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# The ecological force and function of literary translation

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## ABSTRACT

This article proposes: that translation, with its peculiar combination of expanding consciousness and situational specificity, is an agent of ecological action; that translation institutes a process of ecological embedding which is relational rather than identitarian, vocative rather than accusative; that translation promotes a certain kind of ecological understanding which is developmental and mutational. All these issues are examined, and the guiding propositions pursued, through a sequence of interconnected inquiries: into the notions of idiolect and 'alterity', as handled by Steiner, into page-space as a modality of environmental inhabitation, into the force of situated presentness in translation, into the drawbacks of conservation, into the body's translational indispensability. The application of this sequence of inquiries is then tested in a translation of Victor Hugo's 'Fenêtres ouvertes' (*L'Art d'être grand-père*, 1877). In conclusion, the article argues that different dimensions of ecology can only find their fruitful connections and ramifications through transversal thinking, a function peculiar to translation. But this function must be properly capitalised upon, if translation is fully to realise itself as a model of ecological relating.

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## 1. Preliminaries

This article is guided by certain underlying assumptions, to wit: that translation is an agent of ecological action; that translation is a process of ecological embedding, an embedding of the joint enterprise source text/target text (ST/TT); that translation proposes a particular kind of ecological strategy: the developmental and relational rather than the conservationist and identitarian.<sup>1</sup>

As the agent of ecological action, translation involves a dialectical movement between the centrifugal and the centripetal; it invites us to generate expansion from within a text, to supplement the text with associations, multi-sensory connections, linguistic and para-linguistic variations/variants. But as we undertake this transformation of text, the process of expansion is counterpointed by what might be seen as a contradictory pull, towards the situatedness of speech, the specificity and presentness of a particular articulatory transaction. Translation both takes us out of text into environment, and draws an environment into itself.

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Since ecological embedding is one of the objectives of translation, so the performative, the servant of the idiolectal, must be an intrinsic part of the translational process, performance *in* the text as much as performance *of* the text. Performance is that process by which the text, now to be understood as the compound ST/TT, is symbiotically interwoven with its environment. If translation translates text (ST) towards script or scenario, towards re-oralisation, then the ST/TT must be read for what it activates with its environment rather than for what it means.

In order for translation to exert an ecological force, it must multiply language and languages, and it must be a developmental act, an act of becoming. It must therefore be a polyglot translation; standard monoglot translation reduces the number of languages by providing substitutes, by allowing the reader to continue inhabiting the *Umwelt*<sup>2</sup> of his/her own *langue* (national language). By 'polyglot' we mean not a person who knows many languages, but a person who is permeable to many languages, where 'many languages' means all languages of expression, graphic, gestural, chromatic, as well as verbal, that is to say, *langage* as an inclusive medium of human expression. The kind of translational ecology we here envisage is not *primarily* bio-linguistic diversity – although this is clearly an issue that translation theory should constantly address – that is, not an ecology of conservation, of closed-system *Umwelten*, however multiple, but an ecology of developmental, inter-species, inter-sensory overlaps, a continual dialectical process of self-differentiation and re-assimilation. In translating we enter not into an accusative relationship with the ST – the ST as object to be interpreted – but into a vocative one, into a dialogue with the ST in which we construct the expressive parameters of the I/You partnership; and this vocative connection, a connection of address, of reciprocal participatory interpellation, equally underpins the relationship between the ST/TT as bi-lateral text and its reading environment. These ambitions require that translation should always work within the open field (smooth space) of the relational rather than in the territorialised and tribal spaces (striated space)<sup>3,4</sup> of the identitarian.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Idiolect and 'alterity'

The difference between the relational and the identitarian is, from a translational point of view, captured in the distinction one might make between idiolectal objectives and those of literary style. Style, an essentially scriptural concept, pulls text into the shape of a certain consistent model of deviation, which points to a particular manner of envisioning the world, to a particular verbal chemistry which corresponds to the perceptual/cognitive metabolism of the individual writer. In this way, style *characterises* the writer, has an unavoidable autobiographical continuity, though it may undergo modification: early style, late style. Early idiolect and late idiolect, on the other hand, make no sense as collocations. Idiolect, understood as personal dialect, is a reading, a writing and a speech informed by environmental connections, by local colourations, senses, modalities, which reveal the way in which a linguistic instance has impressed upon it a sensory context, a pressure of combined connotations, the imprint, in short, of a specific existential ecology. A style can be imitated, an idiolect can be shared in. An idiolect always takes place in a now, and with an immediacy that style need not have. In terms of *mise-en-page*, style consolidates certain habits, whether of layout, typography or punctuation, but of an 'attitudinising' kind, as in the colons and parentheses of Barthes, for example (see Thomas

2015: 119–23). But *mise-en-page*, in an idiolectal sense, explores the free-variational plurality of writing as a medium highly sensitive to expressive perspectivalising and nuancing. In translation, then, one should seek to translate style towards idiolect. Let us insist: in translating, we are not trying to find a way back to the ST (an equivalent or resurrection of its style); we are trying to find a way forward for it, into a multiplicity of possible idiolects. But as indicated, in our version of translation, the ST and TT remain dialectically indispensable to each other; the ST is never superseded by the TT.

Thus, in our understanding of the term, as we use it in a particular kind of translational practice, idiolect is not imprisoned in, or limited by, its distinctiveness, it is not a *minority* form of *langue*. Quite the contrary, it is a form of *langue* which, by its capture of the specifically experiential, opens it up to *langage*, to language's alternativity or 'alternity'. And in speaking of idiolect and 'alternity', we enter the orbit of George Steiner. About idiolect, Steiner observes:

No two human beings share an identical associative context. Because such a context is made up of the totality of an individual existence, because it comprehends not only the sum of personal memory and experience but also the reservoir of the particular subconscious, it will differ from person to person. [. . .] All speech forms and notations, therefore, entail a latent or realised element of individual specificity. They are in part an idiolect (Steiner 1998: 178-9).

What might then cause the reader some consternation is Steiner's view that, while natural language itself, by its very 'multivalence', serves idiolect (Steiner 1998: 214), translation, which Steiner describes at one point as 'the transfer from one designative coherence to another' (1998: 215), works only to undermine it: 'The entire business of translation, the current search for universals in generative grammars, express a fundamental reaction against the privacies of individual usage and the disorder of Babel' (1998: 214–15). Translation, in this account, serves public interests and has no truck with the elaboration of the idiolectal. The hermeneutic condition, his hermeneutic conviction, denies Steiner, as translator, access to a quality of language which, for him, is a fundamental constituent of the literary.

Distrust of the critical validity of the performative realisation of text leads Steiner to a favouring of text-inherent meaning over conferred meaning. For Steiner, the reader extracts from the text but does not feed into the text, whereas for Wilhelm von Humboldt, whom Steiner so much admires, the exact sense of language only takes its final shape in the mind of the individual who speaks or hears it. Furthermore, in the circumstances of speech/dialogue, Humboldt tells us, misunderstanding between speakers, the non-coincidence of their idiolects, is made fruitful in the dialectic of dialogue itself, which is progressive and never completed, rather than being a mechanism of resolution:

Erst im Individuum erhält die Sprache ihre letzte Bestimmtheit. Keiner denkt bei dem Wort gerade und genau das, was der andre, und die noch so kleine Verschiedenheit zittert, wie ein Kreis im Wasser, durch die ganze Sprache fort. Alles Verstehen ist daher immer zugleich ein Nicht-Verstehen, alle Uebereinstimmung in Gedanken und Gefühlen zugleich ein Auseinandergehen (2003: 330)

[Only in the individual does language receive its ultimate determinacy. Nobody means by a word precisely and exactly what his neighbour does, and the difference, be it ever so small, vibrates, like a ripple in water, throughout the entire language. Thus all understanding is always at the same time a not-understanding, all concurrence in thought and feeling at the same time a divergence (Heath 1988: 63)].

Through a vocative relationship, two idiolects, those of writer and reader/translator, can fruitfully interact and supplement each other. But for Steiner, the text to be translated is accusative rather than vocative, not a cooperative You but a recalcitrant It.

It is in the very nature of language to create these new speculative experiential spaces, what Steiner calls 'the elbow room of the mind, its literal *Lebensraum*' (Steiner 1998: 226). Language, in its conditionals, its suppositionals, its optatives, is where individuals, and the societies they constitute, make imaginative space for themselves, give themselves options on alternative existences, escape the predictions of history; as Steiner puts it: 'Through language, so much of which is focused inward to our private selves, we reject the empirical inevitability of the world. Through language, we construct what I have called "alternities of being"' (Steiner 1998: 497). This, for us, is precisely what translation sets out to do.

It is the projective, future-orientated nature of this *Lebensraum* of the hypothetical that should be emphasised:

Human consciousness recognises in the existent a constant margin of incompleteness, of arrested potentiality which challenges fulfilment. Man's awareness of 'becoming', his capacity to envisage a history of the future, distinguishes him from all other living species (1998: 227).

We want to propose that translation creates this forward-directed alternity of being, by itself acting as the agent not of transfer but of hypothesis; the source text (ST) begets the target text (TT) as optative, or conditional, or suppositional, by, as it were, the translator's dreaming off the text. Translation *justifies* the diversity of languages by itself pursuing alternity (not to be confused with alterity). Translation refuses to accept the world (ST) as it is; foreign languages are invitations to reimagine or reconfigure reality, to re-set perceptual co-ordinates, to change the chemistry of consciousness. So we return to the proposition that translation is a reconciliation of contradictory pulls, between idiolect and alternity, between the historicity and situatedness of the speaking subject, and the expansion of that subject into linguistic diversity and expanding virtuality, between a variable *Umwelt* and a variability and blending of *Umwelten*, between the intra-relational and the inter-relational.

### 3. The space of translation

How does a poetic text relate to the space of the page, to what is a simple geometry, a Euclidian geometry of the rectangle? More often than not, it aligns itself with that rectangle (lines, margins, regular spacings), so that we more readily apprehend its form, its rhythmic deployment, its repetitive structuring and its consonances, its not being prose. But in translation, the space of the page is the space of the translating subject in the page. Space is not always a compliant companion because words are not just elements in a rule-governed syntax and disposition; they are articulations,<sup>5</sup> the very body and being of a subject. Words are those things in which a subject embodies a situation of self, a verbal event, something subject to the contingencies of point of view. For the purposes of articulation, space needs to be smooth, in the Boulez/Deleuze and Guattarian sense, constantly re-mappable, re-assignable, not to be coerced by any imperatives of property or production. A text on a page is susceptible, like any territory, to multiple mappings (its

relief, its heritage sites, its demographics, its ethnicities, etc.), to multiple articulations. The kind of map that translation's space is mapping is likely to be as much a Situationist psycho-geographic map as any other.

To translate is not to produce a faithful image of the text (ST) but a projection onto the paper of the space of its reading. The reading of text contributes its own animation of space. It is the reading of text which inscribes space with its 'existential' (circumstantial, involuntarily absorbed, but informing characteristics),<sup>6</sup> its dimensionality, its depth. Since these things are not repeated from one version of a text to another, each text – where translation is the principle of its multiplication – must constantly generate new ecosystems. As the translator, therefore, inscribes his/her new text on the page, the way it moves about on the page embodies a new way of articulating and inhabiting it. Space we know – through agriculture or totalitarian cityscapes – can be an agent of domination and control. But how do we make it an agent of 'ouverture', of multilateral and reciprocal forms of subjecthood?

When we speak of the movement of inhabitation, we are suggesting most particularly that the articulation of space is partly an enrhythming of it. Space is shot through with rhythmic impulses, with attitudinal drives, which imply that the subject-voice is trying to find a pathway, to understand a meshwork of experience.<sup>7</sup> Many who speak of ecosystems fall back on the notion of equilibrium (see Bellamy 2020: 131); but equilibrium is the condition of precariousness and vulnerability, however quick it is to self-readjust. Enrhythming avoids notions of balance and instead gives shape to motion, to articulatory path-finding, to articulation in its physical duration, to diversified temporal unfolding.

The space of the ST has a history: the reiterations of its visibility. But the spaces of the TT are without a textual history, without textual imperatives or urgings, however responsive they may be to the history of the reader as it is expressed in reconfigurative desires and needs. The space of the translational page is an existential space in which what was originally a simple Euclidean geometry, a rectangle, becomes an n-dimensional space of linguistic/paralinguistic self-exploration. What was before a space of formal endorsement, allowing the confident perception of metrico-rhythmic patterning, repetitive line-lengths, stanzaic structuring, becomes the space of an inscription, a language finding its 'existential', its depth, its perspectives, in a particular subject-situation.

As we have said, this new space, the space of translation, is not striated space, but smooth space, a space without territories and borders, a space ever to move into, a space of currents and flows, outside state control, a space of rhythmic multi-dimensionality, a space of temporal passage. We might then suggest that time (the unfolding of the duration of utterance, of subjecthood in uttering) counters any attempt by space to make itself consistent, to represent a stable value or function. Regular verse may entail our entering an architecture, a dwelling, our being guided by, and respecting, an explicit structure; but free and tabular verse instal a nomadic landscape, an open landscape of paths and meshworks, and changing temporalities.

#### 4. Translational situatedness and the present

Translation changes our perception of language and our way of inhabiting it. There is a danger that we will perceive the language of the ST as something distant in time and/or space, something that does not exist in our present, something without the malleability of the spoken, something which attracts to itself the out-of-play and dissociated languages

of dictionary and thesaurus. Our argument is that the practice of creative polyglot translation, in translating *langue* towards *langage*, engages the subjecthood of the translator in a somewhat paradoxical 'expanding situatedness', a condition in which spreading, centrifugal expressive energy is located in a particular situated present.

The nature of this present is of special importance. Our objection to conservational forms of eco-thinking is that they require stable habitats and unresourceful animal occupants, that is, habitats that are durative presents, and animals which behave in iterative presents (predation, grazing/browsing, display, territorial patrolling, mating, hibernation, migration, etc.). In this kind of world, the iterative and durative presents are the presents of the species, not the individual animal; in this kind of world, the punctual present is the present of confirmatory or exemplary events, the evidence of the iterative. But the punctual present used *with a real punctuality* prevents the signifier dipping out of its signifying activity into the signified; the signifier itself does not surrender its presence/presentness to a concept. And it is a sense of the signifier's presence that maintains rhythm as a sequence of genetic impulses rather than an instrument for measuring recurrence; by its espousal of the unfolding present, rhythm can be the flux of consciousness, tracing its *écarts*, its continual adjustments and modulations.

It is voice which makes manifest the presentness of text in its unfolding. The voice turns text into events in the vocal tract and it is for this reason that the articulatory nature of vocal language rather than the abstract acousticity of phonemes (text read as IPA) matters. This is an emphasis which, as we have seen (note 5), Humboldt had already underlined. The voice is indispensable to *participation in text*, for it is, quite simply, the body of the reader. Institutionalisation of the voice, on the other hand, leads to its disembodiment, to its becoming acousmatic. The computer is complicit in this tendency; the transformative resources it offers are concerned with textual rather than vocal manipulation; voice is no more than an assumption of text. Furthermore, the fact that text has an existence anterior to its being read, means that we tend to treat reading (aloud) as a transmission (recitation) of the said (having been said), rather than as an adventure in the sayable or in saying. It is the voice, precisely, that is capable of transforming the said into saying and the sayable, whose unpredictability, whose being at a creative edge, depends upon the presentness of utterance.

The sayable has a range that the printed text, in its sacrifice of paralinguistic, has forgone. A performative text is a saying text, an environmentally connected text, which releases the further sayable. And this is the transformation that translation enacts on the ST.

## 5. A translation of Hugo's 'Fenêtres ouvertes'

In translation-as-dialogue, each party depends on the other to achieve more than it could on its own; they parley for the purposes of mutual benefit (symbiosis). A conversation produces two texts which constantly re-consider themselves. The ST is part of a linguistic environment that is revealed in a new guise by translation, which plumbs its invisible, its virtualities and latencies. We may be able to recover some of the ST's invisible by consulting variants, but the rest we must *make visible* (variation, diversification), by the process of translation. Translation is a dialectical

adventure in cross-linguistic and cross-subjective experience, and in the understanding of the complementary energies of forms. What is at stake in translation? Not fidelity to text, but the exploration of the expanding linguistic universe let loose by translation and the accompanying environmental relating, as we might begin to see in a version of Hugo's 'Fenêtres ouvertes: Le Matin. – En dormant' (*L'Art d'être grand-père*) (Hugo 2002: 50):

J'entends des voix. Lueurs à travers ma paupière.	$4(2 > 2) > 2\sqrt{\quad}/3 > 3$
Une cloche est en branle à l'église Saint-Pierre.	$3 > 3//3 > 3$
Cris des baigneurs. Plus près! plus loin! non, par ici!	$4(1 > 3) > 2//2 > 4(1 > 3)$
Non, par là! Les oiseaux gazouillent, Jeanne aussi,	$3(1 > 2) > 3\sqrt{\quad}/3' > 3$
Georges l'appelle. Chant des coqs. Une truëlle	$5'(1 > 4') > 1\sqrt{\quad}/2 > 4$
Racle un toit. Des chevaux passent dans la ruelle.	$3(1 > 2) > 3\sqrt{\quad}/1 > 5$
Grincement d'une faux qui coupe le gazon.	$3 > 3//2 > 4$
Chocs. Rumeurs. Des couvreurs marchent sur la maison.	$3(1 > 2) > 3\sqrt{\quad}/1 > 5$
Bruits du port. Sifflement des machines chauffées.	$3(1 > 2) > 3\sqrt{\quad}/3 > 3$
Musique militaire arrivant par bouffées.	$2 > 4//3 > 3$
Brouhaha sur le quai. Voix françaises. Merci.	$3 > 3//4' > 2$
Bonjour. Adieu. Sans doute il est tard, car voici	$2 > 2 > 2(3')\sqrt{\quad}/3 > 3$
Que vient tout près de moi chanter mon rouge-gorge.	$2 > 4\sqrt{\quad}/2 > 4$
Vacarme de marteaux lointains dans une forge.	$2 > 4\sqrt{\quad}/2 > 4$
L'eau clapote. On entend haleter un steamer.	$3(4') > 3\sqrt{\quad}/3 > 3$
Une mouche entre. Souffle immense de la mer.	$5'(3 > 2') > 1(2')\sqrt{\quad}/2 > 4$

[Note:  $\sqrt{\quad}$  indicates caesura with enjambement; an apostrophe after the measure (e.g. 4') indicates the presence of a *coupe lyrique* (*coupe after word-terminal*, counted e, rather than a *coupe before* the syllable containing word-terminal, counted e (*coupe enjambante*)); a bracketed double measure indicates the possibility of a second(ary) accent within a single measure; a bracketed single measure with apostrophe indicates a 'phantom' extrametrical e creating a *coupe lyrique* (see argument below)].

[Statistics of a reading: (i) Lines: of the 16 lines, 11, in my reading, have caesuras with enjambement. (ii) Rhymes: of the eight rhymes, four are *suffisantes* (2 elements in single syllable), three are *riches* (3 elements in single syllable), one is *léonine* (2 syllables). (iii) Hemistichs: of the 32 hemistichs, 15 are  $3 > 3$ , 9 are  $2 > 4$ , 3 are  $4 > 2$ , 2 are  $5 > 1$ , 2 are  $1 > 5$  and 1 is  $2 > 2 > 2$ . If line 8 were read as  $1 > 2 > 3\sqrt{\quad}/1 > 5$ , then  $3 > 3$  would reduce to 14].

What I want to explore here, among other things, are the environmental ramifications of poetic form, the ways in which form constitutes relational eco-embedding, the ways in which it acts as a force of inhabitation.<sup>8</sup> But also how translation is able, through its own modifications, to supplement, extend and develop that inhabitational capacity. There is, of course, the danger that Hugo's alexandrine will oblige the world to conform to its own order, and the poet seems to have taken steps to resist this, by four devices:

- (1) Enjambement at the caesura (in 11 lines out of 16)
- (2) Measure-internal accents, indicated in the metrico-rhythmic notation by bracketing (in 11 hemistichs out of 32)
- (3) Punctuation, both grammatical (full stops) and prosodic (caesurae), which promotes the *coupe lyrique* even where technically it might not exist. There are instances, in my reading, of authentic *coupes lyriques*, e.g. 'gazouillent', 'Georges l'appelle', 'Voix françaises', 'Une mouche entre'. But other examples, by suggestive contagion, or the two-consonant principle, might attract a phonated *e atone*,





Snatches of military  
 music  
 blown in  
 on gusts of air

Hubbub on the quayside: Bonjour French voices Merci Adieu

It must be getting late: my robin's come close by to sing

Din

of distant hammers in a forge      The water  
 lap-lap-lapping ... a steamer

puffing panting      a fly buzzes in      The vasty respiration of the sea.

How do we invest these environmental notations with a deictic force, that is to say not as something described and put in place, but as something indicated, in its randomness, so that language acts indexically, as a trace in consciousness of the co-present? I can remove 'explanatory' elements like 'J'entends' (l. 1), 'est' (l. 2), 'On entend' (l.15); I can maintain onomatopoeic levels. But I can also appropriate what a tabular layout offers of differential spatial and temporal motion and continual re-location. Phenomena are eruptive and unpredictable events, resistant to any linear and prosodic ordering.

This shift from linear to tabular consciousness, activates a different order of rhythmic awareness, an awareness propelled not by the already sequential, not by the need to hear its measurable shapes and their repetition, as confirmation of a form, but by a speaking subject finding its way into a language that grasps a certain unfolding of heterogeneous durations and changing acoustic spaces. This is not to say that there are not recurrent rhythmic figures and rhythmic collocations: phrase-initial nouns may be an iamb<sup>9</sup> ('a bell'; 'A scythe's'), an amphibrach ('A trowel'; 'The water'), a trochee ('Voices'; 'Noises'); prepositional phrases may gravitate towards anapaest ('from the port'; 'of the sea'). But these intimations of a steady set of perceptual values are countervailed by (a) other, more complex or recalcitrant rhythmic configurations: e.g. second paeon ('chirp-tittering'), third paeon ('at Saint Peter's'), ionic ('being fired up'), bacchic ('and Jeanne, too'), choriamb ('pacing about'), molossus ('scrunch-scrunch-scrunch'); (b) rhythmic inversions: amphibrach to amphimacer ('my robin's' > 'come close by'), reversed ionic ('Georges calls to her'), reversed bacchic ('sharp impacts'); (c) ambiguities of segmentation: is 'music/blown in' a trochee + iamb or a choriamb? Is 'scrapes/a roof' a stressed monosyllable + iamb or an amphimacer?

Clearly, the rhythmic groupings itemised here do not initiate or contribute to running metres; they describe a sequence of relationships with the world – insofar as those relationships are expressed in the music of grammatical and syntactic collocations – and in so doing trace changes of perspective, proximity, perceptual stance, temporal and spatial consciousness. As we have suggested, these rhythmic phrases articulate their own spaces, are different modes of inhabiting page-space, feeding into a psycho-

geographic or psycho-topographic presence, a changing set of voluntary and involuntary impulses, a self-inscription of the subject. Thus, rather than confirming a certain dispositional pattern, rather than consolidating form, these rhythms are genetic energies, bringing into existence different dimensions of experiential response within a self-elaborating environment.

## Conclusion

For Félix Guattari, ecology is a composite of three ecologies (Guattari 1989; 2000): ‘une articulation éthico-politique – que je nomme *écosophie* – entre les trois registres écologiques, celui de l’environnement, celui des rapports sociaux et celui de la subjectivité humaine’ (Guattari 1989: 12–13) [an eco-political articulation – which I call *ecosophy* – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity) (2000: 17–18)]. We should also perhaps insist on the inclusion of the digital and bio-technological (i.e. the post-human, see Braidotti 2013). But in any event, all these different dimensions of environment must be thought transversally, if they are to bear powerfully one upon the other and to generate a fruitful interactivity and mutual benefit. The habit of transversal thinking is integral to the translational mind and encourages the formation of new existential configurations, new ways of ‘managing’ reality.

It is important for transversal thinking that differences are perceived diacritically, that is to say, differentially,<sup>10</sup> because it is only by grasping the senses in which difference is modulation, *écart*, metamorphosis, that, as we have suggested, reciprocity supersedes alterity,<sup>11</sup> that otherness becomes a force for reflexivity, dialectic, symbiosis. We are caught in a constant process of shifting our perspective, of multiplying perspective, through the vagaries of an untamed dissidence, whose horizon is a heterogeneous and restless totality. Translators embody that dissensus, not merely because they all possess language differently, but because they generate their own signifiers, and allow the supercession of standard ‘behaviours’ by constant relational re-alignments.

The natural world is not something to be conserved, any more than it is translation’s task to ‘preserve’ any ST in its ‘original’ form. Just as a text is translated towards its own totality, the totality of all its possible manifestations, so ecology similarly multiplies and projects larger horizons through processes of translation, translation of the verbal into the verbal, yes, but also into the non-verbal, into the spatial, into spatio-temporal blind fields, into other eco-systems. To begin to do this we must associate translation with the kind of thinking that Braidotti associates with the posthuman, ‘a more rhizomatic style of thinking’ which ‘allows for multiple connections and lines of interaction that necessarily connect the text to its many “outsides” [...] A text, theoretical and scientific as well as literary, is a relay point between different moments in space and time, as well as different levels, degrees, forms and configurations of the thinking process’ (Braidotti 2013: 165–166).

In translating, we put ourselves in a set of concentric spaces: the space of the page, the space of the reading environment and the space of the environment beyond. In doing so, we invite the multiform intrusions of *langage*, that is to say, all languages from the non-human to the post-human. We have yet properly to harness and capitalise upon these capacities and possibilities. If the text (ST) is a white rhino then the rhino, like the ST, will

have to re-think itself, find a subjecthood in another language or languages, find its difference from itself that gives it a future. If the ST is an ecosystem, then, with translation, it changes a stability of system into a system of change, which perpetuates itself by constant differential re-positioning.

The human occupant, through that ‘prosthetic’ we call translation, through that self-multiplying consciousness that lies in bio-linguistic diversification, is able not only to enlarge its own *Umwelt*, but also freely to cross over into other *Umwelten*. What matters in translation is not primarily the making available of a foreign text to a native reader, but the cultivation of a mindset in which the world can be constantly and creatively reconfigured, its constituents harnessed to new modes of being/becoming, new and fruitful interactive behaviours.

## Notes

1. In her *état présent* of francophone ecocriticism, Stephanie Posthumus argues for positions which are fundamental to our own approach, to wit: ‘to construct a relational ontology that undoes the nature-culture divide’ (Posthumus 2019: 600), and indeed many other dualisms; to provide a ‘theoretical foundation for rethinking the text as material object’ (2019: 605) in the living world, that is, the text as ‘material agent within a physical reality’ (Posthumus 2019: 610), or ‘an ecological reading of texts, [. . .] in which texts emerge as temporary co-habitants in a world of relations’ (2019: 611).
2. The notion of *Umwelt*, although now more widely used, has its source here in the work of Jakob von Uexküll (Uexküll 2010; Uexküll and Kriszat 1970).
3. The opposing concepts of smooth and striated space are owed to Pierre Boulez (2011: 93–113; 1971: 83–98), but filtered through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980: 592–625; 1988: 474–500); smooth space is the space in which measure, periodicity, assigned position, pattern, the characteristics of striated space, no longer obtain, in which the ear and the eye conjoin in a constant process of redistribution, discovering constantly re-configured fields of energy.
4. The field of eco-translation has, in the footsteps of ecocriticism, embarked on a significant expansion. Indicative mention might be made of Cronin (2017) and Scott (2018; 2023). Issues of multilingualism and the global ecology are explored in Yildiz (2012) and Gramling (2016), and a plea for a culture of multilingual exchange in the environmental humanities is made by, among others, Eppelsheimer, Küchler and Melin (2014).
5. We should remember Humboldt’s insistence that thought in speech manifests itself in articulation, in the physiological operation of the vocal tract, rather than in the sound (IPA) that is audible to the ear: ‘Der articulirte Laut oder, allgemeiner zu sprechen, die Articulation ist das eigentliche Wesen der Sprache, der Hebel, durch welchen sie und der Gedanke zu Stande kommt, der Schlussstein ihrer beiderseitigen innigen Verbindung. Dasjenige aber, wessen das Denken, um den Begriff zu bilden, in der Sprache, strenge genommen bedarf, ist nicht eigentlich das dem Ohr wirklich Vernehmbare; oder um es anders auszudrücken, wenn man den articulirten Laut in die Articulation und das Geräusch zerlegt, nicht dieses, sondern jene’ (Humboldt 2003: 147). [The articulated sound or, speaking more generally, the articulation is the essential being of language, the lever whereby language and thought come about, the keystone of their reciprocal inner connection. But what thought, in the strict sense of the term, needs in order to form concepts in language, is not actually what is in reality audible to the ear; but, to express it otherwise, if one separates out the articulated sound into articulation on the one hand, and pure sound on the other, it is articulation and not pure sound that counts (my translation)].
6. Merleau-Ponty speaks of ‘existenciaux’ in these terms: ‘En réalité, ce qui est à comprendre, c’est, par-delà les “personnes”, les existenciaux selon lesquels nous les comprenons, et qui sont le sens sédimenté de toutes nos expériences volontaires et involontaires. [. . .]. Ils sont

l'armature de ce "monde invisible" qui, avec la parole, commence d'imprégner toutes les choses que nous voyons, [...] (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 231) [In fact what has to be understood is, beyond the 'persons', the existentials according to which we comprehend them, and which are the sedimented meaning [sense] of all our voluntary and involuntary experiences. [...] They are the armature of that 'invisible world' which, with speech, begins to impregnate all the things we see, [...] (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 180)].

7. As we have said, this new space of translation is not striated space, or an architecture, but smooth space, a space without territories and borders, a space ever to move into, a space of currents and flows, outside state control, a space of rhythmic multi-dimensionality, a space of duration and temporal passage; as Henri Lefebvre puts it: 'Dans les rythmes, les répétitions et redondances, les symétries et assymétries interagissent de façon irréductible aux déterminations découpées et fixées par la pensée analytique. Le corps polyrythmique ne se laisse comprendre et approprier qu'à ces conditions. Les rythmes diffèrent par les amplitudes, les énergies déployées et véhiculées, les fréquences. Ils transportent et reproduisent ces différences, dans l'intensité, la force de l'attente, de la tension, de l'action, tous se croissant dans le corps comme les ondes dans l'"éther"' (Lefebvre 2000: 237) [The repetitions and redundancies of rhythms, their symmetries and asymmetries, interact in ways that cannot be reduced to the discrete and fixed determinants of analytic thought. Only if this is clearly grasped can the polyrhythmic body be understood and appropriated. Rhythms differ from one another in their amplitude, in the energies they ferry and deploy, and in their frequency. Such differences, conveyed and reproduced by the rhythms which embody them, translate into intensity or strength of anticipation, tension and action. All these factors interact with one another within the body, which is traversed by rhythms rather as the 'ether' is traversed by waves (Lefebvre 1991: 205–6)]. See also Lefebvre (2019/1992; Lefebvre 2004).
8. This carries forward investigations begun in (Scott 2002), in which I examine the verse-line as a landscaping capacity, as a modality of perception with topographical repercussions, a line of thinking shared, for example, by David Evans (2015).
9. I use the classical vocabulary of metrical 'feet' to designate the phrasal rhythms of this translation. This may strike the reader as a foolhardy and perverse decision, given that metricity, patterns of accentual recurrence, are the last things I want to suggest. Instead, I want such feet to be understood as a shifting web of modalities, as the *genetic* force, the discursive meshwork, of rhythmic impulses. A convenient nomenclature *is* necessary, and the classical terms can, I believe, be harnessed to a new function, without any inevitable misunderstanding.
10. We might usefully remember how Merleau-Ponty expresses this: 'il faut que nos différences ne soient plus comme des qualités opaques, il faut qu'elles soient devenues sens' (1969: 198) [then our differences can no longer be opaque qualities. They must become meaning [sense] (1973: 142)].
11. My quarrel with alterity is threefold: (a) it presupposes an immobilised identity which itself is a conceptual presupposition (ontology); (b) it militates against the ethos of the pronoun, the reversibility of I and You, the exchange of the subject position; (d) it is an unjustified obstacle, if it fails to allow the conversion of difference into the differential.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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