and enjoyment (to frame the problem again from the Lacanian perspective). The deployment of speech in theatre is a case in point. The causing of affects moreover points beyond the function that in the past century was framed in terms of linguistic performativity; it pinpoints the materiality of the signifier. Plato believed that mathematics deals with eternal and thus unchangeable truths, sustaining true knowledge. Poetry, in turn, deals with wordplay, unstable and dynamic structures, and therefore sustains mere semblance of knowledge, the multiplicity of opinions. Hence, in the familiar Platonist scenario, poetry must eventually be excluded, banned from the ideal state, since it destabilises not only the social relations but, moreover, exposes a rather inconvenient ontological problem, the instability of being.[9] It rejects Parmenides' opposition between being and non-being and confirms Heraclitus' notion of ontological movement, flux or becoming, in which being and non-being are precisely intertwined, or rather, where the dichotomy between being and non-being no longer makes sense.

The dispute concerning whether philosophy should orientate itself in accordance with formal or poetic language took the familiar twist in the 20th century. While analytic philosophy, pragmatism and communication theory established themselves as some kind of modern forms of Aristotelian normativism, Heidegger proposed an original, yet highly problematic, affirmation of poetic language. In his philosophy of language, Heidegger elaborated something like a linguistic nationalism, according to which German language stands for the modern language of being. Cassin's work critically rejects both alternatives, abstract normativism (logic and grammar, Aristotle) and linguistic nationalism (Romanticism, Heidegger), showing that both positions are grounded in fetishisation of language, precisely as language of being. For the linguistic and logical normativism the language of being comes in

guise of an ideal language, which is first and foremost without any kind of surplus. As already stated, the Aristotelian name for this ideal language is apophantic *logos*, in which the unveiling of being takes place. Approached from this side, the main discursive problematic evolves around meaning and predication. Apophantic logos is a linguistic activity, which attributes or denies a predicate, feature or characteristic to a given object. The fundamental activity of *logos apophantikos* therefore consists in revealing or unveiling – a feature, which remains unaltered even in Heidegger's philosophy.

Nevertheless, Heidegger's linguistic nationalism significantly deviates from the logical vision of ideal language, since it ends up privileging one language in the multiplicity of languages, in which being is unveiled in a privileged manner. For Heidegger, Greek was the premodern and German the modern language of being. On the background of this fetishist determination, Heidegger understood the task of German philosophy and particularly his own role in the history of philosophy as a return to the Greek origins, in order to renew the lost authenticity in the relation between thinking, being and speaking. Mathematics and its modern embodiment in technology are furthest from this authenticity, thus radicalising the oblivion of being, which took place with Plato's move from being to the highest of beings, and more fundamental from his turn away from poetry toward mathematics.

Heidegger's move is profoundly premodern and at the same time reactionary: the return to the Pre-Socratic philosophers is a return to the hypothesis of the authentic language of being. It is also a return to a fictitious unique language before the confusion called "Babylon"; hence the proliferation of fake etymologies in Heidegger's poetic subversion of philosophy, which are supposed to reconstruct at least some fragments of the presumable originary language of ontology and restore bits and pieces of the forgotten authenticity of being. To repeat, while the logical-normativist fetishisation fabricates one ideal language in contrast to all actually existing languages, one language to regulate them all, the Heideggerian fetishisation decides one actually existing language against all other actually existing languages as *the* language of being. For the analytic tradition, there is no privileged language among languages, hence no linguistic nationalism, but there is metalanguage, in which it can be normatively spoken about all other languages: the ideal language of communication and information, in which the procedure of quantification sustains a stable relation between the signifier and being. It is this tendency to quantification that Heidegger most vehemently rejects in his critique of modern technology and mathematics.

Heidegger and the analytic tradition certainly could not be further apart, since the latter seeks for a language without surplus, whereas the former embraces poetic language, which is indeed a language of surplus. However, what unites both positions is that they display a certain resistance to the ontological scandal of language, and, in both cases, this scandal concerns the aspect of productivity of language that cannot be restricted to the question of being (whether unveiled or actively produced by means of linguistic performativity). Elizabeth Grosz once argued that

the European philosophy was characterised by a certain "somatophobia",[10] ever since Plato's language game with the Greek *soma* (body) and *sema* (grave) defined the body as grave of the soul. With Barbara Cassin one could add that philosophy was plagued by another, no less problematic phobia, this time concerning language, "logophobia", which motivated philosophy to reject the productive and destabilising aspects of language. The consequences of this "phobia" reach well into the present and sustain an unbridgeable gap and antagonism in philosophy. One merely needs to recall the resistance of analytic philosophy to all of the philosophical schools and orientations that reject the primacy of logic and dispute its role as "therapy of language". At the same time, Heidegger's scepticism toward formal languages, geometry and mathematics provides the flipside of this "phobic" attitude. It is also hardly surprising that "somatophobia" and "logophobia" are closely linked. The problematic that philosophy expelled out of its preoccupation with language concerns precisely its excessively corporeal consequences, which demonstrate that there is a fundamental deadlock and disequilibrium at stake in the speaking body.[11]

At the other end of European metaphysics, Ferdinand de Saussure grounded the science of language on the distinction between language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*). With this move, Saussure in fact reproduced the classical ontological detachment of language from the speaking body and under the banner of "science of language" elaborated yet another metaphysical linguistics. Psychoanalysis seems to be one of the few intellectual inventions that strived to counteract the metaphysical leanings of the modern science of language. The fundamental objects and problems of psychoanalysis – the unconscious, sexuality, drive, to name just the obvious ones – are all phenomena of fusion between the symbolic and the corporeal, the material effects or bodily actualisations of the symbolic order. It comes as no surprise that in his later years Lacan introduced the notion of *lalangue* in order to mark the point where the psychoanalytic examination of the junction between the symbolic and the somatic decisively diverges from the epistemic (hence ultimately incorporeal) object of linguistics. Alluding to a specific speech impediment, stuttering, the concept of *lalangue* is meant to cover precisely the disfunctioning of language and its irregularities, while continuing to examine language in its autonomy, independently from the ideal of communication, transmission of information and representation of reality.

It is not that the father of structuralism did not take into account the autonomy of language. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure overtly remarks that language in general, and linguistic changes in particular, escape our conscious will.[12] There is, thus, an open acknowledgment of tension between the speaker's intentionality or the intentionality of a community of speakers, on the one hand, and something that could well be called the intentionality of language, on the other. How do the changes in language take place then? Saussure in any case insists that individuals and generations, who for the most part unconsciously follow the rules of language, do not make these changes. Only a few speakers actually cognize the linguistic rules. What seems beyond doubt is that a major reason why a linguistic change

cannot be planned is linked with the arbitrarity of the sign, the loose and unstable relation between the signifier and its signified. Although this Saussurean idea has been criticised even by structuralists themselves,[13] arbitrariness provides at least the kernel of the explanation as to why linguistic changes cannot be programmed and why they effectively take place on daily level, albeit in the guise of micro-changes and micro-inventions. The autonomy and discreteness of linguistic change is driven by the fact that we are dealing with an entire network of arbitrariness, a virtually endless and open system in constant motion. But the changes may not be easy to register since the over-complexity, consistency and organisation of the system also exercises constant resistance against change. Resistance is a key feature of the structure of language. Language is torn between stability and instability, and in this respect it can indeed be described as organised disequilibrium. Despite creating the impression that macroscopic changes or linguistic revolutions are practically impossible, language is nevertheless subjected to historicity, and this means to constant change, brought to the point in the looseness – precisely arbitrariness – in the relation between the signifier and the signified. In language everything flows and at the same time preserves its consistency. The life of language is thus a state of constant tension.[14]

More than any other philosopher to date, Cassin allows us to recognise in language an ontological scandal with which philosophy and linguistics continuously struggle. The crucial aspect of this problematic is reflected in the activity of speaking, in which the manifested autonomy and the productivity of language exceed the speaker's intentionality. When reflecting on the surplus at stake in human linguistic activity, Cassin reminds one of the ambiguity in the French *plus*, more and no more. Jacques Derrida pinpointed this ambiguity in the formula, *plus d'un langue:* "One never speaks one language" and "One never speaks more than one language".[15] The activity of speaking continuously actualises both moments, so that speaking always means finding oneself in a dislocated position. In other words, to inhabit one linguistic universe always-already implies dealing with a redoubling in one and the same language. Moreover, it means dealing with an activity, in which the language one speaks, the mother tongue, is in the process of self-constitution and self-overcoming, emergence and disappearance, consistency and processuality. Again with Aristotle, language is *energeia* (activity) without *ergon* (result) – an activity, which cannot be compared with use of a pre-existing, ready-made linguistic tool, but rather stands for the perpetual economisation of the "weak" inexistence of language. Lacan's dictum "the Other does not exist" again enters the picture and lays the foundation for a negative ontology of language.

The activity of translation, understood as a metalinguistic activity, evolves around the same ontological issue. Translation is only possible because there is no metalanguage; more precisely, the labour of translation unfolds against the background of a radical, "strong" inexistence, not in order somehow to make this metalanguage emerge, but to take its inexistence as a means for relating distinct languages to one another. Moreover, the inexistence of a metalanguage implies that

there is something radically untranslatable between languages. Every translation leaves an untranslatable remainder, which expresses the irreducible difference between languages and, in the same move, makes translation an impossible activity that is inevitably marked with failure. This view of translation is central to Barbara Cassin's exceptional editorial project entitled *The Dictionary of Untranslatables*.

Emphasising the untranslatable may create the impression that another fetishisation of language might be lurking on the horizon. Cassin accentuates, however, that every language is placed in the impossible position of openness and closure, unbordering and border. Just as in the Lacanian framework, one could argue that the inexistence of language is the true driving force behind the activity of speech – the negativity that is always addressed and that brings the linguistic production forward – the untranslatable is for Cassin the actual driving force of translation. And, just like matter in ancient atomism, linguistic matter, too, is moved by a void. The untranslatable is thus not meant to designate the impenetrable core of meaning expressed in one language, but rather the condition of possibility of linguistic transmission. At this point, it is worth recalling that the German language possesses two expressions for translation, which are crucial for understanding the critical scope of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* since they allow one to distinguish between two modes of translation: *dolmetschen* and *übersetzen*. The former merely searches for matching equivalents of a word in another language, whereas the latter must be understood in the stronger sense of *über-setzen*, dis-placement or transmission. The question, however, is what is being transmitted? *Dolmetschen* transmits meaning, whereas *übersetzen* transmits difference, the impossibility of integral translation, its constitutive inadequacy. This difference suggests that übersetzen actively contributes to the expansion and the life of language, it "contaminates" language with foreignness.

Taken as a whole, the project of *Dictionary of Untranslatables* comprises an important thesis on the nature of philosophy in general and on philosophical language it particular. For it is quite clear that the *Dictionary* transmits more than a mere collection of philosophical concepts; it shows that the entire practice of philosophy is grounded on linguistic equivocity. The fundamental concepts of philosophy are ultimately condensations of linguistic surplus and the means of its transmission. Here we confront anew the tension between the translatable and the untranslatable or, in the language of psychoanalysis, between meaning and enjoyment. Philosophy has always strived to tame linguistic peculiarities such as homophony, where sound and sense are fused together in an equivocal or polyphonic manner. By showing that the language of philosophy comprises an accumulation of equivocations, language games and homonymies, the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* creates the impression of being an "antiphilosophical" project. It is certainly a negation of the typical philosophical dictionary or encyclopaedia, which would be a project of the "university discourse", a collection of concepts and notions, which presumably ground philosophy in a universal language of being. In turn, the untranslatables show the anchoring of philosophy in *lalangue*,

thus confronting it with something that the normative tendencies in philosophy systematically strived to repress, its own enjoyment of language.

The untranslatables are not only symptoms of the philosophical enjoyment of language. They are also "symptoms of difference between languages",[16] which confront philosophers with the imperative of working with this difference. This work, however, does not amount to the plain and simple acknowledgment of irreducible singularity of each particular language or its absolute closure for other languages. This would indeed amount to the fetishisation of untranslatable. Instead, translation as a form of work comprises the construction of a weak universal, or perhaps better, a discursive commons, which is not to be mistaken for construction of metalanguage. The discursive commons addressed throughout the project of *Dictionary of Untranslatables* is difference itself. By taking translation in the sense of *Übersetzung*, the *Dictionary* demonstrates that language is continuously touched by difference and in this way made to expand and transform itself. Translation unborders language by exposing it to the foreignness of another language, but also to self-foreignness, since linguistic irregularities in one and the same language already imply a view on language from its "inner outside", a constitutive split in the (native) speaker.

For the most part of its history, philosophy strived to avoid the problematic of *lalangue* and the anchoring of concept in equivocity, the instability and enjoyment of *logos*. Such a confrontation would inevitably face philosophy with the internal limit of its own discursive consistency and with the problematic status of its claim for abstract universalism. The limit of philosophy traditionally assumed the externalised form in the figure of the sophist, this negative mirror image of philosopher and the objectivation of linguistic surplus that philosophy struggles with in its own linguistic practice. While philosophers always understood their endeavour as a search for truth and knowledge for which they required the invention of a stable and normalised language, sophistry presumably relativized and questioned both truth and knowledge. While philosophers strived to stabilise language by means of logic and grammar (the self-proclaimed "medicine of language"), sophists mobilised the dynamic of language in rhetoric (the so-called "art of speaking") and placed poetic figures such as metaphor and metonymy, condensation and displacement of sense and meaning, equivocity and language game at the core of their discursive practice. In doing so, the sophists implicitly confronted philosophy with the contrast between language of being and language of enjoyment as two aspects of one and the same linguistic "tool". The practice of sophistry demonstrated that, contrary to what philosophy strived to reject, there is something like "enjoyment of being".[17]

Inverting the view of language and putting its own dynamic – "life" – and the affectivity it causes in the speaking body – "enjoyment" – at the centre of philosophical investigations displaces the accent from the presumable logical and grammatical stability of language to the intricacies of linguistic confusion. However, this linguistic confusion implies a critical view of language that

importantly deviates from the normative gaze of ideal language. As Cassin notes: "Every language has its share of confusions, but these confusions are identified from another language, and even they only exist from this other point of view. It's always from the outside that we see how things work at home, it's outside our own territory that we become aware of it."[18] An example of such confusion is certainly homonymy and, even more so, homophony, equivocity or polyphony, which raises a different and indeed more pressing issue. The difference between homonymy – same word endowed with different meanings – and homophony – same sound endowed with different sense – is crucial here. It is only with homophony and equivocity that the materiality and affectivity of language enters the picture – not simply the materiality of writing, but more importantly the speaking body. In homophony, more is at stake than simple overlapping or condensation of meanings, semantic confusion. Here two equally important overlappings take place: on the one hand, between sound and sense, and on the other, between enjoyment and sense (what Lacan called *joui-sense,* enjoyed sense) whereby sound and enjoyment overtly imply the presence of a speaking body and incorporation of the signifier.

In its fusion of language and the body, homophony indicates a limit of linguistics whose scientific concerns cover merely the physiology of the speech apparatus and the cerebral localisation of linguistic activity but not the material causality of the signifier in the psychoanalytic and poetological sense of the term, where the main interest goes to the production of symbolically charged affects (again, enjoyment). Here again we come across the double character of language, its suspension between material bodily activity and virtually existing system. The latter is an incorporeal epistemic object, an idealisation, extracted from the activity of speech. By performing its epistemic separation of language from the body, linguistics ended up privileging the actualisation of the symbolic system in the present, language in its synchronic aspect, its "eternal now".

Although homophony provides a more exemplary case of linguistic confusion from homonymy – because it concretises the materiality of the signifier – the "con-fusion" of language and the body, if I may make the pun, is elevated on the level of the concept in the paradigmatic homonymy shared by several languages. The English *tongue,* the French *tongue* or the Latin *lingua*, the Slavic *jezik* (and the list could be continued) are all variations of the same homonymy, where the word signifies the general faculty of speech and part of the physiological speech apparatus. Derrida is one among many who drew attention to this homonymy. However, in this context Derrida reminded one of the specificity of Hebrew, where the word *safah* is a homonymy of "language" and "lip". In his discussion of the biblical myth of Babylon, Derrida remarks that the Babylonian confusion stands for a "multiplicity of lips and not tongues"[19]. The Biblical myth is supposed to explain the emergence of linguistic multiplicity, the non-understanding and difference between languages. Before the confusion of languages there was only one language and, in accordance with homonymy, one lip.[20] Or, taken in its absolute singularity, the lip becomes a mythical organ, implying the absence of mouth. There is nothing mythical about

one tongue; this is an anatomical fact, and perhaps it is the homonymy of language with tongue that amplifies the conviction that there was one language before languages, a language that presumably ceased to exist as a consequence of Divine punishment. Next to being a mythical organ, a single lip symbolises absence of language, as well as the impossibility of unity in the field of language: not only the impossible identity between languages, which would enable their transparent communicability, but also the impossible identity and oneness in one and the same language. As soon as there is one lip, there are necessarily two. Of course, the two lips make a speaking mouth, in which, according to Hegel's hilarious remark, the highest and the lowest are brought together: the articulation of speech, which is the main means for the expression and externalisation of spirit, and spitting or eating, where the mouth is reduced to its miserable and anything but sublime corporeality.[21] Extending this Hegelian remark from tongue to language, one can add that, it, too unites, if not the highest and the lowest, then at least two opposites: communication and enjoyment, information and violence, truth and lie, unveiling of being and its performative production, *langue* and *lalangue.*

Lips point toward touch, which is an activity that establishes both link and difference. They are indeed the privileged figure of redoubling, unity and division. If the tongue is a metaphor of linguistic unity, lips are not simply a metaphor of linguistic duality, but rather an exemplification of internal redoubling that characterises language. Language is no longer one – this is where the myth of Babylon comes in – and not yet two – the language of being and language of enjoyment, communication and babbling do not stand for two distinct languages, but for internal confusion and discrepancy of on and the same language. Or better, language was never one and it will never be two.[22]

The text in which Derrida engages in an extensive commentary on the myth of Babylon ventures a wordplay in its title: *Des tours de Babel* (Babylonian Towers) echoes *Détours de Babel* (Babylon's detours). Babylon is ultimately an empty place, to which one can never return to, one can merely circumvent it and, in doing so, produce it as a place, which moreover gives a topological consistency to the linguistic confusion or the organised disequilibrium that is language. Babylon is a hole, which presumably pierced the lip and, in so doing, created the speaking mouth. Further, Babylon, too, is a homonymy. One meaning covers the tower of Babylon as a mythical construction of unique language and as metaphor of understanding, communication and relationality between languages, a metaphor of union, linguistic unity and oneness, relation and social bond. Derrida's wordplay speaks of the tower of Babylon in plural, which is undoubtedly crucial. There is only multiplicity; each language is a figure of the absolute, impenetrable for others and itself gravitating around a point of impenetrability and untranslatability. This leads directly to the second meaning of Babylon. Here, the name stands for the actual mixing of languages and their mutual incomprehensibility – in opposition to the myth's assumption of the virtual existence of One-Language.

The incomprehensibility governs between languages and within each particular language. After all, this is what Freud named the unconscious.

So what, then, is the task of translation? What activity are we talking about? Clearly this activity not only takes place between different languages but also within one and the same language, and, further, it not only takes place between different speaking beings but also within one and the same subject. The subject is constituted around a point of non-understanding, self-incomprehensibility, self-opaqueness and self-foreignness. Translation would thus comprise an ethics of handling with this foreignness, the care for the foreignness in oneself and in the other. As Cassin insists, translation must not abolish difference but work with it – work it through in a manner that will be metamorphic both for language and for the subject. Translation is indeed something that comes close to analytic work, understood in the Freudian sense of working-through. Moreover, as a metalinguistic practice, translation stands for an activity in which languages are, so to speak, observed from the outside. However, this outside is not absolute (a metaposition), but rather an inner-outer, which binds and unbinds, connects and differentiates languages. It is thus a process, in which (self-)identity and (self-)difference of language is constituted. Babylon ultimately comes forward as a figure for the impossibility of a language to bring its constitution to term and, in so doing, to inscribe itself in the order of being.

A language is in discrepancy with itself, but the symptoms of this discrepancy, as Cassin points out, can be efficiently detected and described only when one looks at a language from the viewpoint of another language. These symptoms also expose the two-sidedness of translation. In the same move, translation exposes the affinity and the discrepancy between languages, their relation and non-relation, which are continuously at work in one and the same link between languages, as well as in one and the same language. It is this internally broken, non-relational relation that makes of translation an activity that contributes to the extension of language by inscribing deadlocks into it. At the same time, translation pushes for the invention of a linguistic common, as Derrida concluded in his own manner:

> This co-deployment toward the whole is a reply because what it intends to attain is "the pure language [*die reine Sprache*]," or the pure tongue. What is intended, then, by this co-operation of languages and intentional aims is not transcendent to the language; it is not a reality that they besiege from all sides, like a tower that they are trying to surround. No, what they are aiming at intentionally, individually and together, in translation is the language itself as Babelian event, a language that is neither the universal language in the Leibnizian sense, nor a language that is the natural language that each still remains on its own; it is the being-language of the language, tongue or language as such, that unity without any self-identity that makes for the fact that there are plural *languages* and that they are *languages*.[23]

It is this linguistic commonality that Barbara Cassin addresses in her idea of "complicated universal". In the same move, she demonsrates that complicating the universal has concrete consequences for philosophy, since it obliges philosophers to complicate the form of language that they historically invented for themselves in order to speak in behalf of others. Complicating the universal then ultimately means complicating philosophy, throwing it out of its linguistic comfort zone. Leibniz's project of universal language,[24] this fictitious language of encyclopaedic knowledge and of the modern university discourse, shares its abstract universalist aspirations with another, much more efficient and violent modern attempt in discursive unification, the "language of commodities". In stark opposition to the epistemic and economic uniformity in the field of social and subjective relations, the construction of a complicated universal, understood as a discursive event and a work-process, means above all inventing a language of emancipation, which would affirm the shared space and the equally shared difference of languages and subjectivities. Inventing a language without identity. This language would clearly not be an abstract universal, by means of which all differences would be mastered, if not effectively abolished, or in which particular languages and subjectivities would find their ultimate harmony (again in accordance with the Leibnizian model). For complicating the universal means sustaining what Derrida pointedly calls "unity without any self-identity" – this is what the labour of translation, understood as transmission of deadlocks that the subject encounters in speaking (as well as other registers of praxis), exemplifies.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Barbara Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction. Compliquer l'universel* (Paris: Fayard, 2016).

2. See Barbara Cassin and Michel Narcy, *La décision du sens. Le livre* Gamma *de la* Métaphysique *d'Aristote, introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Paris: Vrin, 1989).

3. Lacan, quoted in Cassin, Éloge de la traduction, *op. cit.,* p. 27.

4. To recall a wordplay that Freud briefly refers to in his book on *Jokes: traduttore-tradittore,* which determines translator's activity as an act of treason, albeit an unintended one.

5. See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 2002), p. 418.

6. For the link between thinking and affect, see Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (1969-1970) (*New York: Norton, 2006), p. 150-151. Thought

and affect can, of course, be linked on the background of the Freudian concept of the unconscious, which stands precisely for the fusion of language and the body.

7. In his writing on the drive, Freud spoke of the nexus between the somatic and the psychic. The drive is "on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body." Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 122. From the Lacanian viewpoint, the psychic could be translated with the symbolic.

8. In its critical positioning vis-à-vis Aristotle, logology in its own way pursues the line that was initiated by structuralism, the first thorough epistemological break with the Aristotelian philosophy of langage and the first systematic thematisation of the autonomy of the symbolic order.

9. Aristotle's position toward poetic language was less "excessive", but not against sophistry, which was for him the exemplification of an untenable position in thinking and speaking. It is because of the very existence of sophistry that a therapy of language is needed and a normative conception of language must be elaborated.

10. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 5.

11. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan addresses the link between language and body in two animal metaphors. The first one concerns the spider's web and its activity of weaving, which is supposed to exemplify the real coming into the symbolic. The second metaphor is the swarm, which is supposed to exemplify the activity of signifiers and the unstable and dynamic consistency of language (in difference to the more rigid figure of the signifier chain). The web and the swarm, a singular activity of the spider's body and a collective activity of, say, a flock of birds or a bee swarm: we have here two models, a body weaving a structure and a structure that actively determines the behaviour of its elements (hence the common example of swarm as active matter). Lacan implicitly suggests that language, too, is active matter. The web and swarm moreover provide the examples for language and *lalangue*, or perhaps better, for what is mathematisable in language and what seems to escape mathematisation, but what can be, at least according to Lacan, geometrised by means of topology.

12. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 72-74.

13. Émile Benveniste relativized Saussure's notion of arbitrarity by reminding that in our daily use of language we, the speakers, almost compulsively associate every signifier to its strictly determined signified. The bond between the two components of linguistic sign is thus for him grounded in necessity rather than arbitrarity. Lacan, in turn, took the other direction and eventually suggested replacing the notion of arbitrarity with contingency. For him, arbitrarity was not going far enough in pinpointing the non-relational aspects of language.

14. Another aspect of the arbitrarity of language is brought to the point in linguistic actions such as poetry and other forms of literary language, in language games, in what Freud called the psychopathology of everyday life, in short, in the unconscious. All these are cases of linguistic revolution, albeit not in the sense of radical subversion of the

structural order existing in the present. Structure stands less for a rigid transcendental order than for a gradual process of becoming; it comprises both the spatial ("synchronic") and the temporal ("diachronic") extension.

15. Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 21. Another crucial remark, proposed by Derrida, which pretty much summarises the experience of speaking, goes as follows: "I have only one language/tongue, it is not mine." Derrida, *Le monolinguisme, op. cit.*, p. 12. Needless to add that it is precisely this experience of linguistic expropriation that stands at the core of the psychoanalytic link between language, body and the unconscious.

16. Barbara Cassin, *Plus d'une langue* (Paris: Fayard, 2019), p. 23.

17. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 70. Transl. modified.

18. Cassin, *Plus d'une langue, op. cit.*, p. 27-28.

19. Jacques Derrida, *Psyché. Inventions of the Other*, Vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 205.

20. More on this homonymy in Michael Friedman, "Jenseits der (deutschen) Sprache. Eine mathematisch-hebräische Falte", in: Michael Friedman and Angelika Seppi (eds.), *Martin Heidegger: Die Falte der Sprache* (Vienna: Turia + Kant Verlag, 2016), p. 194-195.

21. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 210-211, footnote. The actual passage, where Hegel discusses the mouth in terms of union of the highest with the lowest activity, is taken from his *Philosophy of Nature*.

22. However, both lips and tongue accurately point out the linguistic surplus, since they are very much the central organs of enjoyment. Language is an extended, fantomic or spectral symbolic body, indeed an unbordered body. It can only touch itself by overcoming its presumable unity or rather by producing unity as a retroactive fiction.

23. Derrida, *Psyché, op. cit.*, p. 221-222.

24. See G.W. Leibniz, *L'harmonie des langues* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), notably the introduction by Marc Crépon, pp. 9-34.