

THE PRISON-HOUSE OF TRANSLATION?

CARCERAL MODELS,
TRANSLATIONAL
TURNS

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What is a message inside a machine? Something which proceeds by opening and not opening, the way an electronic lamp does, by yes or no. . . . At any given moment, this something which turns has to, or doesn't, come back into play. It is always ready to give a reply, and be completed by this selfsame act of replying, that is to say by ceasing to function as an isolated and closed circuit, by entering into the general run of things. Now this comes very close to what we conceive of as *Zwang*, the compulsion to repeat.

Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*¹

At ten he [Albert Einstein] was already certain that this disciplined machine was not for him. He had a horror of constraint, in any shape or form, physical, emotional, intellectual. *Zwang*. Did I know the German word, he asked me, as we talked about English manners. In the Munich high school he made his first strike against *Zwang*.

C.P. Snow, "Einstein," in *Variety of Men*²

They are not the eternal prisons they were once thought. . . . If you feel you are trapped in a black hole, don't give up. There is a way out.

Stephen Hawking, *Lecture at Harvard, June 2016*³

Fredric Jameson's classic work of 1972, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, stands out historically as an inquiry into what a model is in the comparative humanities of the postwar period. Though his particular focus in the book is on the linguistic turn (posed against Marxist formalism), his consideration of the model bears directly on "turn theory," be it deconstructive, cultural, historicist, postcolonial, or cognitive. With Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* clearly in mind, and presciently heralding the computer as the next great paradigm-shifter, Jameson opened *Prison-House* with an apodictic pronouncement: "The history of thought is the history of its models. Classical mechanics, the organism, natural selection, the atomic nucleus or electronic field, the computer: such are some of the objects or systems which, first used to organize our understanding of the natural world, have then been called upon to illuminate human reality."⁴

For Jameson, the model lives within a certain life cycle. In its early years it achieves stability "serving as a medium through which a new view of the universe may be obtained and catalogued." Later, however, the model starts to decline such that

a proportionately greater amount of time has to be spent in readjusting the model itself, in bringing it back into line with its object of study. Now research tends to become theoretical rather than practical, and to turn back upon its own presuppositions (the structure of the model itself), finding itself vexed by the false problems and dilemmas into which the

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inadequacy of the model seems increasingly to lead it. One thinks, for example, of the ether or of collective consciousness.⁵

The big stress test of the structural linguistic model occurs after it sweeps through the other disciplines usurping textual approaches enshrined in older traditions of philology and stylistics:

Nothing could be more fitting, one would think, than the application of linguistic methods to literature, itself essentially a linguistic structure. Yet the older stylistics, that of Spitzer and Auerbach, or more recently of J.-P. Richard, worked much more closely with the verbal texture of the work itself. We find ourselves ultimately before the conclusion that the attempt to see the literary work as a linguistic system is in reality the application of a *metaphor*.⁶

Jameson's attunement to the metaphoric status of the linguistic in the structural turn is striking. The metaphor complicates what a model is, drawing attention to the blurred boundaries of where its materialities lie, the difficulty of delimiting its pragmatic uses, the challenge of gauging the positive effects of its modes of cognition, research, and critical practice. One of Jameson's central points is that models are *ideologemes*: devices or fictions that produce epistemes (thought-systems) that catalyze the *Zeitgeist*, and stand ever at risk of being tipped into the dustbin of history.⁷ Language proves especially hard to demystify as an ideological superstructure because its structure—its materiality—is composed of language itself. This peculiar status is conveyed by Jameson's exclamation marks: "Language as a model! To rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics!"⁸

In Jameson's narrative of superseded models, "language" occupies a unique position. Though it *can* be regarded as just another model (a common denominator of Freud's parapraxis, J. L. Austin's performative utterances, Chomsky's transformational grammar, Peirce's or Saussure's semiotic signifying systems, Russian formalist morphology), it is also exceptional since it avoids the pitfalls of "methodological substantialism" that beset other theories (say of culture or society), prone to taking themselves as autonomous objects.⁹ Jameson wants to problematize the apparent "ontological priority" of language, its self-positioning in a pre-Hegelian, pre-Marxist phase of philosophy.¹⁰ Concerned to hold the linguistic model of structuralism to critical account rather than reject it outright on ideological grounds, he will subject it to dialectical critique and, in so doing, associate the linguistic metaphor with something concrete rather than abstract: a "raw material" or phenomenality of medium and cultural social messaging.¹¹ The aim is to historicize by bringing forth the paradoxical, "propaedeutic" effect of structuralist synchrony: its extreme synchrony makes one alive to the historical dimension of language, renewing "our fascination with the seeds of time."¹²

Though set up as a dialectical critique of how structuralism and Russian formalist projections give rise to a "philosophical formalism, as the extreme point of that general movement everywhere in modern philosophy away from positive content," this is a text that also demonstrates its own strangely unmediated relationship to the premier metaphor of its model, namely the *carceral* one.¹³ It is hard to underestimate the impact

of the master trope of the *prison-house* on literary theory, and yet nowhere in the text is it directly addressed. This is curious given that the book was written at a time when the prison was such an important crucible of the civil rights and Black Power movements. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a proclamation of the moral duty to disobey unjust laws in the nonviolent combat against racism, shook the foundations of Jim Crow and galvanized the cause of race justice, with direct impact on worldwide anticolonial and anti-apartheid struggles. Malcolm X's *Autobiography* (1965) localized the process of his wokeness and self-formation in the Norfolk Prison Colony Library. Eldridge Cleaver's Black empowerment memoir *Soul on Ice* (1968), written in 1965 while he was an inmate in Folsom State Prison, began with his "Letters from Prison." In November 1970 James Baldwin addressed "An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis" while she was behind bars, decrying the shocking exploitation by *Newsweek* of a photograph of Davis in chains on its cover. The Attica riots exploded in 1971. *Prison-House* sits, then, in a continuum bracketed by these texts and events, while its titular metaphor portends Angela Davis's indictment of the prison-industrial complex¹⁴ and #BlackLivesMatter's recourse to carceral metaphors to describe the condition of living while Black.

From the standpoint of theory already prevalent at the time, *Prison-House* must be positioned in relation to Michel Foucault's project, itself informed by the French anti-psychiatry movement forged in the 1950s by François Tosquelles, Frantz Fanon, Jean Oury, Georges Canguilhem, and a bit later Félix Guattari. Their experiments with decarceral approaches to the treatment and sequestration of psychotic and schizophrenic patients grew into an entire culture of nonhierarchical group dynamics and psychotherapies, identified with the "utopian" Clinique de La Borde.¹⁵ Foucault's early research on penal institutions, undertaken with Pierre-Vidal Naquet and Jean-Marie Domenach in 1971, led to the foundation of the Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIF) and the prisoner-constituted Comité d'action des prisonniers, embarking him on a period of activism. The politics of overimprisonment, the cumulative effects of confinement (*le grand enfermement*), and the harsh material conditions of prisoners' lives informed Foucault's 1971–72 lectures at the Collège de France on "penal theories and institutions" as well as the following year's sessions on the "punitive society." Though the watershed volume *Discipline and Punish* would not appear until three years after publication of *The Prison-House of Language*, its concerns were part of a global groundswell of anti-incarceration.¹⁶

While *Prison-House* references Foucault's work on the asylum as a space of quarantine (*Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* came out in 1961), no dots are connected between the "prison-house of language" and Foucault's prepossessing description of the madhouse at Charenton. If Foucault figures in the text, he is there to illustrate flaws in a methodology dependent on seismographic metaphors

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of rupture and upheaval that impede conscious apprehension of historical links and dialectical modes of understanding.¹⁷ For Jameson, this heuristic leaves the interpreter with meaningless shifts and mutations, a symphony of synchronic epiphenomena that cohere unto themselves but are historically dehiscent. Foucault epitomizes a relativistic practice of historicist decoding, with “language” playing a starring role as that which representationally implodes after the classical period, subsisting thereafter in historically stranded, if occasionally overlapping, systems of discursive figuration.

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In hindsight, Jameson’s lack of explicit reflection on the book’s prison trope—whether as institution or episteme—is especially curious given that so much of the book consists of a sustained critique of theory that lacks “self-consciousness of the object with which it is concerned,” and which thus ends up “drawing its own eye without realizing it” in the manner of a language-game by Wittgenstein. Structuralism is faulted for being hived off from semiological “awareness of itself as a process,”¹⁸ producing a structural alienation of its structure. Metalanguage is criticized for proximity to its methodological object (remaining “at one with language itself” and thus immune to the rigors of antinomy)—a problem identified by Jameson in Foucault’s empirical objects of study, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological subjects, A. J. Greimas’s semiotic grids, Lacan’s adherence to a model of castration or “charged absence . . . around which the entire meaning or language system necessarily organizes itself,” and Derrida’s attack on the metaphysics of presence, that “conceptual ceiling of Western thought” with “words and terminology which, no sooner used, themselves solidify and become instruments in the perpetuation of that illusion of presence which they were initially designed to dispel.”¹⁹ Throughout, the metalanguage of “language” is subject to exhaustive scrutiny, yet Jameson never directly takes up the carceral metaphor that brands his model. The story complicates further on recalling that the expression “prison-house of language” was predicated on a translation—a controversial one—that affords a significant episode in the narrative of the translational turn.

The Prison-House of Language opens with an epigraph grafted from Nietzsche’s late notebooks (1886–87), often included in editions of *The Will to Power*: “We have to cease to think if we refuse to do it in the prison-house of language; for we cannot reach further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit.”²⁰ In the original German, the passage reads: “Wir hören auf zu denken, wenn wir es nicht in dem sprachlichen Zwange tun wollen, wir langen gerade noch bei dem Zweifel an, hier eine Grenze als Grenze zu sehen,” and was translated by Walter Kaufmann as follows: “We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation.”²¹ The translation included in Rüdiger Bittner’s 2003 edition of Nietzsche’s late aphorisms followed suit in adopting “constraints of language” for *sprachlichen Zwang*.²² So where did the prison-house come from? Certainly, it seems compatible with the German term for limit (*die Grenze*), which references the border patrol or police checkpoint. It also cues to the idea of being

compelled to speak by enforcing a psychic mechanism of repetition-compulsion (Freud's *Wiederholungszwang*, glossed as machinic reply by Lacan in Seminar 2). But it appears that Jameson adopted "prison-house" from Erich Heller's free translation of Nietzsche in his essay "Wittgenstein: Unphilosophical Notes," published in *Encounter* in 1959 (and republished in 1966 as "Wittgenstein and Nietzsche" in *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and Other Essays*). The context is Heller's concern to single out the convergence between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein on the question of language limits. He cites an aphorism from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* heralding philosophy's discovery of "bruises to understanding" that result from "bumping its head against the limits of language" and then proceeds to his translation of the Nietzsche passage:²³

Language is founded upon the most naïve prejudices. . . . We read contradictions and problems into everything because we *think only* within the forms of language. . . . *We have to cease to think, if we refuse to do it in the prisonhouse of language*; for we cannot reach further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit. . . . *All rational thought is interpretation in accordance with a scheme which we cannot throw off.*²⁴

David Lovekin alleges that

Jameson has, apparently, copied Heller's translation without indicating the metaphor's origins (perhaps without knowing those origins). And literary critics have slavishly referred to the importance of this notion—the prison-house of language—with no sense of context or limitation. Jameson adds force to the notion of the academic assembly line by example in its reduction of language to arbitrary nonreferential expression.²⁵

Ernst Behler, editor of Nietzsche's *Complete Works* in English weighs in with an even harsher verdict:

The difference between "prison-house of language" and "constraint of language" may appear small, but is really not when Nietzsche is read as a language theorist. Then the notion of a prison house of language conveys a sinister finality which Nietzsche's text actually does not express. For we are always capable of outdoing and outwitting the "constraint of language" through style, metaphorical language, irony, and other rhetorical means. There is even a certain enjoyment in these games with language. This ironic mood comes forth in another fragment of Nietzsche's later period which concludes: "'Reason' in language: oh what a deceitful old woman! I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar."²⁶

The critics concur in their judgment that Jameson, led astray by Heller, misread the language limit, overreading its carceral restriction, underestimating its fungibility as a porous boundary, which is to say (borrowing from Thomas Trezise on this Nietzsche phrase) "an interiority *engendered* by the necessity of its own transgression, much as the restricted economy is produced by the force of a general economy that exceeds it."²⁷

In pressing the carceral aspect of limit or constraint, Jameson seems to have fallen prey to a linguistic determinism often ascribed to Wittgenstein's famous thought: "What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

(*Was sich überhaupt sagen lässt, lässt sich klar sagen; und wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen.* [second variation: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*]).²⁸ The phrase interestingly complements the argument introduced by a character in Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, to the effect that phatic speech is an obstacle to real communication, condemning life itself to silence: "Words can do much, but there are things beyond words. The real truth between two people cannot be put into words. The moment we speak certain doors begin to close; language works best for what doesn't really matter; we talk in lieu of living."²⁹ In philosophy, Wittgenstein's phrase is frequently taken to mean that language limits thought, or fails to articulate the unthought, or consigns to silence that which is beyond the pale of expressibility—illogical, ungraspable, belonging to the Great Outdoors of non-sense (*Unsinn*). The logical positivists added an empiricist/realist twist, allowing for cases where things that might not be stated might nonetheless be empirically shown. It was in this spirit that Otto Neurath produced the Wittgensteinian gloss: "Man muss ja schweigen, aber nicht über etwas," translated loosely by A. J. Ayer: "One must indeed be silent, but not *about* anything."³⁰

For Lacan, an assiduous reader of Wittgenstein, the language-limit defines the unthought in the analytic situation and functions as a foil that enables the psyche to sustain the delusion that it can compel the moving target of speech in the signifying chain to a standstill.³¹ If there is a limit in this instance, it has most likely moved on from where it is thought to be or may never have been there in the first place.³²

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Jameson's book title was and continues to be read, albeit in skewed or reductive ways, as an endorsement of the idea that language is a prison. Jonathan Culler's review of the book shortly after it came out began by asserting: "A formalism based on language is the ultimate high-security prison, for we cannot imagine life outside, cannot even, in our theoretical discussions, think our way out." He argues that Jameson's recourse to a world of essences that only "history itself understands," drawn from lived experience and the life cycle of capitalism, fails to solve the prisoner's dilemma since, as Foucault would contend, history is always already "subject to the determinations of historical discourse" and remains "a mode of discourse open to formal analysis." Culler concludes that Jameson "has tried to break out of formalism too soon."³³

In 1987 Tony Bennett published an essay titled "The Prison-House of Criticism" in *New Formations*. Criticism has inherited a "capacity for incarceration," Bennett contends, stretching from Matthew Arnold to H. R. Leavis.³⁴ He advocates returning to Terry Eagleton's conviction that "modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state," warning that unless criticism's future is newly identified "with a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all."³⁵ These examples, chosen among countless others, confirm the extent to which it was assumed that Jameson's subject of language was walled in, unable to escape discursive laws and hierarchies or the a priori condition of grammatical deep structure.

And yet on returning to the original Nietzsche quote, doubt is cast on the presumption of internment in language. Rather than being entrapped in linguistic structures further held by the restraint of the permanent present (Saussurean synchrony), Nietzsche's subject of language, one might argue, transforms the structure into a holding environment for a limitless prospect of deferred or deposed ends. It is as if Nietzsche were saying: If we want to think, we must resolve to think with and through the limit otherwise. In place of a totalizing allness, there would be refracted lines of flight that lead perception, intuition, or affect—via other languages or translation—to limitless modes of expressionism, to intimations of the unthought.

To interpret *Zwang* in this way, as the possibility of a self-transcending constraint whose medium is translation, makes of translation something of a jail-breaking trope akin to *karman* (Sanskrit) and its Latin variant *crimen*. In Giorgio Agamben's reading both terms signify crime and accusation. Together they wean the act from an Arendtian tradition of moral action. Agamben derives from *karman* a gesture capable of release from *agencement*, from the infinite chain of causality and consequence devolving from the Kantian analytic of finitude. This freedom through *désœuvrement* (inoperativity) has implications for jurisprudence and systems of justice insofar as it models the conditions of impossibility governing the imputation of fault or crime. *Karman* names the impossible to judge or justice without ends (on the order of Kant's "finality without ends" [*finalité sans fin*, *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*] or Benjamin's "mediality without ends" or "pure means").³⁶ It affords a promissory space outside time and territory while serving as a mechanism (*dispositif*) that unbinds causative sequence. As a concept-metaphor whose intent is to break free from the prison-house (in this case the prison-house of consequentialism and theories of normative action), *karman/crimen*, we might say, qualifies as a better translation than "prison-house" of *sprachlichen Zwanges*.

A corrective course might align Nietzsche's *sprachlichen Zwang* with Agamben's *karman* (toward a theory of limitless, impossible justice) and table Jameson's carceral metaphor as an unfortunate instance of overtranslation. But such a course arguably passes over the interest of *sprachlichen Zwange* as an example of how an untranslatable term—prone to error, resistant to equivalence, susceptible to accidental deviations from a grammatical intention in the original—functions as a producer of theoretical novelties, new turns. In this intellectual genealogy the "prison-house" anticipates the "afterlife"

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of untranslatability, implicating Jameson (despite his critical distance from deconstruction) in the historic response of deconstruction to Walter Benjamin's translation theory, and seeding new uses for the carceral model in analyses of translation and justice.³⁷

Historically speaking, the "translation turn" owes much to deconstruction, specifically to Jacques Derrida's and Paul de Man's close readings of Benjamin's foundational essay "The Task of the Translator" ("Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers"). In "Des tours de Babel" and "Living On: Borderlines" (originally conceived as one long text inspired by a year-long faculty seminar at Yale devoted to Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*), Derrida worked his way carefully through Benjamin's construct of "the afterlife of translation" (as it came to be called in Harry Zohn's English translation), assimilating it to the French term *survie*.³⁸

The dominance of "afterlife" in English has been subject to contestation. Benjamin availed himself of the German *Überleben* (afterlife) only once in the essay, deferring for the rest to the unusual term *Fortleben* (roughly forthlife, or forelife), in reference to a perseverant mode of the future anterior or past of the virtual. It implies a "perpetual reviviscence"³⁹ or continuation of life that comports with his sense of translation as a process that allows the being of a work to realize full morphosis and attain the peak stage of its historical fame.⁴⁰ This process does not occur in linear time; Benjamin grafts from the future rather than from the past or original source text. He describes translation as the process of a work's "issuing forth not so much from the original's life as from its 'survival.'"⁴¹ What he meant by survival (*Fortleben*)—whether something messianic, eschatological, revolutionary, or plastic (in the epigenetic sense of auto-transformative)—, remains open to question, but certainly its ambiguous signification informs Derrida's rendering of *Fortleben* as *survie*.⁴² For Derrida, *Fortleben* implies something like an excess or supplement, a plus-one, or "more than a surviving,"⁴³ carried over in the guise of the translator's duty to inscribe herself as survivor into genealogical inheritance.⁴⁴ *Fortleben*, *survie*, *living-on*, each turn or tour of duty profoundly inflects Derrida's signature constructs of *différance*, inscription, and trace: differential orders of expression that translate futurities of Benjaminian *Fortleben*.

De Man, for his part, took direct aim at theotropic readings of "afterlife," often linked to Benjamin's opaque notion of *reine Sprache* (pure or sacred language). In his commentary on "The Task of the Translator" in the 1983 Messenger Lecture at Cornell (published in *Theory and the Disappearing Future*), he presses on Benjamin's default to the "interlinear version of the Scriptures" as the ideal prototype (*Urbild*) of all translation to critical interrogation.⁴⁵ De Man prefers Benjamin's example of strong translation embodied in Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles: it gives rise to a model of the untranslatable (*das Unübersetzbare*), a mode of translating that sublates meaning and carries a node of unworked conceptuality over from translation to translation. De Man wants to recoup this "dangerous" translational form of *Unverständlichkeit*. In Hölderlin's Sophocles translations, Benjamin warns that "meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language."⁴⁶ What is deathly in *Überleben* spurs the reader to divine "the linguistic reasons which allow Benjamin to speak of a suffering, of a disarticulation, of falling apart of any original work."⁴⁷

De Man's concern to rescue Benjaminian translation theory from messianism prompts him to go looking for the "nihilistic conclusion" that went missing from "The Task of the Translator." In his posthumously published notebooks on the essay he telegraphed intimations of how this translational nihilism might be construed:

it is certainly not messianic, since it consists in the rigorous separation, the [bringing] acting out of the separation of the sacred from the poetic, of *Reine Sprache* from poetic language

necessarily nihilistic moment/active moment [can only occur]

B. said this, in the clearest terms, in relation to political action; but only in German before the English translation (end/end) messes it up!

p. 280 Theological political fragment
(whose nihilistic conclusion is left behind in

The Task of the Translator)

for [historical and] political, we can substitute poetical for we now see that the non-messianic, not sacred, i.e. political aspect of history is the result of the [linguistic] poetical (in the sense of a poetics), structure of language⁴⁸

De Man retrieves nihilism from the complex figure of "eternal downfall" (*die Ewigkeit eines Unterganges*) discovered in the last lines of Benjamin's *Theo-political Fragment*.⁴⁹ Benjamin qualifies the downfall as a "transient, worldly existence" in the process of ceaselessly passing away: "To strive for such a passing away—even the passing away of those stages of man that are nature—is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism."⁵⁰ Sami Khatib underscores the eudaemonic dimension of this statement, demonstrating how Benjamin opens "the messianic *nihil*" to the possibility of a temporal incision for "happiness, happenstance, lucky breaks." He contends that Benjamin's messianic nihilism "corresponds to the unworking, self-dismantling nature of the transient order of the profane."⁵¹ These processes of "unworking" and "self-dismantling" are de Man's closest approximation of an escape from the vise of *reine Sprache*.

Derrida's and de Man's compelling readings of "The Task of the Translator" set in motion a "translation turn" inseparable from the "deconstructive turn." Building out a philosophical philology encompassing the work of Martin Heidegger, Leo Spitzer, Hans-Georg Gadamer, George Steiner, Peter Szondi, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, and later, Samuel Weber, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, Werner Hamacher, and Barbara Cassin (among others), they renewed ties with the Babelic tradition of plural languages in dissonant unison, infinitely completing and incompleting each other. In articulating aporias within and across languages they foregrounded untranslatability as

an effect defined across a spectrum going from not-translated (appearing in its original language in the target language) to hard-to-translate, mistranslated (or adjudged to be false by the superegoic norms of syntactic and semantic equivalence that regulate translation practice), constantly retranslated, or not in need of translation because of its semantic transparency.

In his own gloss on *reine Sprache*, Derrida maintains that the “pure transferable can announce itself, give itself, present itself, let itself be translated *as untranslatable* (*comme intraduisible*).”⁵² It is this foregrounding of the “as untranslatable” that provided impetus for a field that emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s, occasionally qualified as untranslatability studies. It counts among its contributors Barbara Cassin (who anointed the concept of the Untranslatable in the subtitle of her 2004 *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (her introduction to Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast Stories* from 1997), Abdelfattah Kilito (*Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, 2008), Etienne Balibar (the historic incommutability of *conscience* into consciousness, or *sujet* into subject), Ali Benmakhlouf (the untranslatability of law, norm, *Shari’a*), Souleymane Bachir Diagne (translation as an act of decolonization), Adi Ophir (philological concept-histories of “goy” versus “gentile”), Shaden

Tageldin (*Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Empire in Egypt*, 2011), Brian Lennon (“non-translation studies”), Jacques Lezra (*Untranslation Machines: A Genealogy for the Ends of Global Thought*, 2018), myself (*Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, 2013), and Suzanne Jill Levine, editor of *Untranslatability Goes Global* (2018).

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a post-Heideggerian metaphysics of language; its critical stakes would allow for the disciplinary remaking of comparative literature. De Man’s invitation to Derrida in 1979 to teach a seminar at Yale whose title was “The Concept of Comparative Literature and the Theoretical Problems of Translation” (*Le concept de littérature comparée et les problèmes de la traduction*) is emblematic in this regard.⁵³ Relevant, too, was Derrida’s assertion in 1987 (“Letter to a Japanese Friend”) that “the question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation.”⁵⁴ Derrida’s final seminar echoed this point. In *The Beast and the Sovereign* translation is privileged as the heuristic lever that mediates relations among beast and beast, animal and human, human and sovereign. “It really is the whole of the history of the Western world that is in play in these operations of translation, and thus in the definition of the relations between the beast and the sovereign. . . . We are dealing with questions of translation that are absolutely determining, determining and difficult to determine, difficult to circumscribe: there are no limits, no frontiers that contain these issues of translation.”⁵⁵

In the time that has elapsed between deconstruction's inauguration of a pivotal translational turn and the present day, translation theory has taken many turns, from the critique of ontological nationalism within national languages, to the politics of border-crossing, to transmedial aesthetics. Cassin's imperative "to philosophize in languages" prompted new approaches to doing philosophy and became the working method of her 2004 *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*. A monumental revision of the history of philosophy from translation's point of view, this philosophical dictionary, compiled by a host of scholars with specialized competence in European languages and philosophical traditions, treated philosophemes such as *vérité*, *nomos*, *Pravda*, *Dasein*, *sujet*, *Aufhebung*, *saudade*, or sense as dynamical entities, subjects of *energeia*. Whether master tropes of philosophy or more prosaic terms that acquire philosophical singularity in a given tongue, the *Vocabulaire* conceived philosophy in the plural as a practice no longer confined by the strictures of continental or Anglo-analytic disciplinary protocols, no longer indifferent to the vagaries of mistranslation or nontranslation within their concept history. For Cassin the Untranslatable was a premier symptom of language difference as such, with difference understood as the prime factor in "complicating the universal."⁵⁶ This mode of differing difference, consonant with practices that I have associated with theorizing in Untranslatables, becomes another turn in the turn—revitalizing philology in literary and philosophical work, fostering collaborative pedagogies, opening translation research to advances in information technology, machine translation, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence.

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Where once there was a structuralist "prison-house of language" transposed via Benjaminian translation theory to poststructuralist models of *survie* (Derrida) and poetic *nihil* (de Man), where once there was the "cellular" module of subjectivation and biopolitical regulation (Foucault) complemented by a "control society," preconditional to any imagination of "deterritorialization" or "line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari), now there is an era of the "prism-house of translation."⁵⁷ Here we defer to the notion of "prismatic translation" drafted from an initiative launched at St. Anne's College, University of Oxford, in October 2015.⁵⁸ Making full use of the resources of data-mining and sophisticated software, prismatic translation takes to the next order of magnitude an older model of polysystems translation developed by Itamar Even-Zohar.⁵⁹ A strong current in the 1990s, polysystems called for translation practices that challenged (according to Kurt Müller-Vollmer and Michael Irmscher) "the original text as an absolute point of reference, the representational theory of language designed to account for translating 'meanings' successfully from one language to another, and the postulate of reliable categories for detecting 'equivalences' between the source and the target document."⁶⁰ Prismaticizing the original, the theorists of the 90s relativized its presumptive authority; shifting the axis to polysemic target languages. Thus, to go back to Nietzsche translations, one would note with respect to Behler's American edition of Nietzsche that instead of hewing to

the official German edition edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Behler foregrounded the fluctuation and disunity of Nietzsche's thought. Destabilizing any notion of an original by setting Nietzsche's works inside a network of notes, fragments, and unpublished versions of manuscripts, Behler modeled a genetic practice of *translatio* that emphasized Nietzsche's "multiplicity of 'perspectives'" and constant "shifting from position to counter position."⁶¹ A prismatic approach to the Nietzsche-Heller-Jameson example of *sprachlichen Zwanges* with which we began thus yields a crystalline structure refracting a celestial sphere of noetics beyond language. The term leaps beyond its monolingual boundary—moving across *die Grenze*, the checkpoint, into plurilingual language worlds, where the "what" of reference, or predicate of what a word means, is traduced (some would say deconstructed) through translation. Prismatic translation, in this sense, implies a political unbordering, such that monolingual totality is superseded by the praxis of perpetual translating.

A prismatic approach to the Nietzsche-Heller-Jameson example of *sprachlichen Zwanges* with which we began thus yields a crystalline structure refracting a celestial sphere of noetics beyond language.

If the "translation turn" has alighted on a philosophically oriented practice of theorizing in Untranslatables or translating infinitely through prismatic parametrics, it might seem time to retire the carceral language model popularized by Jameson's readings of structuralist and Russian formalist projections. But not so fast! The prison-house, as we have already intimated, "re-turns" at other regional

points on the curve: as a term rife with material reference to pretrial detention and bail bond practices that generate revenue streams on which racial capitalism depends; as a term of equipment for at-home digital jail, reliant on "offender-monitoring" shackling devices (GPS electronic wrist and ankle bracelets); as a system of containment out of which leaks, scandals, and secret information leach;⁶² as crucial lexeme of #socialdistance, quarantine, and "shelter at home" that burst on the scene with the advent of the COVID-19 virus. This last usage brings in its train, as Paul B. Preciado notes, a "tele-republic of your home" marked by a border that "is forever tightening around you, pushing you ever closer to your body. Calais blows up in your face. The new frontier is the mask. The air that you breathe has to be yours alone. The new frontier is your epidermis. The new Lampedusa is your skin. . . . Now we are living in detention centers in our own homes."⁶³ The prison-house comes back as the catalyst of ongoing emancipatory political movements, actions, and discourses.⁶⁴ These include prison abolitionism; legal battles against residential redlining and redistricting; immigration rights actions against mass quarantine in US border detention zones; indigenous land sovereignty claims that contest the genocidal legacy of resettlement policies imposed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the association of "reservation" with human parks; LGBTQI legislation against the gender constriction of binary pronouns; and postcolonial theory's refusal of axial traditions of thought and aesthetic production that reproduce regional

fault lines of European and American imperialism.

The “prison-house of language,” no longer just a figure of speech for thought enclosure, emerges as a medium of political remembering that, as in the artist Isaac Julien’s work, “resists the neat template of commemoration and regeneration.”⁶⁵ It designates a mode of transference by which deep memories of slavery and colonial apartheid are grafted onto idioms of the historical present. This process is clear in efforts to translate the French slave-word *nègre*. In his introduction to *Resolutely Black*, a series of conversations between Françoise Vergès and Aimé Césaire conducted not long before Césaire’s death, translator Matthew B. Smith discusses why *nègre* is an Untranslatable. Typically replaced by *noir* in contemporary parlance, the word is reclaimed by Césaire to mark the *irreparable*, that remainder beyond any system of compensation.⁶⁶ Where Césaire advocates for preserving linguistic markers of injustice, Toni Morrison makes the case for excising racially compromised language even though the operation leaves a “sore thumb.”⁶⁷ In search of a final word for a novel, she discovers to her dismay that she must jettison “one that was racially resonant and figuratively logical for one that was only the latter, because my original last word was so clearly disjunctive . . . a jarring note combining as it did two functions linguistically incompatible except when signaling racial exoticism.”⁶⁸ Chafing against the linguistic bars of racism that impinge on her creative process, Morrison shows how every relinquished word, every foreclosed syntactic construction, constructs a prison-house of language.

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In “Prison and Life”, Catherine Malabou discusses how “prison,” as a master metaphor of involuntary servitude and colonial trauma, is embedded in the long history of ontology—from ancient philosophies of being to existentialism, phenomenologies of perception, and theories of modes of existence. The prison as concept, she argues, inheres in the very word “concept”: a compound of “with” (*con*) and “taken” (*cept*), a Latin word meaning “taken, or taken toward yourself,” much like the German *Begriff*, from the verb *greifen*, to grasp, to hold, to take in hand. Prison reverts to the prehensile, to the handle that grabs or takes something (*pris* in French).

This figure of philosophical capture is Malabou’s guiding thread. She traces the idea, harking back to Plato’s cave and Heidegger’s *Benommenheit* (“closure,” brought on by inauthentic ways of “taking care”), of *life* as *prison*, calling out “the essential complicity between the closure of concepts and the captivity of life.”⁶⁹ Manifestly oblivious to its own purpose or possible freedom, life defaults to routine, repetitive habit, subjective alienation. “Being in jail,” for Malabou, is the existential endgame of the prison-industrial complex, taking her cue from an essay by Michael Hardt on Jean Genet (that echoes Foucault’s equation of the prison form to a social form⁷⁰), and from Hardt and Negri’s thesis in *Multitudes*, that, as Malabou paraphrases it, “prison time characterizes the situation of the global proletariat, the carceral mode of living imposed upon it by globalization.”⁷¹

It is also—and here we return to the Jameson model—a state of “being trapped in

language.”⁷² Malabou underscores this condition as it was articulated by Roland Barthes in his 1977 Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France. Barthes never mentions Jameson and was likely unfamiliar with *The Prison-House of Language*, but his argument is strikingly similar. Barthes opens the lecture with a seemingly anodyne allusion to his desire for release. He confesses to a “personal inclination to escape intellectual difficulty through the interrogation of my own pleasure.”⁷³ But soon things take a claustal turn. Thanking Foucault for making his election to the Collège possible, he turns to power, Foucault’s signature theme, noting that “*libido dominandi*” (the desire to dominate, the lust for government), exists “hidden in any discourse, even when uttered in a place outside the bounds of power.”⁷⁴ Establishing a correlation between the language of law and the sovereign power of language as such, Barthes asserts famously that “language is legislation, speech is its code. Jakobson has shown that a speech-system is defined less by what it permits us to say than by what it compels us to say.”⁷⁵ He offers by way of example the overdetermination of gender by French grammar (“the neuter and the dual are forbidden to me”), and the power differentials instantiated by the choice to address someone using the pronouns *tu* or *vous* (“social or affective suspension is denied me”).⁷⁶ Barthes’s view of the prison-house of language leads him to the charged conclusion that “language is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech.”⁷⁷

In my own ongoing projects the carceral model is understood as “compelled,” in Barthes’s sense, when translation is weaponized in policing, armed response, and the processing of asylum petitions or implicated in juridical vocabularies of defense, public and personal safety, detentional zoning, punitive damages, and constitutive theories of justice. To pose the question: “What is just translation?” in the sense of what is (ethically) “right” translation or what is justice-making as a translational praxis, entails working the lexicon of legal Untranslatables (*lex, jus, nomos, Sharia, right, droit, Recht, Sittlichkeit*, equaliberty). The object is to determine the political right to language or the right to untranslatability under hostile conditions of social and cultural violation. Spivak has a construct for this: “translation-as-violation.” It is introduced in her critique of Kipling’s use of “pidgin Hindusthani,” a subclass of British pidgin guaranteed to sound “barbaric to the native speaker, devoid of syntactic connections, always infelicitous, almost always incorrect” and above all an “effect of the mark of perceiving a language as subordinate.”⁷⁸

Important too is the investigation of how aesthetic measures that establish relations of equivalence and inequality are embedded in legal theory, itself often at odds with practices of community justice. Here, emphasis is placed on how norms of harmony, measure, balance, fittingness, euphony, consonance, likeness, affinity, commensurability, and comparability, crucial to acts of making judgments, produce forms of “discrimination” (in both racial and decisionist senses), that infuse the execution of due process with bias, with scaled inequality.

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The carceral model acquires renewed traction in the contemporary discourse of transparency and exposure in the era of digital surveillance. I refer here to another scene of translation controversy—specifically, Talcott Parsons’s 1930 translation of Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, 1905), where Parsons rendered the expression *stahlhartes Gehäuse* as “iron cage.”

In Baxter’s view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the ‘saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.’ But fate (*Verhängnis*, in Michael Löwy’s estimation a term freighted with *Kulturpessimismus*) decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*).⁷⁹

The “iron cage” was drafted from Parsons’s memory of Paul Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, available to Parsons from his own strict Protestant upbringing and linked to a line from Psalm 142: “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.” Peter Baehr suggests that Parson’s use of “iron cage” was “inappropriate because the despairing Man of Bunyan’s creation, and the inane specialist of Weber’s, are asymmetrical figures. The former suffers and is being punished; the latter is a hedonist motivated by the quest for materialistic consumption and confident of his superiority.”⁸⁰ Baehr also refers us to the figure of the “iron cage” in Nietzsche’s description of Man duped and suborned by the priests in *The Will to Power* (as translated by Walter Kaufmann): “Man, imprisoned in an iron cage of errors, became a caricature of man, sick, wretched, ill-disposed toward himself, full of hatred for the impulses of life.”⁸¹

Debates over translation of the “iron cage” raged on. In French the term *carapace* (too soft, as in the shell of a snail) was discarded in favor of *habitable*, a word translated as “binnacle” in English, and a technical reference to the casing on nautical equipment on a ship’s deck with a secondary meaning as domicile or abode. Was the casing an inescapable cosmos confining the subject to a lifeworld of mediocrity and disenchantment?⁸² A set of conditions induced by bureaucratization, technological modernity, and the ascendancy of rational choice in economic distributive systems? A restraint (“the spirit of religious asceticism”) made obsolete when capitalism no longer needs it to justify itself? (“To-day the spirit of religious asceticism—whether final, who knows?—has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer.”)⁸³ A figure of the earthly shell’s depletion at the end of the fossil fuel economy? This last question, resting on Weber’s equation of the reign of technical production and unbridled economic acquisitiveness with the time when “the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt” predicts a turn in ecopolitical theory connecting capitalism’s demise to global resource depletion by the extractive industries.⁸⁴ Weber’s variant use of “iron cage of bondage” with direct reference to slavery invites further extrapolations—to notions of subjectified labor,⁸⁵ petrified spirit, economic precarity, and structural racism: “It is in the process of manufacturing the *Gehäuse* of that future serfdom to which, perhaps, men may have to submit powerlessly, just like the slaves in the ancient state

of Egypt.”⁸⁶ The cage of structural racism, localized and materialized in the image of Black Panther Bobby Seale who “is really in a real jail made of stones, concrete and steel,” stands out in Jean Genet’s May Day speech, delivered at a rally at Yale in 1970.⁸⁷ Genet would “translate” the transference of Seale’s condition of imprisonment to racial segregation in the courtroom. After entering the courthouse with his Panther comrades, he was immediately escorted by the police to the front row where only white people were seated. What appears as an “insignificant episode” was “for me, being its pseudo-beneficiary . . . a sign I immediately translated.”⁸⁸

In *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age* (2015) Bernard Harcourt repurposes the “iron cage” as preeminent model for his analytic of the “expository society,” grounded in the basic paradox that all-around access to information restricts freedom of movement (through tracking devices) and produces a panoptical condition of enhanced surveillance. Harcourt allows that the faulty, overtranslated expression “iron cage” was foisted on Weber by Parsons, but for his own purposes it is avowedly a “godsend.”

The metaphor—in its more literal translation—allows us to recuperate, appropriate, and actualize Weber’s original notion of a “shell as hard as steel” to better understand how the mirrored glass and digits work together: more of a tangled mesh, a webbed cloak, than iron bars. Steel is an alloy, a more modern material made by combining age-old iron with carbon or a shell or a cloak that might be more appropriate than the prison cell or cage to describe our digital age. To be sure, the iron cage lives on, at the very heart of our mirrored glass house. But digital exposure takes on a different shape, a different form in this expository society. Virtual transparency and correctional monitoring work together more like a straitjacket, a casing, a shell made of some modern fabric, something like Teflon or woven Kevlar. We have graduated from the suit of armor, from the breastplate and gorget, from the pauldron and plackart, from the chain mail and iron plate of the analog age to the Kevlar jacket of digital times. Our expository society, it turns out, is a shell as hard as steel.⁸⁹

Here we come full circle to Jameson’s “prison-house of language,” interrogating where and how it overlaps with the “steel mesh” of Harcourt’s Kevlar vest. Both are models of the prison without walls: Jameson’s (like Barthes’s), a claustal language limit, Harcourt’s, a digital way of life that can no longer distinguish between freedom and correctional monitoring.

Jameson himself, an avid reader of Weber, having authored an essay on his work titled “The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller” in 1973, was, of course, wise to the stakes for theory of Weber’s figure of the “iron cage.” In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), he would criticize the expression as a loose catchall for “bureaucratic society.” Like Foucault’s “political technology of the body” or historicist paradigms of “the cultural programming of a given historical ‘moment’” such as one finds in Giambattista Vico, G.W.F. Hegel, or Oswald Spengler, the “iron cage,” he asserts, is a model prone to the flaws of all totalizing systems that “relegate change and development to the marginalized category of the merely ‘diachronic,’ the contingent or the rigorously unmeaningful.”⁹⁰ Such systems neutralize the forces of negation and criticality within

dialectics, reducing the transformational potential of theoretical praxis. Though Jameson eschews outright prescriptions, he gestures toward an “ideology of forms” understood as historically nonsynchronous, unevenly developed, and radically historicized.⁹¹ But there are risks incurred: “History is what hurts.”⁹² The iron bars of historical discourse abrade the body and curtail freedom even as Jameson attempts to wish them away by means of a fantasy—a kind of theory black box—described as an “untranscendable horizon that needs no particular theoretical justification.”⁹³

This theorizing without ends must, it would seem, be ungrounded and scattered like Robert Musil’s “iron filings,” which figure the unraveling of Europe’s social order on the eve of world war: “Something imponderable. An omen. An illusion. As when a magnet releases iron filings and they fall in confusion again.” (*Wie wenn ein Magnet die Eisenspäne losläßt und sie wieder durcheinandergeraten.*)⁹⁴ And yet Musil’s specific recourse to iron recalls the lively argument among Weber scholars over whether *stahlhartes Gehäuse* should be rendered iron or steel. Baehr insists:

As a metal that is associated in the European context with modernity, fabrication, ductility, and malleability, steel appears to have much more in common with rational bourgeois capitalism than the iron of which it is a refinement. . . . If Weber had wanted to deploy the imagery of the “iron cage,” he could have exercised that option in German with the expression *eiserner Käfig*.⁹⁵

Taking these distinctions to heart, only steel would accurately capture the historical specificity of Weber’s disenchanted world of industrial modernity.⁹⁶ Alternatively, one could say that by selecting iron over steel Parsons tapped into Weber’s incipient *collapsologie*, whereby the end of capitalist time dovetails with the very last of raw materials on earth.⁹⁷ And of course, the “career” (as Baehr calls it) of *stahlhartes Gehäuse* in translation hardly stops there. The association between iron and shackled existence under totalitarian rule is refracted in myriad political uses of “Iron Curtain,” including Pierre Lévy’s “ontological Iron Curtain” (*le rideau de fer ontologique entre l’être et les choses*)⁹⁸ to dramatize the barrier between human and machinic object. Lévy’s coinage prompts Guattari’s imagination of *écosophie* as a line of flight: a “‘transversalist’ enlargement of enunciation” for modalities of “the psyche, human societies, the living world, machinic species and, in the last analysis, the Cosmos itself.”⁹⁹

The histories of mistranslation issuing from Nietzsche’s *sprachlichem Zwange* and Weber’s *stahlhartem Gehäuse* devolve on a symptom—untranslatability (or, as in the case of Genet’s diagnosis of structural racism, overtranslatability)—that invites us to relate the “prison-house of language” to the “iron cage.” What connects them is a metaphor (let’s call it, following Guattari, a “metamodel”):¹⁰⁰ the *prison-house of translation*. It captures something about the humanities today, abidingly in pursuit of justice—the just word, the right equivalent, the “free” translation—and yet dogged by the fear that (as Jameson explicitly warned us in *The Political Unconscious*) theoretical justification has no horizon. In this context the carceral condition, buried within idioms of everyday micropolitics and the history of translational turns, is none other than a sentence in perpetuity.

Notes

My thanks to Virginia Jackson and Martin Harries for thoughts, references, feedback.

1 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*, 89.

2 Snow, *Variety of Men*, 92.

3 Stephen Hawking as cited by Overbye, “No Escape from Black Holes?” Hawking is referring to light rays as the rays of hope that will keep us—and all information—from disappearing into the maw of the universe’s black holes. These rays, though trapped on the surface of the black hole, are able to slide back and forth in response to incoming material, thus becoming archivists of memory, of information that has passed through the horizon and vanished. This process (a “spatial gravitational memory effect” in the words of Andrew Strominger and Alexander Zhiboedov) is dubbed, interestingly enough, a “supertranslation.” In the same paper, “Gravitational Memory, BMS Supertranslations, and Soft Theorems,” Strominger and Zhiboedov state that “black holes have a lush infinite head of supertranslation hair” (11). As an instance of metamodelization, supertranslation points to a future “turn” where translation theory converges with astrophysics.

4 Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, v.

5 Jameson, v.

6 Jameson, viii. The reference in this passage to Erich Auerbach reminds us that Jameson was a student at Yale when Auerbach taught there in Comparative Literature. Though Jameson did his dissertation in French (“Sartre: The Origins of a Style” in 1961, under the supervision of Henri Peyre), his work was indebted to Auerbach’s historical approach to Western realism and to his purview of philological *Weltliteratur* (world literature).

7 Ernest Gellner, in his 1959 *Words and Things*, paralleled and anticipated Jameson’s ideological critique of structuralism. Gellner ardently contests “the claim that Linguistic Philosophy is neutral, employs no

question-begging concepts of its own, but merely shows language systems for what they are in the hope of freeing us from cramps and misunderstandings, etc. It says, as it were, ‘I am a camera.’ Once it is realized that no such unmediated knowledge is possible, . . . these claims to doctrinelessness and neutrality are seen in their full absurdity” (135). More biting in his polemical style than Jameson, Gellner deploys mocking “models” to call out linguistic philosophy’s disavowed models. They include the “‘spectrum’ of positions” (a stand-in for real philosophical problems), “the prayer-wheel” (referring to the Wittgensteinians’ inability to focus on anything other than how we use things with words), and “the needle in the haystack” (the assumption that there always has to be a needle in a haystack, and when it isn’t found, a move to the probability theory that there is likely a needle, followed by a whatever position: “Haystacks are interesting. We like hay” (166–70).

8 Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, vii.

9 Jameson, vi.

10 Jameson, vii.

11 Jameson, vii.

12 Jameson, xi.

13 Jameson, 195.

14 Davis, *The Prison-Industrial Complex*.

15 François Dosse describes La Borde, situated in a *château* in the Loir-et-Chair countryside, as a “mythical place,” a kind of “utopia” in which the practice of isolating people with psychiatric disorders was rejected, and psychotic patients mingled with the “normal.” (Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari*, 40.)

16 Didier Eribon relays the opening salvo of GIP (Groupe d’information sur les prisons)—a pamphlet titled *Intolérable*—naming its principal targets: “tribunals, cops, hospitals, asylums, school, military service, the press, television, and the State, and above all,

the prison.” Foucault founded the movement in the Saint-Bernard Chapel near Montparnasse, announcing: “No-one can be certain to escape prison. Today less than ever before” (cited in Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 237).

17 Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, 193–94.

18 Jameson, 207.

19 Jameson, 173–74.

20 Jameson, n.p.

21 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 283 (my emphasis).

22 Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 110. The passage cited by Jameson appears as Fragment 5 [22] under the heading “Fundamental solution.” In Bittner’s alternate translation the phrase reads: “we cease thinking when we no longer want to think within the constraints of language, we just manage to reach the suspicion that there might be a boundary here” (my emphasis).

23 Wittgenstein cited and translated by Heller, “Ludwig Wittgenstein: Unphilosophical Notes,” 46. Heller also notes the similarity to Karl Krauss’s aphorism: “If I cannot get further, this is because I have banged my head against the wall of language. Then, with my head bleeding, I withdraw. And want to go on.”

24 Nietzsche cited and translated by Heller, 46 (emphases in text).

25 Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness*, 209.

26 Behler, “Translating Nietzsche in the United States,” 142–43.

27 Trezise, foreword to *The Subject of Philosophy* by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, xvi.

28 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, 1. Here is the context of the famous phrase: “The book

deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, as I believe, that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language. Its whole meaning could be summed up somewhat as follows: *What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent*. The book will, therefore, draw a limit (*eine Grenze*) to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of the limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense (*wird einfach Unsinn sein*).”

29 Musil, *The Man without Qualities* 1, 549.

30 Ayer, *Part of My Life*, 115–16. “I took it for granted that the ‘atomic propositions,’ which served in the *Tractatus* to determine the sense of everything that could be said, were propositions which referred to observable states of affairs. This was not made explicit by Wittgenstein himself, and it is now thought by some of his disciples not to have been what he intended, but it was an assumption generally made at the time by those who latched on to the *Tractatus*, including philosophers with whom Wittgenstein was personally in contact.”

31 In an as-yet unpublished essay on Lacan’s linguistics, Pierre Schwarzer writes: “Lacan refuses the idea of a limit within language—and in further opposition, he very much assumes that there is a limit in what can be thought. On the couch of the analyst, the patients do not grapple with something that they cannot say—rather, they grapple with something they cannot think, something they do not allow themselves to think—and it is that unthought which emerges in their language. The analyst does not intervene on language, but rather on the unthinkable that reveals itself within it insofar as in language, one can very well be on the two sides of the bar between signifier and signified.”

- 32 Schwarzer, comments in an email exchange, April 6, 2020.
- 33 Culler, "Language and Knowledge," 3, 6, 7.
- 34 Bennett, "The Prison-House of Criticism," 127.
- 35 Bennett, 127.
- 36 Agamben, 121, 122.
- 37 Jameson, interestingly enough, refers to the "afterlife" of the linguistic model in gesturing toward its future disciplinary interpolations. "The linguists have gone on to work Saussure's system through to its logical conclusions, and indeed, with Chomsky, to reverse it, proposing a new linguistic model altogether. We, however, will henceforth be concerned with the *afterlife of the original theory* in other realms of knowledge, and in particular with its liberating influence, as model and analogy, in the areas of literary criticism, anthropology, and ultimately of philosophy itself." (Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, 39, my emphasis).
- 38 See Derrida, "Des tours de Babel" and "Living On: Borderlines." See also Comay, "Geopolitics of Translation."
- 39 Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 202.
- 40 In "Benjamin's 'Afterlife': A Productive (?) Mistranslation," Caroline Disler writes: "In his first mention of the concept that has come to be known as 'afterlife' he deliberately chooses 'Überleben,' a common German word familiar to all his readers. A word that unequivocally means 'survival'—'über-leben' 'sur-vival'/'sur-vie.' A word that can be found in any German dictionary. The word, however, is chosen tentatively, hesitatingly, distinguished by quotation marks, as if to familiarize readers with a strange, novel idea by introducing it with a commonplace term. It appears only once in *Die Aufgabe*. In all subsequent treatment of this concept, Benjamin replaces 'Überleben' with a new term, a very uncommon word: 'Fortleben.' Obviously, he did not intend that the two be taken synonymously."
- 41 Disler.
- 42 Disler writes: "*Fortleben* continues, eternally, whether or not 'anyone' is ever aware of the work, whether or not the work is ever translated. There is, again, no human agency implied. On the other hand, awareness of a literary work in its *Fortleben*, through translation, is called 'fame.' When, during its *Fortleben*, a work of art has come into its own, has reached its stage of fame, then translations arise that are more than mere transmissions of information. Benjamin asserts quite boldly that no translation would be possible if it aspired to similarity with the original. He justifies this startlingly counter-intuitive declaration by claiming that the original changes in its *Fortleben*, 'which would not be allowed to be called that if it were not transformation and renewal of the living' (my emphasis). *Fortleben* is transformation and renewal of the living. This is one of the key phrases in attempting to comprehend this enigmatic word. There has been no death, no damage, no catastrophe to the original. There is no afterlife. There is no survival. Neither is there a simple continuation of the original that was. There is *Fortleben*, metamorphosis, evolution, transformation."
- 43 Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 223. "Telle survie donne un plus de vie, plus qu'une survivance. L'œuvre ne vit pas seulement plus longtemps, elle vit plus et mieux, au-dessus des moyens de son auteur."
- 44 Derrida, 179.
- 45 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 262.
- 46 Benjamin, 262.
- 47 De Man, "Transcription," 39.
- 48 De Man, 49.
- 49 De Man, 308.

- 50 Benjamin, "Theo-Political Fragment," 306.
- 51 Khatib, "Derrida & Sons."
- 52 Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 203 (my emphasis).
- 53 Letter from Paul de Man to Jacques Derrida, September 6, 1979; letter from Derrida to de Man, April 26, 1979. Courtesy Patricia de Man, personal archive. See Apter, "Derrida's Theologies of Translation," 228–46.
- 54 Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 1.
- 55 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 451.
- 56 Cassin, *Plus d'une langue*, 23 (my translation). See also Cassin's *Éloge de la traduction*.
- 57 As Peter Hallward notes in a chapter on "creatural confinement," the task for Deleuze, as for a disparate group of thinkers that includes Bergson, Sartre, Lacan, Foucault, Levinas, Baudrillard, Badiou, and Rosset, "is to escape confinement within the creatural without yielding to the temptation of an abrupt transcendence of the creatural. . . . The goal is to trace a sustainable 'line of flight, a flight out of your place, out of your body, out of your self, out of our world. . . . As creations, lines of flight are themselves primary and constituent; they are 'not phenomena of resistance or counterattack in an assemblage, but cutting edges of creation and deterritorialization.'" Hallward is citing *A Thousand Plateaus* and Deleuze's book on Kafka (see Hallward, *Out of this World*, 58). We must also note how Deleuze's model of baroque aesthetics and specifically the fold, based on the Leibnizian monad, depends on the metaphor of the room, apartment, or cell, its inner walls consisting of diversified folds that block permeation from the outside world (see Deleuze, *Le pli*, 39).
- 58 Reynolds et al., "Prismatic Translation."
- 59 See Even-Zohar, "Polysystems Studies" and "The Position of Translated Literature."
- 60 Mueller-Vollmer and Irmscher, Introduction to *Translating Literatures, Translating Cultures*, xi.
- 61 Behler, "Translating Nietzsche in the United States," 130–31.
- 62 El-Ariss, "Scandal," 3. The idea of "escape from containment" is complemented by a structure of arrested attention on unpatrolled information and its weaponization. El-Ariss explains further that scandal "appears to follow in leaking's footsteps, in that it arrests structures: making them do things they don't want to do or can't control. It also brings crowds who can't help but watch" (5).
- 63 Preciado, "Learning from the Virus," 82, 80.
- 64 Leslie Jamison, in her diaristic essay "Since I Became Symptomatic," describes the "quarantine of the senses" experienced with COVID-19: "This loss of taste has become a kind of sensory quarantine. It's as if the quarantine keeps inching closer and closer to my insides. First, I lost the touch of other bodies; then I lost the air; now I've lost the taste of bananas. . . . The quarantine. As if it weren't plural." Jamison figures the virus as a straitjacketing, lowering presence of cohabitation: "The virus is my new partner, our third companion in the apartment, wetly draped across my body in the night."
- 65 Miller, "Isaac Julien's Political Memory."
- 66 Smith, "Note on the Translation," x. Smith specifies a number of issues that arise with raced translation, including obstacles posed by his own status as a white, male translator of Césaire's "resolutely black" text. "Once synonymous with 'slave,' the term *nègre*" carries a range of meanings, he writes; "from offensive slur to a self-affirming designator" with "no exact equivalent in English. Throughout the history of its use, it aligns with a different set of English terms depending on the period in question" (ix).
- 67 Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*, 136.

- 68 Morrison, 136.
- 69 Malabou, "Life and Prison."
- 70 "Now, this prison-form is much more than an architectural form: it is a social form. With a great deal of speculation we might go so far as to say that if the Greek city state invented a certain social space, the *agora*, which was the institutional condition of possibility of the *logos*, the form of the star, of the power of surveillance, gives rise to a new type of knowledge." (Foucault, Lecture of March 28, 1973, 227).
- 71 Malabou, "Life and Prison."
- 72 Malabou.
- 73 Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture," 458.
- 74 Barthes, 459.
- 75 Barthes, 460.
- 76 Barthes, 460.
- 77 Barthes, 461.
- 78 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 162.
- 79 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 181.
- 80 Baehr, "The 'Iron Cage' and the 'Shell as Hard as Steel,'" 160. Baehr notes Gisela Hinkle's criticism of translations by Edward Shils, Henry Finch, and Talcott Parsons, which erased the original's neo-Kantian affiliations and Americanized its philosophical and methodological frame of reference, creating false connections to modern empiricism, philosophical realism, and behaviorism and eradicating Nietzschean "Last Man" allusions with the substitution by Parsons of "last phase" for *die letzten Menschen* (156).
- 81 Baehr, 162.
- 82 Michael Löwy offers a strong reading of "habitable" as a space of enslavement, associating it with Weber's use (in *Economy and Society*) of the expression *herrenlose Sklaverei* (slavery without master) for the impersonal, absolute domination of capitalism. It is associated with a "thing-force" or market pulsion captured in the German term *Sachzwang*. Löwy insists that Weber saw no "elective affinity" between freedom and capitalism, and further, that any industrial economy driven solely by material interests—whether in the USA, Germany, or Russia—was destined to reproduce new habitats of servitude (*Gehäuse für die neue Hörigkeit*). See Löwy, "Max Weber, capitalisme et liberté."
- 83 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 181–82.
- 84 Weber, 181.
- 85 Rey Chow traces the link between subjectified labor and her notion of the "protestant ethnic" as follows: "As do some of Weber's interpreters, what I consider most decisive about his theory is the effective structural collaboration he pinpoints between the power of subjective belief (in salvation) as found in modern, secularized society and capitalist economism's ways of hailing, disciplining, and rewarding identities constituted by certain forms of labor. The charged figure that results from this collaboration . . . is what I call the protestant ethnic" (Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic & the Spirit of Capitalism*, viii).
- 86 Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany Under a New Political Order," 158. Cited by Baehr, "The 'Iron Cage' and the 'Shell as Hard as Steel,'" 166.
- 87 Genet, *May Day Speech*, 8.
- 88 Genet, 8, 9.
- 89 Harcourt, *Exposed*, 236.
- 90 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 90, 91.
- 91 Jameson, 97.
- 92 Jameson, 102.

93 Jameson, 102.

94 Musil, *The Man without Qualities* 1, 56.

95 Baehr, "The 'Iron Cage' and the 'Shell as Hard as Steel,'" 162.

96 In "Issues of Language and Translation in Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Writings," Gordon C. Wells, Baehr's co-translator of *The Protestant Ethic*, elaborates how they arrived at "shell as hard as steel." He writes: "We reverted to Weber's 'steel.' Amongst other factors, steel is the product of *human fabrication*. It is both extremely hard *and* flexible, and is associated in the European context with modernity; accordingly, it has more in common with rational bourgeois capitalism than the iron of which it is a refinement. We translated *Gehäuse* by *shell*, which is one meaning of the word (*casing* is another). A shell has an organic quality, and symbolizes something that has not been externally imposed, but has become integral to human existence. Whereas a cage confines human agents, a shell suggests that modern capitalism has created a *new kind of being*. Our final rendering was *shell as hard as steel*" (36). Baehr shores up the case for "steel," citing David Chalcraft's "the steel shell of the capitalist order" used in his essay "Bringing the Text Back In" (Baehr, "The 'Iron Cage' and the 'Shell as Hard as Steel,'" 164).

97 *Collapsologie*, a buzzword brought into circulation by Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens in their book *How Everything Can Collapse*, contains a view of late capitalist decline already intimated by Weber. "Collapse" in Weber's time would have applied to the idea of resource exhaustion imbricated with psychic exhaustion.

98 Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que l'écosophie?*, 112. Guattari is citing Pierre Lévy's essay "Plissé fractal" as well as his book *Les Technologies de l'intelligence*. Lévy originally used the expression "ontological iron curtain" with reference to works by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers.

99 Guattari, "The New Aesthetic Paradigm," 108.

100 Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que l'écosophie?*, 304, 307. In an interview with John Johnston, "Vertige de l'immanence" (vertigos of immanence), Guattari associates *métamodélisation* with using the "heterogenetic" practice of schizoanalysis to grasp singular diversities (304) and existential territories (307).

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