

## From Heidegger to Translation and the Address of the Other

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***Abstract:** Is Heidegger's philosophy of language capable of receiving the other that is quite different? Of seeing or witnessing this? This paper attempts to demonstrate the limits of Heidegger in terms of the capacity to recognise and acknowledge the complete otherness of the other. In doing so, I examine some of Heidegger's remarks regarding being and language, particularly in relation to his attitude toward other languages. Through exploring this, I move from language to languages, and then to translation. I explore translation, beyond the technical understanding of it, as a site of diversity and plurality — that is, the place for a responsible response to the other. To this end, I acknowledge language already in its plurality, as sustained in and by that plurality rather than as being rooted. Understanding language in this way is also to acknowledge the very condition of human being in its plurality, always already in relation to the other. In this sense, no matter how thought-provoking his account of language is, Heidegger's philosophy of language may not be enough to address current problems in society — that is, societies now, more evidently than ever before, that are based on human plurality.*

Is Heidegger's philosophy of language capable of receiving the other that is quite different? Of seeing or witnessing this? This paper attempts to demonstrate the limits of Heidegger in terms of the capacity to recognise and acknowledge the complete otherness of the other. In doing so, I examine some of Heidegger's remarks regarding being and language, particularly in relation to his attitude toward other languages. Through exploring this, I move from language to languages, and then to translation. I explore translation, beyond the technical understanding of it, as a site of diversity and plurality — that is, the place for a responsible response to the other. To this end, Barbara Cassin provides us with helpful resources by means of her book *Nostalgia: When Are We Ever at Home?* (Cassin, 2016).

After the so-called 'turn' in his philosophy, Heidegger's attention moves from the focus on being to questions of language and poetry. However, although rather indirectly, his reflections on being had intertwined with questions of language.

In this way, Heidegger's account of language is inextricably related to being. I shall begin with one of Heidegger's most striking remarks: language is the house of being. With these words Heidegger is attempting to show that it is language that enables us to think and is a source of thought. Various accounts have been offered of how Heidegger's thinking about language helps us to think beyond traditional understandings of it and hence to think education anew (see for example, Standish 1992; Williams 2013). This is made possible especially through the richness of Heidegger's thought, which directs us towards paying attention to new possibilities for responsiveness and receptivity to things. While there is no doubt of his contribution, there still remain things to be questioned or answered, and to do this it is necessary to take further steps, sometimes beyond but sometimes with Heidegger. In this paper, I suggest that a leap from language to languages is needed, and then from this toward a proper understanding of translation.

Let us repeat the question: to what extent is Heidegger open to the otherness of the other, particularly when the other is completely different? This question may seem quite ironic given the richness of Heidegger's thought in terms of responsiveness and receptivity to things (others). At the same time, it is reasonable to acknowledge the doubts that are to be found in, for example, Emmanuel Levinas's criticisms of Heidegger. Levinas suggests that Heidegger's vision of *Mitsein* is something like 'marching-together' in resolution toward the same destiny and perhaps on the strength of a common identity (Levinas 2002, 137). Levinas basically takes issue with Heidegger over the question central to his philosophy, the question of being, for its totalising power, which reduces the other to the same (see, for example Hodgson 2016). This paper, taking a somewhat different route from thinkers such as Levinas, is to answer the question of whether Heidegger's thought can acknowledge the other by exploring his thoughts regarding language. I attempt to show that Heidegger's account of language has a limit when it comes to an understanding of the other, with the conjecture that this comes from the lack of proper attention toward different languages. This is to understand language already in its plurality, as sustained in and by that plurality rather than as being rooted. To understand language in this way is also to acknowledge the very condition of human being in its plurality, always already in relation to the other. In this sense, no matter how thought-provoking his account of language is, Heidegger's philosophy of language may not be enough to address current problems in society — that is, societies now, more evidently than ever before, that are based on human plurality.

## The Problem of Translation

*Language is the house of being.* This extraordinary phrase appears in several writings of Heidegger such as the “Letter On Humanism”, and “What Are Poets For?”. Let us begin with its use in “A Dialogue on Language: between a Japanese and an Inquirer” (Heidegger 2003) This dialogue is based on an actual meeting of Heidegger and the Japanese scholar, Tezuka Tomio (1903–1983). The Inquirer, who appears to be very much like Heidegger himself, draws, upon his experience of the problem in translating the Japanese words. With the Japanese words *Iki* and *Koto ba*,<sup>1</sup> the Inquirer professes the mysteriousness of East Asian (Japanese) thought. He says:

Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, *the house of Being*. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man (Heidegger 2003, 5).

Here, the Inquirer acknowledges the difference between languages by identifying them as different houses of being. The Inquirer then expresses the belief that it is impossible for an outsider to come to understand Japanese thought and language from the inside. For example, he will never understand the *Noh* play. In this sense, both men in the dialogue, from two different cultures, dwelling in totally different houses, will never fully understand each other. While this may indicate where the problem of translation comes from, this is not, for Heidegger, a problem in a sense that it could, or even should, be fixed. It is the nature of language rather than a problem to be corrected. Let us clarify this point further by firstly considering Heidegger’s worthwhile accounts on language.

Heidegger, in the course of the dialogue, not only illustrates but also allows readers to experience the way of thinking that is beyond representation. This is a poetic thinking in its responsiveness and receptiveness toward things in contrast to the kind of thinking that puts things into pre-existing concepts or classifies them according to given sets of criteria. This is precisely the way of thinking into which

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<sup>1</sup> Those respectively can be translated, in English, into art and language. In the dialogue, after a long hesitation, the Japanese explains *Iki* as “the breath of the stillness of luminous delight”, and *Koto ba* as “the petals that stem from *Koto*”, which is the event that gives delight (Heidegger 2003, 44–47).

Heidegger wishes to lead the reader; without this we are ‘still not thinking’ (Heidegger 1976, 4). In Heidegger’s terms, this is ‘poetic thinking’ as an alternative to ‘calculative thinking’, where the latter is to be understood as rendering things as mere objects — *Bestand* — waiting to be mastered, scrutinised, and exploited.

In overcoming calculative thinking, a proper understanding of language comes as a key. Far from traditional ways of understanding language, Heidegger helps us to be aware that human beings are not the agents of language and thus fully in control of it; rather, they are more the products of language. Thus language speaks the human being, not the other way around. Thoughts come to us and we respond to language allowing things to reveal themselves — that is, we respond to the ‘Saying’. In this way we understand language not as a mere communicative tool, rather as a source — a wellspring — of thought from which we can never withdraw. We are, in a real sense, *sentenced* or *convicted* by our words, sentenced to be in language in the sense that we cannot extricate ourselves from it. At the same time, the words are not in my control, it always flees from me, beyond my expectations; what I mean is partly decided by others; thus it can seem to be *stolen* from me. Heidegger’s thought implies that the supposed problem of translation (not only between languages, but also within a language) is precisely what illustrates the nature of language. Moreover, when we attempt to grasp things by means of representation, we only lose it as they become mere objects. Thus it is, Heidegger says, that the dialogue is *of* language, not *about* language.

Although I take Heidegger’s insights into language as a basis of my thought, the question I nevertheless want to raise at this point is not of language but, let us say, of *languages*, which, I suggest, start to reveal the limits of his account. While Heidegger certainly seems to be concerned about such foreign languages as Japanese, it is ironically the case, I believe, that his attention is really focused on language, in the singular, not on languages. And I shall suggest that this lies behind his incapacity to receive the other. Needless to say, it raises also some questions (and maybe provides some answers) with regard to Heidegger’s dubious politics. Before proceeding to clarify this fully, let us attend more closely to the dialogue.

It is true that Heidegger does pay attention to foreign languages from time to time. Apart from Japanese (and sometimes Chinese), his great interest is in Greek. I want to show how this may be problematic. In the dialogue, as Paul Standish writes, Heidegger seems to be eulogising the Japanese way of life and thought and thus the Japanese language, while “seeing it as offering a real alternative to the degradation of the West (of the English-speaking world in particular), whose thought had been

progressively colonised by technology” (Saito and Standish 2014, 23). While a language such as English is attuned to calculative thinking, Greek is the language best placed to overcome this in its relation to the truth of being. This favourable gloss on Greek applies also, as we shall see shortly, to German and Japanese.

To help understand this point, consider the full title of the dialogue for a moment. It is a dialogue between a Japanese and an Inquirer. Given that this is based on a real encounter, I want to question why Heidegger is speaking of ‘A Japanese’, not ‘The Japanese’ (or why, for that matter, the man’s name is not used instead), and why the other participant to the dialogue is designated as ‘An Inquirer’ and not as Heidegger himself? While this already sounds strange as there is no identification of the person, the effect is, to some extent, one of generalising or even idealising Japanese (or perhaps in a broad sense East Asian) characteristics. By anonymising the participants in this self-conscious way, Heidegger is projecting the Japanese as an idealised and abstract way.

Despite the belief Heidegger has earlier professed, it seems that both very much understand each other in the end, and they seem united in their aversion to the colonising power of European or American thoughts, “the complete Europeanization” (Heidegger 2003, 15). Also, both of them agree on the intimate relationship between *Koto ba* and ‘Saying’, taking Saying to be the ‘essential being’: the “Japanese word *Koto ba* hints and beckons” (Heidegger 2003, 47). With a particular understanding of language — *Koto ba* — the Japanese goes on to profess, in a kind of mutuality of respect (or flattery), that “we Japanese have an innate understanding” for Heidegger’s thought, regretting in the process the fact that there are not many who could hear “an echo of the nature of language which [the] word *Koto ba* names” (Heidegger 2003, 50; 53). *Koto ba* now is understood as an idealised form of Saying. The way both understand the other culture is becoming quite suspicious. Both at first expressed the view that there was something unique in Japanese thought and language that an outsider could never understand, but then, with their common interest in overcoming Westernised thinking, they come to understand each other rather well. The Japanese also seems to be drawn into this exoticisation of Japanese language and thought. Is this not a mystification and then idealisation?

The hyperbole of the assertion “I cannot understand you as you are so different” is used duplicitously in a kind of performative contradiction, and, in spite of its avowed intentions, feeds surreptitiously the exoticisation of the other. It falls far short of a genuine understanding. The Inquirer, in a display of humility, declares the impossibility of understanding the other, in a way that covertly incorporates the

other into the same. Any act of mystifying or idealising only effects the objectification of the other. The boundary between humility and hubris is blurred. This dialogue is in a sense also a dialogue not only about language but about the other. As a dialogue that is stylised, and thus possibly ventrilloquised, it reveals what is in the end Heidegger's incapacity for receiving the other. And this may in some sense be inherent in Heidegger's account of language as Saying and its relation to the truth of being. A further discussion shall be provided in the following section.

Heidegger may be fully aware of the fact that there are dangers in translation, but he does not seem able entirely to overcome the Western perspective. Translation involves understanding other languages and cultures — that is, the otherness of the other. The problem of translation is not that there is a loss within the process, as we have seen already, but that there are languages that we should acknowledge as equal, which seems obvious but is all too easily forgotten. A lack of understanding may reduce the other to a mere object, in a process of exoticisation or mystification. And this goes hand in hand with privileging one over the other, as will shortly be seen. The loss is not one-sided. What is at stake in translation is to allow myself to lose some part of my language, to ready myself for that loss. This is integral to the path from language to languages, which will be clarified below. I turn my attention now to Heidegger's much celebrated concept of home, which has different facets and incorporates its own tensions, say, between belonging and being *unheimlich*. Heidegger's sense of privileging a certain kind of language (as the house of being) will be further discussed in relation to this.

### **Stories of Home: From language to languages**

Let us make a short digression to glimpse somewhat different ideas of home and nostalgia. Barbara Cassin, in her book *Nostalgia*, provides three stories of home. Nostalgia, it is to be remembered, literally means the pain of home, homesickness. In her discussion she first considers two stories drawn from classical mythology. One is that of Odysseus, an iconic story of returning home that has much influenced the development of European thought in many ways, and the other is that of Aeneas, who founded Lavinium, the Rome of today. What do these stories tell?

Homer's *The Odyssey* recounts the story of Odysseus, who, after a long and exhausting journey, finally returns home to where Penelope, his wife, awaits. Home is epitomised by their marriage-bed, which is made from a yew tree still strongly

rooted in the ground. Thus, home here is literally rooted in the way the bed is. By contrast, the story of Aeneas, which is recounted by Virgil in *The Aeneid*, has a very different movement. Aeneas also leaves his home city, Troy, when it is destroyed in war, a destruction that means can never go back. Aeneas, unlike Odysseus, leaves for a new place while carrying his homeland and his father, his past, on his back. He, then, founds a new city where he adopts the new language — Latin — which is in contrast with the old language — Greek. In the world of Odysseus, Greek is *the* language, and this is understood by way of contrast with what is scarcely language, the speech of barbarians. Yet, Aeneas now is in the world of at least two languages, one after the other. The stories of home are nothing more than those of language. And it is only in terms of languages, their difference, their plurality, that he can now think.

It will be helpful at this point to relate the contrast that has been established by Cassin to a further distinction that emerges later in her book: between Heidegger and Hannah Arendt.

Let us begin with Heidegger. Heidegger sometimes expresses the view that there has been a kind of decline in being and in philosophy, which in a certain sense is a decline in thinking itself. And this has come about, according to him, partly through language — specifically, through displacement of Greek by Latin in the classical world. Heidegger thinks that Latin as a language is inclined to arrange and set straight, to set things in order. It might be worth providing some examples at this point. While the Greek word *hylē* means something like “substance” or “material” (both words of Latin origin), there is a sense within the Greek term of a dynamism — that everything grows and is in movement. That character of energy or life is part of the motion of the world. However, with the Latin words, Heidegger contends, this sense of dynamism is neutralised and deadened. Similarly, *physis*, the word closest to our “nature”, implies something in growing or changing, which in turn implies a dynamism or activity, whereas *natura*, the Latin substitute, indicates just what is there, implying something more static by comparison. Although it may be obvious in biology that things such as trees are growing, but in metaphysical terms they are to a certain extent fixed.

*Logos*, a term that is the origin of our contemporary usage of the word “logic”, is also of importance for Heidegger. According to Heidegger, at least in the West, “thought about thinking has flourished as ‘logic’ ” (Heidegger 1976, 21). Yet if we trace it back to its Greek origin, we find *logos* used in a richer and broader sense than this. This extends to the sense of the verb *legein*, which means “to lay

before, lay out, lay to — all this laying” (Heidegger 1976, 198). Thus, if we understand things in the way that Greek does, *logos* originally “includes the senses not only of reasoning but of speaking, and also of gathering, and even of making one’s way” (Standish 2014, 198). It is in Latin that these ideas start to be separate. On the whole, this sense of nature with its energy and growth, and with language interweaving with this, is now, by means of Latin, partly deadened: it becomes, in Heidegger’s terms, *Bestand*. Accordingly, words are relegated to the function of mere tools, and thinking is reduced to representation. Only one particular way of thinking holds sway: thinking as an attempt to dominate and master things. Hence, things are not allowed to be in their own right. This, as we saw before, is calculative thinking. And, for Heidegger, Greek appears to reveal possibilities of overcoming this in its particularity and more appropriate relationship with things, as we saw with *physis* and *hylē*.

While there is no doubt of the value of all these accounts, there are at least two points to be discussed in the present context. First, Heidegger’s affinity to a certain kind of language should be further related to his desire for origins. Greek, for him, has some authentic connection with being, which is then lost in the deterioration from ancient Greek into later forms of Greek, and then into Latin and into the modern languages we have now (most significantly, English, which encourages the separation of human being and world). German, the modern language with more possibilities than most other languages, can reveal and renew our connection to the world. That is how the Greek language (or German which for Heidegger, Cassin says, is even more Greek than Greek) relates to being, origin, and even essence — that is, to a kind of home, a place of return for Heidegger. Hence, his nostalgia for roots. In this respect, the exoticisation of Japanese in the dialogue can be seen more clearly to be coupled with Heidegger’s privileging of one (language and thought) over the other. Heidegger is holding on to a certain kind of language at the expense of others. Even when Heidegger pays attention to other languages, he is to some extent utilising them as a way of extending Greek or German thought. And this sense of an original language, I suggest, gives rise to the second point — i.e., the idealising or rather neutralising of language itself.

To explore the second point fully, it is worth referring to Paul Celan, the Jewish poet who was himself a translator. It is ironic and amazing that Celan, as a poet writing after Auschwitz, finds some affinity to Heidegger’s philosophy. Over a period of some two decades, letters were exchanged between the two, and they even met on several occasions, one of which is described in the poem *Todtnauberg*. This



enigmatic poem records in what appear at first sight to be simple notes an afternoon when Celan visited Heidegger at his mountain hut and walked with him for some ninety minutes in the forest. What emerges, on closer reading, is the desire, on Celan's part, for a word of explanation from Heidegger about his connections with the horrors of Nazism. In *The Meridian*, which is the speech Celan gave when receiving the Georg Büchner prize, he seems to be thinking of this encounter when he speaks of language and poetry. Celan says that one should not forget that one only speaks, when one speaks, from the particular "angle of inclination", that is, within one's existence, one's being here and now (Celan in Derrida 2005). Human beings, thus are poets, are always leaning toward something or someone rather than standing upright. Celan powerfully continues: "[t]he poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this Other, it needs a vis-à-vis. It searches it out and addresses it" (Celan in Derrida 2005, 181). Thus:

[t]he poem becomes — and under what conditions! — a poem of one who — as before — perceives, who faces that which appears. Who questions this appearing and addresses it. It becomes dialogue — it is often despairing dialogue.

Only in the realm of this dialogue does that which is addressed take form and gather around the I who is addressing and naming it. But the one who has been addressed and who, by virtue of having been named, has, as it were, become a thou, also brings its otherness along into the present, into this present. In the here and now of the poem it is still possible — the poem itself, after all, has only this one, unique, limited present — only in this immediacy and proximity does it allow the most idiosyncratic quality of the Other, its time, to participate in the dialogue (Celan in Derrida 2005, 182).

It is in the light of this primary requirement or condition of human being that we must speak to one another. It is upon this condition that the poem becomes a poem and language can have meaning. In language, we address and we are addressed. We are invited to dialogue. Perhaps, in a sense, this is what we see in the life of the very young child. The child does not progressively accumulate knowledge of things, to which is then added the relation to human beings. On the contrary, the animal, inchoate, and inarticulated life of the young child is broken open by the approach of

the mother,<sup>2</sup> who from the start looks to the child for response. It is by this address and response that the child can come not only into language but into the world. Thus, more strongly, we are already addressed. And this calls for the responsibility to respond in which the other becomes a thou. Yet, is there a thou in Heidegger's dialogue with a Japanese? Is there any real inclination, or rather stabilising, a consolidation of positions? In *Todtnauberg* Heidegger is invited to speak, but does he respond? We in some sense are responsible in this way in all that we say. It is certainly by responding to the other that we come into human being, come to be human beings. In *The Meridian* Celan is dexterously levelling at Heidegger's accounts of language, at the idea that 'language speaks'. Such an account is oblivious of the very fact that language is here, between people in conversation, that it is fundamentally an address to the other. In "language speaks", it is merely impersonalised and neutralised, neutered. As Standish points out, the neutering tendency in Heidegger's anxious emphasis on authenticity of language has the effect of denying "the partiality of the human and the essential place in language of the address" (Saito and Standish 2017, 66). It is his longing for essence that in effect blocks the possibilities of welcoming the other, and of being aware that we are already addressing the other (and addressed at the same time). And it is true that Heidegger was preoccupied with *Wesen* — essence. Hence, Cassin writes, "let the essence vacillate! Not to be assured of the essence of things is the best thing that can happen to the world and to us" (Cassin 2016, 60).

Hannah Arendt, the third point of focus in Cassin's stories of home, is herself an exile from Germany who, after escaping from Europe, settles at last in New York. The contrast between Arendt and Heidegger parallels the other we have considered, that of Odysseus and Aeneas. Arendt's experience of nostalgia was, as she puts it, for German, not Germany. She became very fluent in French and English, the language in which she came to write, and thus the world she lived in was necessarily one with other languages. This was not just a matter of one other but of all those other languages as well — that is, a necessary plurality. So the whole connection with Germany, of which she was partly deprived, actually proved enabling for her: it enabled the experience of plurality. The condition of being exiled that made all the more evident this richness in plurality, which she understood as nothing but the experience of human plurality. If Heidegger experiences any sense of exile, it is from the original language he imagines; for Arendt, by contrast, the condition of

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<sup>2</sup> The "mother" here could of course be a man. The reference is to the adult caring for the child.

being exiled is one she embraces as the very condition of human being — that is, the condition enables one to understand the other.

We can now see rather clearly how home, language, and the idea of the origin are entangled. The story of Odysseus, like that of Heidegger, indicates an affinity with the origin. Heidegger, while being aware that language is not totalisable, responded by way of a dwelling within language — say, an in-dwelling. What Cassin illustrates through the examples of Aeneas and Arendt is something closer to the experience of being broken open and of living with that rupture. Notably, in the end, Odysseus leaves home for another departure, for a new place distant enough that he will need to renew his language to be understood and to understand. This is the departure from language (or “from *logos*” as Cassin puts it) to languages (Cassin 2016, 32).

Unlike Heidegger, Arendt experienced language as itself a manifestation of human plurality. We are all in a sense related not just to one language, but to the very fact that there are languages. Even if we cannot speak any other languages, our existence is conditioned by our being in a world that is already and necessarily plural. To explain this more fully, I shall discuss language further, particularly its characteristic of always already being plural. In this way, language may be seen not just as one sign of that plurality, but as plurality *par excellence*.

### **Rooted in the air**

Is the contrast between being rooted and uprooted sufficient to describe the human condition? Does either term in this apparently obvious contrast apply? Heidegger rightly names the human condition as *unheimlich* — hence, as never having been at home, or paradoxically as at home and not at home. Would it be right to say that we are already exiled? Exiled and not exiled. As Cassin says, one is neither rooted nor uprooted, but rooted in the air — that is with “airborne roots” (Cassin 2016, 62). What is it, then, to be rooted in the air, what does it mean to be exiled as the very condition of human being? In order to take further the discussion of language, let us begin with its relation to air.

How does air connect with language, or human beings? Of course, there is no doubt we cannot survive without air, yet much more can be said. Let us first think of what happens when we speak. My speaking depends upon fluctuations in the pressure of air. The voice would not be as it is if there were no air. That my vocal

cords change partly depends upon how I control the flow of air. Even the structures of sentences depend on human breathing too, so we can breathe properly at the ends of phrases or sentences before we start up again. Writing is not an exception if we think of where we put commas and full-stops. It is obvious, is it not, how central our breath is to our speaking, and thus to language? We simply cannot speak without air as a physical condition, and without this there would be no language at all; if I cannot speak or hear people speaking, I shall not think either. It is out of that circulation of signs enabled by breathing that I come to hear words, and that we come into language, which is, in the end, inextricable of thinking. It is worth noting that to breathe is also to respire (respiration), to aspire (aspiration), and to inspire (inspiration), all of which share the root sense of spirit. In this way, breathing is involved in both the physical and spiritual — as conditions for language itself.

Spirit here is better understood not in terms of the Christian idea but rather as what we have in every conversation. Spirit is what is alive in the ordinary interchange of people, in the air they breathe, or in the words they express — that is, in addressing one another, as Celan reminds us. *Geist*, the German word for spirit, which relates also to the sense of the ghostly, is better suggestive of what Derrida has in mind when he speaks of words exceeding one's death. How can this be so? For me to speak now, I must be using the words that were there even before I was born. And what I speak will still be there after I die. In this way language, extending beyond my death and also beyond presence, is what shows my mortality. Let us clarify further. Language is always opened to new connections and changes. Due to its unsaturated and disseminating character (the dehiscence of the seed-pod), language is new and may falter even in a single word. Language never can be contained in itself. Language, as Derrida puts it, defers, and never arrives at a fixed meaning. Whatever I say is going to connect with the things that are not here now. My thoughts and words actually depend on what is not here now. In this sense, there is a ghostly element in our language. Derrida<sup>3</sup> helps us to understand language as certainly something opened in the air. And this certainly connects with the very condition of human being, which, in Heidegger's term, is described as an 'ek-sistence': our presence depends upon spirit or something that is referred to —

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<sup>3</sup> The affinity and difference between Heidegger and Derrida have been discussed from various points of view. For example, Timothy Clark discusses the lack of intersubjectivity in Heidegger's concept of *Dichtung*. and in her discussion of Derrida's text *Of Spirit* Emma Williams illustrates the residue of Western metaphysics in Heidegger's thematic of spirit (Clark 2008; Williams 2016).

that is, to something that is not here now. Our being is in this sense a non-being, as we depend on non-presence. Unlike the lives of animals, human beings, as language exceeds itself, are always interrupted and opened to new possibilities: thus, they are not at home; their condition is *unheimlich*, uncanny. Hence, language, more or less, is the human condition.

Moreover, language cannot be possessed by anyone, and it cannot simply be attached to a people. Heidegger may well agree on the point that language does not belong to any individuals, yet, for him, it could be said to belong to or be a part of a *Volk*. But Arendt decouples this, and Cassin repeats the point playing on the expression *déracine*, ‘de-races’, uproots — taking the root out, removing the idea of an origin that was never there. Language always exceeds any particular people — any *Volk* (Cassin 2016, 56). German cannot be rooted or uprooted, as there is no such thing as an authentic people attached to German. This is powerfully repeated in Derrida’s sentence: “I only have one language; it is not mine” (Derrida 1998, 1). Derrida says, in spite of the fact that he speaks several languages, he has only one language. Any one language is already in relation to others. This is so even for one’s first language. In this sense, there is no such a thing as a first, let alone the first, language. A first language exists in circumstances that are always plural. Language is *already* out there, and already in the *plural*, which is to say also in a muddle, in relation to something other — that is, in relation to otherness that is endless thus it is not mine. It cannot be a property, nor can it be *propre* (clean) because it is never secure, stable, or self-contained. Odysseus was not living in one language. He only had the illusion of living in one language. The Greek he was brought up into was already itself plural. Thus the myth of an original language is now dispelled.

Cassin asks, “When are we ever at home?” Maybe we are always on the way home. But this is not in the sense of endless adventure and floating. It is neither staying in a sense of rootedness, nor a smooth nomadism. It is rather, to employ a crucial concept of Henry David Thoreau, a matter of ‘sojourning’ — of spending ‘the day’, that is, some time, and then moving on. We arrive home only to leave home. This might be a matter of literally moving from one place to another, yet, for most people, it will most likely be living in a particular place — in one’s marriage, one’s family, one’s community — and necessarily in relationship to the other. These are places that will not stay the same and that, in consequence, require us to sojourn if we are to live well. Often there are illusions of permanence or origin. Of course it is true that we, at least to some extent, stabilise things, and that in a way language has been stabilised. But then we must be ready to leave, to be open to new

connections. This, is it not, actually is our reality, and thus the healthy way to understand and to be in the world? “Rootedness and uprootedness: that is nostalgia” (Cassin 2016, 7). If there are roots, they are only airborne roots. To conclude, I turn back to translation, particularly with regard to the relationship with the other.

### **Translation and the address of the other**

Translation is about the relation to the other. To understand this fully it is necessary to see that we are always open to the air, toward new connections, and that we are already plural, perhaps more importantly, in the place of the address. As one who speaks, I am already in this circulation, most significantly in conversation. This is the place in which word connects to word and thought gives rise to new thought. Moreover, it is through this circulation of signs that I transform, renew myself. Being aware of what has been discussed, I am ready to be affected and for a responsible response. Hence, understanding language in this way helps us understand the other as already exceeding ourselves.

At this point, it is worth pondering what Lovisa Bergdahl says regarding the ‘double desire’ that I assume everyone may to some extent have. Bergdahl writes of the desire that is “between see me, hear me, understand me and do not reduce me by imposing your definition of who I am — [which] cuts to the very heart of who, as human beings, we are” (Bergdahl 2009, 7). To do justice to this, on the one hand, we need to remind ourselves that we are encountering something untranslatable but, and on the other, to still keep trying to translate. And this endeavour requires of me precisely new words, concepts and ways of speaking, which will become a new source for my thoughts. It is to understand and say things better, in allowing something new to come and affect me, although we know that we will struggle in welcoming the other. This is in a sense to open a new path of thinking. Rather than following what others say and being complacent about it, I must respond with my voice, in addressing others and in being addressed. Translation indeed involves this invention, this creation of language — a transformation of my language, of myself. And this is nothing less than ethics.

The possibility of understanding the other involves plunging into a different world that exists between different words. An idea of transformation has been glimpsed here; it is through being broken open by the other that I can transform myself; it is precisely to transform this language of mine, which actually is not mine.

This is how we should venture in languages — like the adventure of Odysseus, not only to return but to set sail again, towards plurality. And this is by sojourning, rather than searching for an essence or origin — a permanent place; by understanding language, and thus translation, as the place of the address.

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