

BELONGING IN MOTHER TONGUES

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Abstract

What does it mean to belong? On the one hand, belonging is the dynamic, internal, intimate, individual experience of relating to others and being part of a ‘we’ that remains undetermined. On the other hand, belonging is the result of an external act of attribution, a fixed assignation of identity. Both are essentially carried in and through language.

I propose that belonging is made possible by the act of coming to speaking and the experience of being heard. I explore this possibility through a social art practice that works with the poetic, emotive, reflexive and phatic function of the word, especially when spoken, and of the photographic image, still or moving. My research outputs, often the results of encounters and collaborations taking place in specific places, function as examples of what it means to belong.

Throughout this research project, I draw on the experience of living in between one’s mother tongue and other languages in order to demonstrate how immersing oneself in a language different from the language one grew up in radically reconfigures a subject’s identity and sense of belonging. The Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst, literary theorist and poet Julia Kristeva writes that in between silence, your element is silence. Breaking that silence and coming to speaking and writing in a new language transforms the relation between subject and language into a dynamic and emancipatory relation, reassessing what makes a language maternal and proposing a reformulation of what it means to belong.

The experience of belonging is connected to the practice of place. Over the past couple of years, I have developed my research in between three different kind of places: the fine art research seminar room, conversing with fellow researchers who live in between languages, the Masbro community centre in Hammersmith, London, working with the students and teachers of English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes, and my home, which is the place where I live with my family, welcome my relatives and friends and develop my work.

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Author's declaration:

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in the thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is submitted.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annette Mowson d'Almeida".

Date: 28 March 2018

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To the witches and wizards I met on the Island, the Continent mainland and elsewhere,
whose mind is in the service of the heart.

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In fact, it is because we have a responsibility with regard to the words we use, the responsibility of an author and not of a receiver or communicating go-between, that language is also political.

Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia: When are we ever at home?*

Fermer les yeux, c'est la serrure de la mort.
To close one's eyes is the doorlock of death.

Marie-Amélie Cabrol, July 2010

In fact, it is because we have a responsibility with regard to the words we use, the responsibility of an author and not of a master or communicating go-between, that language is also political.

Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia. When are we ever at home?*

ce n'est plus l'île qui se
tire du fond de la terre
à travers le eaux, c'est l'
homme qui recrée le monde
à partir de l'île et sur les
eaux. L'homme reprend de

Le texte ne « commente » pas les images.
Les images n'« illustrent » pas le texte :
chaque a été seulement pour moi le
départ d'une sorte de vacillement visuel,
analogique peut-être à cette perte de sens
que le Zen appelle un satori ; texte et images,
dans leur entrelacs, veulent assurer la
circulation, l'échange de ces signifiants : le
corps, le visage, l'écriture, et y lire le recul
des signes.

trouvé qu'il en soit aussi, j'en
ai quindi trouvato dans l'immag

en distribuant les sexes au gré de sa réverie. Il doit à moitié se persuader qu'il n'existe pas de combat de ce genre, faire en sorte à moitié, qu'il n'y en ait plus. L'existence des îles est d'une façon tout à fait nécessaire à ce tel point de vue, mais il y a aussi une nécessité d'autre chose, d'autre part, et d'une autre direction. Ce séparé tout court que l'Angleterre soit peuplée, l'homme ne peut vivre sur une île qu'en oubliant ce qu'elle représente. Les îles sont d'avant l'homme, ou pour après.

Mais tout ce que nous disait la géographie sur deux sortes d'îles, l'île qui se sépare déjà pour son compte et d'une autre façon. L'île qui l'interdit qui protège, et les îles mêmes. Rêver des îles, avec angoisse ou joie peu importe, c'est rêver que l'on se sépare, qu'on est déjà séparé, loin des contingences qui l'on est seul et perdu – ou bien c'est rêver qu'on report à zéro, que l'on recommence. Il y avait des îles dévastées, mais l'île, c'est ce vers quoi l'on dérive, et il y avait des îles originaires, mais l'île, *not about the origine*, c'est autre chose. Il faut bien s'occuper quand on est séparé, il vaut mieux se séparer quand on veut recréer, testement de l'imagination des îles toujours. Ainsi le mouvement, mais il n'a pas le même objet. C'est le même qui sépare, mais pas le même mobile. C'est que plus l'île qui se sépare du continent, c'est l'homme qui se sépare de tout le reste de la terre à travers les îles. Ce n'est plus l'île qui se crée du tout à partir de l'île et sur les eaux. L'homme reprend donc à son tour l'un et l'autre des mouvements de l'île, et peut l'assumer sur l'autre qui n'a justement pas ce mouvement : on peut dériver vers une île pourtant originale, et créer dans une île seulement dévastée. A bien réfléchir, on trouvera la une tout désertique pour laquelle toute l'île est et reste théorique.

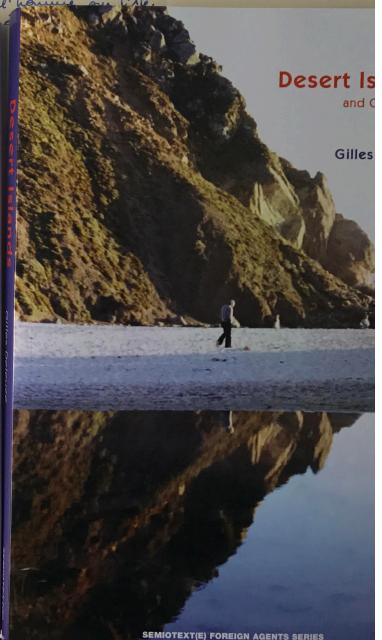
Tout qu'une île cesse d'être déserte, en effet, il ne suffit pas

qu'elle soit habité. Si ce est vrai que le mouvement de l'homme

sur l'île reprend le mouvement de l'île avant les hom

mes hommes peuvent l'occuper, elle est encore déserte, c'est

tion, le mouvement qui
assure l'homme sur l'île,



SEMOTEXT(E) FOREIGN AGENTS SERIES

Introduction

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The four chapters that follow form the written component of a PhD Research in Fine Art by project I have undertaken over a period of four years. This research started with a concern with the ways the encounter between mother tongue and a second language is consciously and unconsciously enunciated and enacted in contemporary art practices and in the works they produce. The fast changing political atmosphere in the United Kingdom impelled me to reflect on the relationship between the language(s) in which one speaks and one's sense of belonging and on the mutual dependence of the notions of mother tongue and home. I reformulated the research question to 'what does it mean to belong?' and 'when does one feel at home?'. I propose that one feels one belongs, one feels at home, when one is able to speak to, be listened to and understood by others, a proposal which has enabled me to reassess the maternal of language through the responses I developed in my own practice.

Julia Kristeva's writings on the speaking subject and the signifying practice of the text have been a constant reference in my research. However, my encounter with Barbara Cassin's writings on the mother tongue took me away from considerations of the subverting influence of the pre-linguistic on the integrity of language as theorized in Kristeva's *Revolution in poetic language*¹ towards an engagement of language as always already unstable in relation to other languages. Through this approach, I propose a reassessment of the maternal in language: rather than a maternal fixed in the nativist representation embedded in the expression 'mother tongue', a language is 'maternal' when it becomes a dynamic holding environment² that enables the subject to come to speaking to, be listened to and understood by others.

I have asked these questions and produced responses in a language that is not my mother tongue, in the constant to and fro between English and French, the language in which I grew up and was educated and in encounters with others' tongues through a social practice, working with the poetic, emotive, reflexive and phatic function of the word, and of the photographic image.

¹ Julia Kristeva.1984. 'The semiotic and the symbolic' in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 21-106.

² I borrow this expression from Donald Winnicott's writings on maternal care. See Donald Winnicott.1960. 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant relationship'. *Int.J.Psycho-Anal.*, 41:585-595 available at <http://icpla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Winnicott-D.-The-Theory-of-the-Parent-Infant-Relationship-IJPA-Vol.-41-pps.-585-595.pdf> accessed 15.03.18.

A social practice of place, interstitial and vernacular

The experience of belonging is connected to the practice of place. Over the past four years, I have developed my research in between three different kinds of places: the fine art research seminar room at the Royal College of Art and other academic places, conversing with fellow researchers who live in between languages, the Masbro community centre³, and my home, the place where I live with my family, welcome my relatives and friends and develop my work.

I define a place not so much as a static site but as a ‘dynamic meshwork of relations’, ‘an entanglement’, ‘where beings grow along and “issue force” along the lines of their relationships’⁴. During this research project, I have produced visual and textual works that respond to the question of what it means to belong in an art practice that ‘operates through relation and occurs socially’⁵, in the particular locality of ‘place’ and focuses on that which constitutes relations through the development of interaction, participation and collaboration.

In an interview with Erik Bordeleau⁶, Isabelle Stengers speaks about ‘practices of the interstice’, defined not so much in opposition to a bloc but through a mode of existence dependent on the ability to create situations, to construct ways of doing that enable ‘thinking together’ and the possibility to transform and be transformed.

I have initiated concrete situations that have produced interstices, intervening spaces in the different milieux in which my research has taken place, enabling me to think through my research question with others. In ‘thinking together’ as Stengers says, new understandings have arisen, opening possibilities of transformation, my own as well as others.

In the project *Plurality of Languages*, I initiated informal workshops, private conversations, email correspondence with fellow researchers, at the RCA and elsewhere, on and around the translation of ‘Pluralität der Sprachen’, a short text written by Hannah

³ <http://www.masbrocentre.org.uk/>

⁴ Tim Ingold. 2011. ‘The Meshwork’ in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London:Routledge), p.70, cited in Emma Smith. 2015. *Practice of Place* (London: Bedford Press), p.26.

⁵ Smith, p.76.

⁶ Erik Bordeleau, ‘le soin des possibles – entretien avec Isabelle Stengers’, available at <www.academia.edu/5245518/Le_soin_des_posibles_-_entretien_avec_Isabelle_Stengers> accessed 15.12.17.

Arendt⁷. This project has inhabited interstitial spaces in which I was able to think together with others about and through the problems arising in developing research in a language different from one's mother tongue.

The project *Home?* developed out of occasional sessions, then weekly interventions in the last 40 minutes of a two-hours class of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at the Masbro Community Centre in London. These interventions aimed at enabling the students, the teacher and myself to think and speak together from the question 'How does one feel at home?'.

The works produced in and around these projects are the manifestations of collective, experimental, laborious and fragile endeavours that stand as possible examples of the forms 'thinking together' may take.

My practice inhabits interstices of space and time that exists between the blocks of the unpaid work I produce performing the roles of 'mother' and 'wife', without which the market-economy cannot function. I have developed my practice as a fighting response to the alienating nature of that shadow work, as Ivan Illich calls it⁸. It is a vernacular practice in the sense Illich gives the term, providing for social subsistence, my own and perhaps that of others. He defines the vernacular as:

the activities of people when they are not motivated by thoughts of exchange, a word that denotes autonomous, non-market related actions through which people satisfy everyday needs – the actions that by their own true nature escape bureaucratic control, satisfying needs to which, in the very process, they give specific shape⁹.

Conversation is the basic vernacular practice that is absolutely necessary to that subsistence and has been instrumental in creating the situations enabling 'thinking together' to take place.

⁷ Hannah Arendt. 2003. 'Pluralität der Sprachen' in *Hannah Arendt: Denktagebuch 1950-1973*, ed. by Ursula Lodz and Ingeborg Nordmann (München: Piper Verlag)

⁸ Ivan Illich. 1998. *Shadow Work* (Salem: Marion Boyars), p.100.

⁹ Illich, p.31.

Language matters

Language is the matter of my practice. Even when no words are uttered or read, language is the invisible matter that holds one's vision together. Any vision of the world is entangled in a web of words. I don't separate writing from what might be considered my studio practice according to academic definitions. The image emerges from description, metaphor or comparison as much as it emerges from its material realisation. Many figures animate the visual and textual work produced in the research, oscillating between visibility and invisibility. Meaning is not limited to the sign. The conversation between words, spoken or written and images ensure the circulation and exchange of signifiers, opening into a plurality of meanings.

I have been researching what Denise Riley calls the 'forcible affect of language which courses like blood through its speakers'. 'Language is impersonal', she writes, 'its working through and across us is indifferent to us, yet in the same blow it constitutes the fiber of the personal'¹⁰.

Enunciation is the event in which language becomes personal, embodied. It is, according to Émile Benveniste, the act of the speaker mobilizing the language on his or her behalf, a process of appropriation, the vocal realization of language. Any enunciation is, explicitly or implicitly an allocution¹¹, calling for another individual, real or fictive to respond. It is the embodied exercise of a voice calling other voices to respond.

The individual act of speaking, is itself perhaps more important than what is being said as Jacques Lacan infers when he writes: "That one might be saying (Qu'on dise) remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard".¹² This is especially true, when it is said in a language the listener may not understand.

One becomes more aware of the 'forcible affect of language' through the practice of another language along one's own mother tongue, noticing the polysemy words carry and the equivocality of meaning given within and above all with languages¹³. I have long been concerned and worked with what the philologist and philosopher Barbara Cassin

¹⁰ Denise Riley. 2005. *Impersonal passion: language as affect* (Durham: Duke University Press), p.2.

¹¹ Émile Benveniste. 2014. 'The formal apparatus of enunciation' in *The Discourse Studies Reader*, ed. by Johanes Angermuller & als (Philadelphia: John Benjamins), pp.141-145.

¹² Jacques Lacan, *L'étourdit*, trans. by C. Gallagher, <<http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/JL-etourdit-CG-Trans-Letter-41.pdf>>, accessed 16.12.17

¹³ Quoted from the entry 'Plurality of Languages' in Hannah Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, English translation available in Barbara Cassin. 2016. *Nostalgia: When are we ever at Home?*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault (New York: Fordham University Press), pp.57-58.

refers to as ‘elements of language’¹⁴. These ‘elements of language’ are often clichés, linguistic automatisms that exert their determinations on the way we think and behave. Clichés belong to what Ivan Illich calls ‘the taught mother tongue’¹⁵. Getting to think and speak in another language enables one to notice and question clichés carried by idiomatic expressions and slogans.

I have been developing my research from the shores of the English language, neither inside nor outside it, on the unplaceable line of its coast, in the words of Jacques Derrida¹⁶. I have been thinking and writing in translation the responses to the question I set myself to research, experimenting with a poetics of (un)translation, thinking and writing with words and expressions Barbara Cassin refers to as ‘untranslatables’. The ‘untranslatable’, she writes, is ‘what one keeps on (not) translating ‘ and something that ‘indicates that their translation, into one language or another, creates a problem’¹⁷. The translation of ‘to belong’ and ‘to feel at home’ in the corresponding French terms ‘appartenir’ and ‘se sentir chez soi’ is problematic. This correspondence that is not an equivalence has been a very productive place to think about the research question. This poetics of (un)translation is not so much a poetics of resistance to the second language as a poetics of its displacement exploring the possibility of the second language becoming a ‘langue d’accueil’, a host language in which hospitality takes over from hostility, welcoming what Jacques Derrida calls ‘le corps verbal’¹⁸, and Jacques Lacan la ‘dit-mension’¹⁹, the dimension of speech embodied in the other language. The texts and the images gathered in the written component experiment with modes of writing that foreground the event of enunciation and render voices audible. Each chapter tells a story in which an ‘I’ addresses, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, a ‘you’ who becomes the place of a new enunciation. The ‘I’ weaves the other voices who inhabit and animate the texts with her own in a conversation inviting

¹⁴ Barbara Cassin. 2016. *Nostalgia: When are we ever at Home?*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault (New York: Fordham University Press), p.48

¹⁵ Illich, p.44.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida. 1998. *Monolingualism of the Other OR the Prosthetic of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p.2.

¹⁷ Barbara Cassin. 2014. ‘Introduction’, in *Dictionary of Untranslatability: a Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by Barbara Cassin, trans. and ed. by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. xvii-xx.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida. 1967. ‘Freud et la scène de l’écriture’ in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: editions du Seuil), p.132.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan quoted in Barbara Cassin. 2014. ‘L’énergie des intraduisibles’ in *Philosopher en langues: les intraduisibles en traduction*, ed. by Barbara Cassin (Paris: Éditions rue d’Ulm), p.11.

the reader to listen to and think with a polyphony of voices. I have written in the conversational mode, making use of the rhetorical devices of irony and parataxis. Irony was used to convey the incongruity of certain elements of language I encountered in the course of my research, to possibly lead the reader to reassess the meaning produced by such elements of language. Parataxis, by placing side by side thoughts with spoken fragments of conversation and descriptions of gestures and actions, was used to depict the non hierarchical operation of signification at work in a stream of consciousness inviting the reader's own free associations. The spacing of paragraphs has also been used to create silent interruptions facilitating the reader's signifying process.

I have also written in the interrogative mode: "I" frequently asks questions to 'you'. In between the moment of asking a question and the formulation of an answer, an exchange takes place in which roles are endlessly reversed and the vision of another possible world is heard and perhaps understood.

I don't speak on behalf of the others whose voices animate the stories I wrote. I think with them. I have thought with the words of Hannah Arendt, Barbara Cassin, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Daniel Sibony among others. They are philosophers for whom language is not a transparent thing or a mere tool used to say exactly what they meant to say; they acknowledge the agency of language in the development of their thoughts, putting it to work with powerful poetic effects. Their writings often draw from their reading of literature, another source of references. I practice 'reading as poaching', in the words of Michel de Certeau. I come across ideas that enable my own thoughts to progress further. I may have invented in their texts something different from what they "intended"²⁰. Whenever I was able to, I have read the texts in the original language they were written and in the published English translation. When an English translation was not available, I have proposed my own translation reproduced here with the text in the original language.

I have thought with the fragments of remembered conversations with the people I involved in my research and fragments collected from other vernacular sources such as online searches in Wikipedia, organizations and companies websites, pages of British daily newspapers and comments on newspapers blogs. The Daily Telegraph, in particular, was selected as a major source of textual material for the defense by one of its

²⁰ Michel de Certeau.1984. 'Reading is poaching' in *The Practice of everyday life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press), p.169.

journalists of Standard English as ‘correct English’²¹. Often anecdotal, these vernacular enunciations have nevertheless contributed to the form of theorizing my writing is experimenting with, producing a polyphonic text with an agency without authority.

Working with the materiality of words, I have taken necessary liberties with the requirements for the presentation of a PhD thesis:

Punctuation has been used to emphasize the orality associated with storytelling. I have used commas and semicolons to punctuate the sentences in a rhythm appropriate to reading aloud the text. Single quotation marks have been used to mark words singled out in the reading aloud of the text.

No footnotes or endnotes have been used in any of the four chapters as they are markers of a different mode of writing. The words of others are embedded in the writing either as reported speech, often introduced by ‘I read’, ‘I heard’, using indentations for longer extracts and long quotations, in compliance with academic conventions. Corresponding sources can be found in the section ‘Works cited’.

I have also used free indirect speech, especially in reporting conversations I had with people.

Words in other languages are embedded among English words without any kind of typographical discrimination.

Chapter 1 ‘Mother tongues’ revisits the figures of the Island and Robinson to think through the maternal in language.

Chapter 2 ‘Nature morte’ is the textual pendant of the dyptich Equivoque: Still life/Nature Morte. Both are responses to my asking what the untranslatables ‘still life’ and ‘nature morte’ actually say.

Chapter 3 ‘Conversation piece’ is the story of what took place in and around classroom A of the Masbro Community Centre as the project Home? developed.

Chapter 4 ‘Birdcalls’ experiments with the power of analogy, as I witness the changes in atmosphere on the Island showing through particular uses of the English language.

²¹ in Simon Heffer and Oliver Kamm. 2015. ‘The Duel: is There Such a Thing as Correct English?’, *Prospect*, 19 February, available at: <<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-duel-is-there-such-a-thing-as-correct-english>>, accessed 10.12.17



Mother tongues

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You write continental sentences, I was told nine years ago. What do you mean? I asked. The response I got had something to do with the length of my sentences and too many comas.

You write continental sentences ...

Why was I told something like that? How did this manner of speaking come - consciously or unconsciously - to the mind of my interlocutor? How did 'continental', an adjective belonging to the semantic domain of geography become associated with 'sentences'? How does it sound to you? To me, at the time, it sounded slightly inappropriate and a little pompous. It still does. What I heard at the time and what I still hear today is 'this is not the way one writes here'.

'Here' is a piece of land that is separated from the continent by a stretch of water. 'Here' is the southern part of the largest island in an archipelago of islands off the coast of the Continent mainland, often designated with the term 'The Isles of the Island'. The - Encyclopaedia of the Island states that, though the term 'Isles of the Island' has a long history of common usage, it has become increasingly controversial, especially for some people living on the smaller island west of the Island who, I quote, object to its connotation of political and cultural connections with the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom of the Island and Northern Western Island – which from now on I will call the United Kingdom – is the official name of the political community organised under a democratic government elected by the citizens of that country living on the Island, part of the North-East of the smaller Western Island and those citizens living abroad – 'overseas' I have often heard say - who are eligible and have registered to vote in the United Kingdom embassies in other states around the world. The Island is big enough that you can forget it is an island, until you reach the shore. In the introduction of *Nostalgia: When are we ever at home?*, Barbara Cassin describes the shore as the limit between an inside and the great outside. She writes that an island is real, it has a definite contour; it emerges like an idea. The Continent to which my interlocutor was referring has ambiguous contours. One might know where it ends, but not where it begins or vice versa depending on the point of view. Whether the Island is said to be part or not of the Continent also differs depending on points of view. Different sources present the Island as a good example of what geography designates as a continental island. The Encyclopaedia of the Island describes continental islands as simply unsubmerged parts of the continental shelf that are entirely surrounded by water, adding

that many of the largest islands of the world are of the continental type and listing the Island among them. However it describes quite elliptically the Island archipelago as westward extensions of Continental structures, with the shallow waters of the Strait of Dover and the North Sea, as if avoiding the association of the term continental with the term archipelago.

In the online English living dictionary put together by the most prestigious university on the Island – which from now, I will refer to with the acronym ELD – I read that continental is the attribute of something forming or belonging to a continent; it is also said of something in, from, or characteristic of the Continent mainland. Many things are designated as ‘continental’ here. A continental is an inhabitant of the Continent mainland. Mansion blocks are said to be continental. There is a single Centre for Continental philosophy in the northern part of the Island that focuses on teaching the crossover between philosophy’s continental and analytic traditions. There are continental chocolates, continental breakfast, continental cheese selection, continental cuisine, continental school days, continental markets and continental clients. Some places on the Island cultivate a continental feel. There is the history of the Island and Continental history. What I hear in continental is that it is not of the Island. It does not partake of the Island. What is continental does not belong to the Island.

I write these sentences in a language that is not the language I was born and grew up in. I write these sentences in a language that is not my mother tongue. I write in a language that is neither my mother’s nor my father’s tongue. I write in another language, no longer foreign to me as it is the language spoken in the country where I live. I have been in exile, not from the land I come from as I can return there whenever I want and have returned to it often enough, but from my mother tongue, the French language, the main language but not the only one spoken in that land. I am in exile from my mother tongue because I have had to use the English language to speak, write, work, and live here. My mother tongue is always *in the back of my mind* as Hannah Arendt said in English in her conversation with the journalist Günter Gauss interviewing her, *Zur Person*, in her first appearance on German television in 1964.

Exile changes one’s relationship to language, to languages. Barbara Cassin writes that exile denaturalises the mother tongue. It unites it from la ‘patrie’, the land of the fathers. I believe that if, or when I return to live in the country I come from, I will be in exile from the English language. I feel at home in English as much as I do in French. When I

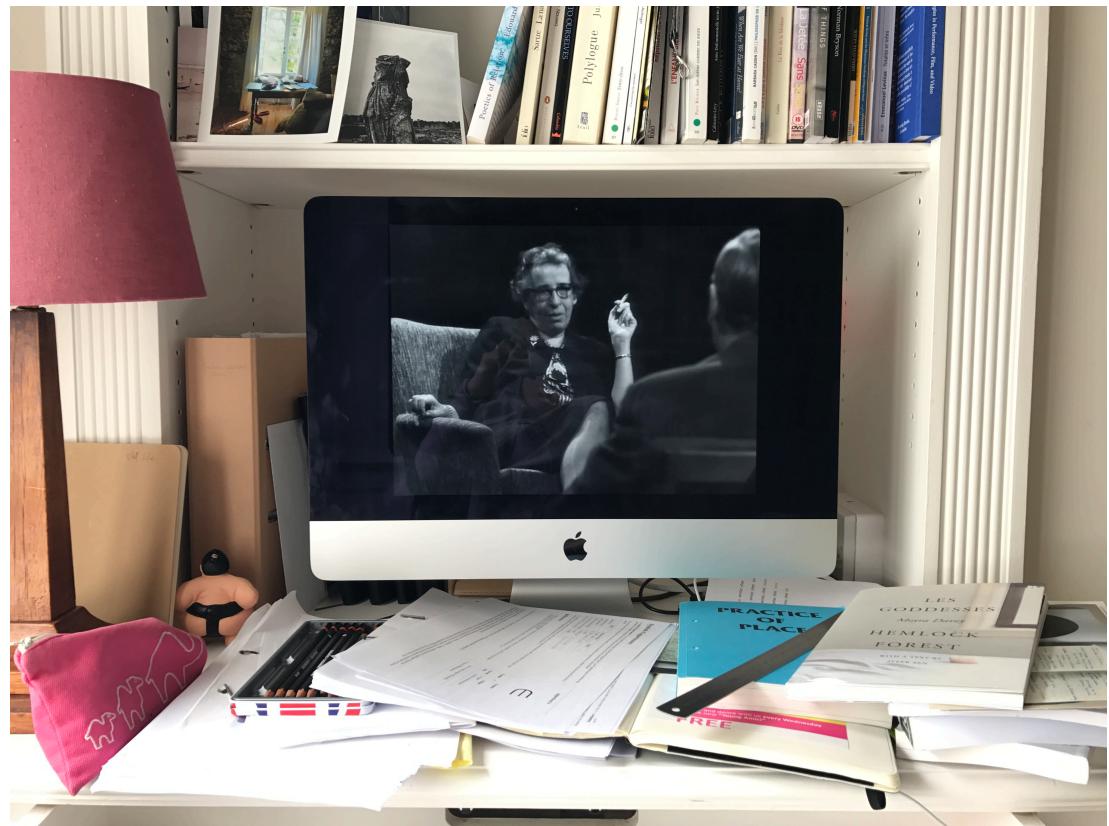
am bathed in the French language, words, expressions come to me in English and I sometimes look at French words as strange animals. Nancy Huston would perhaps say qu'ils ne me parlent plus. They don't speak to me anymore.

I like to think that I have adopted the English language. However, I have often experienced situations where I have felt the English language has not – yet? – adopted me; where the way I formulated my thoughts in English – carefully, respectfully but under the conscious and unconscious influence of my mother tongue – was not accepted well; that the way I spoke was not welcome.

I retain a very pronounced French accent when I speak English. It is particularly strong when I get emotional. 'Retain' is accurate for what I am trying to say. Unconsciously and now consciously, I have retained my French accent to keep my mother tongue, this irreplaceable thing, intact and alive, words I borrow from Hannah Arendt again. I did not have to forget it, unlike, as Barbara Cassin writes, the refugee who obeys and follows the good advice of his or her saviours or today, the requirements of its host country. But I have lost the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures and the unaffected expression of feelings Arendt associated with the mother tongue. Barbara Cassin writes that Arendt cultivated the sound, the syntax and the rhythm of German when she wrote in English. Arendt said to Günter Gaus that she always consciously refused to lose her mother tongue, always maintaining a certain distance from French, which she then spoke almost fluently, as well as from English, in which she wrote at the time of the interview. My mother tongue lost its transparency, a transparency English, as a second language I was formally taught, never had for me. In the interview, Arendt says that she expresses herself un-idiomatically, unlike the people who have forgotten their mother tongue and speak in a language where one cliché chases another. Cassin stresses that the cliché must not be mistaken for an ordinary use of words, for ordinary language that on the contrary is full of the associations and meanings that have accrued to it *in the back of the mind*. She writes that holding on to one's mother tongue is not some coquettish resistance on the part of Arendt, but expresses a very deep fear that makes sense only when it is seen in light of Arendt's conception of the banality of evil. Think of Eichman, the specialist, Cassin reminds her reader, one can speak one's mother tongue using clichés. The Third Reich used and abused the German language and people by manipulating words to create terrible euphemisms, such as the 'Endlösung', the Final Solution, designating the systematic extermination of people in 'Konzentrationslager', concentration camps.

Words can be like tiny doses of arsenic: they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then, after a little time, the toxic reaction sets in after all.

Barbara Cassin quotes these words written from his 'Jew house' by Victor Klemperer, a professor of French literature relieved of his chair at the University of Dresden by the Third Reich government. The largely unnoticed power of Lingua Tertia Imperii, as Klemperer names the language of the Third Reich, effected and enforced the transformation of the German society into a totalitarian state, centralized and dictatorial, that required complete subservience of the people to the state. Cassin writes that one's tongue is no longer a "mother tongue as soon as one no longer invents anything in it; it is no longer even really a "tongue" for all those politically and humanly idiotic listeners-transmitters crippled with banalities and lacking in any reflective or critical judgment.



Current political discourses resonate with sounds of the Island separating from the Continent. The stretch of water that physically separates the Island from the Continent is here called the Channel and, on the other side la Manche, metaphorically named after the narrow piece of garment in which the arm fits. Throughout the centuries until the 18th century, I read, this stretch of water did not have any fixed name in English and French and it was never defined as a political border and not considered the property of a nation; the first time this body of water was called the Channel was in a play by William Shakespeare claimed to be the most famous playwright of this land and the English language; the play deals with the loss of the territories of the Island on the Continent, across the Channel. It is the natural border and the channel for exchanges between the Island and the Continent, a fluid frontier open to l'Océan Mondial, the Global Ocean Conveyor belt that encircles the globe. In geological terms, the Isles of the Island are unsubmerged parts of the Continent crust entirely surrounded by water. I read in a paper published by the Imperial College Department of Earth science and Engineering that the Island was separated from the Continent in the late Quaternary – quite recently in geological terms – by the erosion of a rock ridge resulting in the opening of the Strait of Dover.

The political border between the United Kingdom and the neighbouring state on the Continent mainland is traced through the Channel according to a line agreed by both parties based on the legal definition of the term ‘continental shelf’. This definition, established case by case, differs from the geological definition according to which the continental shelf is a part of the continental crust defined as the relatively thick part of the earth's crust which forms the large land masses. The geological Island and the Continent mainland belong to the same continental crust. The geographical Island may or may not belong to the same continental crust, depending on the changing legal understanding and description of the delimitation of the United Kingdom’s continental shelf and that of the neighbouring Republic across the Channel. This legal definition has been the source of constant disagreements between the two states. Reaching an agreement required complex international arbitration and the development of the law of the sea by the United Nations. The United Kingdom and the Republic across the Channel may have decided to disagree on some portions of the line, for what I know, as I did not go through the 414 pages of the 1978 United Nations arbitral decision.

I read ‘Causes et Raisons des Îles Désertes’ written by Gilles Deleuze - a continental philosopher according to the academic terminology in usage on the Island- and its published English translation, entitled ‘Desert Islands’. Curiously, the translators dropped ‘the causes and reasons for’ in Deleuze’s original title; I wonder why? Deleuze writes that, unlike oceanic islands that are originary, essential islands emerging and disappearing within the depths of the planet’s Oceans,

Continental islands are accidental, derived islands, separated from a continent, born of disarticulation, erosion, fracture; they survive the absorption of what once contained them.

Deleuze writes that continental islands ‘survivent à l’engloutissement de ce qui les retenait’; Rather surviving the ‘absorption of what once contained them’, they survive the engulfing of what once held them back.

Over the past nine years, I have listened to the conflicted and divisive clamours coming up louder and bolder on the Island’s Broadcast Corporation radio channels and newspapers pages: the Continent is wrecked; it is sinking; the Island must leave the Continent if it does not want to be absorbed, engulfed in the Continent’s problems; the Continent needs us more than we need them; the Island will sail the World; we have the Commonwealth; Look ahead, we can make it on our own, we have the world that speaks our language, we will take back control of our laws, of our borders, of our money, of our lives, let’s LEAVE! Look at the evidence given by experts; we’re already getting our money back from the Continent; they are our neighbours; think in a rational way, if we leave the Continent we will have no more say on rules we will have to follow anyway; we need the Continent more than they need us; we will be sent to the back of the queue, we are small, we’ll be even smaller and we will be alone. Why wreck positive relationships woven over many decades that have on the whole worked so well for the Island? REMAIN!

Why would I vote Leave when I can freely drive through the borders of the various states on the Continent mainland and my healthcare costs are all covered if I get sick on my Continental vacations? If they had wished to, I told her, your children could have studied at the Continent mainland universities and find work in any of the countries there. They couldn’t, they don’t speak any of the languages, my hairdresser says to me as she was blowing my hair dry. I very much enjoy listening to her stories. She arrived here

with her parents when she was about 11, escaping a country locked in the totalitarian Communist Union's Bloc on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. I remember the strong emotion I felt, along with fellow university students, watching on television the demise of the Berliner Mauer, a concrete wall that had separated the Western and Eastern parts of the vanquished Third Reich capital; it was the iconic moment of the process of reunification of the Eastern and Western parts of the German country under the government of a new German Republic of Federal States; it led, along with the eroding effects of popular revolutions in neighbouring countries, to the dissolution of the Communist Union and the collapse of the Eastern Continental Bloc.

My hairdresser regularly visits the country she was born in; she inherited a house and some land and still has family there. She tells me that the physical and mental scars of the inter-ethnic wars that followed the split of the constituent republics of the Yugo-Slavic Socialist Federal Republic run deep and that the intensification of religious political revendications is making a new conflict very possible. The tension is palpable, she says, I am lucky to have an Island passport and drive a car with an Island plate. She drives all the way through the Continent's mainland to visit her family and tend for her property there. She tells me that she does not feel safe going through the border controls between the republics that used to compose the Yugo-Slavic Republic: My surname gives away what ethnic group I belong to, she says to me. I remember the horrific scenes of war reported in newspapers and television. I was working in the United States, on the other side of the pond as I have often heard say, in fact thousands of kilometres of Ocean away from the Island. I was not really concerned with it at the time. But I remember reading that this conflict is one of the main reasons why the Continent states decided to invite countries from the former Eastern Bloc to join the Continental Economic Community (CEC) and that the United Kingdom was the strongest advocate for an opening to Eastern Continental countries and from 2004 onwards invited without restrictions workers from these countries to settle on the Island, a very generous invitation compared to the restrictions imposed by the CEC older member states on the Continent's mainland.

On the radio, I heard an old lady say that she was afraid of dying on her own with people she can't understand around her; all the nurses have a foreign accent, I can't understand them, she said. I think about the conversation I had with an old gentle man, a musician I met at one of my teacher friend's parties. More than likely prompted by my French accent, he had asked me: where is home for you? I remember responding to

him: home is where I live with my husband and children. He had seemed puzzled by my response and in a surprisingly open way he had told me that his wife and him had decided not to have children. We had terribly lonely childhoods, our parents were walled in their silent memories of the war, I remember him telling me. They hold the memories of two wars, I thought. His parents like my parents' parents carried the weight of two wars, the unsaid of their parents' suffering in the first world war, repeated two generations later in the second world war and the pain, privation and terror themselves had to suffer in their bodies and their minds. I briefly met his wife, a teacher of English working for the Council of the Island. I remember she told me she was getting ready for a few months of teaching in Burma. I met the old gentle man again on a terrible evening in November two years ago. He was on his own, his wife was teaching abroad. He was going to vote Leave, for a question of sovereignty he told me and because there are too many foreigners, he added. Did he, does he consider me as a foreigner? I wonder if he has also been afraid of dying surrounded by people he does not understand, people who don't speak his mother tongue properly, the English of the Island he learnt from his parents and was educated in. I know I am. I remember Nancy Huston writing about the very possible fact that she and her husband, having different mother tongues, would very likely not be able to understand each other in their dotage as the first languages to be forgotten are languages acquired on top of the mother tongue.

Our conversations on the possible separation of the Island from the Continent were interrupted by text messages we received from family and friends from the other side of the Channel. A major terror attack was taking place in the 11th arrondissement of the capital of the Republic just across the Channel. People were being slaughtered on the terraces of cafes, inside restaurants and in a famous concert hall. My daughter told me later that in the underground of the Island's capital, reports of the attacks were broadcast on screens, asking people to contact their loved ones to check they were OK. The capital of the Island had never felt closer to the capital of the Republic across the Channel.

Eight months later, a meagre majority of the people entitled to vote on the Island voted to leave the Continent. I have listened to the clamors of the people who supported the decision to leave, echoed by the current government: Exit is Exit; this is the Will of the People; no deal is better than a bad deal; we will separate, at all costs.

We're not leaving the Continent, we're leaving the Continent Union, the United Kingdom Prime Minister clarified in her Lancaster House speech a few months ago. She studied geography, a science which, as the suffix '-graphy' indicates, describes and produces images, a science which, according to the ELD's definition, studies the physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and of human activity as it affects and is affected by these, including the distribution of populations and resources and political and economic activities. As a matter of fact, the geological separation between the Island and the Continent's mainland was overcome by sea and air travel. However a little more than 20 years ago, the construction of a 31.35 mile rail tunnel beneath the Straight of Dover – a joint human intervention on both sides of the Channel described as one of the seven modern Wonders of the World – for the first time enables travel along a physically continuous link between the Island and the Continent.

On the online site of the Daily Telegraph – which I shall refer to from now as the Telegraph – I found an article I had read four years ago. It is a report of the previous government's decision to remove any reference to the Continent's economic and political union from the geography curriculum of primary and secondary schools on the Island, in complete contradiction with the definition of the scope of that human science. These are the words used by the Telegraph to report this decision at the time:

Government insiders warned that the Continental Union was seen as a political and economic entity and had no place in geography lessons; new history and citizenship syllabuses make reference to the Island's relationship with the Continent but make no mention of the Continent Union itself. The disclosure is likely to delight Continent-sceptics just weeks after the prime minister promised an in/out referendum on the Continent if its party wins the next General Elections.

The Guardian wasn't watching at the time; I could not find anything on its online pages. Two years later, on the eve of the Referendum campaign, it proposed in its Teacher Network pages a collection of ideas and resources designed to boost awareness about the Continent Union, what it does and why it is relevant for primary and secondary school students.

On the day the results of the Referendum were announced, my daughter and I were in the capital of a county in the centre of the Island to attend its university open day. I will always remember the ashen faces of most of the Leave lead campaigners interviewed in the early hours by frantic journalists. They did not expect the Leave side to win, I

thought. As we were quietly talking about the Referendum results over breakfast in the small dining room of the pub heavily decorated with Saint George flags – they celebrate the Continental football cup, Mummy, my daughter had mockingly told me when we checked in – a mother and her daughter came in. She looked upset. I had to speak to her. To break the heavy silence, I asked her for the honey I wanted to pour in the hot porridge I had been served by the very polite waitress. The lady immediately told me how devastated she was by the Referendum outcome. I lived on the Continent, she told me, I still have a house there; I speak French; people voted for the nostalgia of an Island that never existed; they remember a powerful Island, beacon of the free world, ordering the world along with the United States. In a recent tribune in the Telegraph, the current Foreign Secretary and main Leave speaker wrote that he regards the United States as one of the finest ideological and cultural creations of this country – even if involuntarily – and was prepared to live with that assessment. What does he mean by that?

During the eerie open day where my daughter and I were not the only ones lost, we attended a talk on the Continental Union referendum outcome given by the admission officer of the university politics department. Pacing up and down the stage, speaking with a strong foreign accent, she explained that the Leave side had won because of the rosy emotional and simplistic picture they presented to voters while the remain side built its campaign on negative rational complex economic arguments, ‘Project Fear’ as the Leave campaigners called it. On the train back to the Island’s capital, my daughter and I only spoke in English; I could feel how happy many people were on the train. They had their say and their side of the argument had won.



Deleuze writes:

Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew [...] Some islands drifted away from the continent, but the island is also that toward which one drifts; other islands originated in the Ocean, but *the island is also the origin*, radical and absolute.

That the Island is populated will always come as a surprise, he writes a moment earlier. Yes, I think, for some people on the Island, the fact that people have always come to live on the Island still certainly comes as a surprise. Don't they have the common knowledge of the history of the Island, a knowledge people asking for the right to become permanent residents and citizens of the Island have to acquire and be tested on? As I prepare for the exam, I come across this passage in the text book *Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents*:

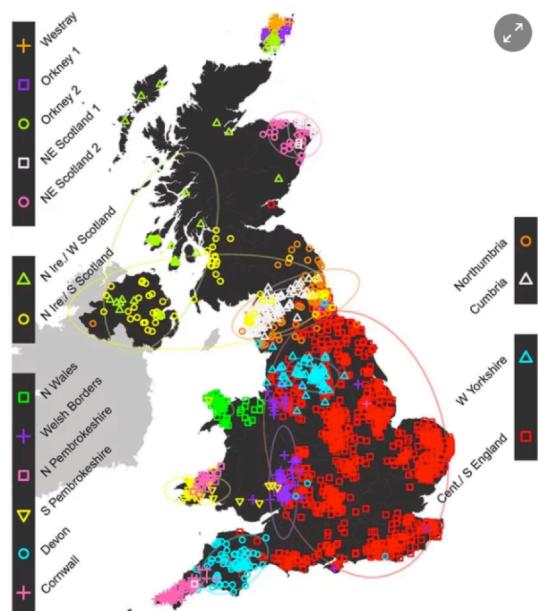
The first people to live on the Island were hunter-gatherers, in what we call the Stone Age. For much of the Stone Age, the Island was connected to the continent by a land bridge. People came and went, following the herds of deer and horses which they hunted. The Island only became permanently separated from the Continent by the Channel about 10,000 years ago. The first farmers arrived in the Island 6,000 years ago. The ancestors of those first farmers probably came from the Continent south-east.

Humans always encounter the island from the outside, Deleuze writes, their presence spoils its desertedness. There are causes and reasons for an island to be said 'déserte', Deleuze's original title reminds me.

The island is also the origin, radical and absolute. Looking online for some information on the ancestry of the people living on the Island, I came across two very different but equally confusing images of its genetic landscape in the Guardian and the Telegraph. They make silent genes talk in very different ways.

observe such exquisite and fascinating detail."

The study found that people's ancestral contributions varied considerably across Britain, with people from areas of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland emerging as separate genetic clusters, providing a scientific basis to the idea of regional identity for the first time.



Map of the UK showing clustering of individuals based on genetics, and its striking relationship with geography. Photograph: Stephen Leslie/Nature/EuroGeographics



The population of the Orkney Isles was found to be the most genetically distinct, with 25% of DNA coming from Norwegian ancestors who invaded the islands in the 9th century.

The Welsh also showed striking

Advertisement



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Entitled 'Genetic studies reveals 30% of White Island DNA has German ancestry', the Guardian's article - written by a science correspondent of the newspaper and published a year before the Referendum - is grounded on the findings of a study co-led by the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics at the most prestigious university on the Island. I found the corresponding paper published in the scientific journal Nature through the link provided by the Guardian. Browsing through it, I discovered that the map reproduced in the Guardian's article does not include the full legend for the figure disclosed in the scientific paper:

Figure 1. Clustering of the 2,039 Island individuals into 17 clusters based only on genetic data. For each individual, the coloured symbol representing the genetic cluster to which the individual is plotted at the centroid of their grandparents's birthplaces. Cluster names are in side-bars and ellipses give an informal sense of the range of each cluster (see Methods). No relation between clusters is implied by the colours/symbols.

The tree diagram that accompanies the map was not included either by the Guardian. This tree depicts the order of the hierarchical merging of the clusters. I was utterly confused by the scientific jargon used in the paper and gave up the idea to read the 24 pages survey in full. The Guardian's translation reads as follows:

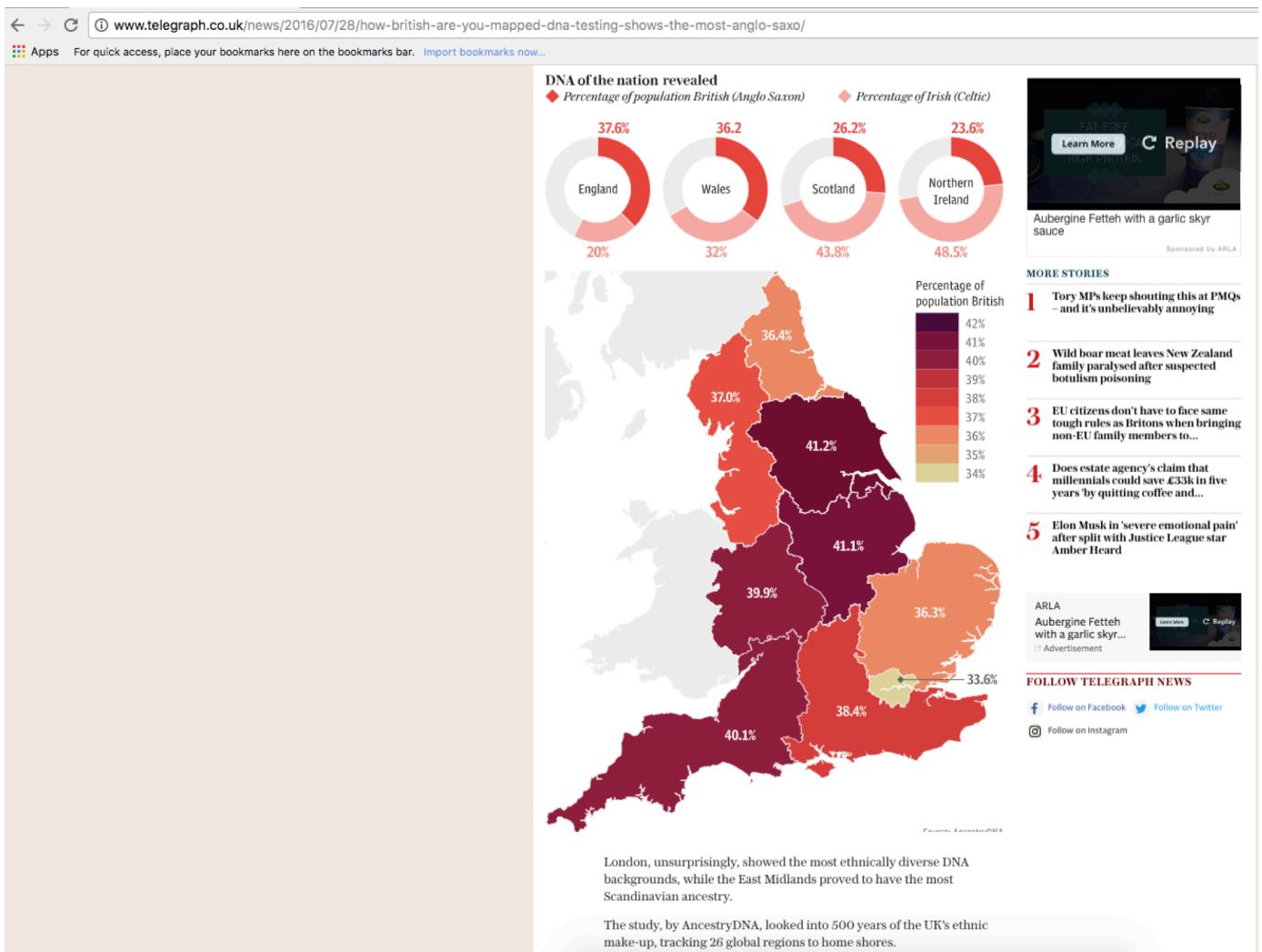
The analysis shows that the Anglo-Saxons were the only conquering force, around 400-500 AD, to substantially alter the country's genetic makeup, with most white people on the Island now owing almost 30% of their DNA to the ancestors of modern-day Germans [...] The study found that people's ancestral contributions varied considerably across the Island, with people from the West and the North of the Island and from the North-East of the Western Island emerging as separate genetic clusters, providing a scientific basis to the idea of regional identity for the first time [...] The people from the West of the Island showed striking differences to the rest of the Island, and scientists concluded that their DNA most closely resembles that of the earliest hunter-gatherers to have arrived when the Island became habitable again after the Ice Age. Surprisingly, the study showed no genetic basis for a single 'Celtic' group, with people living in the North and the West of the Island and the North-East of the Western Island being among the most different form [sic]each other genetically.[...]The participants were all white Islanders, lived in rural areas and had four grand-parents all born within 50 miles of each other. Since a quarter of our genome comes from each of our grand-parents , the scientists were effectively obtaining a snapshot of British genetics at the beginning of the 20th century. [sic] [...] The team also looked at data from 6,209 individuals from 10 Continental countries to reconstruct the contributions made to the genetic makeup of the Islanders. The analysis shows that despite the momentous historical impact on the Island civilisation of the Roman, Viking and Norman invasions, none of these events did much to alter the basic biological makeup of people living here. [...] The analysis also settles a long-running dispute about the nature of the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the South of the Island following the collapse of the Roman Empire. The replacement of the Celtic language by Anglo-Saxon and the complete shift towards North-West German farming and pottery styles has led some to suggest that local populations must have retreated to Wales or even been wiped out in a genocide.

To support the point made on the settlement of the dispute, the journalist quotes an archaeologist from the Museum of Natural History of the Island most prestigious university:

"[our results] suggest that at least 20% of the genetic makeup in this area is from Anglo-Saxon migrants, and that there was mixing; it is not genocide or complete disappearance of Islanders".

The Guardian's story makes a few things clear: the sample studied shows that the studied sample of white people living in the Island countryside don't settle too far from

their parents and grand-parents; the genetic landscape of the Island is a complex one and it is the result of many waves of people coming and settling.



The Telegraph's article entitled 'How Islandish are you? Mapped: DNA testing shows the most Anglo-Saxon regions in the Island' was written by an arts correspondent of the newspaper and published in the news section of the newspaper on the wake of the Exit Referendum. It is grounded on a study undertaken by AncestryDNA. When I entered 'what is AncestryDNA' in my search engine, I found that it is

an autosomal DNA test that examines your unique genetic code for clues about your family history. Then we use genetic science to determine family relationships within our database of AncestryDNA members and your ethnicity origins.

This is what the AncestryDNA online advertising says:

Get the #1 Selling Consumer DNA **Test** for the Lowest **Price** of the Year. Only £49!
Simple and Secure · Get Started in Minutes · Uncover Your Ethnic Mix · Easy Saliva Test

The title of the Telegraph article asks a question:

'How Islandish are you?'

and gives a response:

'Mapped: DNA testing shows the most Anglo-Saxon regions in the Island'.

'Islandish', the adjective attribute of 'you' the subject of the question –that is, the Telegraph's readership – is mirrored by the double qualifying adjective 'Anglo-Saxon' in the response, inferring that the response to the question is:

to be 'Islandish' is to be 'Anglo-Saxon'.

The article reads like this:

With its inimitable humour, love of tea and dedication to cricket in all weathers, there can be little doubt the Great Island spirit is alive and well in the shire at the centre of the Island. But it has gone one step further in cementing its reputation as God's Own County, after a study found it is the most Islandish region in the United Kingdom. A study of the DNA of people living in that shire has revealed the country to have the highest percentage of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, at 41.17% compared with a national average of just 36.94%.

The Telegraph inaccurately describes the shire in the centre of the Island as a 'country'. This shire is not a country but a county of the Island, according to the ELD's definition of the word shire. Is it a slip of the tongue or a mere typo?

The figure entitled 'DNA of the nation revealed' comprises four donuts and an incomplete map of the Island; the legend is very unclear to me. What is the nation the title of the figure refers to? Aren't the people living on the Island constituting one nation? I remember the day I realised that the Kingdom of the Island and Northern Western Island is 'united' because it unites four nations isomorphic to the four geographical regions represented by each donut. I did not know that the Island's

Kingdom was created three hundred years ago, I read, following the Treaty of the Union in 1706 ratified by the Acts of the Union 1707 which united the kingdoms of the South and the North of the Island; it did not include the Western Island which remained a separate realm with the King of the United Kingdom as its king, until the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Western Island were merged to form the United Kingdom of the Island and the Western Island in 1801; in 1922, five-sixths of Western Island seceded and the state was renamed the United Kingdom of the Island and Northern Western Island— a title it has retained to date.

The four donuts are split between the blood red ‘percentage of population Islandish (Anglo Saxon)’, the pink ‘percentage of Western Islandish (Celtic)’ and an unnamed cloud-coloured section for the remaining percentage for each of the main regions of the Island. Below the line of donuts, a map presents a picture of the ‘Percentage of population Islandish’ for the South of the Island showing by county a blood red coloured gradient from the lowest 34% to the highest 42% percentage. The other 58 to 66% is ignored. Assuming that the blood-red gradient of the map corresponds to the blood-red colour of the section ‘percentage of population Islandish (Anglo-Saxon), I understand that the percentage disclosed for each country is the ‘percentage of population Islandish (Anglo-Saxon)’. What percentage? What population? Reading the text of the article, I understand that the AncestryDNA study provides an analysis of the genetic origins of the DNA of a sample of people in various parts of the country, so the figure legend is inaccurate and misleading. What about the large percentage of that population that is unnamed in the donuts representation and simply ignored in the map? Metonymy is at work in the title and in the figure of the article: the nation of the South of the Island is not one nation of the Island, it is the nation of the Island. What about the three other nations from the West and the North of the Island, notwithstanding that nation populating the North-East of the smaller Western Island? They are ignored, silenced in light grey on the map as the non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Irish (Celtic) significant part of the sampled population’s DNA is unnamed, ignored, silenced in the donuts representation.

I go back to Deleuze's thoughts on the causes and reasons of desert islands. He writes that:

An island does not stop being deserted simply because it is inhabited. [...] *some* people can occupy the island – it is still deserted, all the more so, provided they are sufficiently, that is absolutely separate, and provided they are sufficient, absolute creators. Certainly, this is never the case in fact, though people who shipwrecked approach such condition.

It is not easy to follow Deleuze's dense and elliptical train of thoughts. I go back to his words in French:

Pour qu'une île cesse d'être déserte, en effet, il ne suffit pas qu'elle soit habitée [...] *des* hommes peuvent l'occuper, elle est encore déserte, plus déserte encore, pour peu qu'ils soient suffisamment, c'est-à-dire absolument séparés, suffisamment, c'est-à-dire absolument créateurs. Sans doute ce n'est jamais ainsi en fait, bien que le naufragé s'approche d'une telle condition.

Deleuze chooses 'déserte' and not 'désertée', the past participle of the verb 'déserter'. The translator could have used the adjective 'desert' which means uninhabited and desolate, like a desert. The adjective 'desert' expresses the quality of the 'desert island', that of being empty of people. He chose the passive voice of the verb 'to desert': 'the island is still deserted'. This particular choice in translation allows me to think about a specificity of the English language. The entry 'English' in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* explains how the English language passive voice is charged with an agency described as:

a strange intersection of points of view that makes it possible to designate the person who is acting while at the same time concealing the actor behind the act and thus locating agency in the passive subject itself.

In 'the island is deserted', the passive voice conceals the actor behind the act 'to desert', thus locating agency in the passive subject itself, that is the island, as if the island actively pushes people out. The island is 'deserted', unpeopled, emptied of the people that may already inhabit it when the people who come on and occupy the island, declare it to be 'a desert island'. And by doing so, they declare themselves 'absolutely separate and sufficient, absolute creators' of that 'desert island'.

I continue my very slow reading of Deleuze:

Far from compromising it, humans bring the desertedness to its perfection and highest point. In certain conditions [...] people who come to the island do not put an end to desertedness, they make it sacred.

They make the Island sacred. Sacred? The Island Spirit is alive and well, the Telegraph claims, in that part of the Island which has the highest percentage of Anglo-Saxon ancestry; a country that has gone one step further in cementing its reputation as God's Own County. Such a vision that makes the Island *sacred* nurtures the idea that *some* people – the Anglo-saxons – came on and occupied the Island, populating it with their descendants, deserting the Island of people that are not of so-called Anglo-Saxon origin. What is inferred in the article is that the Island's Nation is the nation populating the South of the Island, the 's marking the personification of the Island.

Deleuze writes:

Those people who come to the island indeed occupy and populate it; but in reality, were they sufficiently separate, sufficiently creative, they would give the island only a dynamic image of itself [...] such that through them the island would in the end become conscious of itself as deserted and unpeopled. The island would be only the dreams of humans, and humans, the pure consciousness of the island.

The Telegraph speaks on behalf of the Island personified by a Spirit they say is alive and well. What kind of cult is that? Is that a prank? Their map represents the Island as a desert island occupied in the South by people deemed of Anglo-Saxon origin according to a study undertaken by a company selling DNA tests to people in search of their origins. I found an earlier article by a scientific correspondent from the Telegraph reporting a warning about the accuracy of the tests backed by a number of leading genetics experts including an Emeritus Professor of Human Genetics at University College Capital in the capital of the Island who said: "On a long trudge through history – two parents, four great-grandparents, and so on – very soon everyone runs out of ancestors and has to share them, as a result, almost every Islander is a descendant of Viking hordes, Roman legions, African migrants, Indian Brahmins, or anyone else they fancy." "These claims are usually planted by the companies that provide these so-called tests and are not backed up by published scientific research", I read, "this is business,

and the business is genetic astrology"; "Genetics researchers are telling us that you are better off digging around in your loft than doing a DNA ancestry test if you want to find out about your family tree."

I recently told my youngest daughter who does not want to ever leave the house we moved into the year before she was born, that we are not trees, we're not rooted in the ground, we take roots in places in which we feel welcome and comfortable. Does the Telegraph editorial board really believe the story they tell to their readers? Are they dreaming themselves as the pure consciousness of the Island?

Deleuze writes that the unity of the deserted island and its inhabitants is not actual, only imaginary. More importantly, he adds, it is doubtful whether the individual imagination, unaided, could raise itself up to such an admirable identity; it would require the collective imagination, what is most profound in it, i.e. rites and mythology. Is the Telegraph's story invoking the Island spirit speaking through Anglo-Saxon genes an attempt at shaping the collective imagination of its readers? Do they identify with the individuals who purchased AncestryDNA tests in search of their origin. Daniel Sibony's words resonate with my thoughts:

Paradox de l'origine: *il nous faut une origine à perdre*, elle est nécessaire, et elle est vouée à être perdue. Il nous faut une origine à quitter, une d'où l'on puisse partir, et si on l'a, le danger est d'y rester, de trop en jouir, de s'y perdre, de se fasciner devant elle, de s'enfoncer en elle en croyant la creuser, et de s'abîmer dans son vide, "divin" à l'occasion.

Paradox of the origin: *we need an origin to lose*; it is necessary and it is bound to be lost. We need an origin to leave, one we can depart from, and if one has an origin, the danger is remaining with that origin, enjoying it too much, getting lost in it, allowing for oneself to be fascinated before it, sinking into that origin while believing one is burrowing into it, falling into the abyss of its void, "divine" as the occasion arises.

Who are the shipwrecked who dream of an Island where geography and imagination are one, invoking the Anglo-Saxon spirit of the Island, fascinated by an ancestry that is only one aspect of a plurality of origins, to the point of willing themselves to becoming absolutely separate, taking back control and firmly occupying the Island, oblivious of others who live on it? The reasons for such call are incomplete, inaccurate, weak, unfounded.

Sibony continues as follows:

On cherche des raisons ... mais leur mérite est d'être toutes insuffisantes. [...] Si l'origine est un complexe de traces vivantes, alors pour qu'une trace se traduise, il faut qu'elle puisse s'éclipser [...] Nous sommes une piètre machine d'écriture, qui doit oublier *ceci* pour retenir *cela*; "cela" est à la fois retenu et marqué d'oubli; sa couleur d'oubli fait nos délices nostalgiques. Mais dans la nostalgie on oublie que l'objet du désir c'est l'oubli, que ce qu'on veut ce n'est pas le retour de "cette chose-là" mais l'atteinte de mémoire qu'elle était, le don et la perte de mémoire... Le paradoxe est que notre mémoire n'est pas un stock mais une pulsation multiple: elle rattrape ce qu'elle lâche, elle lâche pour retenir, et ses appels sont des forces de rappel.

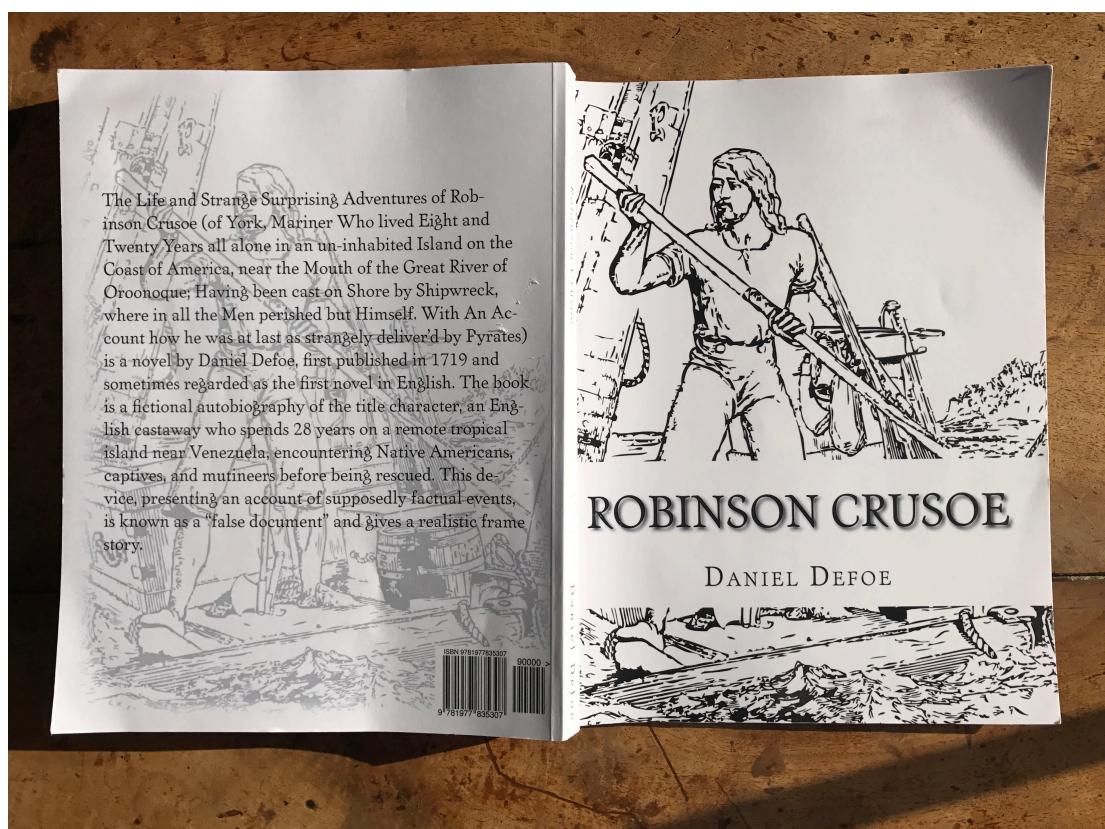
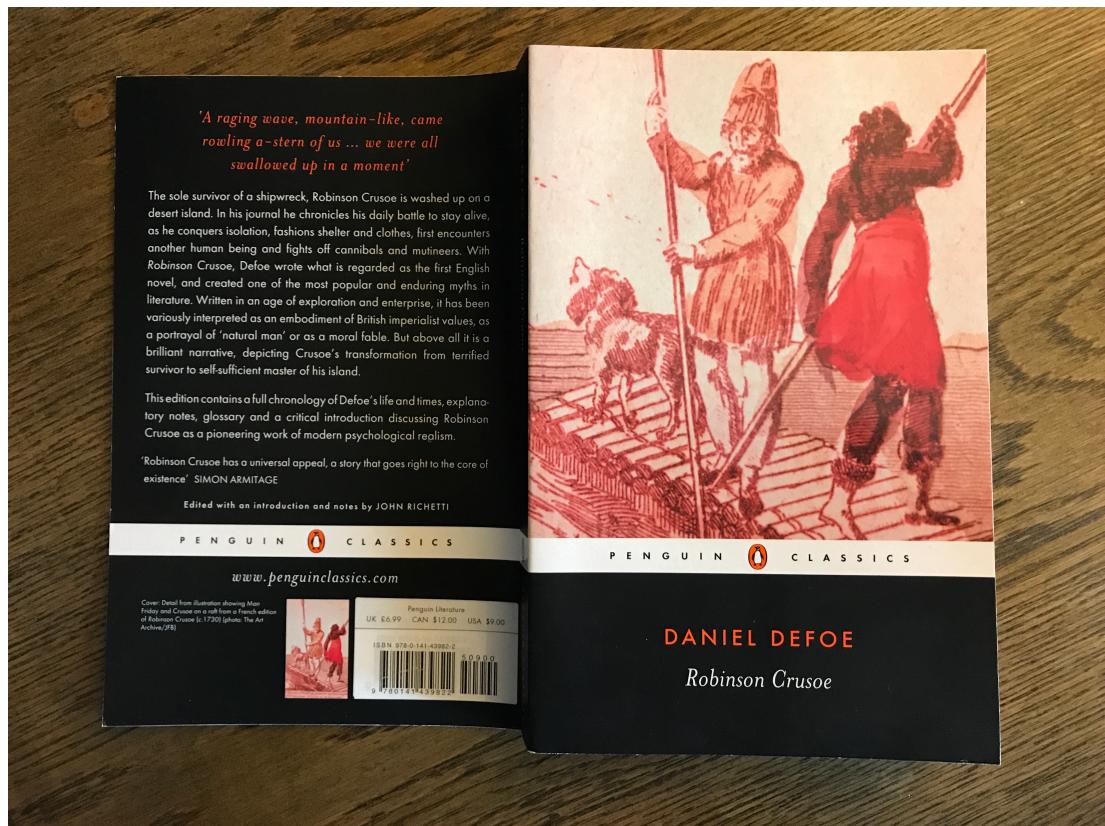
Et puis, à trop jouir de son origine, on ne peut plus rien en dire: on peut chanter, incanter et sombrer dans la confusion ... Ce n'est pas nouveau que l'excès de jouissance s'oppose au dire et au savoir [...] On peut toujours donner des raisons et de bonnes; il y en a d'autres, ni bonnes ni mauvaises, simplement indicibles; ou des raisons perdues. Bref il y a de l'inconscient.

Le paradoxe qui nous occupe peut donc se dire ainsi: *le support inconscient existe en tant qu'insupportable; il échappe aux raisons "inconscientes" ou il les fait se perdre; ce qui le fonde est infondé.*

I translate:

We are looking for reasons ... but their merit is to be all insufficient. [...] If the origin is a complex of living traces, then for a trace to be translated, it must be able to slip away [...] We are a poor writing machine, which must forget *this* to remember *that*; "That" is both remembered and marked with forgetfulness; its colour of forgetfulness makes our nostalgic delights. But in nostalgia we forget that the object of desire is forgetfulness, that what we want is not the return of "that thing" but the memory loss that it was, the gift and the loss of memory ... The paradox is that our memory is not a stock but a multiple pulsation: it catches what it releases, it lets go to hold back, and its calls are reminder forces. And then, to enjoy too much of its origin, we can not say anything more: we can sing, incant and sink into confusion ... It is not new that the excess of jouissance is opposed to saying and knowing [...] One can always give reasons and good ones; there are others, neither good nor bad, simply unspeakable; or lost reasons. In short, there is the unconscious. The paradox which occupies us can thus be said: *the unconscious support exists as unbearable; it escapes the "unconscious" reasons or makes them lose themselves; what grounds it is unfounded.*

The article of the Telegraph sings, incants and sinks into the confusion of the origin in an excess of enjoyment opposed to saying and knowing. What are the other reasons, unspeakable and unbearable that animate the collective unconscious supporting the story told by the Telegraph about the Anglo-Saxon ancestry of the Island's people? In *Causes et raisons des îles désertes*, Deleuze repeats that the essence of the deserted island is imaginary and not actual, mythological and not geographical and that literature is the attempt to interpret, in an ingenious way, the myths we no longer understand. Literature, he writes, is the competition of misinterpretations that consciousness naturally and necessarily produces on themes of the unconscious. Deleuze presents *Robinson Crusoe* as one classic novel of the desert island in which mythology fails and dies. *Robinson Crusoe*, he writes, emphasises the creative aspect, the beginning anew that takes place on the desert island. I am sure you know the story: after a shipwreck catastrophe, the terrified survivor begins anew, reconstructs the world of his origins, transforming himself into the self-sufficient master of his island. Deleuze writes that a movement of imagination makes the deserted island a model, a prototype of the collective soul; the deserted island is the second origin, as the island is the material that survives the first origin, necessarily compromised, born for renewal and already renounced in a catastrophe. For some people on the Island, the separation of the United Kingdom from the Continent Union is a catastrophe, for others it marks a new beginning. Our destiny will be in our own hands and that will be immensely healthy, the Island current Foreign secretary recently wrote in an article published in the Telegraph.



On the back cover of the cheap edition of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published by CreateSpace, a self-publishing and free distribution platform for books created by the current largest worldwide online retailer of consumer goods, I read that the novel was first published in 1719 and is sometimes regarded as the first novel in English. Reading the work in its original language is a much livelier and pleasurable experience than the memory I have of reading an antiquated French translation.

The first thing I note is that Defoe wrote long sentences with commas and hyphens, 'continental' sentences so to speak. This is how Robinson Crusoe introduces his adventures in the very first lines of the novel, quoted from the Penguin edition which, according to the notes of John Richetti, retains all features of the original text except for the capitalization of common nouns:

I was born in the year 1632, in the City of York, of a good family, tho' not of that country, my father being a foreigner of *Bremen*, who settled first at *Hull*: He got a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade, lived afterwards at *York* whence he married my mother, whose relations were named *Robinson*, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was call'd *Robinson Kreutznaer*; but, by the usual corruption of words in *England*, we are now call'd, nay we call our selves, and write our name *Crusoe*; and so my companions always call'd me.

I note that his original family name – Kreutznaer – was changed to Crusoe due to 'the usual corruption of words' in the Southern part of the Island. Robinson stresses that his family anglicised their foreign family name to fit within the native people. I think about the family name I hold, the Huguenot name of my husband's family. 'Mourgue' means 'shepherd' in the dialect that used to be spoken in the village of Algue, in the Cevennes in the South of the country I grew up in. Algue sounds like 'une algue', algae or seaweed. My surname is regularly corrupted when spoken and written by the Island's English native speakers; the 'u' of *Mourgue* is generally dropped. A 'morgue' is a mortuary, a word with sinister resonance in both French and English. The word carries another rather negative meaning in French, designating a haughty, dismissive attitude. French arrogance is one of the 'lieux communs', one of the clichés I have often heard on the Island. If I had to anglicise my surname, what do you think of Moorg-Dalg? It does not sound very English to me. Should I go all the way to Shepherd of Seaweed? I read in a recent article of the Telegraph commemorating the anniversary of his death, that Daniel Defoe was born in London in 1660 to a family of Continental origin; he

could not attend any of the Island's prestigious universities – why? I ask myself –but received an exceptionally broad education. This nonconformist, as the article qualifies him, rode out to welcome the foreigner that was to become the new Island king, defending him in his pamphlet *The True-Born Englishman* from which I can't resist quoting a few lines:

A True-Born Englishman's a contradiction,
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.
A banter made to be a test of fools,
Which those that use it justly ridicules.
A metaphor invented to express
A man akin to all the universe.

[...] 'Tis well that virtue gives nobility,
Else God knows where we had our gentry;
Since scarce one family is left alive,
Which does not from some foreigner derive.

From these words, I allow myself to think that Daniel Defoe would have derided those people on the Island who currently worship Anglo-Saxon ancestry. I wonder what he would have thought of the Exit and whether he would have been pamphleting the current government reminding the parliament of the United Kingdom of its sovereignty.

I wonder how Robinson and Friday speak together. I look for the words Defoe puts in Robinson's mouth when he first encounters and saves the savage man from the practice of cannibalism he shares with the people who held him captive:

he spoke some words to me, and tho' I could not understand them, yet I thought they were pleasant to hear; for they were the first sound of a man's voice that I had heard, my own excepted, for above twenty-five years.

Robinson recognises the savage's voice as a human voice, the first that he had heard, his own excepted, for a quarter of a century.

Soon after, however, he tells:

In a little time I began to speak to him; and teach him to speak to me: and first, I let him know his name should be *Friday*, which was the day I sav'd his life: I call'd him so for the memory of the time. I likewise taught him to say *Master*; and then let him know that was to be my name: I likewise taught him to say *Yes* and *No* and to know the meaning of them.

At no point Robinson seems interested in discovering whether Friday speaks a language he could learn. Robinson dresses his 'man Friday' – an expression that has entered the Island's English language to mean a man servant or assistant – with clothes salvaged from the shipwreck and pieces of garment he made himself 'as well as his skill would allow'. Robinson reports that Friday:

was cloth'd, for the present, tolerably well, and was mighty well pleas'd to see himself almost as well cloth'd as his master

and notes that:

he went awkwardly in these things at first; wearing the drawers was very awkward to him, and the sleeves of the waist-coat gall'd his shoulders, and the inside of his arms; but a little easing them, where he complain'd they hurt him, and using himself to them, at length he took to them very well.

Friday has to conform with what Robinson expects from him: to dress and to speak *almost* as well as his master.

I was greatly delighted with him and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spake; and he was the aptest scholar that ever was; and particularly was so merry, so constantly diligent, and so pleas'd, when he could but understand me, or make me understand him, that it was very pleasant to me to talk to him

There is only one way Robinson's world speaks, it is in Robinson's language. Friday is to talk to Robinson in the language Robinson teaches him. Robinson does not consider Friday's tongue as a language. Friday's mother tongue is silenced by the monolingualism of Robinson. Robinson never mentions his father's tongue, a German dialect most

likely. Wherever he lands; he always encounters people who speak his tongue and never attempts to learn their language. He is captured and kept as a slave by the captain of a Turkish rover; he escapes on a boat with a local youth who learnt to speak English by conversing with the slaves captured by Robinson's owner. They shipwreck on an island Robinson calls 'desert' although it is inhabited by people 'quite black and stark-naked', he reports, but unarmed, who generously share food with him and his companion. They are rescued by a Continental boat. This is what he says about his encounter with his rescuers:

They asked me what I was, in *Portuguese*, and in *Spanish* and in *French*, but I understood none of them; but at last a *Scots* sailor, who was on board, call'd to me: and I answer'd him, and told him I was an *Englishman*, that I had made my escape out of slavery from the *Moors* at *Sallee*; then they bade me come on board, and very kindly took me in, and all my goods.

That boat takes him to Brazil, where he buys a plantation. He has a neighbour answering to the English name of Wells, a Portuguese of Lisbon, but born of English parents, who is his only conversation companion until he finally learns the language of fellow planters. He decides to entrust the plantation in the safe hands of the captain of the ship who rescued him, and because that man speaks English, can be entrusted with his business. He embarks on a ship sailing to Africa to buy more slaves. It is that ship that will shipwreck, turning him into a terrified survivor on the island where he will educate Friday, successfully as reported in these words:

Friday began to talk pretty well, and understand the names of almost every thing I had occasion to call for, and of every place I had to send him to, and talk'd a great deal to me; so that, in short, I began now to have some use for my tongue again, which indeed, I had very little occasion for before; that is to say, *about speech*; besides the pleasure of talking to him, I had a singular satisfaction in the fellow himself; his simple, unfeign'd honesty appear'd to me more and more every day, and I began really to love the creature; and on his side I believe he loved me more than it was possible for him to love anything before.

Although Robinson initially recognized Friday's voice as that of a fellow man, the education Robinson subjects him to turns Friday into a 'creature' – an animal distinct from a human being as per the ELD definition of the word – whose voice is tamed to

respond in his master's language to any of his demands and to believe in things his master says:

I began to instruct him in the knowledge of the true God; [...] and thus, by degrees, I open'd his eyes. He listen'd with great attention, and receiv'd with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us; and of the manner of making our prayers to God, and His being able to hear us, even in heaven

Friday and I became intimately acquainted, Robinson writes, he could understand almost all I said and speak fluently, tho' in broken English, to me. Robinson's use of 'almost' and 'broken' imply that Friday never speaks the English Robinson speaks perfectly as a native speaker. Friday is only permitted to speak to Robinson in one language and it is not his own. But Jacques Derrida would also perhaps have said that Robinson has only one language but that language is not his own as well. Derrida's essay *le monolingisme de l'autre ou la prothèse de l'origine* is constructed around this elliptical proposition:

On ne parle jamais qu'une seule langue.
(oui, mais)
On ne parle jamais une seule langue,

Translated in the English edition as:

We only ever speak one language
(yes, but)
We never speak only one language

My proposed translation is:

One only ever speaks one tongue
(yes, but)
One never speaks only one language.

The published translation gives up the equivocity of meaning at work in the words chosen in French by Derrida. 'We' is not 'on'. 'On' is generally translated in English through the passive voice. The collective 'we' does not agree with the 'tongue' of an

individual. Derrida plays with the possible double meaning of the word ‘langue’ : langue-tongue and langue-language. The word ‘langue’ in French is both the fleshy muscular organ enabling humans to speak, the ‘tongue’ and ‘language’, a system of communication used in a particular country or community. ‘Le langage’ in French is both the human ability to speak and the way this language is actualised in one’s idiosyncratic speech, respectively translated as ‘language’ and ‘tongue’ in English. One’s own idiosyncratic way of speaking a language, one’s tongue, is unique while any language is visited by the presence of other languages. There is the gift of language and there is not *a* language, writes Derrida, adding:

there can be no question of getting out of this *uniqueness without unity*. It is not to be opposed to the other, nor even distinguished from the other. It is the monolanguage *of* the other. The *of* signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, *the* coming of the other.

Robinson is the master of Friday’s tongue. Friday can only speak with Robinson in Robinson’s language; the tongue he speaks is not Friday’s own. But paradoxically, the language Robinson speaks is not one language. I read that the English language stemmed from a Proto-Germanic language, closely related to Frisian and other West-Germanic languages and was significantly influenced by Old Norse, Greek, Latin and Anglo-Norman French. Some scholars have argued English can be considered a mixed language or a creole, a theory called the Middle English Creole hypothesis. The language Robinson speaks is a language visited by many other languages and is not his tongue either. It is the tongue he received from his mother and the tongue he was taught in school. His prosody – or rather Defoe’s prosody, let’s not forget Robinson is the main character of a novel – is his own but in a language that has been evolving in what Ivan Illich calls a ‘taught mother tongue’, the instrument of bureaucratic control of a nascent modern nation-state – the United Kingdom of the Island– which at the time Defoe writes Robinson Crusoe is only a few years old. While Robinson tells us that he got a competent share of learning, as far as house-education and a country free school generally go, I note that at no point in the novel does he evoke the existence of that state. He evokes different places he lived in and people he visited on the Island but does not talk about his belonging to any polity nor any subjection to a monarch. Ivan Illich explains how the unbound and ungoverned everyday languages spoken by people living on territories governed as a nascent Kingdom by Queen Isabella of Spain was colonized

and replaced by her *lengua*, the Queen's tongue through the teaching of a language engineered out of her own idiosyncratic speech forms. Nebrija's Spanish grammar was published the year Columbus discovered the New World, the first grammar in any Continental tongue. He also published a dictionary that, according to Illich, remains the single best source of Old Spanish. For the first time, language is regularised, normalized, standardized and taught. The first English grammar *Pamphlet for Grammar* by William Bullokar, I read, written with the seeming goal of demonstrating that English was quite as rule-bound as Latin, was published in 1586 –almost a century after Nebrija's grammar; Bullokar's grammar was faithfully modeled on William Lily's Latin grammar, *Rudimenta Grammatices* published in 1534. According to Ivan Illich,

The new state takes from people the words on which they subsist, and transforms them into the standardized language which henceforth they are compelled to use; each one at the level of education that has been institutionally imputed to him.

The 'mother' of the taught mother tongue is pointing to an institutional maternity that, according to Illich has had a unique Continental history since the third century. The early Christian notion of the Church as mother has no historical precedent, he writes, but the description of the Church's maternity is quite explicit as the Church conceives, bears and gives birth to her sons and daughters; she may have a miscarriage; she raises her children to her breast to nourish them with the milk of faith. According to Illich, the image of the Church as a prototype of the authoritarian and possessive mother becomes dominant in the Middle Ages; the popes then insist on an understanding of the Church as Mater, Magistra and Domina – mother, authoritative teacher, sovereign. Nebrija's argument, he writes, implies that, institutionally, the state must now assume the universally maternal functions heretofore claimed only by the Church; *education*, as a function first institutionalized at the bosom of Mother Church becomes a function of the Crown in the process of the modern state's formation; this kind of polity requires a standard language understood by all those subject to its laws and for whom the tales written at the monarch's behest (that is, propaganda) are destined.

I wonder whether the silent Queen of the Island would agree with Illich's analysis. I read that the Island's unwritten Constitution, grounded in more than three centuries of conversations within and between the Island Parliament and the Island monarch, expects, requires the Queen to remain silent. She is not allowed to speak her mind. I

have heard her speak on two occasions: her annual Christmas speech and the Queen's speech opening a new Parliament. Appointed people, however, speak on her behalf. Around the time of the Continent Referendum, I remember reading what many newspapers made of an ambiguous question her official biographer reported having heard the Queen ask dinner guests. This is how the Telegraph reported it:

Continental Union Referendum: Queen asks guests to give her three reasons why the Island should remain with the Continent

Under a picture of a smiling Queen in bright pink, the caption is:

The Queen is politically neutral but is still privately debating Island's membership of the Continental Union

The article reads as follows:

The Queen has been canvassing opinion on the Continental Union debate by asking dinner companions: "Give me three good reasons why the Island should be part of the Continent." Her Majesty's biographer, Robert Lacey, reported the Queen's comments and suggested they may mean the Queen favours withdrawal from the Continental Union.

Buckingham Palace would neither confirm nor deny that the Queen had been debating the merits of Exit in private, but royal sources pointed out that the words attributed to the Queen were "a question not a statement".

However the leading nature of the alleged question adds weight to previous claims that the Queen would like Island to pull out of the Continental Union.

Indeed, the Queen asked a question, she did not make a statement. What if what was reported had been: Give me three good reasons why the Island should *not* be part of the Continent? Or, Give me three good reasons why the Island should *leave* the Continent? The Guardian did not report on the Queen's ambiguous question. But a year earlier, a Guardian opinion article entitled 'The Queen has said what the Prime Minister can't: the Continental Union is worth fighting for' reported on the turn of phrase adopted by the Queen in her speech at a State Banquet on the Continent. The Queen was reported to have said:

“The United Kingdom has always been closely involved in its continent”

And it was commented on as follows:

In a single paragraph – indeed with that single tiny word “its” – she made it plain that a United Kingdom which stood alone from the Continent was unimaginable. She could have said the continent – the us-and-them formulation preferred by UKippers – but she opted for “its”, not I assume out of a sense of ownership but because we are an archipelago lurking off the north-west coast of a greater land mass. No man is an island, or even a collection of islands.

I read Deleuze’s analysis of Michel Tournier’s adventures of Robinson Crusoe, entitled *Friday* in its English translation, an abbreviation of the original title, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*. Defoe’s and Tournier’s works start from the same question: what becomes of a man who is alone, without Others, on a desert island? But Tournier’s Robinson differs greatly from Defoe’s because it responds to another question: what is going to happen in the insular world without Others?

Deleuze writes:

It has often been said that the theme of Robinson’s in Defoe’s work was not only a story, but an “instrument of research” – a research which starts out from the desert island and aspires to reconstitute the origins and the rigorous order of works and conquests which happen with time. But it is clear that the research is twice falsified. On the one hand, the image of the origins presupposes that which it tries to generate (see for example, all that Robinson has pulled from the wreck). On the other hand, the world which is reproduced on the basis of this origin is the equivalent of the *real* – that is, economic – world [...]

This ‘false document’, as Defoe’s novel is presented on the back cover of the print on demand copy of the book, presents the world as it would be, as it would have to be if there were no sexuality, Deleuze writes, pointing at the elimination of all sexuality in Defoe’s Robinson.

Deleuze opposes Tournier's Robinson to Defoe's in virtue of three strictly related characteristics:

1. he is related to ends and goals rather than to origins;
2. he is sexual;
3. these ends represent a fantastic deviation from our world, under the influence of a transformed sexuality, rather than an economic reproduction of our world, under the impact of a continuous effort.

Nothing describes this deviation better than what happens when the absolute solitude of Robinson is broken by his encounter with Friday. The arrival and the effect of the presence of Friday on both Robinson and the Island is central to Tournier's novel as shown by the title he gave to the adventures. This is not the case in Defoe's novel where Friday arrives quite late in the story and does not disturb the order reconstructed by Robinson who, despite initially recognising him as a being with a human voice, proceeds in making him less than a man, dehumanising him by clothing him to look *almost* like him, teaching him to speak a broken English, educating him to be the replica of a servant, to become his instrument and his subject, the only one until he rescues and welcomes a group of sailors abandoned by mutineers.

When halfway through Tournier's novel, Robinson encounters Friday he can no longer apprehend him as an Other because it is too late, Deleuze writes, the structure-Other has disappeared. He describes Robinson's perception of Friday oscillating between simulacrum and phantasm:

Sometimes [Friday] functions as a bizarre object, sometimes as a strange accomplice. Robinson treats him sometimes as a slave and tries to integrate him into the economic order of the island – that is, as a poor simulacrum – and sometimes as the keeper of a new secret which threatens that order – that is, as a mysterious phantasm. Sometimes he treats him almost like an object or an animal, sometimes as if Friday were a “beyond” with respect to himself, a “beyond” Friday, his own double or image. Sometimes he treats him as if he were falling short of the Other, sometimes as if he were transcending the Other [...] He is in this other world, a double of the Other who no longer is and cannot be [...] Not an Other but a wholly other (*un tout-autre*) than the Other ; not a replica but a Double.

Friday becomes Robinson's double, equal, identical, similar to him, in perfect mathematical identity. With the progressive disappearance of the structure-Other, the possible object of Robinson's desire disappears, his desire melting into the phantasm of dissolving into the free elements. That 'Great Health' Tournier's Robinson finds on Speranza strangely resonates with the words written by the current Foreign Secretary in his recent article addressed to the Telegraph's readers:

'Our destiny will be in our hands and that will be immensely healthy [...] we will build a truly global Island'.

I wonder where the Exit deviation is taking the people living on the Island. How is it going to transform the world we have in common with others?

The Robinson hypothesis, that is the circumstances of the desert island, is what enables that deviation to take place in Tournier's novel. Tournier draws the consequences of such circumstances into the progressive but ineluctable loss of the structure-Autrui. Sometimes translated as 'the Other', 'others' or 'other people' in the published translation, 'autrui' is, Deleuze writes, neither an object in the field of my perception nor a subject that perceives me; it is a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does. This *a priori* Other, as absolute structure, he continues, establishes the relativity of others as terms actualizing the structure of the possible within each field. This is the example he gives to explain this complex thought:

The terrified countenance bears no resemblance to the terrifying thing. It implicates it, it envelops it as something else, in a kind of torsion which situates what is expressed in the expressing. When I, in turn and for my part, grasp the reality of what the Other was expressing, I do nothing but explicate the Other, as I develop the corresponding possible world. It is true that the Other already, bestows a certain reality on the possibilities which he encompasses – especially by speaking. The other is the existence of the encompassed possible. Language is the reality of the possible as such. The self is the development and the explication of what is possible, the process of its realisation in the actual [...] In short, the Other as structure is the expression of a possible world; it is the expressed, grasped as not yet existing outside of that which expresses it.

Tournier's Robinson looks into Friday's eyes but does not, cannot see Friday's terrified or happy visage, his 'countenance', as Deleuze's translator chose as the corresponding

English word although the word visage is in use in the English language for the exact meaning Deleuze wants to put to work.

I find an entry for the word AUTRUI in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*. Autrui, I read, is the complement of *autre*, from the latin *alter* which means “the other of two” or “one, the other, the second” like the Greek *heteros*, whereas *alius*, corresponding to the Greek *allos* designates “the other of several” and provides the expression of reciprocity; on the one hand, the you opposed to an I, an “alter ego” whose distance is to be gauged and whose difference is to be understood; on the other hand, a he, a she or it of some kind, an “other” among others, representing a contingent variation of personal identity. The entry takes me to visiting the meanings of two German words – ‘nebenmensch’ and ‘mitmensch’. ‘Nebenmensch’ – the man next [me] – designates the neutral alterity of other individuals, or neighbours, as opposed to a postulated identical universal. The word ‘neighbour’ corresponds to the French word ‘prochain’ in the *Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles*, secularising the ethico-religious dimension of that word, sometimes translated as ‘fellow (wo)men’. Can you hear the sound of ‘proche’ in ‘prochain’? ‘Proche’ carries the temporal, spatial, intellectual and emotional dimensions of proximity, embedding the notion of a distance to be gauged and a difference to be understood, as expounded in the entry for ‘Autrui’. ‘Mitmensch’ – the man with [me] – is not simply the other nor exactly autrui, I read, it expresses a singularity irreducible to the tension between particular and universal and constitutes a modality structuring the relationship of an ego to the world. Marc de Launay’s entry MITMENSCH takes me back to Deleuze’s Structure-Autrui and to words of Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* in which he writes:

Autrui is not so much a freedom seen *from without* as destiny or fate, a subject competing with a subject, but it is caught in a circuit that binds it to the world, as ourselves, and thereby also into a circuit that binds it to us – and that world is common to us

Even if we have one *principal other*, from whom are derived many secondary others in our life, I read elsewhere in *the Visible and the Invisible*, the sole fact that he is not the unique other obliges us to comprehend him not as what contests my life, but as what forms it, not as another universe in which I would be alienated but as the preferred variant of a life that has never been only my own.





Earlier this year, on a sunny and cold late winter Saturday morning, I joined the National March celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Rome Treaty that founded the ancestor of the current Continental Union. Make your voice heard, I read on a gigantic banner. Although the cortege was mostly silent, many voices could be heard if you read the many banners people carried with them.

There has not been much listening in the Referendum campaign, each side throwing at each other reasons, good or bad, founded or unfounded as Sibony may have said. Those reasons made very apparent the geographical and cultural divides among the people living on the Island. The Structure-Other has strongly weakened on the Island. Among the Continent's citizens living on the Island, only the citizens of the United Kingdom and the citizens of the Republic of Western Island residing on the Island were entitled to vote for the Continent Referendum, along with citizens of the Commonwealth; a departure from the electoral rules set up for the Referendum on the Independence of the North of the Island two years earlier. Migrants, however long they had been residents of the Island were not given the right to have their say. For the Robinsons of the Island, those people should only be allowed on the Island in strictly controlled numbers to work as their (wo)men-Fridays and pay taxes.

Since the Referendum, so-called Remoaners have been bullied into silence by triumphant Leavers. The people have spoken, we've got to get on with it, the Prime Minister has been repeating again and again. The sovereignty of Parliament, a paramount argument in the Leave campaign, has been jeopardized by the current Government's declared intention to use the so-called Henry VIII's clause enabling it to modify outside the scrutiny of the Parliament the Continental laws to which the United Kingdom has willingly and democratically subjected itself over the past 40 years. As I write, the so-called Repeal Bill that states how Continental laws will be incorporated in the United Kingdom legislation is the object of an intense review, a conflicted debate and amendments proposals among members of Parliament, some of whom have been threatened with death by members of the public for criticising the exit policies of the government. I remember the heavy sadness I felt inside me and around me on the underground taking me to one of the Island's capital airports for a weekend in Catalonia, a troubled region in another troubled Kingdom. Jo Cox's life was stilled; she was killed; she was put to death because she spoke so clearly and so vibrantly for an inclusive vision of the world. Meanwhile the United Kingdom's government has turned the guarantee of the right of those continentals who have settled in this country to

continue living and working on the Island into a bargaining chip; continentals have become pawns, objects, means for the Robinsons of the Island to achieve their vision of a world without others.

This is what Tournier's Robinson writes in his journal of the men on the ship which could take him back to the world with others, a world he is unable to rejoin as the structure-Other has collapsed as his bond with the desert Island has grown:

Each of these men was a *possible* world, having its own coherence, its values, its sources of attraction and repulsion, its centre of gravity. And with all the differences between them, each of these possible worlds at that moment shared a visual, casual and superficial, of the Island of Speranza, which caused them to act in common [...] And each of these possible worlds naively proclaimed itself the reality. That was what other people were: the possible obstinately passing for the real.

Is that what happens when one refuses to open a space for the voice of others to be heard, when one refuses to listen and understand others' points of view? Is that what the migrants that have settled on the Island – from the Continent and elsewhere – are for the Robinsons on the Island? Are they a possible passing for the real?

A few weeks ago, as I was walking back home, crossing one of the busiest roundabouts of the Island's capital, I was stopped by the sight of vivid graphics moving across three gigantic digital boards overlooking the roundabout, just by the side of one of the biggest commercial centres in the Island. I read later that it was part of the Telegraph's new integrated six-weeks campaign launched to showcase its award-winning quality journalism and to raise awareness and encourage reappraisal of the newspaper among new audiences on whichever platform they use; the campaign made its debut at prime time during the broadcast of a popular TV series last season and was rolled out across printed media, TV, radio, the Internet, cinema and urban streets. The campaign slogan caught my eyes:

Words are powerful. Choose them well.

Indeed, words are powerful and we should be careful in the ways we use them, I thought to myself. I stood for a while, watching the two clips appearing in between an

ad to raise money for a charity and another for the sequel of a dystopian movie from the eighties. This is how the Telegraph presents its campaign in its online pages:

The creative appropriates famous cultural references – from politics, to sport and pop culture – to highlight iconic moments when words have been chosen well to deliver the most impact. Executionally, the campaign brings to life specific words that, through their inherent power, have taken root in culture or affected the very course of history.

At a time when fake news has never been more prevalent, the campaign seeks to demonstrate the influence and importance of the spoken and the written word and the role that quality journalism plays in providing news, insight and analysis.

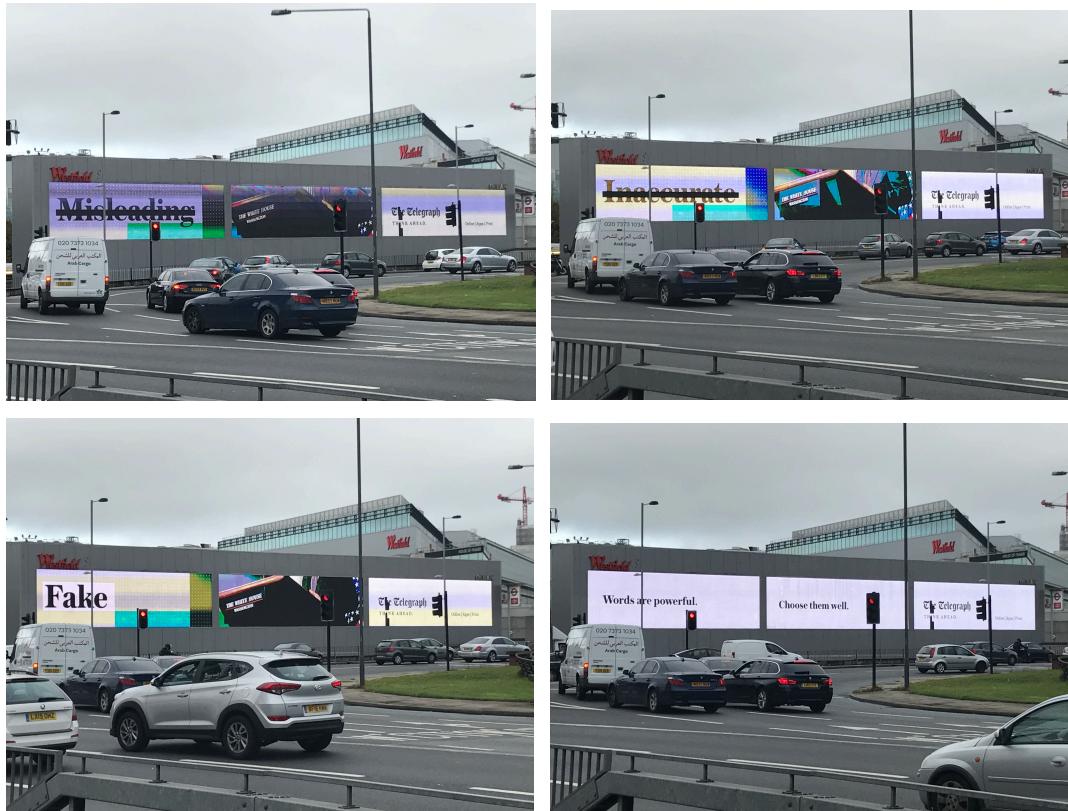
As I was filming the clips, a middle-aged white man shouted at me: ‘fucking witch’. I was shaken.



Thought Vision Dream

Who Martin Luther King is and which of his speeches the word ‘dream’ comes from are facts the Telegraph’s target readership is expected to know. The Telegraph’s newspaper is a broadsheet, I read, widely regarded as a national newspaper of record with international reputation for quality; reliable in other words. I, however, feel there is

something disturbing in the ad: aside from the instrumentalisation and reduction of a historic moment of the Civil Rights struggle at the service of increasing sales, it is the assumption that we on the Island share a common knowledge that amounts to a common history – to which the American Civil Rights movement belongs. And yet it is this very commonality that the Telegraph's concern with Anglo-Saxon ancestry calls into question when it asks 'How Islandish are you?'.



Misleading Inaccurate Fake

Three words are juxtaposed with a photograph of the lectern in the press conference room of the United States government's seat, the White House. I read that 'fake news' is one of the terms that have significantly increased in usage over the past year. The current President of the United States has appropriated the term 'fake news', often to refer to reports he disagrees with, I read on an online page of the Telegraph. I have been listening to claims that we have entered a 'post-truth' era, defined by the ELD as an era in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Fake news is inaccurate and misleading; it is not correct, inexact, deceitful but is capable of successfully reaching the intended target; it definitely gives a wrong impression.

The Telegraph claims for itself the rhetorical brilliance of Martin Luther King that it itself lacks. It also trades on the affective force of this historical moment to increase its sales. And when it juxtaposes this reference to that of the current president of the United States, the ad effects a leveling that is almost intolerable: Martin Luther King's 'dream' is given the same value as the United States current president's 'fake news'. In the public speech Martin Luther King delivered on the occasion of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, he said:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation wherer they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

Of this the Telegraph campaign tells us nothing, making it possible for those who do not know that particular history to see in this orphaned image a group of black men in muslim headdress, dreaming of a new life on the Island. The colour of your skin always gives you away as a foreigner or not, a friend told me; until you start speaking, I added. It is because we have a responsibility with regard to the words we use, the responsibility of an author and not of a receiver or communicating go-between that language is also political, writes Barbara Cassin. The Telegraph's article based on the AncestryDNA study promotes belonging to a nation in purely genetic terms, no longer blood and soil, but genes and soil, an ideological position presented in the guise of a dispassionate scientific study. A friend told me he wasn't shocked by this article; it is showing we're a mongrel nation, he said to me.

I think about the people who compose a newspaper readership, people who buy everyday the same newspaper and are rarely interested in what other newspapers might report on the same story, through a different point of view. These people may have a different understanding and analysis of the stories reported in the newspaper they read but there is a strong and systematic association between social status and newspaper readership on the Island. It is like belonging to a club, 'exclusive' in all senses of the word. In a paper published by a team of sociologists from the most prestigious University on the Island, I read that status is an order, a structure of relations expressing perceived and typically accepted social superiority, equality or inferiority of a quite generalized kind that is linked not to the qualities of particular individuals but rather to social positions that they hold or to certain of their ascribed attributes (e.g."birth" or ethnicity); a status hierarchy persists in the Island society, despite the decline in displays of deference and in the readiness of individuals openly to assert their social superiority;

status appears to be still rather systematically associated with the degree of “manuality” of work; there is a good deal of overlap in status between classes, and at the same time the spread of status within classes is in some cases quite considerable. Individuals’ position in the status order constitute [sic] a part of their social identity, the researchers write, thus to signal status is to lay claim to group membership: whom one has affiliations, and from whom one is different. The conclusions of the survey read as follows:

The probability of individuals reading “highbrow” broadsheets rises with status, and at an increasing rate; the probability of their reading “lowbrow” redtop tabloids falls with status in a more or less linear fashion and their probability of their reading “middlebrow” tabloids first increase with status and then decreases [...] the association between status and readership persists within different levels of education.

I am intrigued by these words constructed with ‘brow’, a word used to designate a person’s forehead; or in plural a person’s eyebrows. The ELD definitions read as follows:

Highbrow: derogatory. Intellectual or rarefied in taste.

Middlebrow: derogatory. Demanding, involving, or having only a moderate degree of intellectual application.

Lowbrow: derogatory. Not highly intellectual or cultured.

I am wondering what category of brows the Telegraph’s article on Anglo-Saxon ancestry fits in: highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow?

Two years ago I attended a debate organised by *Prospect*, a monthly magazine that could certainly be qualified as highbrow. ‘The Duel’, as the debate was presented, asked two journalists, one writing for the Telegraph, the other writing for the Times, one question: is there such a thing as correct English? The Telegraph’s journalist defended the idea that there is such a thing as correct English, Standard English and that newspapers such as the Times and the Telegraph – highbrow newspapers – are channels for the transmission of correct English. Your argument that Standard English is correct is illegitimate, the Times’ journalist responded, Standard English is the most recognisable variant of the language but it is a dialect nonetheless.

In the YES/NO article that followed up on the Duel, he writes that :

Standard English isn't just another dialect, but it is a dialect even so. It is the dialect that got lucky: the variant of English that emerged in and around the capital of the Island and that was associated with wealth and power. It has become a global language because of the influence of, successively, the Island's empire and the United States (whose variant of Standard English is neither more or less "correct" than the dialect you and I use).

I disagree, replies the Telegraph's journalist; custom and practice have made it so; this is not something any individual or law can dictate, but it has come about by an intelligent consensus. I do not claim this is either a good thing or a bad thing, but is how things are.

Is that how things are?

In the foreword of the Council of the Island 2013 report entitled 'the English Effect', I read that:

English is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide, By 2020, two billion people will be using it – or learning to use it; and it is the economically active, the thought leaders, the business decision-makers, the young, the movers and shakers present and future who are learning and speaking English. They are talking to each other more and English is the 'operating system' of that global conversation [...]

English makes a significant contribution to sustainable global development. It eases trade between countries that do not share a common language. It is used as a language of convenience, facilitating dialogue and building trust where an understanding of diverse positions is crucial – notably in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, where security forces and other uniformed services increasingly speak to each other in English. A fairer, most prosperous world is a safer and more secure world, and English is increasingly a lingua franca that holds together the international conversation and debate in areas such as climate change, terrorism and human rights. It is the UK's greatest gift to the world and the world's common language.

It is the business of the Council of the Island to promote the teaching of Standard English across the globe. I read that the teaching of the Island's standard English is a big business that supports 25,000 jobs and brings over 1.2 billion of the Island's currency to the Island economy. I am not sure all would agree that English is the world's common language. In 'Language Matters More and More: A position Statement'

by the Academy of Humanities and Social Science of the Island, produced in 2011, I read that it can no longer be assumed that English is the global language par excellence as 75% of the world population does not speak English and the proportion of internet usage conducted in English is already on the decline, falling from 51% to 29% between 2000 and 2009.

English is one of the working languages of the United Nations among others: Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish. The plurality of languages is acknowledged by the United Nations who provide for the translation in over 500 languages of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights – originally written in French and English. English is a lingua franca adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

In a Guardian article entitled ‘After Exit, Continental English will be free to morph into a distinct variety’, written by a scholar of evolutionary linguistic from another prestigious university in the North of the Island, I read that the exit of the United Kingdom from the Continental Union may paradoxically consolidate the dominance of English as a lingua franca on the Continent. It is spoken as a second language by 38% of the adults [...] a dominance set to grow dramatically with 94% of secondary students in the Continental Union learning English as a Foreign language. The newfound neutrality of English, I read, is likely to help it survive the exit of the United Kingdom, as the only English native speakers left will be the people of the Western Island Republic, representing less than 1% of the total Continental Union population; The major change is the United Kingdom will no longer be able to exert an influence pulling the Continent’s use of English toward the Island’s English standard; this will enable the Continent’s English to develop features of vocabulary and grammar that are perfectly well understood by other Continentals speaking English as a second language. The English of the Island is becoming one variety among many English, I read elsewhere. Is the English language an island for the Robinsons on the Island?

In a chapter of a book entitled *Language in the Island’s Isles* (2nd edition) published by the other most prestigious university on the Island – regarded together they form the so-called Oxbridge group – I read that Standard English and Received Pronunciation (RP), the corresponding standard pronunciation, have been conceptualised by those who have an academic, professional or policy-maker’s interest in them. I read elsewhere that both the former prime minister and the current Foreign Secretary are considered notable speakers of Standard English and Received Pronunciation, unsurprisingly as they were

both educated in the same Public School, another euphemism for very private and elitist secondary schools.

In an article of the Telegraph entitled ‘The Exit will be good for the Island universities’, says the head of Exit strategy at the most prestigious university on the Island’, I read that the Exit will provide the Island with the opportunity to resume the ‘nice and easy flow’ of ‘English-speaking medicine’ with five countries, four of them being former dominions of the Island’s Empire and current members of that Commonwealth. On the side of the article, there is an advertisement I have already seen, inviting the reader to ‘join leaders from around the globe as we explore emerging business opportunities across the Commonwealth’. I read on the website of the Commonwealth that it is a voluntary association of 52 independent and equal sovereign states, pursuing shared goals such as development, democracy and peace; it celebrates diversity and comprises many faiths, races, languages, cultures and traditions. To become members of the Commonwealth, prospective members must accept Commonwealth norms and conventions, such as the use of the English language as a medium of inter-Commonwealth relations, and must acknowledge the current Queen of the United Kingdom as the Head of the organisation. The Commonwealth was created by the government of the United Kingdom at the time it had been losing control of overseas territories they had sailed to, occupied and inhabited more or less since the time the novel *Robinson Crusoe* was written. 51 of the 52 countries belonging to the organisation are former dominions and territories of the Island’s crown; they all share English as de facto official language, Standard English being taught in their schools, above or among the other languages spoken by their people.

Any vision – and it is a matter of fact not a matter of opinion - has to be described through words and depicted through images. Any vision, conveyed through words and images, sometimes separate, sometimes combined, weaving their way in the (un)conscious of who is exposed to them, is necessarily ideological. A friend pointed me to what George Canguilhem, another continental philosopher, wrote on ideology:

Idéologie est un concept épistémologique à fonction polémique, appliqué à ces systèmes de représentations qui s’expriment dans la langue de la politique, de la morale, de la religion et de la métaphysique. Ces langues se donnent pour l’expression de ce que sont les choses mêmes, alors qu’elles sont des moyens de protection et de défense d’une situation, c’est-à-dire d’un système de rapports des hommes entre eux et des hommes aux choses.[...] Aucune

de ces idéologies ne dit le vrai, même si certaines sont moins éloignées que d'autres du réel, toutes sont illusoires. Et par illusion on doit entendre sans doute une erreur, une méprise, mais aussi une fabulation rassurante, une complaisance inconsciente à un jugement orienté par un intérêt.

I translate:

Ideology is an epistemological concept with a polemical function, applied to those systems of representation that find an expression in the language of politics, moral, religion and metaphysics. These languages present themselves as the expression of what things really are, whereas they are means of protection and defence of a situation, that is a system of relations among men and between men and things. [...] None of these ideologies speak the truth. Although some are less distant than others from the real, all are illusory. And by illusion, one must hear perhaps an error, a misunderstanding, but also reassuring storytelling, an unconscious complacency to judgement oriented by an interest.

Who benefits from the storytelling of the Telegraph? Is the foregrounding of the Anglo-Saxon ancestry of the South of the Island protecting, defending a situation that benefits the people who claim such illusory ancestry?

You write continental sentences, I was told nine years ago. The comment was not about spelling, grammatical or word usage inaccuracies. I did not mistreat the English language. I don't believe I committed barbarisms. The English language includes many barbarisms according to the definition given by the ELD:

Barbarism:

1. Absence of culture and civilization.

1.1 A word or expression which is badly formed according to traditional philological rules. E.g. a word formed from elements of different languages, such as a breathalyser (English and Greek), television (Greek and Latin);

2. Extreme cruelty or brutality.

My thoughts were understood. But the way I wrote, the way I used the English language, the turn of my phrases did not agree with what was expected. The way I wrote wasn't familiar to that reader. Perhaps I did not write sentences insular enough. To be allowed to pursue my doctoral studies here, I had to prove I had reached the required level of proficiency in the English language, a 7.0 in the Test of Written

English in the International English Language Testing System. The Council of the Island describes the test as the world's most popular English language proficiency test for higher education and global migration, with over 3 million tests taken in the last year. Band 7 is the skill level of a good user. The description reads as follows:

You have an operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally you handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.

The requirements to prove you are a good user of English only apply to candidates whose first language is not English. At the end of my research application interview, the lead interviewer, who spoke English with a strong foreign accent, told me I had to sit for the test. I had never been asked to prove my English proficiency when I read for my undergraduate and master degrees, I responded. Things are changing, he replied. The first language, the ELD tells me, is a person's native language, the language one learns to speak first, the language(s) you speak with your parents, your 'mother tongue'. Is to be native in a language the necessary and sufficient condition to be a good user of that language? And how? Native speakers may also be prone to misunderstandings and inaccuracies in the way they use their native language. They may also use it in inappropriate ways. How do you define what is or not appropriate in the use of language? What are the boundaries between the appropriate and the inappropriate? Beyond questions of spelling and syntax, what is appropriate or not in the use of a language is a question of agreement. What is this agreement? Can this agreement be revisited and how?

The ELD provides 'suitable' and 'proper' as synonyms of the word 'appropriate'. 'Suitable' is used to qualify something or someone that is suitable, right or appropriate for a particular person, purpose, or situation. To prove you are a good user of English, what you say or write in that language must be right for a particular person, purpose or situation.

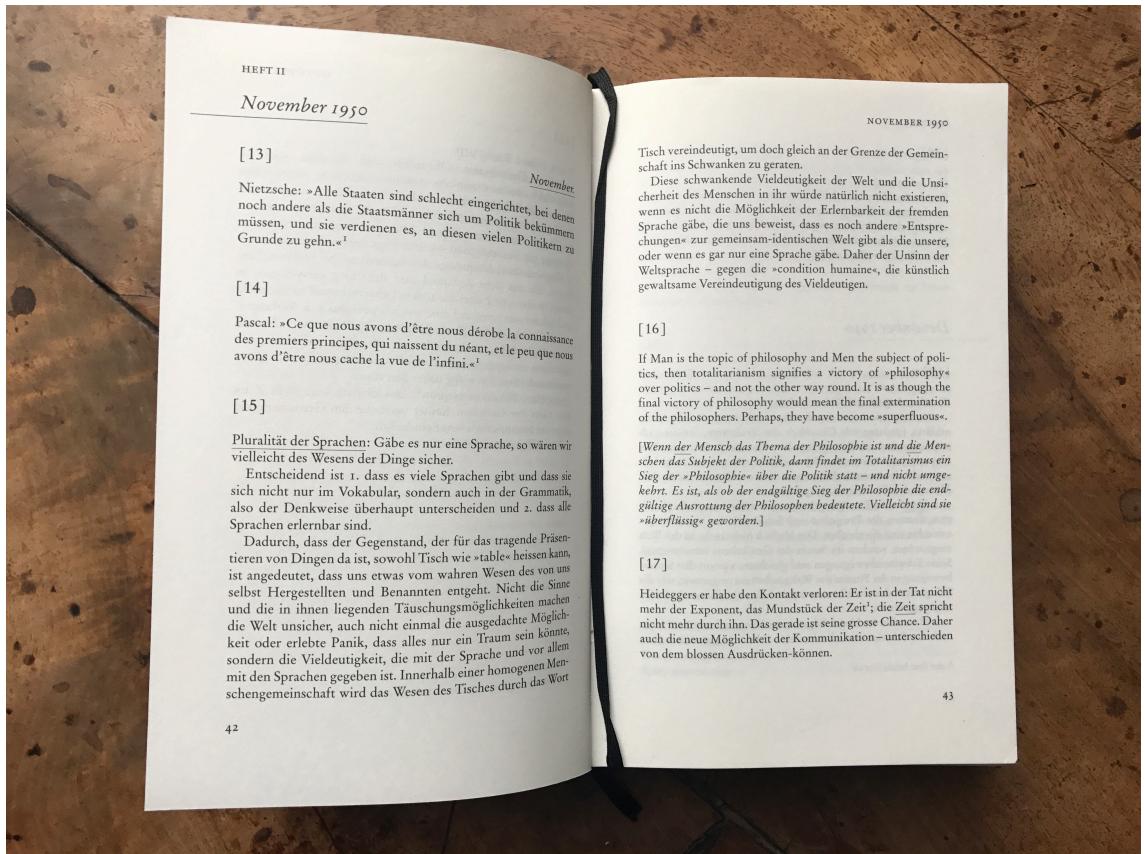
The word ‘proper’ has many uses. This is what happens when I put these uses to work to understand what demonstrates a ‘proper’ use of the English language in speaking and writing:

What it is you say, what it is you write must be truly what is said or written or regarded to be as truly what is said or written; it must be genuine; it must be of the required or correct type or form; it must be suitable or appropriate, right for the particular persons who will hear what you say or read what you write, right for the purposes for which you speak and write, or for the situations in which what you say or wrote will be heard, according to or respecting social standards or conventions; it must be respectable, specially excessively so; it must also be your own; you must own what you say or write.

You must own what you say. You own what you say because it is yours, it belongs to you. You also own it because you are accountable for it. You must mean what you say or write.

I was told: you write continental sentences. In what way are these continental sentences unproper? Did I denaturalise the Island’s English?

I look for the meaning of the word ‘proper’ in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* and the corresponding word ‘propre’ in the *Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles*. They both refer to the unsoiled, the intimate and to property, ownership. Any writing is intimate in the way that it is born of a conversation of oneself with oneself. It is also an address to the reader, yourself and someone else, someone who will come in contact with your writing, someone with whom you share your thoughts. How does one write in an intimate way? Writing in a proper way, does it mean I have to write in a way that is familiar to you, in a way you know intimately, in an idiomatic way? I read that the radical ‘idio’ in ‘idiomatic’ and ‘idiom’ carry the meaning ‘private’ along with the meaning ‘intimate’ in Greek. The idiomatic carries some sense of what is privative in the word ‘private’. A private language is a language spoken among people who speak and understand what is spoken in the same way, share the same references and the same clichés, qui restent entre soi, who keep to themselves, excluding those who don’t speak, can’t understand that language in the same way, who don’t belong to that cosy group of people.



In the second year of my research, I came across a small text entitled ‘Pluralität der Sprachen’ written by Hannah Arendt in her *Denktagebuch*, and translated in French in Barbara Cassin’s *la Nostalgie*. Although some translations of selected passages are available online or in related publications, a translation of the *Denktagebuch* in English has not yet been published. The *Denktagebuch* is the name of a journal in which Hannah Arendt wrote daily entries between 1950 and 1973. These entries are matinal exercises that witness the engendering of Arendt’s thoughts – in the words of the editors of the French edition Barbara Cassin and Alain Badiou – and manifest the effect on their development of the encounter with the plurality of languages. Hannah Arendt has more than one language, as Derrida would say. Her bibliographer Elizabeth Young-Bruehl wrote that German was her philosophical and poetic homeland, French the language of her first exile, English the language of her second citizenship and Greek and Latin the languages of her political ancestors. The *Denktagebuch* is woven out of thoughts and quotations in all these languages, across many registers, existential, philosophical, political and poetic. In that short entry, she reflects on the many ways one thing can be designated in and signified through language, an equivocity the encounter with other

languages reveals in a particularly acute way. For what is thus revealed, as Barbara Cassin writes, is not the incommensurability of languages and the near-sanctity of certain languages but rather a fundamental instability of meanings and sense-making at work within and between languages. Hannah Arendt presents the acknowledgement of this instability of meanings and sense-making within and between languages as the condition for the construction of a common and identical world. Hannah Arendt's daily entries were not meant for publication. Would she have retained the word 'identical' to describe that common world?

In an earlier entry, she asks:

Was ist Politik?

And answers:

1. Politik beruht auf der Tatsache der Plüralität der Mensche [...]
2. Politik handelt von den Zusammen-und Miteinander-sein der Verschiedenen [...]

What is Politics? 1. Politics rests on the plurality of people – la pluralité humaine, human plurality, the words chosen by Sylvie Courtine-Denamy the French translator of the *Denktagebuch*; politics rests on the coexistence of the different, as translated by the online browser machine translation tool 2. La politique traite de la communauté et de la réciprocité d'êtres différents as the French translator interpreted rather than translated, politics rests on the community and the reciprocity of different beings. My limited knowledge of German still enables me to translate 'Zusammen' as 'together' and 'Miteinander' as 'with another'. An other. I think of the word Autrui and what I read about it. Politics rests on the reciprocal recognition of Autrui and the possible world Autrui expresses. Acknowledging the effects of another language in the language one considers as one's mother tongue is acknowledging the plurality of people and the possibility of constructing a common world.

How can you own what you say or write if what you say or write is not recognised as proper? Comment se sent-on chez soi dans une langue qui n'est pas la sienne? How can one feel at home in a language that is not one's own? How can one appropriate it in a way that will be considered proper?

Une langue, ça n'appartient pas.

A language, that does not belong

My thoughts resonate with the echo of Derrida's words. In an interview with Jean Birnbaum, he talks about his relationship with the French language, the tongue of la mère-patrie – here one might use meaningfully the word fatherland language – he spoke in his Jewish family and was taught at school in a country colonized under the control of the Republic:

I have only one language and at the same time, in a at once singular and exemplary fashion, this language does not belong to me ... A singular history has exacerbated in me this universal law: a language is not something that belongs.

I have asked fellow researchers how they've experienced researching in a language that is not their mother tongue. One of them, who grew up between the Welsh spoken in her family and the English she was educated in at school, told me how difficult it had been for her to speak during her first year at University: she felt that her Welsh accent would immediately situate her geographically and sociologically in the mind of her interlocutors. In between two languages, your realm is silence, writes Julia Kristeva. Breaking that silence and coming to speaking and writing in an acquired language – every language is acquired, writes Julianne Prade in '(M)other Tongues: on Tracking a Precise Uncertainty' – is very difficult, particularly in academic research environments in which what Michel Foucault calls power-knowledge relationships govern the production of accepted knowledge within an established regime of truth.

I remember another fellow researcher telling me: my supervisor says she does not understand what I write, she says I have to make my language clearer; but it is the way one develops thoughts in Russian, ambiguity is at the heart of the Russian language, she cannot understand what happens in the translation between Russian and English, she only speaks English. I recently had a chat with the cashier at the local supermarket. I had been speaking in French with my daughter who was helping me pack the groceries. An old lady was queuing behind me; her face shut, I smiled to her but did not manage to catch her eyes. Do you speak another language? I asked the cashier. She smiled at me, yes I do, she said. What other languages do you speak? Penjabi, she replied. I am always very self-conscious when I speak French in a public place, I said to her, people may not

understand what it is I am speaking about and I often feel it makes them uncomfortable; I don't know what they imagine I am speaking about.

Speaking two languages is never easy, writes Barbara Cassin, but it is an opportunity; it allows you to avoid falling prey to a dangerous illusion the ancient Greeks cultivated; they imagined that only one language, their own, truly existed.; they named it with a word: *logos*; Everybody else, anyone that didn't speak like them, were "barbarians," people who say "blah blah blah," something the Greeks could not understand. Barbara Cassin writes that for the monolingual, the mother tongue may have an absolute singularity, as the Greek logos, a paradigm that constitutes a universal on the basis of a singular to the point of being able to use the same word to say language, tongue, thought, style, intelligence and intelligibility. She continues:

The Greeks hellenize , just by reading Homer one learns to speak Greek, to speak well, to think correctly, to be cultured, to be civilized, in short to be men, and one thereby differentiates oneself from "Barbarians" (we would say "foreigners"), that is, from those we cannot understand, who do not speak Greek, who commit barbarisms in language, who are neither cultured nor civilized, who are not men like us, who are not men at all ... Isn't belonging to a people precisely this imbrication of language and culture? How, by what force, can one prevent this from turning into "nature"?

In a recent editorial entitled 'The Guardian view on languages and the British: Brexit and an Anglosphere prison', the newspaper points at the linguistic monoculture hegemonic on the Island. It reflects many things, I read, but the decline in language teaching is one of the most important. According to the Guardian, the standard excuse for the Island's neglect of foreign languages is that English is the world's preferred language.

This monolingualism seems to be promoted in the South of the Island through policies implemented by governments since 2011 as inferred in 'Multilingual Island' , a report by the Academy of Humanities and Social Science of the Island. I read that the devolved government of the North is committed to the mother tongue + 2 additional language model recommended by the Continental Union and that in the West of the Island, the government makes a modern foreign language compulsory for all 11-14 year olds and has a commitment to offer foreign languages at various levels to 14-19 year olds; however, the government of the South of the Island is not committed to a national language education strategy, decisions relating to language education being made in the

context of wider educational reforms. ‘Language matters more and more’, quoted earlier, states that the decline in the numbers of school pupils learning languages has inevitably resulted in the reduction in the numbers of students reading languages at university level; as a consequence, a number of university language departments have closed, with language provisions now mainly located in the top tiers of the Island’s universities. In ‘Language matters a position paper’, quoted earlier, I read that the Academy gathered a range of evidence that UK humanities and social science research was becoming increasingly insular and that this was having an adverse impact, which could only increase, on the health of the UK’s humanities and social science research as a whole. The report also shows the direct correlation between socio-economic groups and language take-up; pupils from more privileged backgrounds are much more likely to have a language qualification. The report notes the failure of many state schools to promote language learning as effectively as it is done in private schools.

I think about the people on and off the Continent, named after the dominant language spoken in their respective countries: the French, the English, the Spanish, the Germans, the Italians, the Dutch, the Danish, the Norwegians, the list is long ... Daniel Sibony writes:

Bien des Occidentaux “normosés” souffrent à leur insu de n’avoir qu’une seule langue [...] Une seule “langue”, une seule origine, et qui se veut telle; un seul territoire symbolique, dont l’unité les fixe. Or le symbolique ne va jamais avec un-seul, c’est à dire avec l’unité narcissique. Il appelle l’entre-deux, il *est* le déclanchement d’entre deux; passages, “voyages” dont l’enjeu minimal est de rencontrer sa mémoire à partir de l’autre ou du réel.

Which I translate:

Many Westerners “normosised” suffer unaware of having only one tongue [...] One and only one “tongue”, one single origin that claims it to be such; one symbolic territory, the unity of which pins them down. But the symbolic never works with one-and-only, that is with narcissistic unity. It calls for the in-between, it *is* the trigger of the in-between; passages, “journeys” the minimal stake of which is to encounter one’s memory in the encounter with the other or the real.

Sibony continues:

Aimer, c'est désirer faire la rencontre de l'être qui puisse heurter votre mémoire inerte pour lui redonner vie, heurter votre support d'être identique à soi; qui forcera votre identité à faire le voyage qu'elle elude [...] on fait parfois cette rencontre , ce voyage, avec des êtres qui n'en n'ont pas la moindre idée; mais on le fait à partir d'eux [...] Ils vous révèlent le morcellement fécond d'une origine qu'ils ignorent; de l'Origine comme telle.

Which I translate:

To love is to desire to meet the person who will disturb your inert memory to bring it to life again, to disturb the support of your being as identical to yourself; who will compel your identity to go on the journey it eludes [...] One occasionally meets, makes the journey, with people that have no idea about it; starting from them [...] They reveal to you the fecund fragmentation of an origin of which they know nothing; of the Origin as such.

Allowing, enabling oneself to consider the effects of another tongue on one's mother tongue is perhaps a form of love for the other and the journey to a self.

For the past two years, I have asked people to translate the entry 'Pluralität der Sprachen' in the languages they speak. When I initiated the project, I had not come across a published translation in English, so I worked out my own composite translation out of the original German, the existing published French translation and the translations in English produced by friends, a native speaker of German and French fluent in English and native speakers of English, fluent in German and French. You will find all translations currently available in 18 languages in the appendices. My translation reads as follows:

Plurality of languages: if there were only one language, we would perhaps be more assured of the essence of things.

The decisive fact is that 1.there are several languages and that they are distinguished from one another not only by their vocabulary, but also by their grammar, that is to say essentially by their way of thinking, and 2. All languages can be learnt.

The fact that an object that holds things on it for display can be called "Tisch" as well as table indicates that something of the true essence of the things we make and we name escapes us. It is not the senses and the possibilities of illusion they carry that render the

world uncertain, nor the imaginable possibility or the lived panic that it all may be only a dream, but rather the equivocity of meaning that is given with language and even more so with languages. Within a homogeneous human community, the essence of the table is indicated unequivocally by the word “table”, but as soon as it reaches the borders of the community, this word falters.

This faltering equivocity of the world and the insecurity of man who inhabits it would evidently not exist if it was not possible to learn foreign languages, a possibility that proves that other “correspondences” than ours exist for a common and identical world, even though only one language would exist. Hence the absurdity of the universal language – which goes against the “condition humaine”, the artificial and all-powerful uniformisation of equivocity.

In his essay ‘Modes of Writing and Judgement in the *Denktagebuch*’, Thomas Wild translates and comments on some elements of Arendt’s entry. I read that the distance between the uncertainty of ‘perhaps’ in the entry opening statement and the certainty of ‘one language’ and ‘the essence of things’ has the potential for humour, or at least polemical possibility. This is intentional, he writes, as Arendt sees concepts like one “world language” (*Weltsprache*) not only as “nonsense” (*Unsinn*) but also as “artificially enforced disambiguation of the ambiguous” (*künstlich gewaltsame Vereindeutigung des Vieldeutigen*), a totalizing abolition of plurality. In the translation of ‘Pluralität der Sprachen’ proposed in the English translation of Cassin’s *la Nostalgie*, “world language” corresponds to “universal language”, “nonsense” to “absurdity” and “artificially enforced disambiguation of the ambiguous” to “the artificial and all-powerful uniformisation of equivocity”.

Although both translations point at the concept of a world language as the totalizing abolition of plurality – in Thomas Wild’s words – “disambiguation of the ambiguous” does not carry the same meaning and does not have the same effect as the terms and “uniformisation of equivocity”. ‘Vieldeutig’ is constructed with the adjective and determiner ‘viel’/many and ‘deutig’, an adverb or adjective related to ‘Bedeutung’, a word translated as ‘sense’ in French and ‘meaning’ in English. Sylvie Coutine-Denamy coined the word ‘équivocité’ in French to translate ‘Vieldeutigkeit’, a word that evokes a positive equality rather than a negative ambiguity associated with the possibility of a plurality of meanings or interpretation. The online ELD was unable to give exact matches for ‘equivocity’. The search nearest results disclose the words ‘equivocacy’, ‘equivocality’, ‘equivocate’, all referring to the adjective ‘ambiguous’, in the general sense

of being open to more than one interpretations and in the case of the verb equivocate, leading to a further meaning of concealing the truth or avoiding committing oneself. The word ‘equivocity’ exists in American English – defined as the character of being equivocal in signification or predication in the United States English dictionary.

I think about the way one friend translated Arendt’s words *künstlich gewaltsame Vereindeutigung des Vieldeutigen*:

the rendering univocal of the equivocal with artificial forcefulness.

In my friend’s translation, I hear the sounds, the thoughts of the plurality of human voices, the chorus they form, sometimes harmonious, sometimes cacophonic, a chorus that democratic political communities have the responsibility to foster and protect.

My research led me to at least three different translations in English of Arendt’s ‘Vereindeutigung des Vieldeutigen’: my friend’s ‘rendering univocal of the equivocal’, Andrew Goffey and Barbara Cassin’s ‘uniformisation of equivocity’, Thomas Wild’s ‘disambiguation of the ambiguous’, demonstrating the equivocity that exists within one language. One language, among others, is nothing more than the totality of the equivocations that its history has allowed to persist in it, Jacques Lacan wrote in *l'étourdit*.

The uses of language, any language, that restrict the choice of interpretations to one and only one possible interpretation, that impose users to conform to established uses of that language result in the confiscation of knowledge by those defining what is right and proper, threaten one’s freedom of thought and foster the possibility of totalitarianism.

In Barbara Cassin and Andrew Goffey’s paper entitled ‘Sophistics, Rhetorics and Performance; or, How to Really do things with words’, I read that:

Either one begins with things, Or one begins with words.[...]

With Plato and Aristotle, things can be described like this: language is an *organon*, a “tool”, a means of communication, and language, as Socrate says in the *Cratylus*, are simply the different materials that serve to fabricate that tool, sort of habits of the idea. That is why one must start from things, from what is, and not from words (*Cratylus* 439b). From this perspective, it is a matter of getting to the things under words as quickly as possible, of producing the unity of being under the difference of languages, of reducing the multiple to the one: translation is then what Schleiermacher calls *dolmetschen*, interpreter, a go-between.

The world that starts from words is a completely different world; language is no longer considered, firstly or solely as a means but as an end and a force. [...] Language is and is only the difference of language. From this perspective, to translate is no longer *dolmetschen* but *übersetzen*, understanding how different languages produce different worlds, making these worlds communicate, and disquieting them by playing the one against the other, in such a way that the reader's tongue goes that of the writer. The common world becomes a regulating (or guiding) principle, a goal and not a point of departure.

Words are powerful, use them well, is the advice from the Telegraph.

When one begins with things, as Robinson does with all the objects he salvaged from the wreck, the world is a point of departure that brings back to the phantasm of one's origin. When one begins with language, with speaking and listening, the common world is (re)created everyday through conversation. I look for Michel de Certeau's words on conversation in the introduction to the *Practice of Everyday Life*:

The practice of ordinary conversation transforms "speech situations", verbal productions in which the interlacing of speaking positions weaves an oral fabric without individual owners, creations of a communication that belongs to no one. Conversation is a provisional and collective effect of competence in the art of manipulating "commonplaces" in French - and playing with the inevitability of events in such a way as to make them "habitable".

Conversation creates 'un lieu commun', a common place through collective enunciation, produced by the way people engaging in the conversation speak with one another.

Speaking positions change according to the flow of the conversation, bringing people together to inhabit the space and moment of the conversation, creating a place they can belong to and that belongs to no one.

The Continental Union should have listened to the Prime Minister, a little old man said sadly to me, the other day, as I was discussing the Continental Union Withdrawal bill currently being debated in the United Kingdom's parliament, with the local newsagent. During the Continental Union campaign, few wanted to listen to what continentals living on the Island may have to say, I thought sadly.

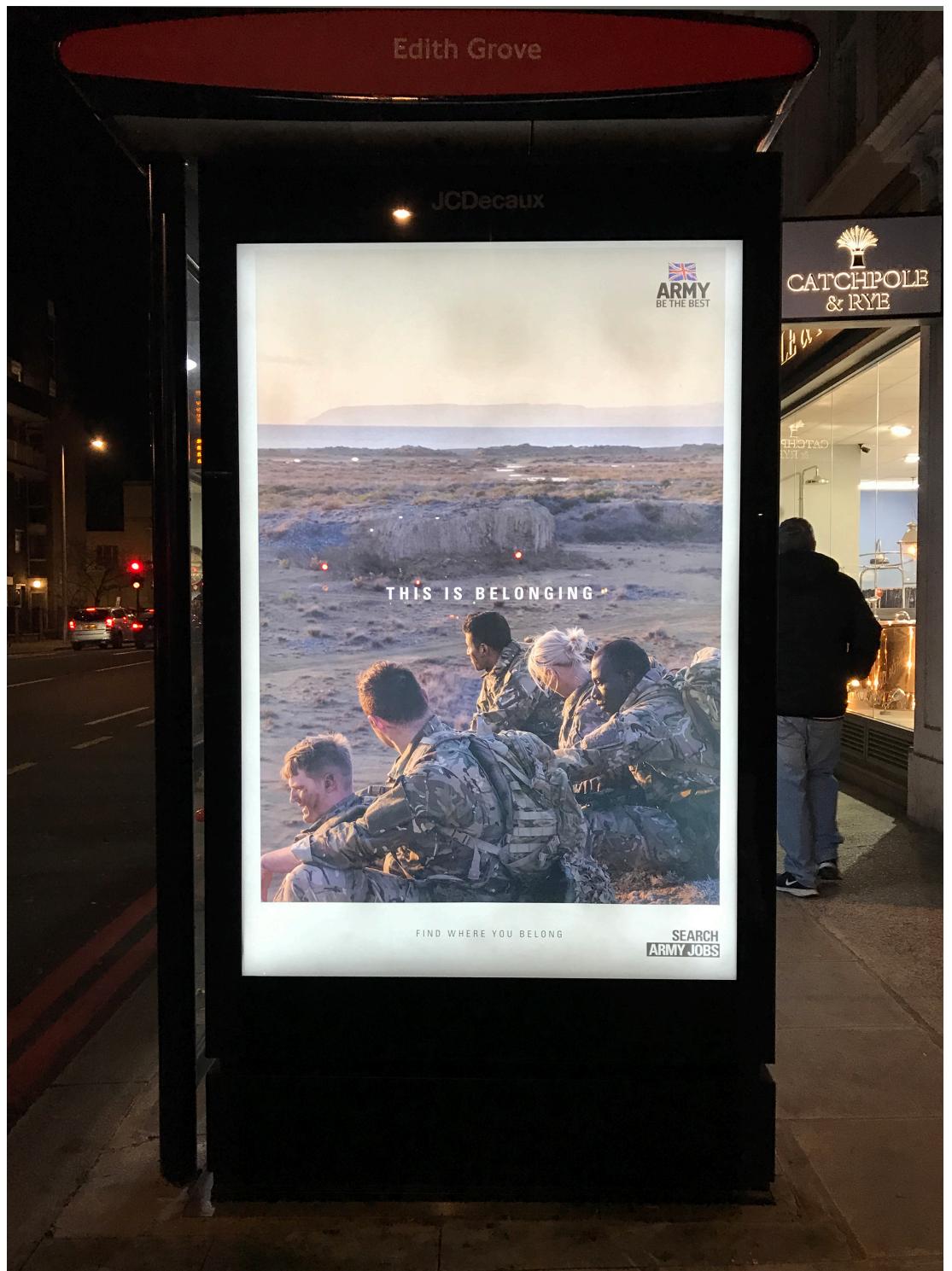
There are many ways to define what belonging means and many ways to experience the sense of belonging. I have felt at home, in the places I have lived on the Island because of the people I have met there, people I have been able to speak with, listen to, hear and understand and whom have listened to me, heard and understood me even if they have sometimes disagreed with me. I have found a home in the English language, a language in which, often but not always, I have been held and encouraged to invent.

What if a mother tongue was the language in which the body of another language can be translated or carried over, in which the body of that other language is reinstated, in a translation that becomes poetry, in Jacques Derrida's words?

What if a mother tongue was the language in which one is always encouraged to speak, write and to invent, even if it is not one's mother tongue?

Even more so ...

London, September - December 2017



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SOIS MORTE



BE STILL

Nature morte

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A soft light comes from the left. It crosses emptiness, until it encounters matter. Light draws the contours of a transparent glass. It rests on the chipped right side rim. It traverses the thin bent walls, entering the liquid silver that fills three-quarter of the glass. Darkness shows through the depth of water. Light continues its path, washing the surface of the stone slab. In its course, it illuminates three small white and round shapes, onions or garlic heads that punctuate the eye's journey to the right. It hits a conical form that emerges behind the brilliant white of two of the garlic heads, soot-black at its base, dark-red towards the top, delicately shaping a pouring beak standing out of a round glazed earthenware body. Light lands softly on a stem of foliage that hangs into the void at the end of the stone. Darkness recedes where the light journeys but it is present in the ellipse opening the top of the jug, in the black hole of the hollow handle sprouting from its side and in the strong shadow the objects cast on the stone slab.

I have returned to the same painting. I have all the time in the world this afternoon. I have left the baby with her carer. It is the first time I leave her for more than a couple of hours. I have to train myself to leave her. I am going back to work the following week. The exhibition room is full of people gathering in front of the paintings of inanimate things and domestic scenes by 18th century French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin. I had trouble booking a ticket and feel lucky to be there. Despite the number of people, the rooms are quiet, onlookers gazing silently at the images.

I realise I have been absent-mindedly following two women. They are very likely mother and daughter, the older pushing an empty pram and the younger carrying an infant who must be my baby's age. Something tells me it is a little girl although what she wears does not give her gender away. The two women and the child have paused in front of the painting with the glass of water, the glazed earthenware jug and the three garlic heads. They remain silent for a while. I come close enough to hear the discrete chatter resuming between the two women. They speak in French. They are talking of Chardin's magic, of his ability to present the most common objects as things of beauty and turn them into objects of contemplation. Yes, I think, Chardin is a magician. I lose myself in his pictures, particularly this one. Chardin's work suspends the flow of my thoughts and fills me with a feeling of a strange happy déjà-vu as if I was returning to a place of safety, known but forgotten.

Cradled in her mother's arms, the baby stares quietly around. I feel I am trespassing but I want to catch the baby's gaze. I come a bit closer, stepping to the right of the younger

woman as if I wanted to read the cartel accompanying the painting. The two women are lost in contemplation. I direct my gaze into the baby's eyes, a liquid dark brown, and smile. The baby stares at me, her eyes locking into mine. The little girl opens her rosy mouth and smiles back at me. Sharp joy rushes through my body. I raise my head, still smiling and meet the mother's gaze, puzzled and slightly annoyed. Vous avez une bien jolie petite fille. c'est le même modèle que la mienne, brune et toute fine. Je l'ai laissée à la maison pour la première fois et elle me manque, I tell her. The young women smiles kindly to me and turns to her mother who has not said a word, grabbing her arm with her free hand while holding the little girl closer. They walk away, talking quietly together. I go back to stillness, staring at the small painting while people come and go around me.

n a t u r e m o r t e

d e a d n a t u r e

The translation in English disturbs me. It is something I often notice in my regular to and fro between French and English. In English, words have a life of their own, they have shapes and edges French words lost for me a long time ago, worn by usage and convention. English words retain some of the magic I feel is at work when I talk to my little girl, pointing at things, naming them, explaining the gestures and actions of our life together with words, enveloping her in language. Dead feels stonier, heavier, more final than morte.

d e a d n a t u r e

How strange does the expression ring, how different it is from the expression used in English to designate this kind of images.

s t i l l l i f e

v i e i m m o b i l e

s i l e n c i e u s e

t r a n q u i l l e

There is no single French word that translates the word still, a word that implies the engagement of at least two senses: vision and hearing.

I find strange the parallel displacement, almost inversion between the two sets of terms. Life is the opposite of death, death is the end of life but neither can do without the other. There is life in nature but all of nature is not alive. And to be still is not necessarily to be dead.

Stillborn

The way one tactfully names an infant born dead in English. I shudder.

m o r t E

LA nature mortE

Nature is without gender in English. It is a feminine word in French.

I meet the tired blue gaze of a woman. She has long blond hair, interlaced with flowers, floating around her. Her round belly protrudes through her silky gown that draws her generous body. Another woman, naked and oblivious of her two companions in dark suits seating with her, looks at me pensively, a basket spilling its fruits in the same offering. A third woman looks sternly down at her breasts, pressing the tits of the two perfect globes between her fingers. The milk spurts in two symmetrical arcs on the fur of two beasts lying at her feet.

la nature est morte

A declaration. People must be pronounced dead for their death to be official. I remember the time when my uncle, the doctor, had been called to pronounce the death of the daughter of my parents' friends. He had signed the certificate required to organise her burial so as to speed up the unbearable process. Whether morte or dead, the word means what it says.

nature is dead

Something is accomplished just by being pronounced.

Blemished grapes, pocked apples, rotting peaches. Freshly cut garden flowers in their glass of water. Picked fruits, cut flowers, living and dying things.

Morte, plutôt que mourante;

dead, rather than dying:

nature morte .

Nature is pronounced dead. It rings as a solemn declaration, an announcement, a formal statement, a death sentence:

À mort,

nature,

quellesetaiseonlaveutréduite
ausilenceinerteabsentée
oblitréeanéantiesouslapéau
sousterrainechaudechairo
odoranteobsédanteobsédée
délicieusedéliréedélirante
quonlabayonnelapossédante
possédéequonlétranglequon
lenterreladévoréedévorante
tuéevivequonloubliededans
loinplusprofondlàencore
soufflecorpsnourrissantvie
surgissantemutiquehurlante
immobiletoujoursprésente
frémissantevantedésirée
désirantenatureditemorte

be quiet stand still speak not
reduced to silent presence
stilled absented obliterated
wiped out deep under skin
warm sweets melting
haunting flesh obsessive
delicious delirious bemuddled
possessing possessed be
strangled buried deep down
devouring devoured be killed
alive stillborn forgotten dead
hot moist desiring dark
swallowing outside inside
stirring throbbing beating
breathing whispering song
immobile yet alive still life

The tranquil silver light shimmers, whitening the base of the glass. I am thirsty. I think of the baby I left many hours ago, about the separation looming ahead. I look at the painting, resting in the quiet of the scene laid in front of me. There are no living beings to be seen but the still scene is alive.

s t i l l l i f e

How much more adequate the English expression is. No threat there, just a quiet acknowledgement of the scene.

n a t u r e m o r t e

The words do not stick to what I see in the image. There is nothing dead in the image. I think of naturalisation, the French term for the taxidermy process. Chardin is not imitating life in his painting. He is not faking it. He is looking, observing it and recording his vision in painting.

I am drawn into the painted rectangle, so small and yet opening a space I inhabit. Someone steps into my field of vision, getting so close that his nose almost touches the canvas. From the corner of my eye, I watch the guard rising from his folding stool and walking towards us. The man steps back, stepping on my feet. He vaguely apologizes, lost in his vision. What is he seeing, gazing so intensely at the painting? Still life? Dead nature? Something else? I think about vision, about seeing being a mental response to what is looked at, inevitably entangled in a network of words. I think of the baby who has recently started to gaze intensely at her tiny fingers, her immature eyes crossing in the effort of looking, trying to grasp the mysterious moving things. What does she see when she looks? Does she understand her hands are part of her? She also spends long moments staring at the mobile floating over her cot, an assemblage of contrasting colourful shapes of birds, monkeys, stars and clouds. She does not know what she is looking at, she has no understanding of what they are, of what they represent.

She is looking at :

s o m e t h i n g

u n e c h o s e

When does looking become seeing? When does a thing becomes an object?

t h e m o u t h s e e s

t h e e y e l i s t e n s

Strange words coming from somewhere I cannot remember.

I watch the people gathered around the painting. They seem sucked into the picture, oblivious of the world around them, silent, silenced. I gaze into the image. The scene tells no story. The objects are still and mute. They are common, timeless objects, bare in their simplicity, generic, deprived of any quality that marks them as of a specific time and place. They do not have any symbolic value. They do not hold any allegorical message. The silence of the image is not a dead silence. It has an inhabited quality. I cannot ignore the presence of the painter. His body is present in the thick traces of his brush strokes, in the patient juxtaposition of the dabs of colour that make his vision appears. There is a hidden geometry in the utterly simple composition. The jug is the opaque and dark inverse of the transparent luminous cone formed by the glass.

Monsieur Chardin arranges the objects carefully on the slab of stone in a corner of his kitchen, experimenting with different conditions of light, at different times of the day, at different times of the year, until something tells him it is what he must paint. Everything is familiar in this picture. The same light falls in my kitchen on sunny winter afternoons when all the leaves of the street plane trees have gone. What did fascinate Chardin so much for him to work so hard in such an unforgettable way? I read that Chardin worked very slowly, producing two or three paintings a year, that in the second half of his long career, he devoted his practice to the painting of simpler objects of his household, repeatedly using the same objects in his compositions. I think it is the something he managed to capture that fascinates me. But I fail at putting words on what it is that is captured in his painting. I observe the contrasting opposite shapes joined so gracefully by the string of the three round forms. I realise that the way I look at the

painted objects is not different from the way I think the baby looks at the shapes swaying above her. I smile. I am a child looking at dark and shiny contrasting forms vibrating in front of my eyes. The objects are there in my vision, naked, bare, uncovered, re-discovered. No detail distracts me from the act of looking, bringing me back to a register of experience that belongs to infancy, before speaking, before things met signs. There is wonder in this vision. There is delight and there is love. The opening at the top of the jug is smiling to me.

O

The hole at the end the handle outgrowing the side of the pot is luring me in. Entrance. Exit. A tunnel, pitch-black and narrow. It is dark in here. It is crammed in here. It is hard to progress. Which way to crawl? In, out?

d O u d O u

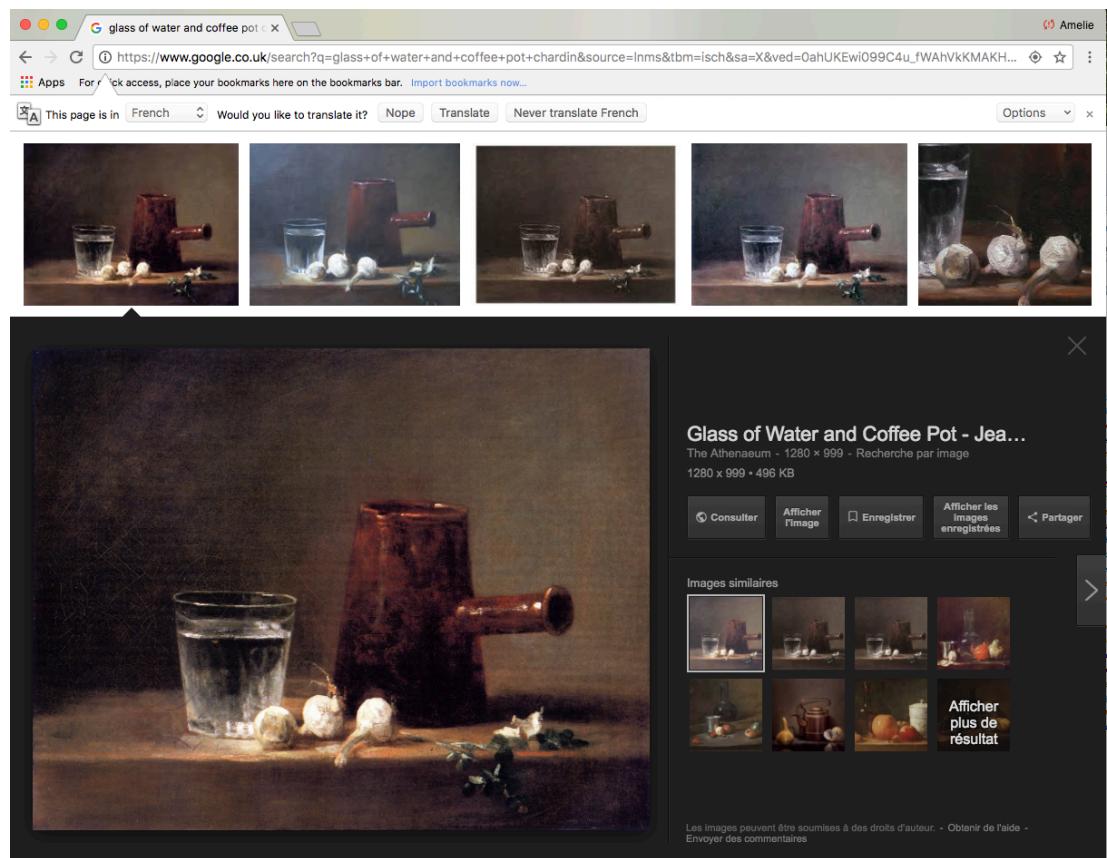
I think my little girl is too young to have a doudou yet. I do not know whether there is an equivalent word in English for a doudou.

d O u d O u

d O u x

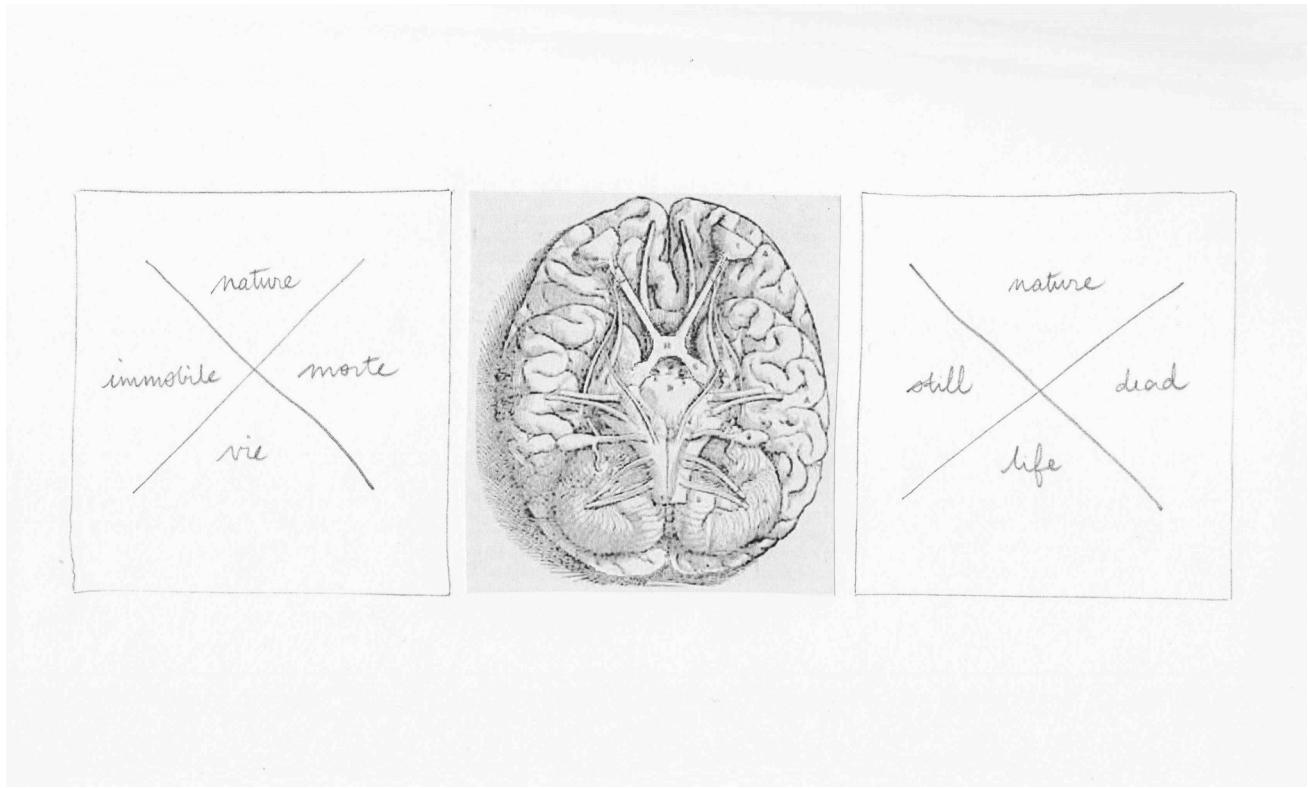
d O u x

My doudou was one of my grand-mother's Indian silk scarfs. I liked it so much that I would take it to nursery school, hidden in my coat pocket. I wonder which of the stuffed animals populating the baby's cot will become her doudou. There is a small zebra dressed with a red dungaree I really like. I gaze at the tranquil painting and listen to the rustling silence that emanates from the picture. I hear the rocking sound of blood in my veins. I look at my watch. It is almost five and I have promised to be home by six. I throw a last gaze at the painting and turn away to walk towards the exit.



Later, much later, I research the origins of the expressions still life and nature morte. I am intrigued by the strange bilingual chiasmus they create, mirroring and ignoring each other in an inverted and partially displaced parallelism. I read that the expression still life emerges out of the studio practice of painters who specialised in the representation ‘from life’ of motionless things as they stand, ‘still’ before their eyes. I discover that the expression nature morte has no such relationship to the process of painting. The expression emerges in mid-18th century in discourses on fine art developed in the context of the Salons, exhibitions organized every two years by the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture. I read it was created in 1648 with the aim of disseminating the principles, norms and categorisations of a French art school able to rival the Italian and Flemish schools.

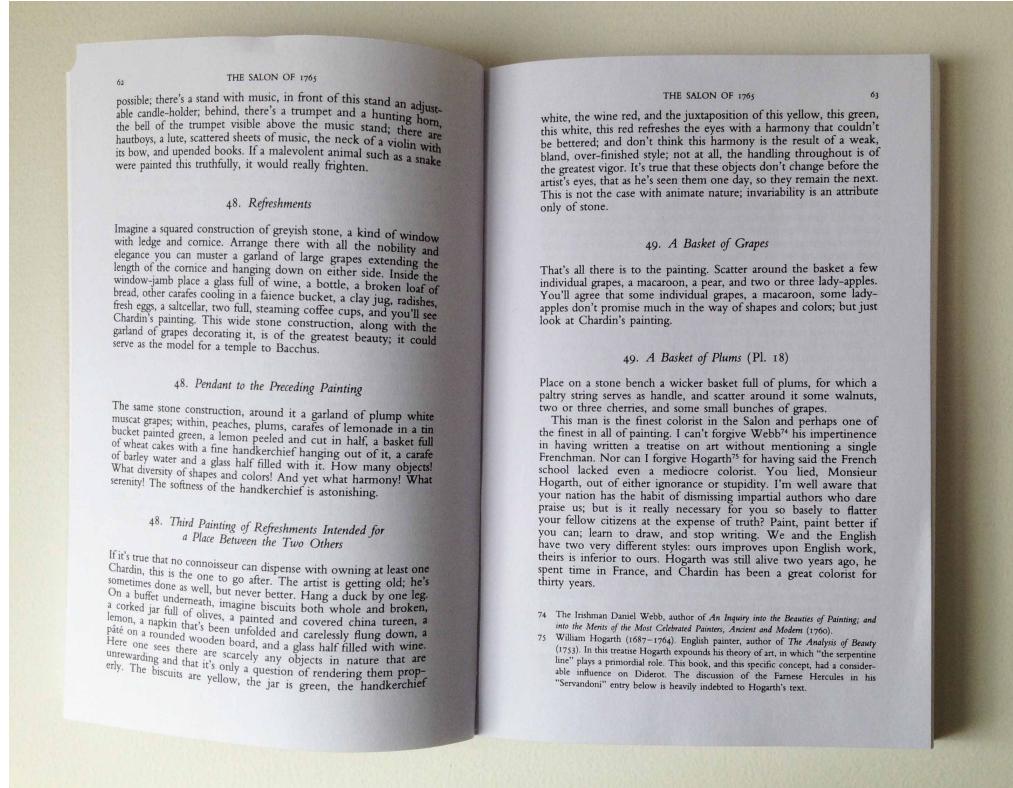
I think about naming, an act at the intersection of two inseparable linguistic operations, designation and signification. ‘There is’, ‘nature morte’ and ‘still life’ indicate in an act of presentation. ‘It is’, they signify, circumscribing the semantic space where the object linguistic presentation takes place. *There is* life, still. The English expression designates the here of perception more than it signifies it. *It is* nature, dead. The French expression, already interpreting, signifies the ‘here’ of the perception more than it designates it.



I read about another chiasmus, that of the sensory experience, at the juncture between perceiving and speaking, where the object of perception is recognized and spoken through language while the operations of perception remain inaccessible to intelligibility. Looking. Seeing. Reading. I think about the question Lyotard asks: would one see if one did not speak? He writes that the mouth sees – just as Paul Claudel writes that the eye listens – otherwise even if one says something, one speaks of nothing, for linguistic reference points at the depth of the visible. The image stands between perception and naming, between looking and seeing, before reading. Looking at Chardin's image, what discourse does the eye listen to, what invisible does the mouth see beyond the visible of this representation, for it to be named differently between languages but so consistently over time? Still life and nature morte are two visions of the same thing, distinct from the sense of sight, grounded in the separation of discourse from its object and on the extension within language of the visible into the invisible through the work of imagination and concept.

I have returned to the same painting by Chardin. I look at it again and again. The painting does not tell any story beyond what the objects are in themselves and how they stand in relation to one another in the space of the picture. They are not allegorical. What I see is what I look at and only that. There is nothing here to imagine. If something is imagined, it is a figment of my imagination, the result of my projections. The painting locks my seeing into looking.

I read through the hundreds of pages written by Diderot on his encounters with the paintings exhibited in the Salons between 1759 and 1781. He is an acquaintance of Chardin. His Salons writings are an early form of art critique developing at the time of the emergence of a public for the arts. I skim through the pages, looking for what Diderot wrote on Chardin and his work.



Diderot is never short of words when he imagines the conversations taking place in his promenades through Vernet's landscapes or the stories unfolding in Greuze's tableaux. But his habitual flow of thoughts is suspended in the act of looking at Chardin's still lifes. They silence him. He has no anecdote, nothing picturesque, no narrative, no story to tell around Chardin's simple compositions. I notice that when Diderot talks about Chardin's still lifes, he uses the same rhetorical device again and again, inviting his readers to imagine themselves setting up the composition. He writes summative descriptions, a succession of minute enunciations of the objects pictured in Chardin's

⁷⁴ The Irishman Daniel Webb, author of *An Inquiry into the Beauty of Painting; and into the Manners of the Most Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern* (1760).

⁷⁵ William Hogarth (1697–1764) English painter, author of *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753). In this treatise Hogarth expounds his theory of art, in which "the serpentine line" plays a primordial role. This book, and this specific concept, had a considerable influence on Diderot. The discussion of the Farnese Hercules in his "Servandoni" entry below is heavily indebted to Hogarth's text.

images which he calls compositions muettes. I think about the double meaning of the adjective muette: unable to speak but also refusing to speak. Silence has agency.

I read somewhere that looking at Chardin's painting is a contradictory sensory experience in which perception oscillates between seeing and touching, distance and proximity, enabling the sudden apparition of a world with multiple and changing appearances, a reality that escapes any holding and conceals itself at the moment of grasping. I pause. What is the reality made present in Chardin's images? I search for the words Diderot uses to convey his sensory experience. He is after the 'truth' of Chardin's painting, a truth that comes not from what is depicted but from how it is depicted. Diderot tells me that truth, nature and the real of human perception reveal themselves in Chardin's faire, through his singular way of making. He talks about the thick layers of colour applied one over another whose effect seeps through from underneath to the top, about the vapour blown onto the canvas, the light foam thrown on other places. Chardin's paintings deceive the eye but not in the way a traditional trompe-l'oeil does. Chardin's illusion does not rest on Albertian perspective and other traditional illusionistic effects aiming at transforming the painting surface into a transparent window, but on the effects of the brush strokes playing with light and colour, enunciation of insignificant notations that in their juxtaposition convey an impression of the real. Chardin's painted signs stand outside any narrative, they replace the narrative. They supercede it. Chardin's reality has nothing to do with the discursive plausibility Diderot finds in Greuze's tableaux, that Barthes analyses as the principal characteristic of classical verisimilitude in his writings on *l'effet de réel*, translated in English as the reality effect. I wonder what Barthes thought of Chardin's still lifes. He writes about the function of the object in 17th century Dutch still lifes, seeing the object as never alone and never privileged, merely there among others, painted between one function and another, participating in the disorder of the movements which picked it up, put it down, utilized. He says that the substance of the object is buried under its myriad qualities and that man never confronts the object which remains dutifully subjugated to him by precisely what it is assigned to provide. His thoughts on Flaubert's barometer and the agency of insignificant details – he calls them notations – in realist narratives resonate with mine. I wonder if, looking at this painting, Barthes could also have said that there is something quietly scandalous in the way Chardin's painted signs enunciate themselves without finality, significance and signification. In the space of the picture, each painted sign is a pure enunciation completely detached from its referent. They do not stand for

anything but the form they are. Both signified and referent have been expulsed from painted signs that are anything but transparent.

I look at Chardin's painting and what I see is the substance of the object, its presence, the cold transparency of the glass, the warm opacity of the pot, the contrasting organic shapes, things complete in their thingness, at one with themselves. I read that despite their apparent simplicity, the objects in this painting have often been identified incorrectly. It does not matter what these objects are and what they are for. They do not need to be named with the words that signify what they are used for. They are present, still and silent. They exist beyond the names they can be given, beyond the categories they are assigned to, beyond any identity. They've broken free of their names. They've escaped the encasing of words. They are wordless, demanding nothing, not imposing, emptied of meaning, empty. Naked.

Il voit la racine qui s'enfonce dans la terre, cette masse noire et noueuse qui lui fait peur et qui lui donne la nausée. Il voit les épaules et la gorge de la femme; existence nue; la gorge douce qui se caresse dans de fraîches dentelles. Il pense : ses nénés, ses beaux fruits. Il voit le sourire mystérieux de la femme, ses seins qui la chatouillent et qui s'épanouissent. Il crie. Il a les yeux grands, ouverts. Il pense que les choses, tout doucement, tendrement, se laissent aller à exister, comme ces femmes lasses qui s'abandonnent. Il pense qu'il faut exister jusque là, jusqu'à la moisissure, jusqu'à la boursoufflure, que l'existence, c'est un fléchissement. Il pense à l'abject confidence des choses, que nous sommes un tas d'existantes, chacun se trouvant de trop par rapport à l'autre. Il pense à la mort, à sa mort qui serait en trop elle aussi. Les mots s'évanouissent. Il voit le jardin lui sourire.

He sees the root that sinks into the earth, this black knotty mass which scares him and gives him nausea. He sees the shoulders and the bosom of the woman; naked existence; the soft bosom that caresses itself in fresh lace. He thinks : her tits, her gorgeous fruits. He sees the woman's mysterious smile, her breasts that tickle her and blossom. He screams. His eyes are wide, open. He thinks that things, slowly, tenderly, let themselves exist, like these weary women who give themselves up. He thinks that one must exist up to now, up to the rot, up to the swelling, that existence is a bending . He thinks of the abject confidence of things , that we are a pile of existents , each finding it self too much in relation to the other. He thinks of death, of his death which itself would also be too much. Words fade. He sees the garden smiling to him.

I see the words, I hear the images encountered when I met Roquentin- Sartre. The story he tells is the story of his discovery of the nakedness of a world ignoring the clothing of words, frightening and obscene and the very source of his Nausea. He shares his vision of a world that is in the naked thingness of a woman's palpitating bosom and the black,

sinuous root of a chestnut tree. Reading his words, it is as if he and I were absorbed into this thingness, into the infancy of our worlds, before and beyond speech and language, an uncanny journey back to a shared origin. Roquentin's words remind me of Michel Tournier's Robinson writing in his log-book his constant fight to remain in language and in the world of men, naming, building, organising, ordering, instrumentalising the island on which he was stranded, a nature that he feels both threatens and calls him. He names her Speranza. Robinson is overwhelmed by the thingness of the wordless world around him, the silent island-woman to whom he makes love in a coomb and crawls back to into the dark cave-womb. I think about Chardin's quiet vision, far from the struggle Roquentin and Robinson experience. I read somewhere about Chardin's pictorial space being a feminine space, inviting, alien, heimlich, secretly familiar but repressed, not unlike the embodied memory of the mother's body. I think about the violence in the expression nature morte. Nature sois morte pour que je reste homme. Nature be dead so I remain a man.

I return to listening to the gentle voice of Barthes. In the *Empire of signs*, I read about the radical experience he had when he visited Japan, reflecting on the effects of his inability to speak and understand had on him; how this experience of other formulations and syntaxes resulted in the undoing of his own reality; how the shock of an untranslatable provoked a total displacement of his topology, unsettling the westerner in him, dispossessing him of the rights of the father tongue, that tongue which comes to us from our fathers and makes us fathers and proprietors of a culture which history transforms into 'nature'.



A cucumber and two aubergines enunciated to the letter like three lines of a haiku.

A glass of water, a coffee pot, three cloves of garlic and a stem of foliage enunciated to the letter like four lines of haiku.

Barthes' words on the haiku resonate in my mind. I translate his thoughts into mine: while being intelligible, the objects represented in the painting do not mean anything and it is through this double condition of intelligibility and absence of meaning that they open to sense, in a particularly available, serviceable way Barthes describes as that of the polite host allowing you, enabling you to make yourself at home, with all your preferences, your values, your symbols intact.

At home ... This is exactly what I feel as I look at this image. C'est comme si je rentrais chez moi, un lieu où je peux demeurer. It is as if I was returning to a place in which I can settle and rest. What does it take to feel at home? What does it take to belong?

London, January 2014 – April 2017

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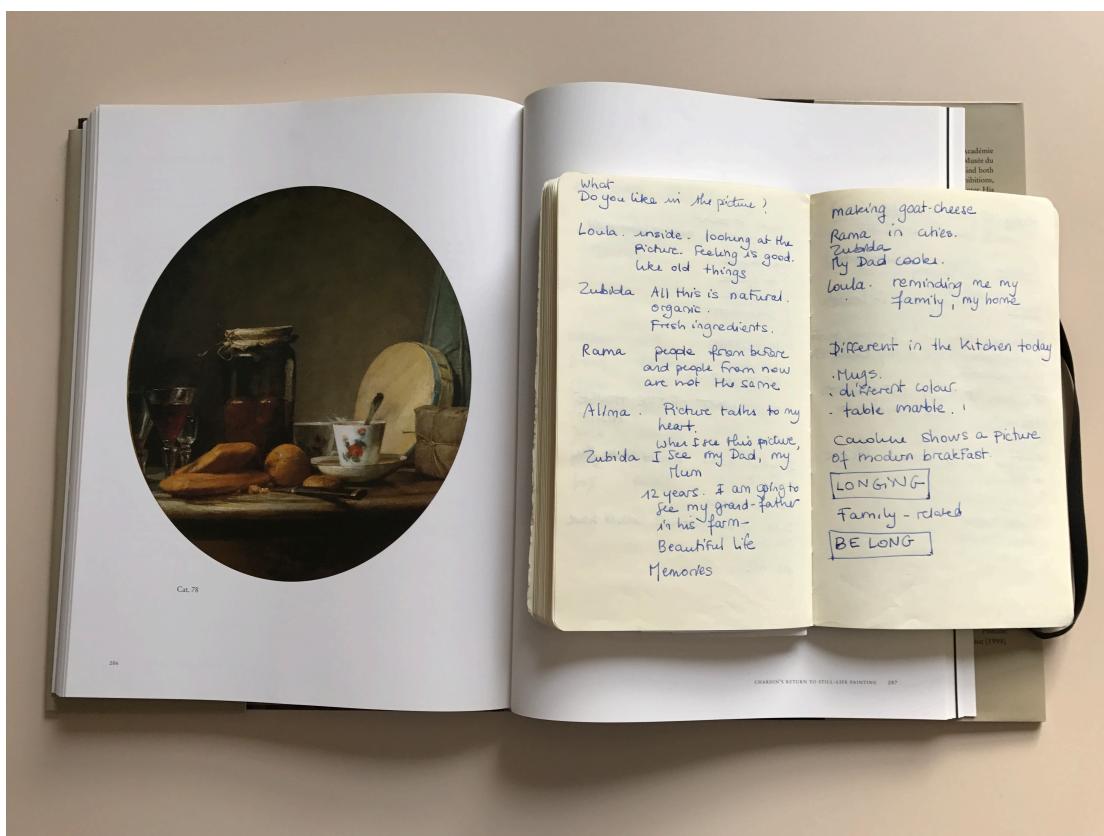
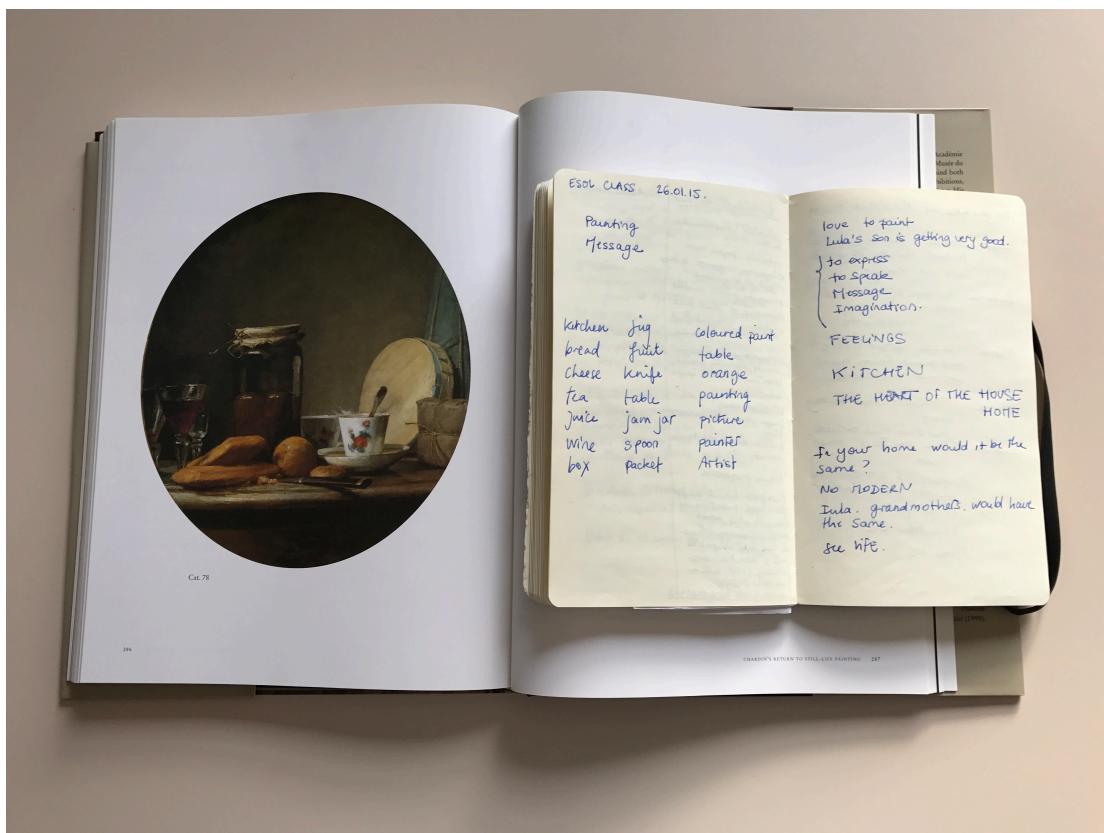


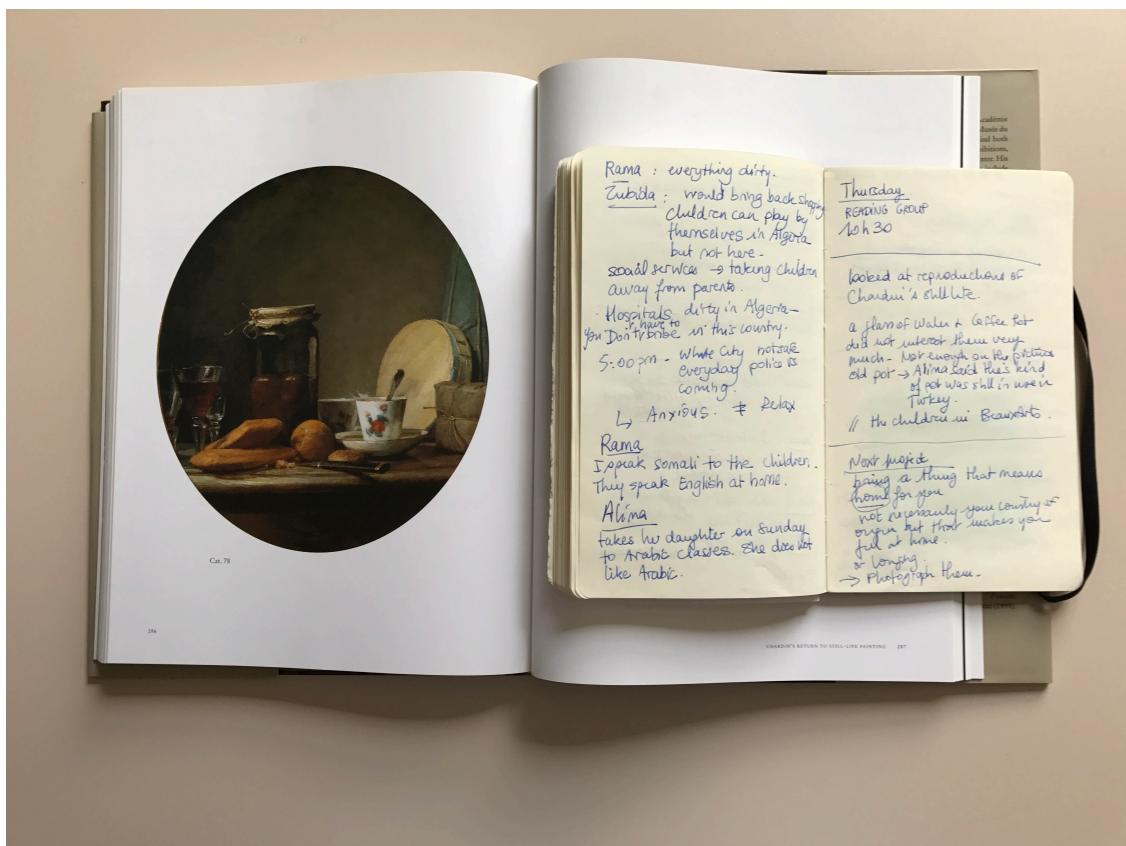
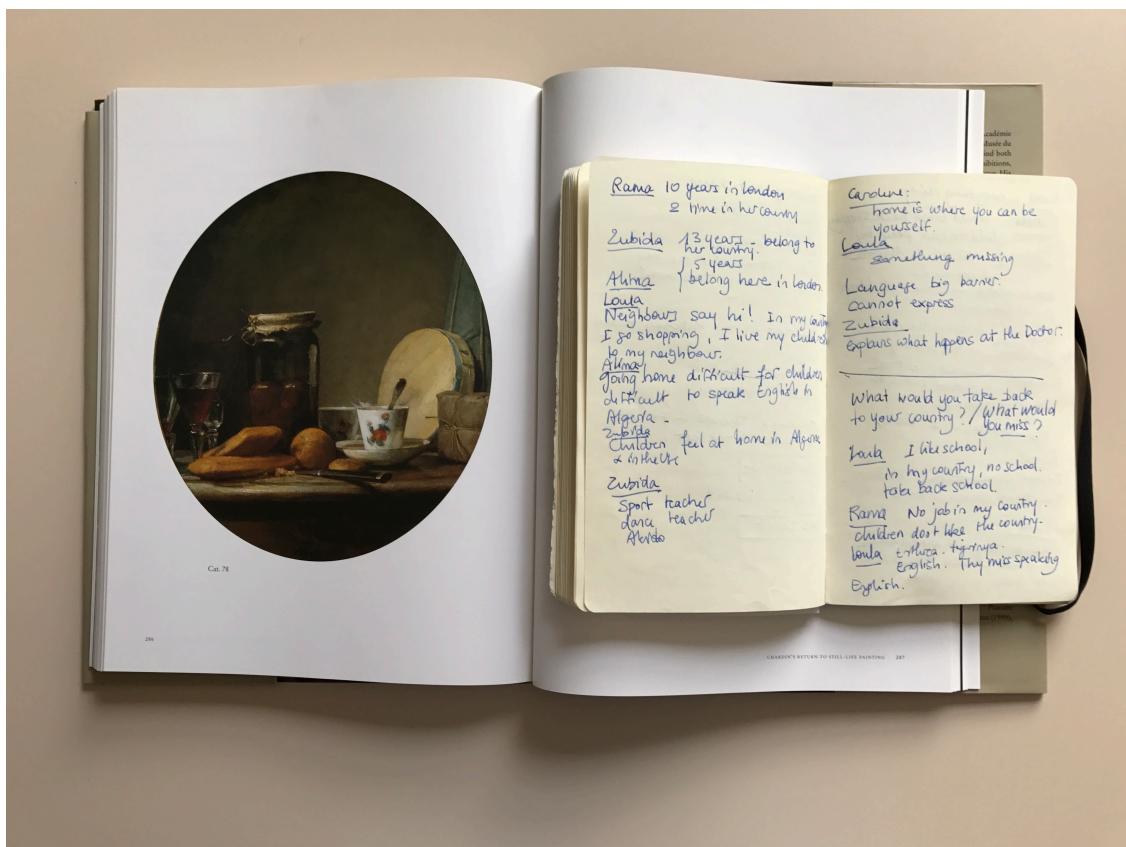
Conversation Piece

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A glass, filled with water, three cloves of garlic, an earthenware coffee pot and a twig, with green leaves and a white flower, stand together on a stony shelf. Shaped by the travel of light, the transparent, cold, smooth and reflective glass of water talks to the dark opaque rough pot, charred with soot, and to the cloves of garlic that draw a dotted line at the forefront of the picture. The twig of foliage loosely joins the tranquil conversation, its tip pointing towards the closest clove.

The objects speak to one another. They listen and respond to each other in a carefully balanced conversation. The double transparency of the water and the glass responds to the dark opacity of the earthenware pot and the deep blackness of its openings. The reflection of the garlic cloves, a brilliant white against the soot black of the pot, reveals the base of the glass and gives substance to the clear liquid it contains. The foliage's green messiness answers the clean geometric shape of the coffee pot. They speak to one another, in their singular languages. The water, the bulbs, the leaves and flower speak the language of natural elements and living things while the plain glass and the earthenware pot talk about human activity, of the human ability to create things that contain, hold and pour, of objects defined by their function. These objects have nothing in common beyond their possible use in the kitchen. They stand in their irreducible differences, in the positions they occupy in the pictorial space. But the position of each object has been carefully chosen for them to relate to one another and to the viewer. A plurality of objects comes together in the space of the painting, in the meshwork of relations established through their proximity, in a quiet, homely intimacy. They belong together.





Chardin's *Glass of water and coffee pot* is among the pictures of still lifes we look at and discuss together. But it is not the one that attracts their attention. When asked to choose which image she likes the most, she points to Chardin's painting called *the Jar of Apricots*. Can you tell us why you chose this image? She turns to her friend and says a few words. Her friend translates for us. Look, she says, the tea is steaming hot and there is a second tea cup. She thinks it is about an older man and woman, husband and wife, an old couple married for a long time. They are sitting together. They have tea and eat cake in the comfort of their home. They are happy.

We talk about the ways we welcome guests at home, often with food and drink. I tell them what I read about the antique xenia, paintings and mosaics that decorated the room in which wealthy Greeks and Romans welcomed their guests; in antique Greece, guests were to take their first meal, made of simple unprepared food, in this special room decorated with images of the same fruits, flowers, leaves, bread, before joining their hosts for the family meals.

I think about the tradition of preparing a place at the family table for the stranger that may knock at the door and ask for hospitality. L'étranger ... The Greek word Xenos, l'étranger is translated in English as the stranger and the foreigner. Xenos is also l'hôte in French, the guest in the English language. L'hôte is both the one giving hospitality and the one to whom hospitality is given, carrying reciprocity in its mirroring meanings.

I think about what I was told by my mother and what I have heard myself say to my children:

On ne parle pas aux étrangers.

On ne parle pas à quelqu'un qu'on ne connaît pas.

Don't talk to strangers.

Don't talk to someone you don't know!

Don't talk to strangers!

Don't talk to the strange stranger!

Don't talk to the stranger,

Difficult to listen to,

to understand,

to speak with.

Who knows where the stranger is coming from?

Who knows what the stranger is capable of doing?

The strange stranger,

Abroad

Here,

Foreign

Out of doors,

Away from home,

Steps

At my door step;

Hey stranger!

I read Jacques Derrida's words:

Isn't the question of the foreigner the foreigner's question? Coming from the foreigner, from abroad? The foreigner questions. The question of the foreigner is the question of the foreigner addressed to the foreigner as though the foreigner were being-in-question, the question-being or the being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question.

Where do you come from?

I tell them this is a question I am frequently asked. I tell them this is a question that reminds me of the strange sounds my tongue creates when I pronounce English words, of that accent that encases the words I pronounce, turning them into incomprehensible things, still after all these years, for people who are not, who cannot get used to it. And of the other question that often comes with the first:

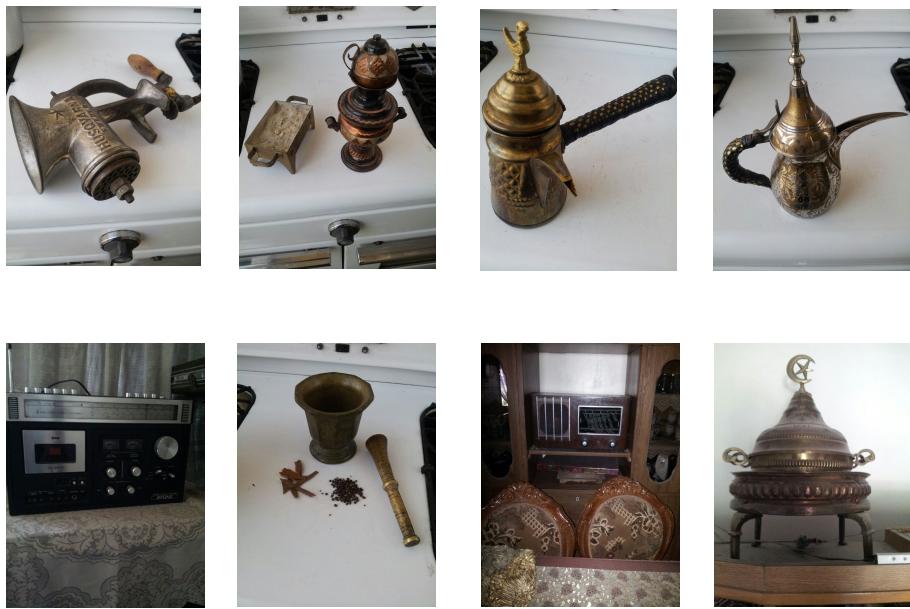
Where is home for you?

I tell them that after many years, I have come up with an answer:

Home is here and now, where I live, with my husband and children.

I think about Barbara Cassin's words:

When are we ever at home? When we are welcomed, we ourselves along with those who are close to us, together with our language, our languages.



Can you bring an object or a picture of that object that evokes home for you? She sends me eight pictures, one above the other in an email that ends with these words:

Hi, how are you.

I think of the order in which the pictures are attached to the email and how they could be presented in a sequence, from right to left, as she would read a text on a page. I arrange the pictures on a single A4 sheet and print them for us. She tells us that she asked her father to take pictures of objects around his house back home and to send them to her. We look at the pictures together. Do you know what these objects are? Yes, we have the same kind of thing in my country. We use it to make special dishes. I like what the letters embossed on its side read. Can you read the letters?

H U S Q V A R N A S W E D E N

I wonder how far an object can travel. Yes we had the same grinder at home in my country. Now we use electric grinders. This one works with the power of the hands. It is an old object that no one uses anymore. It does not require electric power, which is in short supply in Damas these days. When electricity comes back on, everybody rushes to

charge their mobile phones. What is this appliance used for? People use it to make kibbeh. They used to make kibbeh. Yes kibbeh. It is the same word in my country. In my country we call this dish kebbeh. How do you make kibbeh? First, the meat is ground twice. The minced meat is then mixed with bulgur and onions. Then the mix is ground twice more in the grinder. Why did you ask your father to photograph this object? I choose to talk about this object because it reminds me of a traditional dish in my home, in my country and in my family. It reminds me also how our ancestors worked hard to make this dish and they don't have to anymore. I wonder sometimes about the person who invented kibbeh.

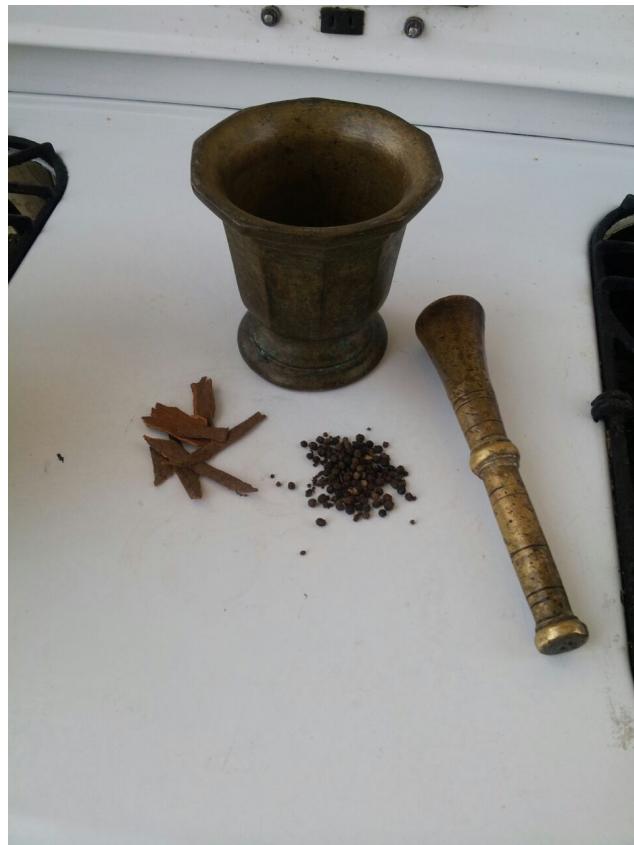


And this strange object near the container with ashes, what is it? We call it a samawer. It comes from Turkey. In Turkey, it is called a semaver. No, it comes from Russia and there it is called a samovar. This product ... this object ... is a metal basin for water. Inside it, there is a pipe that goes to the summit . Do you mean the top? Yes there is a pipe that goes to the top. On the side, there is a tap. The pipe is filled with coal ambers

that boil the water around. The steam goes into the teapot at the top, fermenting the tea. We can pour tea and refill with water all the time.



We have this pot to grind spices in my country too. The pot is called a pestle and the object you use to crush the spices is called a mortar. Do you recognise the spices? There are black peppercorns. Do you know what the other spice is?



I ask her if she would like to continue talking with me around the photographs she sent me. For a while, after the class, we stay together in the classroom, talking with and around the objects her father photographed for her. I follow our conversations with emails in which I summarise what I remember of what she said about the objects. I propose to her that she rewrites my text using the pronoun 'I', and making any other change she would like to make. She sends me a few stories. I send her my corrections, asking her if she would like to read her stories out loud to us:

Sorry for being ~~my~~ late in writing to you.

I read the conversation which we had together and I changed some things. I would like to ask ~~you about~~ your opinion ~~about that~~.

Here is what I wrote.

I asked my father to take photographs of specific objects in his home in Syria.

He sent pictures of those objects.

I chose to talk about the picture of the radio-tape recorder which is important to me because it ~~remembers~~ reminds me of the ~~period of~~ time I was a teenager.

At that time I used to listen to it with my older sister.

We liked to listen to love songs by a famous Egyptian singer Abd Al Haleem Hafiz.

We ~~had mania in listening~~ got really excited and foolish while listening to his songs all the time, even when we wanted to go to sleep and my father always said: 'enough listening to him'.

I like the way he sings the same sentences in different tunes.

Sometime there are things, places or even songs that make you remember ~~about the~~ people you love ~~or and~~ miss them, and that because you ~~maybe~~ perhaps used to listened to those songs with them.

Before coming here, I lived in Istanbul for few months with my sister.

My sister and I sat together on the balcony of her home drinking coffee and watching the view while listening to ~~k~~Kadhim Al Saher.

She ~~wasn't~~didn't like him.

But now she always sits ~~on~~ the same balcony doing the same things and listening to him.

She told me that his voice makes her ~~remember~~think of me and connected to me.

She likes his songs now.

That is what was written.

I hope the way I ~~use to write~~ wrote is right.

I ~~which~~ hope you will like what I wrote.

Thank you for your support.

Have a nice afternoon.

For three weeks I do not hear back from her. Half term may explain her silence but it worries me as until then we have had been exchanging emails regularly. I have afterthoughts about my corrections. I edited her text in pink, thinking it may not look as harsh as the bright red French teachers use to correct their students' works. The more I think about it, the more I feel I have upset her. Before the class resumes, I write her not to be discouraged by the corrections and the edits I made. Sometimes, I say to her, the changes are corrections of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Sometimes they are changes I proposed on the basis of what I read and understood in what she wrote. Sometimes I was not sure what she meant to say. I tell her that how I read, understood

and edited her writing on the picture of the samovar is a good example. She wrote a description of the object and the way it works. It is very technical. It is very difficult to explain how a thing works. I certainly do not have the vocabulary in English, not even in French, my first language. I went to look at the English Wikipedia entry on the samovar to see what its different parts are called in English and to get the words that describe how it works. The English teacher was in the same situation when she wrote one of the students' recipes in English on the white board. She was struggling to find the right verbs for the actions required in the recipe. I tell her how difficult it is to speak out in a language that is not your mother tongue; that after 20 years living here, I still experience the awkwardness that arises when what people first hear is my accent; an accent I am so aware of that this very awareness affects my pronunciation to the point of making what I say impossible to understand. I tell her how uncomfortable I am with the grammatical mistakes I still make when I speak, especially when I am emotional. The persons who listen to me may not notice, but it still makes me fragile to think about what they might think about me, that I do not speak their language well enough and that, for that reason, I don't belong with them. I tell her that in other cultures, it may be considered rude and patronizing to correct a person's language but in France, it is not. It all depends on the tone in which it is done - caring, patronizing or dismissive. I tell her I hope she hears I care in my tone of voice.

Never do something that may stop them speaking and writing; use the word 'error' rather than 'mistake' when you talk about the corrections and never correct in writing what is written to you; talk them through your proposed corrections, the head of the language department says to me when I tell her about my worries.



Each Tuesday afternoon during term time, I leave my home, walk down our street towards the large avenue that cuts through the neighbourhood, wait at the traffic light to cross it, stride past my hairdresser's salon, waving to her, and walk steadily through the network of streets to join the last hour of the weekly language class my friend teaches at the local community centre. She invited me to work with her to engage the students in speaking English in a context different from a formally taught language class. The best way to bring people to speak, she tells me, is to get them to speak about themselves. In the first session, I show them one of the first photographs produced with last year's students. Only one of them returned to the class. Not many return, my teacher friend says to me.

Can you tell us what object is yours and why you chose it? I ask her. This lantern was a gift from my husband when we got engaged. It is a famous thing we buy before Ramadan. We have a lot of designs in different colours and materials, some in plastic and some in glass and every home has a big one. They turn them on, at night, after Maghrib prayer and every child in Egypt gets one before the beginning of Ramadan. Every Ramadan night, they get out in the streets with the lantern and they walk in the city and they sing for Ramadan. The lights stay on all night. This lantern reminds me of being with my family especially when I was young. We have special dishes in Ramadan like Konafa and Qatayf. On Ramadan every year, I take this lantern out and put it on the table, near the window. I remembered she had told me she would buy two new

lanterns for her children during her summer visit. Did you buy lanterns for your children? I asked her . Yes, I did.

Session after session, we weave conversations around what it means to feel at home. What does it mean to feel at home? I ask them. Do you know what 'home' means? Do you know what that word means? It is like 'house'. Yes but it is more than a house. 'Care home'? Yes the word is used to talk about places where children or elderly people are taken care of when their family cannot. It is more than the thing, more than the object, my friend tells them, 'home' is about feelings and emotions. When do you feel at home? Where do you feel at home? How do you feel at home? Do you have an equivalent word in your language?

I tell them that I have been asking many people to give me the translation in their first language of the expression ‘to feel at home’. A friend told me that the Dutch language marks the difference between the experience of feeling at home away from the place you live in and the experience of feeling at home in the place you live in: ‘zich thuis voelen in’, meaning that you feel at home away from your home and ‘zich geriefelijk voelen’, meaning that you don’t miss anything in your home, that you’ve got anything you want or need. To say that you feel at home implies that you are on a journey away from home, that you are displaced and that you feel in the place you are as if you were at home.

I read Barbara Cassin's words:

It looks like I'm going home, but it's not home. Maybe it's because I have no home. Or maybe it's because it's when I am not home that I feel most at home, in a place that feels like home. When are we ever at home?

What, who makes a place feels like home?

I was told that in Arabic there is no expression equivalent to the expression ‘to feel at home’, I say to her. A friend from Lebanon proposed literal translations, in spoken Lebanese Arabic, accorded to the gender of the subject in the sentence: Masculin: Feminin: ببیتی حالی حاسه / Masculin: Hasses halé bi beyté / Feminin: Hassé halé bi beyté) and in formal Arabic, Feminin: منزلي في أنني أشعر / Masculin: أشعر (Phonetically: Ash’our inani fi manzili). She said this literal translation would never be used. She said that as a trilingual Lebanese, whenever she wanted to express this feeling,

she would either use the French or English expression in the middle of an Arabic sentence. She said that 'please make yourself at home' does not have an equivalent in Arabic. She said she realised that the word 'home' in Arabic is only used as a possession, an object or a space and not a feeling.

I think the feeling of home is the feeling you have when you come back to your house after travelling, she tells me during one of our one-to-one conversations. I talked to my father this morning. He told me it was raining in Damas. I miss the smell of the rain on dry earth. When it rained, I could not stay inside, I had to go out, I wanted the rain to wash my face. We all miss the smell of the rain on Syrian earth and we talk about it. Do you like the smell of the rain here? It is not the same thing; the smell of the rain is much more beautiful in Syria. For many years, I tell her, I did not feel here was home until one day, returning after being away for a while, I felt a relief, release and relaxation I had never experienced until that very moment. I don't think I feel this here, she tells me. It takes time, I reply. How can she feel at home here if she cannot return there and come back here? For the time being, she cannot go back where she comes from.



I love to watch plants growing, she tells me. She has been growing a jasmine here. She repotted it to give it some room. At her home in Syria, she grew lots of plants in pots. When her husband left on his journey to Europe, her mother in law wanted her to get rid of them. She fought with her to keep them in her house.

She tells me she asked her half-sister to photograph the mulberry tree her father planted in front of his house when he married her mother. She and her sister used to gorge on the mulberries it produces each year. She tells me its branches were being cut when she left Syria and wonders whether the branches have grown back to their original height. You could write a story around this mulberry tree, I suggest to her. Writing about this tree would be writing a poem, she replies. She does not know whether she can do it. I listen to the sound of her voice. I can feel how homesick she feels. During our first conversation, at some point, as she was telling me about her journey, she started coughing, a dry allergic cough I thought then. Afterwards, I wondered whether it was the emotion she felt that had tighten her throat. I read that nostalgia was made up with two greek words, ‘nostos’ that means ‘return’, and ‘algos’ that means ‘pain’, ‘suffering’, by a Swiss German doctor to describe ‘Heimweh’, the homesickness from which Louis XIV’s Swiss mercenaries suffered. Nostalgia is the pain of return, writes Barbara Cassin, both the suffering that as a hold on you when you are far away and the pains you must endure in order to return. Rootedness and uprootedness: that is nostalgia, she concludes.

We talk about family trees: real trees and the kind of diagram that represents relationships between several generations of a family. The fathers of your father and mother are ... your ‘grand-fathers’; their mothers ... your ‘grand-mothers’, my teacher friend prompts them. The parents of your grand-parents are your ‘great-grand-parents’. Your brothers and sisters are ... your ‘siblings’. The sisters of your father and mother are ... your ‘aunts’. The brothers of your father and mother are ... your ‘uncles’. Their children are your ... ‘nephews’ and ... ‘nieces’. The husband of your sister is your ... ‘brother in law’. The wife of your brother is your ‘sister-in-law’. I tell them of the family tree that hangs in my grand-mother’s living room: she and my grand-father are at the foot of the family tree, shooting from the trunk are four large branches, one for each of their children; each of the branches extend into smaller branches – the children of the children – and these twigs grow into sprigs – the children’s children’s children.

We talk about tree roots, the roots that anchor the body of trees to the ground, absorb and store water and nutrients that feed them. We talk about family roots, about families

anchored in the land where ancestors lived and are buried, *la patrie*. I hear the latin word *pater* in the word ‘patrie’. It is even clearer in the English ‘fatherland’ and the German ‘Vaterland’. Sometimes, but less often, the word motherland, ‘Mutterland’ is used. The word ‘matrie’ does not exists in French. I think of the strange, antiquated, portmanteau word, *la ‘mère-patrie’*, the expression used to designate the colonizing power, *la République Française*, in speeches aimed at the inhabitants of the lands colonized on its behalf. I think of the other English word that can be used to translate ‘patrie’: ‘homeland’. No resonance with filiation and genealogy to be heard here.

Possible translations come to my mind:

Le pays de ma demeure

Le pays où je demeure

Seule demeure la langue maternelle ... I think of the pun at work in the title given by the translator in French of the transcript of Hannah Arendt’s televised interview with Günter Gaus in October 1964:

Only the mother tongue remains ... And
The mother tongue as sole and only home,

The French name ‘demeure’ is the substantive of the verb ‘demeurer’, to ‘stay’, to ‘remain’. *La demeure* designates *le lieu où l’on séjourne*, the place where one stays, *le lieu où l’on habite*, the place one inhabits and also *une maison d’une certaine importance*, a house of respectable dimensions. I think about another expression in French that plays with the word *demeure*, *la ‘dernière demeure’ de quelqu’un*, someone’s burial place, someone’s resting place. Home is where the heart is, my teacher friend tells them. Is home the place where one can rest one’s heart?

I watch and listen to Hannah Arendt conversing with the journalist. When asked what has remained and what was irremediably lost of pre-Hitler Germany, she responds:

Geblieben ist die Sprache.

Il en est resté la langue.

What has remained is the language, her mother tongue, her mother's tongue. Among the many words Derrida has written around that interview, I find the passage where he writes what he heard in her response:

she no longer felt German, except in language, as though the language were a remains of belonging

I think about the mother tongue becoming remains of a belonging. Derrida writes about the so-called mother tongue as a home that never leaves us, a sort of second skin, a mobile home and paradoxically, an immobile home since it moves about with us. I read his words:

Language resists mobilities, it moves about with me.

Mobile phones often ring during the class. I listen to her voice speaking in her language as she answers a call with the fluidity and the easiness of a fish swimming in water and leaves the room to continue her conversation with her caller. What does she feel when she speaks in her mother tongue here? Would she agree that her mother tongue is like a home that never leaves her? She comes back, smiling and says: it is my mother. Do you speak to her often I ask her? Not as often as my father, but almost everyday.

Each of them has a mobile phone. I think about what Derrida wrote on these machines: they break in, dis-locate, introduce ubiquitous disruption and rootlessness of place. Yes, it is true. But they also enable us to maintain the immediacy of spoken conversation with the people we care for, here and there.

I listen to Hannah Arendt explaining what drives her to write:

Ich will verstehen. Und wenn andere Menschen verstehen im selben Sinne, wie ich verstanden habe, dann gibt es mir eine Befriedigung wie ein Heimat gefühl.

Heimat. Heimweh. Heim.

I read that heim is a German and Norwegian suffix in place names, that Heimat is a German concept that has been vulnerable to the easy assimilation to the ‘blood and soil’ literature of the National Socialist party since it is relatively easy to add to the positive feelings for the *Heimat* a rejection of anything foreign, a rejection that is not necessarily there in the first place. It has been alleged that the word has no English equivalent. It is sometimes translated as home or homeland.

I want to understand, she says. And when others understand in the same way I have understood, then it gives me a satisfaction such as that of feeling at home.

There is no foreigner back home, she says to us. What do you mean? We all know each other, what family people belong to, she replies.

I read what Kalle says to Ziffel in Bertold Brecht’s *Conversations in Exile*:

on dit toujours qu’il faut être enraciné quelque part. Je suis convaincu que les seuls êtres qui ont des racines, les arbres, préféreraient ne pas en avoir. Ils pourraient prendre l’avion eux aussi.

They always say that you have to take roots somewhere. I am convinced that the only beings to have roots, that is, trees, would rather not have any, they too would then be able to take a plane.

I picture the flight and hear the cries of the green red-billed birds - ring-necked parakeets – that recently settled in the hollows of the tall plane trees in the local park. Their tangled branches look like airborne roots reaching to the sky. We are not rooted in the ground. We are all uprooted, de-routed, re-routed.

In *le Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles*, I read in the entry for Heimat that while Vaterland refers explicitly to a genealogy, the belonging implied by Heimat is more complex:

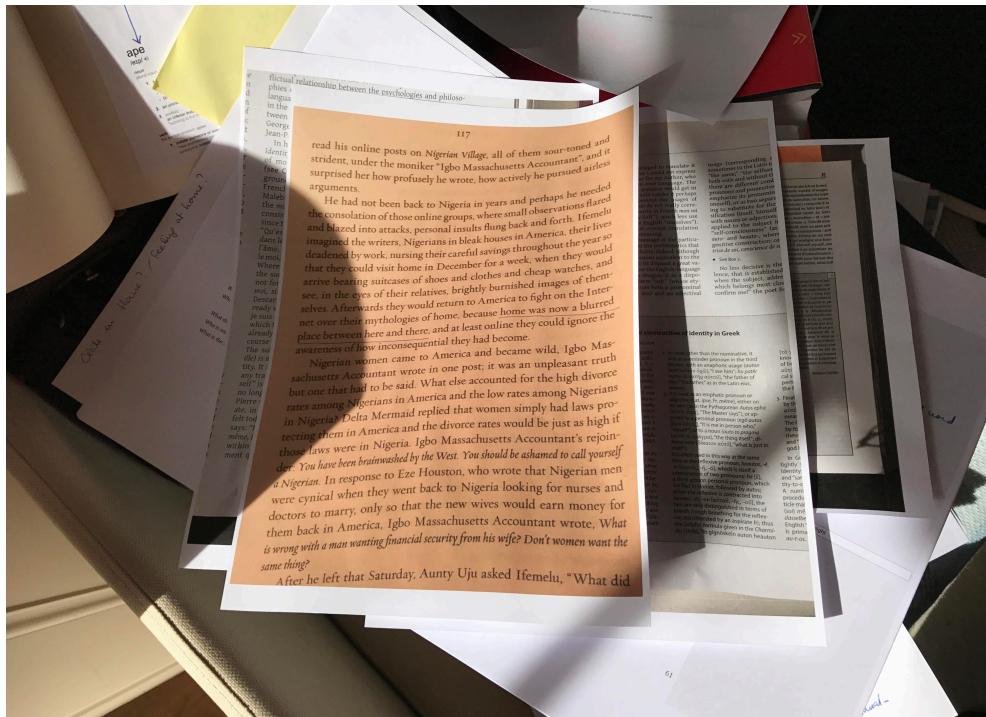
La Heimat ... c'est le pays où l'on s'est trouvé – c'est à dire le pays où l'on a trouvé son séjour, son chez-soi, [...] C'est le lieu qui est nôtre (voire qui l'est devenu) parce qu'il nous est destiné ou approprié.

I look for the corresponding translation in *the Dictionary of Untranslatables*:

Heimat ... is in effect the land where one stays and is settled It is the place that is ours (or the one that has become it) since it is either destined or appropriated by us.

Le pays où l'on s'est trouvé, le pays où l'on a trouvé son chez-soi, the country where one has found oneself, home has disappeared in the translation. Chez soi is the place where one finds oneself. Is home the word naming the place where one has found oneself? And if one has found oneself, how, where did one lose oneself.

How do you get lost? And how do you find yourself?



My teacher friend sends me a photograph of a page from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. I read these words two summers ago, but at the time, they did not resonate as strongly as they do now:

Home was now a blurred place between here and there

Home is a blurred place between here and there.

We talk a lot about there, a lot more than about here. We talk about our expectations, about the gap between what we imagined and what we have experienced living here. Here all the houses are the same, I get lost all the time. Confused is the word that comes out. She utters a few words Africa, airport, here and mimes the gesture of protecting her eyes, her face behind her veil, simulating an overwhelmed expression; she then takes her face in her two hands in a dramatic gesture. Confused? Asked the teacher. She nods and smiles, yes, confused ... confused ... Her body speaks. I remember the sighs, the gazes, the gestures of last year's students when we talked about home looking at Chardin's paintings. They do not have enough words to express what they feel and what they

think, but their bodies speak and If I pay enough attention, I listen to what their sounds say and I feel I understand what they feel.

We are speaking bodies.

Notre parole prend corps,

Our speaking is embodied.

They are lost between here and there. Can they find themselves in this in-between?

I read Daniel Sibony's words:

L'entre-deux concerne l'articulation à "l'autre": autre temps – question de mémoire; autre lieu – question de place; autres personnes – question de lien.

L'entre-deux is the in-between, in-between times - a question of memory; in-between locations – question of place; in-between people – question of ties. In-between is where they live. In-between is where each of us lives.

She tells us she is expecting a baby. Her baby will be born in September. We've seen her tummy bulging bigger week after week. I read that the relation to language starts in the womb long before a child is able to speak. It starts from the moment the foetus is able to feel the internal vibrations of the mother's voice and the muffled external sounds of the persons she talks to, as early as the 16th week. Inside the womb, the foetus recognises the music of the mother's voice, its tone, its register, its melody. I think about her baby listening to the sounds of her mother learning to speak in English, sensing her struggling with the words and rhythm of that language that is new to her, and listening to the sounds of her voice in Syrian Arabic, the song of her father's and brother's voices speaking together at home. I wonder how this individual, preverbal, vocal, gestural experience of language each of us had in our mother's womb and in infancy – what Julia Kristeva calls the semiotic – will actualize the semantic and syntactic laws, the categories, objects and truths established by the order of discourse she calls the symbolic this baby will be born into.

Julia Kristeva writes:

a foreign language remains an artificial language, an algebra, a solfege.

They are learning English by learning lists of words, by learning the language's syntax and the grammar through exercises set up according to rational methods established by linguists and teachers. Each week, my teacher friend starts her class by testing their spelling of words they learnt by rote. They ask for it, she says, otherwise they feel they are not learning. They don't believe they can learn the language by simply speaking together.

I think about the way a small child learns to speak, how she learns through play and repetition, through her interactions with other people. Is there a way to learn a foreign language that would approach the way children access their mother's tongue?

She tells me that her son is given one-to-one English language support classes after regular school hours. His homework is to read a book every evening. She reads out the book with him. I ask her if the teacher has encouraged her to use Arabic when reading with him? Yes, she says to me, we talk about the story in Arabic and in English. The teacher says that getting my son to tell the story in Arabic is good for his English. It is good for yours as well, I tell her.

À tous les enfants qu'on a séparés de la langue de père et mère

To all children separated from the tongue of father and mother

I read these words with which Leila Sebbar dedicates her essay *L'arabe comme un chant secret* - the Arabic language as a secret song. She writes about her experience of estrangement from the Arabic language and from the land of her father's family, Algeria. Her father had decided not to transmit his mother tongue, his mother's tongue, to his children. Instead they learn to speak their mother's tongue, the language of the French République both parents taught at l'école de garçons indigènes, of which her father was the headmaster. I think about the children who do not learn the language spoken by their parents, forgetting or rather repressing its melodies, its sounds, either because they choose to ignore it or because they are told to speak the other language, the language spoken at school.

In the fall, my teacher friend and I travel north to attend a conference about language in education and migration. We listen to and talk with researchers working in educational contexts where human beings and their language(s) are under pain and pressure. Alison Phipps talks about how elements of language shape public imaginaries and calls for reshaping imaginaries through what she calls migratory aesthetics. She asks: how to educate a population for care and for change and for civil society to lead where the government has failed? Talking about the current European refugee crisis, she quotes Hannah Arendt's words around Jewish refugees before, during and after the second world war in her ferocious and moving essay *We Refugees*:

Refugees driven from country represent the vanguard of their people ... The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.

Referring to Giorgio Agamben's eponymous commentary on Arendt's essay, Phipps says that, breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugees throw in crisis the original fiction of the nation. I listen to her calling for the development of an empathic experience in learning languages, using what she calls migratory rather than extractivist methodologies and the intimacy of the everyday speech in conversation.

I pay careful attention to the expressions used to describe languages in the presentations. English is described as an 'additional' or 'second language' compared to the 'first language' or the 'home language' both designating the main language spoken at home. I listen to Andrea Young talking about the monolingual habitus of the French education system and the way translanguaging practices positively change power relationships in the classroom and in the school environment, encouraging children to come to speaking, improving their literacy abilities.

I think about the expression 'langues d'origine' – languages of origin - used to designate the home languages of the children of migrants. In France, all school matters are handled by a Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale – the Ministry of National Education; the French language is the language of the French République, as inscribed in Article 2 of the Constitution of the 5th French République. The French language is a political language; it ties the political community of the French République; it binds the very diverse components that make up the French people into a linguistic community and as such has precedence over any other language d'origine. What are the consequences of

calling ‘langue d’origine’ the main language spoken at home by a child? Isn’t this naming assigning her an origin, enclosing her in that so-called origin, alienating her from other children who do not speak a langue d’origine at home? I discuss with Andrea Young the agency of such expression and the necessity to drop such a designation. She tells me of the belief among French teachers that languages must be practiced in segregated physical, temporal and personal spaces and that implicit or explicit monolingual teaching practices constitute policies, not announced or recommended, but effectively promulgated. These linguistic policies practically drive children and their families to prioritise the French language to the detriment of the language spoken within their family.

I learn that translanguaging is a notion that was born in the United Kingdom in the 1980s in the context of the bilingual teaching of English and Welsh, under the Welsh name Trawsieithu. Translanguaging enables learners in the majority language to use in the classroom the first language they speak at home to construct meaning, going to and fro between their first and the other language.

I think about the other expressions I encountered in the English language. Here, the expression ‘community languages’ is used to refer to languages spoken by members of minority groups or communities within a majority language context. The expression has nothing to do with a fixed, assigned origin, but rather with a balance of power between different groups of people for whom the language they speak contribute to identify them in difference. I also came across another Anglo-Saxon terminology, ‘heritage language’. One can decide to accept or not one’s heritage. Transmission is not an assignation.

I think about the word ‘origin’. The word origin may be used to point at the country of one’s birth, its culture but also a point in time, a beginning. There is no point of origin if there is no departure. The journey in-between two points is what creates the origin. I am worried my son will never feel the same as I do when we come home, she says to me. I think she will return home; but for her son it will not be a return but an encounter with his Syrian origins.

I read Daniel Sibony's elliptical words:

La traversée de l'entre-deux est celle de l'origine

L'entre-deux où l'origine exprime son absence tout en laissant des passages possibles à franchir, à déplacer

L'origine est multiple.

The crossing of the in-between is the crossing of the origin

The in-between, where the origin manifests its absence while revealing passages to cross and displace

The origin is plural.

The origin is not one but plural, multiplied by one's passages through many in-betweens.

Dans ces transits par l'origine, dans ces quêtes confuses, on trouve parfois juste ce qu'il faut pour se libérer de l'origine, pour prendre son départ et n'avoir plus à revenir compulsivement.

In these transits through the origin, in these confused quests, one may find just what one needs to free oneself from the origin, to take one's leave of it and not to have to compulsively return to it. Will her son make the passage in between here and there? How will he learn to practice this in-between?

Come home

Go home

Two imperatives: an invitation and an order, a supplication and a rejection, inwards, outwards. In English, one comes home. In French, on ne 'vient' pas chez soi mais on 'revient', on 're-vient' chez soi. The prefix 're-' indicates both again and back. To 'return' is to go 'back' again to something and/or someone. The back is elided in English as if to come home is always already to come back home. In both languages, it is the

going back that matters, not a turning back that suggests that one never reached one's destination. 'Going back' is folding back, one's folding upon oneself.

We try to find the words to describe the feeling of home. 'Safe' and 'comfortable' are the adjectives that are heard. Food and cooking, meals shared with family and friends, neighbours you can talk to and count on make most of our conversation. We start a cookbook with recipes of special dishes and for a while each week, we share a special dish prepared by one of us. I ask them to take pictures of the different steps of the making of the dish that we translate into words in the classroom.



We talk about what make us feel at home, how we come to call a place home. We talk about places we feel at home in and what make these places special to us. And while we talk about this, I think about the place where the class takes place every week, this community centre we go to, we dwell in, we leave and we return to, this place where we learn to speak out, listen to, understand and share a new language, the language of that place, not the languages we grew up in. I read Tim Ingold's words:

Places ... are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring.

I think about the different journeys that took us to meet each Tuesday in classroom A of this neighbourhood community centre, of the conversations slowly weaving relationships between us, wondering what we will keep with us of these shared moments when we go on with our separate lives.

What does 'take place' in this classroom of the community centre?

I think about the French expression 'faire place', not in the sense of giving way to another but literally, making, creating a place for the other at one's side. We take a seat at the tables arranged in a U to facilitate our interactions. What takes place in the classroom is listening and speaking to one another, making a place for each one of us, for the chatty as for the silent ones, for the engaging as for the remote ones.

We want to hear your voice, my teacher's friend says to her. She does not speak. I listen to her silence. It resonates in me, awakening forgotten emotions. Between two languages, your element is silence, Julia Kristeva wrote.

I look for the words she wrote on the silence of polyglots:

Silence has not only been forced upon you, it is within you: a refusal to speak, a fitful sleep riven to an anguish that wants to remain mute, the private property of your proud, mortified discretion, that silence is harsh light [...] Saying nothing, nothing needs to be said, nothing can be said.

It is hard to break their silence, a silence not only imposed by their lack of words but perhaps also by their refusal to speak, to say what they would like to say with this language that feels like a artificial language, an ill-fitting prosthesis. You can't speak your mother tongue as nobody will understand. You can't speak the new language, not yet,

not well enough, never well enough to be understood. So you prefer not to speak. I listen to her active silence rustling with muted sounds I cannot hear but I am straining to understand.

To listen. Écouter

To hear. Entendre.

To listen is not to hear. They are two different engagements of the auditory perception. I think about the other meaning of the verb entendre in French: entendre is comprendre, to understand in French.

I read Jean-Luc Nancy's words:

If “to hear” is to understand the sense (either in the so-called figurative sense, or in the so-called proper sense: to hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text), to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible.

It is difficult to listen, especially when so little is said. Je dois tendre l'oreille. I must prick my ear. To listen, I have to pay attention, intensely. If I listen carefully, I may understand what it is she says, does not say, does not want to say or find unsayable. I return to my reading of Jean-Luc Nancy:

To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin [...] a resonant meaning, a meaning whose *sense* is supposed to be found in resonance and only in resonance.

In our conversations, I learn to listen. I learn not to speak, to remain silent to create place for listening, I listen to their silences. I listen to the sounds of their voices. Their silences and the sounds their voices carry when they speak hesitantly with the words they can find resonate, resound in me. Do they listen as well? What do they hear in what is spoken or not between us? I hear so many things in our conversations. Do I understand in the same way they understand?

I think of Hannah Arendt's words:

And when others understand in the same way I have understood, then it gives me a satisfaction such as that of feeling at home.

She feels at home when others understand in the same way she has understood. She feels at home when she feels she has been understood. Do they feel they have been understood? Does it make them feel at home? Each one of us comes in this classroom as a stranger to the other. But week after week, what takes place in this classroom is the giving of a place to each one of us to speak out, be listened to, understood and responded to, for our conversations to unfold, for individual memories to emerge from this classroom we have in common, our 'lieu commun'. What we speak about together may be 'commonplace' but our conversation creates a place we make in common, a common place.

I think about us, us. Marielle Macé speaks on the radio. She asks:

Qu'est-ce qu'on dit quand on dit 'nous'?

Qu'est-ce que 'nous' noue?

Qu'est-ce qui 'nous' noue?

What does one say when one says 'we' or 'us'?

What does 'we' knot?

What does knot 'us' together?

What binds 'us'?

The great linguist Benveniste noted that no language derives the word 'we' from the word I, she says; 'we' is not a position of speech that consists in pluralising the word I. He describes 'we' as what he calls a 'dilated I', she continues, that is, the articulation between the one that says 'I' and something else than her that remains undetermined; 'we' encompasses all the 'I' who want to be the 'I' of this 'we', all those who will be able to speak as a subject that can enunciate something in the name of a 'we'; what is at stake in the 'we' is to be tied to a cause, to a fight, to be tied by something for which one

cares, to be bound to one another, not because necessarily identical, not necessarily belonging to the same group.

What do I say when I say ‘we’? When I talk about ‘us’, I don’t talk in their name, on their behalf. But I talk about what was said between us, what we did together. Does this ‘we’ exist only for me? I noticed she uses the pronoun ‘we’ when talking about things people have or do in the place she left to come here. Does she sometimes think about us as a ‘we’? Does she say ‘we’ when she talks about what happens in the classroom? Does ‘we’ come undone as soon as we go separate ways? Or does this ‘we’ remain for each of us belonging to this common place each one of us care for in different ways and for different reasons? What we have in common in this classroom, what binds us is the English language, a language that enables us to listen to one another, speak together and begin to understand each other.

I return to the story of the bound man. *Der Gefesselte* was written in the German language by Ilse Aichinger. Eric Mosbacher’s English translation has resonated with me in a stronger way than the French translation I came across. The story starts with a man waking up, realising that he is bound, all tied up with a single rope. He does not know how he came to be tied up. He tries to free himself of the rope but cannot make it any looser by himself. He learns to move, stand up and walk within his bounds. An animal tamer enrolls him in his circus. The bound man becomes the circus show staple. He practices continually in order to retain his restrained freedom. As long as he remains within the limits imposed by the rope, he is free of it. Many people check that he is really bound. He never answers when they ask him how he came to be tied in such way. The circus owner is the only one who repeatedly asks him about his reasons not to be untied, until he understands that the bound man’s fame actually rests on the fact that he is always bound and that he is, in fact, both protected by his helplessness and by his will not to ask to be freed. He discourages and punishes the attempts continually made to release him during his sleep. When he forgets his rope in his dreams and wakes up and angrily tries to get up, the bound man is a much bigger danger for himself. The circus owner’s wife who brings him food and often checks on him as he sleeps, has come to think that rather than forgetting that he is tied up, he has become used to not forgetting a moment that he is. She worries that, without his rope, he will leave. Summer turns into autumn and the bound man knows he will have to untie to change into warmer cloths

and that, once untied, it will be impossible to tie him up again in the same way. One day, a wolf escapes the circus and attacks cattle. The bound man encounters the wolf and kills it. People do not believe the bound man killed the wolf. They force him to repeat his battle with the wolf. As he enters the cage, the circus owner's wife cuts the rope on his wrists, freeing him from his ties. He grabs the pistol that hangs ready at the side of the cage and shoots the wolf between the eyes. Escaping from all, he hides in the bushes, waiting for dawn by the river, trying to forget what happened to him.

I don't have the same interpretation of this story, my friend says to me. For me it is sinister, this story of that man bound while the others, unbound, are watching the spectacle of him struggling to move and to live within the rope he cannot get freed without help. Whereas you told me that you see in this story the story of emancipation, the story of someone who learns to live free within the constraints imposed by life and society. As I talk to her, I realise that the ending I remembered has nothing to do with the actual ending of the story. I remembered that once freed from the rope, the man died, as if loosening the rope was losing his life or the purpose of his life. I think about the rope, about the ties that bound the bound man. The story says that the circus owner's wife does not know whether she is more concerned with the man or with what ties him. What binds the bound man, the circus owner, his wife, the spectators if not the rope? When the rope is cut, when the ties are undone, the group unravels.

By listening and talking to one another, I think, we have been knotting ties between us in the reciprocity of our conversations. These ties are loose. Some have already slackened to the point of nonexistence. But some of these ties may resist the end of the academic year. I wonder how many of them will register for the class after the summer. She says she will come back in January when the baby is old enough to attend the community centre crèche and if the crèche is open on the day and for the duration of the class. The language department head tells me that they don't have enough funding for the crèche to be run for all classes.

This summer I will go back to Damas via Lebanon, she tells me. I want to give birth to my baby at home with my family around. When I gave birth to my son, my aunts, my sister and my mother helped me. I tell her that all my children were born here and that we started feeling at home in this city with the birth of our first child. The help I could not get from my family, I say to her, I found it in the friendship I developed with other

mothers. Friends become your family when your family is far away. You choose them and they choose you. It creates ties that are different but as deep as blood ties and sometimes stronger. I ask her whether the friend whom she often comes with in class will be around to help her. She thinks so, she tells me.



Next week, bring an objet that reminds you of home, my teacher friend says. I will bring a painting my husband and I bought on our honeymoon... Do you know what a honeymoon is? Yes ... It is after you get married... We found this painting in a shop in the middle of nowhere. I have hanged it in our bedroom in each place we lived in. I did not bring anything with me when I left home, she says. I don't know what to bring. I don't have anything that means home to me. The next session, she brings a painting, a painting she made herself. She tells us that she can make art only when she feels well, only when she feels happy.

She brings a small jasmine she replanted in a big plastic pot to enable it to grow bigger. She tells me she wishes it was in bloom rather than showing tiny closed flowers. Jasmine grows in every street in my city, she says. In the summer, its fresh fragrance makes the heart feel lighter and happier.

She texts two photographs. She figures in both images. In the first one, her face, severed from her body just below her lower lip, hovers above the bottom right edge of the photograph dominated by the giant black figure of a two-headed eagle coat of arms, detaching itself on the blood red backdrop of her country flag. Her eyes are hidden behind the dark opaque lenses of her gold-rimmed sunglasses. She wears bright red lipstick. In the second picture, a black and white portrait photograph, she looks into the camera, her carefully made up face tilted to the left. She wears a light-coloured hat decorated with the same black double-headed eagle blazon.

She brings a strange bird, a white parrot, lying on its side on a bed of dark wood. The bird has gleaming dark beady eyes and a blood red beak. Its body is made of skillfully assembled tiny pearly shells. It is a gift she brought for her brother in law when she arrived here, her friend translates. She tells us this kind of objects and furniture made with shells is a centuries-old craft of her country. When she and her husband moved into their own house – they lived for 10 years in her father in law's house - she was given many pieces of furniture and decorative objects made with shells. I look at the bird. Is it sleeping or dead? She also brought a nest inhabited by two tiny birds, made with another rounder type of shells and a small wooden chest, filled with orange seeds, shells and a small bottle of strong perfume that she bought in the same shop just before she left.

She puts her hand on my hand. She looks into my eyes when she asks for my mobile phone number. I receive a text message from someone who is talking on her behalf: can you please explain to me what is happening exactly so I can explain it to her? Thank you

very much. I text back: Hello I am an artist. We've been working on what the experience of feeling at home is. Tomorrow, the students are invited to bring an object that represents home for them. The objects will become part of still life photographs produced in class. It would be great if she could bring an object that is meaningful for her. Thank you for your help. She brings a dark wooden jar, decorated with ivory beads, looking like seeds or white beans. On one side the flower they form is almost perfect, on the other side the flower has lost most of its petals. The following Tuesday, she gives me a small square of lined paper on which her translator – her auntie she says – wrote that the object is a *Diil* and is important to her as it is used back home to store milk and water. It is carved directly in a tree trunk and decorated with designs made with stones and shells. She tells us that it is always standing on her kitchen table. She never says much. When she speaks, I have to pay special attention to catch her soft childlike voice. She brings a scarf, one of her many scarves. I have noticed that when she wears a dark plain robe, she wears a colourful printed scarf and when she wears a printed dress she matches it with a dark plain scarf. She says this scarf is special because it was hand-woven in the country she comes from. A friend brought it for her when she came to visit last year. It is made of very soft pale blue wool. The short edges of the scarf are decorated with four black stripes, the largest stripe embroidered with geometrical patterns in green and red. I have a friend who calls the scarf a mobile architecture, I tell her. She says that for Iranian women, the scarf is a mobile private place in the public space. Does your scarf feel like a mobile home? I ask her. Do you feel safer and comfortable wearing it? She does not answer. I tell them what my friend told me, that in the 1930s, Iranian women were forced to stop wearing their scarf and in 1979 the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution forced them to wear it again. They did not have a choice. I feel uneasy as I pronounce the words. What do I want to say? Does she hear the ambivalence of my thoughts? Many students wear scarfs and veils, in different fashions. She tells us that one day, at a bus stop, she saw a woman taking away her dark hijab and dress and stuff them in her hand bag. Why do you wear a veil? she asks her. I decided to wear a veil at the end of university, she says. My father asked me if someone told me to wear one, I said no, I want to wear it because I want to be a good Muslim. My husband does not like it; it is my choice.

My friend wrote to me that in Iranian society, the overall sense of self is comprised of an outer shell (the public self) and the inner core (the private self). People and their feelings and behaviours are disjoined and operate in either the *Zaheri* (external) or

Bateni (internal) spheres. She said that the dual nature of self necessitates a boundary, a barrier which like a veil or screen, can protect the core from contamination from the outside. This segregation of the inner and outer space has been cautiously practised in various forms throughout history, she wrote, as seen in architecture, fashion, behaviour, speech, eye contact/body language, and relationships; thus, the 'feeling at home' is practiced as mobile architecture in daily activity of women. 'To feel at home' is a practice of place, in-between the inside and the outside.

I listen tensely as she speaks. Her accent is so strong, stony, raucous, opaque that I have troubles hearing the words within it. The struggle to listen to what she says is as strong as her struggle to sound the words she is so keen to speak out. I feel her struggle in my own body; I feel my tongue taking the shape of the sounds of the mother tongue, resisting the sounds of the new language. She is among the most talkative in the group. She loves the tortoise in the picture I produced with last year students. Tortoise brings luck, she says to us. Will you bring an object for the still life we will make together? I ask her. No, I don't have anything. I came here with my boss.

My friend forwards me an email with two pictures attached. She does not know who sent it. I look at the pictures: an enigmatic head of a pharaoh printed on papyrus paper and a small shiny copper pot with a wooden handle. I think it might have been sent on her behalf. She is very silent and often smiles in such an enigmatic way. At the beginning of the year, when I invited them to bring images that evoke home for them, she brought a picture of a couple in party wear. I remember the picture was crumpled and tarnished, as something that has been handled and looked at many times. She did not say much about it. I think it may have been her wedding picture. She has not come back since the end of last term.

She joined the class at the beginning of the new year, escorted by her daughter who sat with her during part of the first session before leaving, saying she had to go to work. She told us that she has been living at her daughter's for a while now but still does not speak English well enough. She brings the scarf of the supporters of her country's football team. It is red and white with P O L S K A woven in large letters and two crowned white eagles, beaks open, spreading their wings at both ends of the scarf.

On the day I photograph the still lifes, I bring his son's tambourin. He does not show up. She did not bring anything but she shows us on her Ipad a black and white picture of her dog. Can you send it to me? I ask her, II can print it for you and you can include

it into another picture. Is your dog at home? He died two years ago, she replies. A pause. I miss him very much, she says.

I unfold the grey cardboard background, placing one fold over the desk, leaning the other against the wall. My hands group the objects. There are too many to be gathered in the space of the camera's field of vision. My hands split the objects into two groups, working diligently, driven by something akin to affinity, something that is not directed by conscious thinking. My hands are working within the parameters set by the position of the camera in the room. I don't know what they do but I can see it is working. While my hands are busy arranging the objects, I listen to my friend teaching her students to recognise and name in English different genres of music and musical instruments. The movements traced by my hands touching, grasping and moving the objects against the grey background compose a choreography, a sign language activated and actualized in this place, at that very moment.

She has been watching what I have been doing for a while. It is not good, she says. She takes the red and white football scarf and arranges it in elegant folds that frame her photograph and the strange bird made with shells. Now, it is good, she says, smiling broadly. My hands fix the folds while her hands hold the scarf: one white pin, one blue pin, one white pin to fix the left fold against the background, two white pins to hold the middle and one pin to hold the fold on the right. We step back. Have a look into the camera viewer, I suggest. Are you happy with the picture? Yes. Press here to take a picture. I take a series of photographs, carefully focusing the camera lens on different areas of composition. I want the lens to register the woven texture of the scarf, the thick red trimming of its edge, the light reflection on her photograph, the crease on the bottom edge, to the right of her hovering face. I take more photographs.

She interrupts me before I get to the bird. She wants to do another composition with the bird she brought, her friend's jasmine and the painting. It is one of the first time she talks directly to me, instead of asking her friend to speak on her behalf, to translate what she says. I watch her taking away the scarf and the photograph, then positioning the jasmine pot and the abstract painting behind the bird. Check through the camera viewer; are you happy with what you see? I tell her. Then you can take the picture. She looks through the viewer, shifts the painting towards the left, pivots the jasmine and takes a photograph. I take more photographs focusing on the objects one after the other. This time, I get the lens to register the texture of the bird's shells.

Their hands prop the honeymoon painting against the backdrop in the centre. They place the tall dark wooden jar and the smaller dark wooden chest close to one another. They turn the dark wooden jar on the side where the decorative white flower is missing only a couple of petals. You photographed the damaged side, she tells me. She delicately places the little shell birds in their nest on the other side to balance the composition. They look at it together. She takes some of the shells and a small perfume container out of the wooden chest and carefully lay the objects in a line that joins the chest to the nest. We take photographs.



My friend writes to me that ‘zu hause’ in German and ‘a casa’ in Italian both explicitly link the idea of ‘home’ to your house; while ‘daheim’ means ‘back home’, a ‘Heim’, on the contrary, is often used in the sense of an exile, an orphanage or home for the elderly, an exclusion from the open communal space, a closed space where people are taken charge of, rather than the home that is one’s castle; ‘homely’ does not translate as ‘heimlich’, it actually means secretly, but as ‘gemütlich’, ‘Gemüt’ meaning a state of mind; ‘unheimlich’, ‘uncanny’ is not the opposite of ‘homely’ but of ‘secretly’.

Un-heimlich. The ‘Un-‘ negates, opposes, un-does the secrecy of ‘heimlich’. There is secrecy in the home. Secrecy resonates with privacy and intimacy. I think about what Freud wrote about the unheimlich. He located the origin of the unheimlich in the emergence into the cosy, pleasant familiarity of everyday consciousness of something that was, until that moment, concealed, hidden, repressed.

My friend writes that she has dreamt all her life of the house she grew up in, as an emotional space that is much bigger than the actual house, with more depth and uncertain continuations, corridors that don’t end, cellars with dark depths. She dreams recurrently that within her current home or fictitious versions or an ideal own home, she would accidentally discover a hole in the wall or a secret door that would lead to an analogue house that she recognized instantly as also belonging to her, yet of whose existence she is surprised, excited as if it were a gift of something that always already belonged to her, while also worried about the past that lingers in it and that she cannot remember or know, yet she feels is lurking there almost as a quiet threat under the dust of years of forgetting.

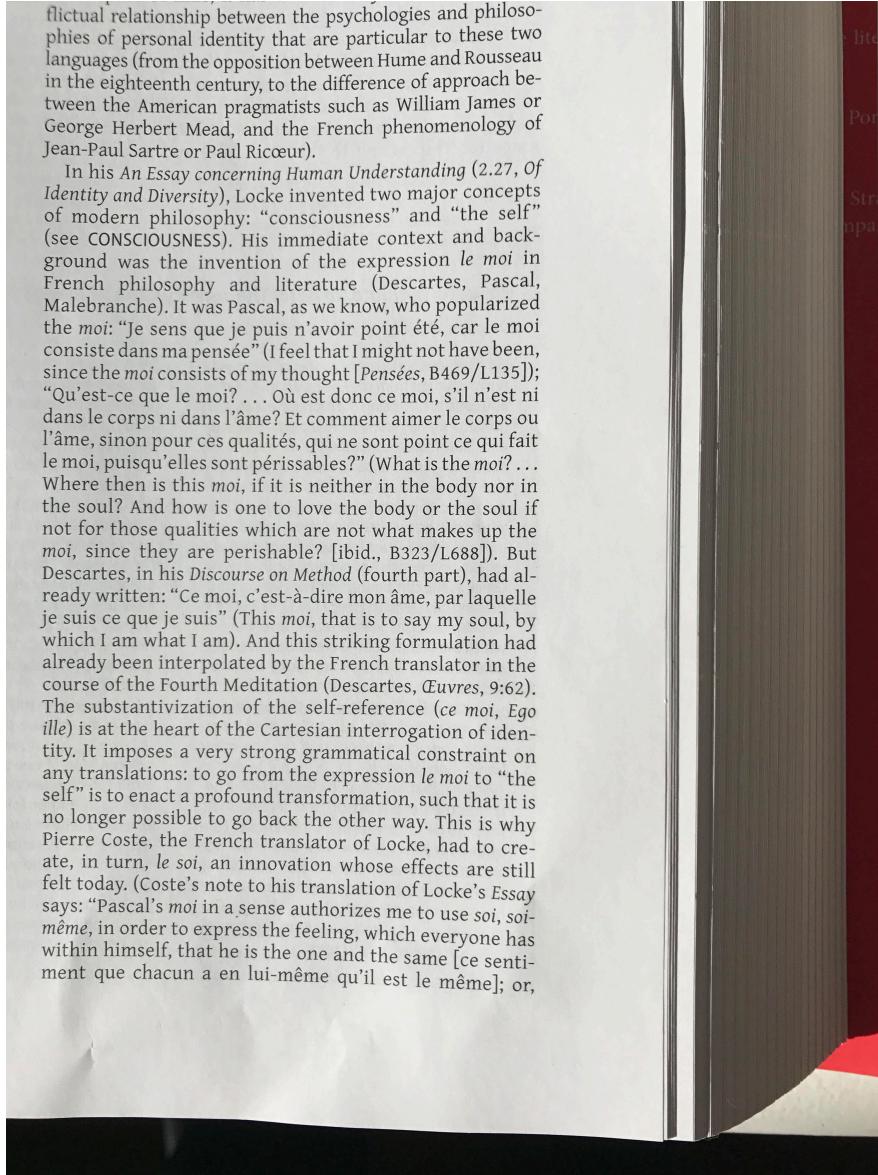
I tell them that in French, ‘to feel at home’ can be translated as ‘se sentir comme à la maison’ - to feel as if being in one’s house - but people generally use the expression ‘se sentir chez soi’. It is a strange expression which I keep on translating. A friend pointed out to me that ‘se sentir’ is reflexive in French while ‘to feel’ is not. The reflexivity at work in the expression, both through the pronominal voice of the verb and the pronoun ‘soi’, makes a word-for-word translation very odd in English. ‘Se sentir’ is literally to ‘feel oneself’. ‘Se sentir chez soi’ is

to feel oneself at oneself.

What does it mean ‘to feel oneself at oneself’?
What does it mean to feel one self at ‘one’ self?
What does it mean to feel one self at ‘one’s’ self?
Who is ‘one’?
What is the ‘self’?

fictual relationship between the psychologies and philosophies of personal identity that are particular to these two languages (from the opposition between Hume and Rousseau in the eighteenth century, to the difference of approach between the American pragmatists such as William James or George Herbert Mead, and the French phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre or Paul Ricoeur).

In his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (2.27, Of Identity and Diversity), Locke invented two major concepts of modern philosophy: “consciousness” and “the self” (see CONSCIOUSNESS). His immediate context and background was the invention of the expression *le moi* in French philosophy and literature (Descartes, Pascal, Malebranche). It was Pascal, as we know, who popularized the *moi*: “Je sens que je puis n'avoir point été, car le moi consiste dans ma pensée” (I feel that I might not have been, since the *moi* consists of my thought [*Pensées*, B469/L135]); “Qu'est-ce que le moi? . . . Où est donc ce moi, s'il n'est ni dans le corps ni dans l'âme? Et comment aimer le corps ou l'âme, sinon pour ces qualités, qui ne sont point ce qui fait le moi, puisqu'elles sont périssables?” (What is the *moi*? . . . Where then is this *moi*, if it is neither in the body nor in the soul? And how is one to love the body or the soul if not for those qualities which are not what makes up the *moi*, since they are perishable? [ibid., B323/L688]). But Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method* (fourth part), had already written: “Ce moi, c'est-à-dire mon âme, par laquelle je suis ce que je suis” (This *moi*, that is to say my soul, by which I am what I am). And this striking formulation had already been interpolated by the French translator in the course of the Fourth Meditation (Descartes, *Oeuvres*, 9:62). The substantivization of the self-reference (*ce moi*, *Ego ille*) is at the heart of the Cartesian interrogation of identity. It imposes a very strong grammatical constraint on any translations: to go from the expression *le moi* to “the self” is to enact a profound transformation, such that it is no longer possible to go back the other way. This is why Pierre Coste, the French translator of Locke, had to create, in turn, *le soi*, an innovation whose effects are still felt today. (Coste's note to his translation of Locke's *Essay* says: “Pascal's *moi* in a sense authorizes me to use *soi*, *soi-même*, in order to express the feeling, which everyone has within himself, that he is the one and the same [ce sentiment que chacun a en lui-même qu'il est le même]; or,



In the entry JE/MOI/SOI Etienne Balibar wrote in le Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles, I read about the innovation of the 17th century French translator of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Pierre Coste, who turned the reflexive pronoun 'soi' into the nominal group 'le soi', to translate Locke's expression 'the self'.

'Je', 'moi', 'soi'

'I', 'me', 'myself'

Locke did not turn 'me' into a substantive to translate 'le moi' of Descartes, Pascal and Malebranche. He did not write about 'me'. Instead, I read, he used the word 'self', a word of obscure etymological origin and the resulting transformation was so profound that translating 'the self' back into 'le moi' was impossible and the translator created 'le soi'.

I read Paul Ricoeur's words:

To say *self* is not to say *I*. The *I* is posited – or is deposited. The *self* is implied reflexively in the operations, the analysis of which precedes the return towards this self.

Me and Myself. Myself and me.

I dwell into the entry I/ME/MYSELF in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*:

This idea of being oneself for one's person obviously suggests an element of reflection, or internal distance. There is thus an uncertainty about the question of knowing whether the identical and identity are "myself" or rather "in me" as object, an image or a verbal simulacrum. But the "self" for Locke is nothing more than an "appearing to oneself" or "perceiving oneself" that is identical through time. It could not, therefore, split in two, whether the split is imagined to occur between a real self and an apparent one (as in Leibniz), or between an actor and a spectator (Hume, Smith) or between subject and object, or between I and Me (in the way that G.H Mead decomposes the Self into an "I" and a "Me", which constantly switch place [...]). This vanishing distance is ultimately the pure differential of the subject.

The more I read about le soi/the self, the more it turns into a vertiginous concept many theories across many disciplines are attempting to define. I don't want to get into this, not now, not yet. I have to hang onto something, a thing that is still missing, for this possible English translation to make sense. The English expression 'to be at one with the world' has come to my mind. I read that 'at one' means 'to be in agreement with', 'united with', 'together with', 'by mutual consent with'. This is perhaps the missing thing. 'At one' carries the feeling of connection and unity that I believe is at work in the French expression 'se sentir chez soi', 'to feel at one with oneself'. A friend told me that in Norwegian, there is an equivalent expression 'å føle seg i ett med seg selv' meaning 'to be in harmony', not only at home, but in harmony with your inner self. For the moment, I decide to translate it as 'to feel at one with oneself'.

I (don't) feel at one with myself

It makes me think about something I have heard people saying here:

I have not been feeling like myself lately

I have not been feeling like my self lately

Je ne me suis pas sentie comme moi dernièrement

Je ne me suis pas sentie comme mon soi dernièrement

I don't think I have ever heard someone saying I have been feeling like myself lately but I have heard people saying I am back to my old self again.

When does one feel like oneself?

When does one feel like one self?

When does one feel like one's self?

Quand se sent-on comme soi?

Quand se sent-on comme un soi?

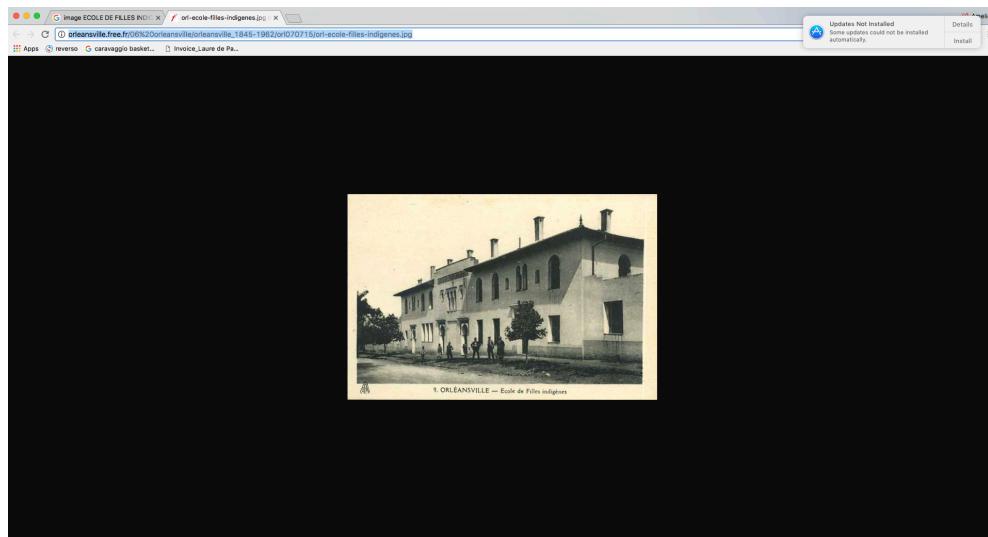
Quand se sent-on comme son soi?

Est-ce que ‘se sentir comme son soi’, c’est ‘se sentir comme chez soi’?

Is ‘feeling like my self’ is ‘feeling like at myself’?

Is that what ‘feeling at home’ means?

I often bump into my friend’s students as I walk my daughter to school or in the supermarket where I do my shopping. She tells me she is not coming to class anymore. Ma mère est malade. Je ne me sens pas bien, she tells me in French. Je vais peut-être aller en France pour voir le docteur parce qu’ici, ils ne peuvent pas me soigner. Ici, là bas. Here and there. Is she, like the young mother in one example Daniel Sibony writes about, depressed, locked in her absent family, her desire hostage of her distant chez soi. Je ne me sens pas chez moi ici, she told us during the session I had organised around Chardin’s still lifes last year. She comes from Algeria. She told us that her husband had to leave the country because his life was in danger. He was a policeman. She was a sport teacher. She told us that she misses teaching. There, she taught girls karate, dance, aerobics. Je ne peux pas enseigner ici. Ils ne me laisseront pas, avec le voile, she told us in French, pointing at her black hijab. I can’t teach here, they won’t let me, because of my veil. We had not said anything. She does not come back to class. Perhaps it is because we speak French, because you are French and I am half-French, my friend told me, I feel there is something going on that comes from the history of French-Algerian relationships. Did she feel the same ambiguity I felt when speaking in French with her, an ambiguity coming from the collision between the intimacy of the shared practice of a common language others do not understand and an inherited troubled relationship – she is too young to have lived under French rule – with the language of the French, the language of the colonisers taught à l’ ECOLE DE FILLES INDIGÈNES, written in capital letters on the façade of the school building.



Je me sens chez moi.

Je me sens chez toi.

Tu te sens chez toi.

Il/elle se sent chez lui/elle

Nous nous sentons chez nous

Vous vous sentez chez vous

Ils se sentent chez eux

Elles se sentent chez elles

On se sent chez soi

I feel myself at mine.

I feel myself at yours

You feel yourself at yours

(s)he feels herself at hers, his

We feel ourselves at ours

You feel yourself at yours

They feel themselves at theirs

One feels oneself at ones

I have written the possessive 's' under erasure.

Etienne Balibar writes that there is a reciprocity bordering on equivalence established between myself and my own when the subject, addressing herself, is referring to that which belongs most closely or properly to her. I think about the double meaning of the verb to belong: on the one hand, things owned by people belong to those people, on the other hand, people say they feel they belong when they feel part of something larger than themselves. What does feeling at home mean? Could I say that to feel at one with oneself is to feel one's own? Or is to feel at home to feel one belongs here in the place one lives? How does one feel this sense of belonging?

'To belong',

To be-long,

'To be', 'to long'.

'To long' means to have a strong wish or desire for something or someone. If 'to feel at home' means to feel one belongs here, could it be translated into 'one feels the desire to be here', in the present of that very place, at that very moment. When, where, how does one feel the desire to be here? I think about her who longs to be with her mother, who longs for the things she thinks she can only do there. She said I don't belong here. How can she feel she belongs here? What should we have said to make her think, to make her feel she could belong here?

'You' stands for both a singular and plural grammatical subject in English, as if the one is always the many; in French, a 'tu' is never used for a 'vous', while a 'vous' may sometimes behave as a 'tu'. A 'tu' is either a signifier of intimacy or a signifier of a perceived inferiority status, depending on the context it is used. In the English expression 'to feel at home', there is no reflexive pronoun to reinforce the return to the self that seems to be at stake in the French expression. Questions 'where do you feel at home?', 'when do you feel at home?', 'how do you feel at home?' are syntactically correct. 'What do you feel at home?' is not, until punctuation brings up meaning: what do you feel, at home?

At home, what do you feel?

What is this place called home?

Home Sweet Home

An Englishman's home is his castle

Je se sent chez moi

Je se sent chez toi

Je se sens chez lui/elle/theirs

Je se sens chez vous

Je se sens chez nous

Je se sent chez soi

I feels herself at you

I think about personal pronouns and their function, particularly about what is said when someone says 'je' or 'I'. The 'Je' or the 'I' is at the same time what designates the person who speaks it as well as a shifter used by all speakers in English and French. 'I' addresses 'you', who shares the situation in time and space of the enunciation, whether in speech or writing.

I talks to you.

I read that not all languages use personal pronouns. In some languages, there is no word that means 'je' or 'I'. The subject is expressed through the way the verb is conjugated. Or as in the Japanese language, the words that express the person who speaks are unstable, changing through history to reflect changes in marks of respect and familiarity. They also mark the social position or role of the speaker in social relations.

She tells me that Arabic has personal pronouns. I read that in Arabic there are masculine and feminine versions of you, as well as singular, dual (standard Arabic only), and plural versions: أنت\انت if you're addressing one person, أنتم\أنتم if you're addressing two (in standard Arabic), and أنتن\أنتم if you're addressing three or more people. The dual "you" (أنتم) is the same regardless of gender. In standard Arabic, there is also a

dual version of "they" (لهم - which is gender-indiscriminate as well) and masculine and feminine versions of the plural "they" (هم and هن). The other languages students speak are Albanian, Mandarin, Tigrinya, Amharic and Somali. I don't know whether these languages use grammatical subjects. How do they name the person who is speaking? How does it feel to say 'I' and 'you' when the equivalent does not exist in your mother tongue? Does it change the way you feel about yourself and the others around you?

'Home is where the heart is'. In this expression, the heart is substituted for love and desire. 'Se sentir chez soi', is it to feel one's heart at ease? What does the heart have to do with the self? I think about my thinking about what 'chez soi' means. I think about the act of thinking, and about feeling? Is 'soi' the conscience I have to be me in that very moment, in that very place and for this me to remain one, composed, together despite never being the same? I recall my friend telling me something along these lines: the conscience that I think is not a proof that I exist but rather an evidence. 'Chez soi' carries an enigma that is not present in the corresponding English expression 'at home'. Home is where the heart is. Home is a place that is not the self but a place where the self desires to be.

I think about the split self or selves associated with the experience of exile and about the myriad possible exiles. How differently is your sense of self affected by each exile experience? You choose to move to and settle in a new country because of work opportunities, settling there thanks to a privileged status granted through the equal membership to a supranational community shared by the country you come from and your host country, enjoying rights guaranteed by this membership. Or you flee the land you grew up in – the land of your ancestors as she said to me - to save your life from war, naked violence or sheer poverty, crossing the sea on derelict fishing boats, walking your way through a continent, hiding at the back of trucks and arriving here by chance – by chance, she repeated – because the police dog did not detect your presence hidden among the empty cardboard box. And yet, these rights you assume imprescriptible may be taken away from you, reminding you that you are a migrant, making you aware of the fragility and arbitrariness of the rights granted through the laws of hospitality of this land.

She speaks more and more openly as the sessions pass and she gets more engaged into the project. She does not know whether she will have the right to stay in this country.

Three years ago, she claimed asylum on humanitarian grounds and has been waiting for the decision of the Home Office. ‘Le Bureau du Chez Soi’ sounds an awkward translation. In France, the name of the corresponding institution is the Ministère de l’Intérieur, ‘The Ministry of the Inside’. Rather strange, too.

I tell her that her English has improved a lot and ask her if she could do something with this new skill if she had to go back to her country. I read that most human rights claim are based on 1950 European Convention on Human Rights Article 3 – prohibition on torture and inhuman or degrading treatments – and Article 8 right to respect for family life and private life. She tells me it would be dangerous for her were she sent back to her country. She wants to stay here. If protection is granted on humanitarian grounds, she will get Humanitarian Protection status for a period of five years, subject to review. My lawyer tells me to be patient but I cannot rest, she tells us, I cannot do anything, I have no money because I am not allowed to take a job. I get £35 a week. I am moved next week to a new place, she says with an anxious tone. It is far away from here, in a different borough. I remember being told that she and the other lady from the same country were likely to be sent to another city up North. I think about the group she has formed with that cheeky lady who speaks the same language and perhaps share the same story and the very quiet young woman who likes to wear stripy robes and colourful veils. She does not speak their language. They’ve grown close to one another. We speak with our hands, she says to me, when I ask her how they communicate with one another. They have lived together in a refuge for women near the community centre since they arrived here. On the group photograph taken at the end of the visit to a palace in the centre of the city, the three of them stand together, the quiet one leaning against her friend who supports herself on crutches as she had to undertake a complex feet operation. I wonder whether this operation and the long recovery that followed saved her from being displaced to the city up North. Are your friends moving as well? I ask her. No they are staying. Can’t you stay with them? I have no choice, she says. She tells us that she will try to continue attending the class but it may be too difficult for her to come as the cost of travelling will be too high. The lady in charge of the language department tells me that the centre is looking for a way to finance her journeys. She tells me she wants to prepare for the exams applicants to permanent residency or citizenship have to pass as part of the process. She hopes she will be able to take the exam, because it will mean she can stay. I have the preparation books, I don’t need them anymore, do you want them? Yes, I want them. I will bring them next week, I tell her.

She told me that as soon as her husband got through the tunnel, he claimed asylum. He had his Syrian passport, she tells me. I think about the words spoken by Kalle at the end of the first chapter of *Dialogues d'exilés*:

Le passeport est la partie la plus noble de l'homme. D'ailleurs, un passeport ne se fabrique pas aussi simplement qu'un homme. On peut faire un homme n'importe où, le plus étourdiment du monde et sans motif raisonnable; un passeport jamais. Aussi reconnaît-on la valeur d'un bon passeport, tandis que la valeur d'un homme, si grande qu'elle soit, n'est pas forcément reconnue.

The passport is the noblest asset of man. Anyway, a passport is not made as simply as a man is. One can make a man anywhere, most thoughtlessly and without reasonable motive; a passport never. Hence the recognition of the value of a good passport while the value of a man, as high as it is, is not necessarily recognised.

It took him a year to get the refugee status that enabled him to bring her and their son here. I read that people filing an asylum application as a refugee must show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership to a particular social group, and are unable or unwilling to seek protection from the authorities in their own country. I read that the refugee status is granted for five years. Five years is a lifetime for their five years-old son. It is not long for his parents. They are refugees, she is an asylum seeker, different categories of foreigners with different rights and obligations. If the country they come from is still deemed unsafe at the end of the five years period, they will have to apply for a legal status known as Indefinite Leave to Remain. I read indefinite leave to remain (ILR) is an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold the right of abode in this country, but who has been admitted here without any time limit on his or her stay and who is free to take up employment or study, without restriction.

I look for the strange formula inscribed in cursive letters inside the cover of the passport issued for citizens of this country:

*Her Britannic Majesty's
Secretary of State
Requests and requires in the
Name of her Majesty
all those whom it may concern to allow
the bearer to pass freely
without let or hindrance,
and to afford the bearer
such assistance and protection
as may be necessary*

All citizens of this country automatically get what is called the ‘right of abode’, that is the right to live and work here without the state permission. ‘Abode’ is another word for ‘home’, a home you have the permission to leave anytime, if you qualify for it. An asylum seeker is not a refugee. Neither are residents of this country. They may get indefinite leave of remain but it is not a permanent residency, even less a right of abode. Only citizens of this country have right of abode. I think about the legal jargon defining the categories each of us belongs to according to the laws of hospitality of this country. She may or not be granted humanitarian protection. If she is not, she will probably appeal the decision and this will grant her a bit more time to remain. What will she do if she does not win her appeal? What is a person who loses her appeal on the decision to refuse to grant her humanitarian protection called? I did not find any name for people ending up in this category, as if they did not exist as human beings anymore, barely case numbers. She will not be a subject in law anymore. A foreigner, she will become an absolute foreigner, a figure in official statistics, without a qualifying name that grants her a place here. In the last few months, I have seen immigration enforcement vehicles patrolling the neighbourhood streets. How will she be forced to leave? Will they force her to board a plane flying back to the country she comes from? Will she be sent to an immigration detention centre? She may decide to ‘overstay’, find people who will help her but she will always be at the mercy of those who, hostile, will continue to abuse her as a foreigner. I read Benveniste writing about the two Latin terms ‘hospes’ and ‘hostis’, both designating the foreigner but in two different ways: ‘hospes’, the favourable

foreigner, l'hôte, the guest and 'hostis', the hostile foreigner, l'ennemi, the enemy. I read Derrida's words taking Benveniste's thoughts further:

hospitality, hostility, hostpitality

When does a guest become an enemy? When does a host become an enemy?

I read Jacques Derrida's words, thinking of her:

The absolute or unconditional hospitality I would like to offer her presupposes a break with hospitality in the ordinary sense, with conditional hospitality, with the right to or the pact of hospitality [...] absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give [...] to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them reciprocity (entering a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights.

I realise that the less I know about the personal circumstances of their arrival here, the freer I am to open myself to the persons they are and enact something closer to the absolute hospitality Derrida is talking about. 'Personne' is a curious word in French. It means at the same time 'somebody' and 'nobody', a person.

Je les ai rencontrées en personne.

I have met them in person.

'En personne', 'in person', I know them as persons. I recognise their faces, I recognise their voices. I think about the questions my teacher friend ask them, questions that never deal with who they are, but about what they understand or what they feel, questions that keeps us folded in the here and now of presence, in the here and now of our existences.

I ask my friend whether all her students have a legal status enabling them to remain here. Am I putting them and us in a delicate situation when I write about the little I know of their lives? She tells me that to know about the community centre language classes, they must have been directed there by government agencies, local or national.

They must all be legal, she tells me. It is likely they had to prove their status to register for the class.

Each week, at the beginning of the class my friend checks who among her students is present and who is missing in the class register listing the first names, surnames and mobile numbers of the students. I am impressed by her ability to remember the first names of each of the students. I have trained myself, she tells me. I pronounce their first names while remembering where they sat and what they wore and check the following week whether I remember properly. For a time that seems too long to me I do not call them by their proper name. I say ‘you’. I ask them to write down their first names, the country they come from and the languages they speak. I ask them to say their first names as many times as I feel it is possible to do without offending them. I listen to the music of their voices. I remember their first names foremost for the grain of their voices. The grain, Roland Barthes wrote, it is the body in the voice that sings. Listening to their voices, it is their bodily presences I welcome.

My teacher friend tells me that some of them do not know how to read and write in their mother tongue, not even their proper names. They learnt to write their first name and surname in English. They are the quietest of them all, she tells me. I was told that in Germany, they teach migrants to read and write in their own language at the same time they learn German. The experience has proven that one process supports the other. I read Sibony’s words on learning to read:

On apprend à lire avec un entre-deux , multiple, étoilé, *l'entre deux de la mémoire et de la perception*; non au sens où il faudrait se rappeler ce qu'on a appris la veille dans le Livre de lecture, mais au sens précis où l'on apprend à lire ce que l'on sait déjà *par cœur*. On apprend à voir ce qu'on a déjà dans la mémoire, et à lire ce qui est déjà venu d'ailleurs, dans le lien physique des voix.

One learns to read in the in-between, plural, starry, *the in-between of memory and perception*; not in the sense that one should remember what was learnt the day before in the Reader, but in the precise sense that one learns to read what one knows already *by heart*. One learns to see what one has already in one’s memory, and to read what has already come from elsewhere, in the physical ties of voices.

How can one be taught to read ‘by heart’?

How can one be taught to speak a new language ‘by heart’?

Look at the letters, at the syllables they form and listen to the sounds they make when you pronounce them, I remember telling my daughter as she was learning to read in French and in English. Do you recognize the words formed by the sounds? Before a child is able to read silently, she reads out loud, listening to her voice pronouncing the letters transforming into meaningful sounds. Do you want to read the first sentence of the text? my friend asks the student on her right. She does not want to. Another time... Do you want to read it? She says to the student next to her. I am not good, she says, I try. I listen to the sounds her voice speaks as she reads the letters forming syllables forming words charged with meaning, imprinting them slowly but surely in her memory and in the memories of the people who listen to her.

I think about her evening reading routine with her son, creating the memory of the sounds of the English words through the music of her voice. She is teaching him to read English ‘by heart’.

I think about the way English is formally taught in the classroom, about the constant correlation made between sounds spoken and signs written on the white board. How do her students look at and see the English words my friend writes on the white board? Some of them learnt the same alphabet, they will recognise letters and sometimes words looking similar or close enough to words in their language. I sometimes experience words in French and in English becoming strange crawling objects detached from the things they designate, the meaning they carry on their back wobbly and weakening. Do they feel something similar? The scripts of the languages spoken by many of the students are completely different from the Roman alphabet common to most of the European languages. How difficult is it for you to learn to read English? I ask her. I have already learnt the Roman alphabet in school in my country, she responds, it is not difficult. She is one of the most advanced students in the class. I can see it is a struggle for many others.

Rote learning, I read, is a memorization technique based on repetition, the idea being that one will be able to quickly recall the meaning of the material the more one repeats it. It is often opposed to meaningful learning, a learning method where new knowledge is related with previous knowledge, making learning meaningful. My teacher friend plans her lessons each week based on what comes up in the discussion she had with her

students the week before. What matters, she says, is to keep them engaged, to give them words to talk about experiences they had, it has to be meaningful for them.

I am not a strong woman, she says to us, I am crying too much. Crying does not mean you are not strong, my teacher friend responds to her. I think you're strong ... We are all strong women here. What does 'strong' mean? What is the opposite of strong? ... Weak. Yes, 'weak' is the opposite of 'strong'. You can be strong in different ways. Can you tell me? You are strong because you have a strong body. You have muscles and you are flexible. To be strong is to have stamina. Stamina is the energy to carry on, not to give up. You are a strong person when you keep your word, when you are committed to a project. You're a strong person when you have the courage to do something difficult. If you do all these things, you are a strong woman... What does 'weak' mean? To be weak is to have a weak body ... without strength... To be weak is ... to be lazy. You are a weak person, she tells us, if you do a thing when you know, when you feel that thing is wrong for you. To give up is to be weak, my friend responds. Crying is not to be weak. You can be strong and cry. Crying is the expression of a strong emotion. Emotions are powerful.

How can a language be learnt through the heart?

I think about Chardin carefully assembling the objects against the plain background, his fingers grasping, holding, dragging, pushing the objects on the tablet against the indistinct background, a few meters from his easel until they stand together in a composition that he feels satisfied with. I read about the hidden geometry of the painting. I read that he placed the glass and the coffee pot, two truncated cones, each the inversion of the other, side by side and connected them with the dotted line formed by the three round shapes of the garlic cloves. The glass from the water level up occupies the same horizontal strip as the handle of the coffee pot. I read that the tonality of the background was rendered from dark on the right to light on the left, to enable the glass to appear brighter and the coffee pot darker. The soft lines of the foliage break the hard line of the shelf supporting the objects, providing an entry to the viewer's gaze into the place of the painting. Diderot wrote about Chardin's silent compositions. He wrote about Chardin's making, about his skilful hands gathering the substance of the objects, air and light on the tip of his brush and depositing them on the

canvas. I read that the hand is the window on to the mind, that making is thinking. What was Chardin thinking when he chose and assembled the objects, when he looked at the composition and painted? What was he seeing? Was he reading the objects of his composition by heart?

We watch together the first few minutes of Hans Op de Beeck's film, *Staging Silence*. I turned off the sound as I want us to focus on what we see happening. The camera is locked on a makeshift stage: background made of plywood and ground made of paper. A hand suddenly enters from the left, holding an object. The hand places the object, a dark ashtray, in the left front corner of the set and retreats to the left. Everything is still for a moment, until a cloud of smoke enters the stage from the left. The hand comes back, grasping a burning cigarette, shaking its ash down, before placing it in the ashtray, leaving the set again. For a while, the smoke of the burning cigarette is the only moving thing on the stage. A hand enters the stage right, holding a metallic thermos. The hand positions the bottle opposite the ashtray, drawing an invisible line at the forefront of the stage. Stillness again... broken by the sudden entrance of hands from both the right and the left: one hand on the right giving a plain white coffee cup to another grabbing it from the left while the first hand places a second coffee cup on the right side of the stage; that hand pouring liquid from the thermos into that cup, that hand taking the cup out of the image back up to a mouth that can only be imagined, then bringing it back to the stage. The hand on the left grasping the cigarette between its fingers, taking it back to another imagined mouth, then bringing it back to the stage, crushing the smoking butt in the ashtray. Stillness again. The hand on the right grabs the thermos and gives it to the hand on the left that places it on the front left side of the stage. From then on, hands on both sides of the stage work together to assemble a tableau, making it appear slowly in front of our eyes. We watch for a couple of minutes the consecutive movements of the hands following each other, retreating, returning, calling, responding to one another in a silent conversation through their interaction with everyday objects carefully positioned in front of the still gaze of the camera to represent the landscape of a street at night. What do you see? Bottles... boxes ... glass containers. ... I like the street made with objects, she says. Yes, this artist works with illusion: the objects are assembled to create the illusion of a street. He shows how what we see is actually beyond what we look at. We look at bottles, boxes, glass containers and we see a street. What else did you see? Hands ... I am interested in the movements of the hands. I am

interested in the fact that he filmed the hands in the process of creating the composition. I would like to film our hands arranging our objects together. What do you think?

I have asked my friend and the head of the language department if I could invite a friend to help us with the film on the last session before the Easter break. She is trained in set design and photography and I know her knowledge will be useful for me. I ask her to meet me at the centre an hour before the class starts so we can set the stage for the film. We arrange the tables so as to create a stage for our composition, two smaller abutting desks to support the objects, placed against three long folding tables, standing on their side to provide support for the backdrop. It must be large enough to support all of the objects they brought. The grey backdrop shows signs of wear and tear. We have used it again and again to shoot our compositions. The gap between sheets is becoming more apparent each time this portable studio is folded and unfolded. We position the tripod for the camera, play with aperture and depth of field. We tape silk paper on the windows to diffuse the light that comes from the windows behind and to the right of the set. We have to work fast. We only have the two hours of the class to produce the film.

Ten minutes before two, the first student to come in is a lady I have not seen for a couple of months. It is good to see you, how are you? She looks at the unusual configuration of the classroom, at the camera fixed on the tripod, at the yet empty set, at my friend she has never met before, and turns her gaze back toward me, looking utterly confused. Today, during the class, we will film our hands creating a composition with the objects we brought. Do you remember? I asked people to bring objects that evoke home for them, that means home for them. We made photographs in February. Today, we're going to make a film. It is been a long time since we saw you here, have you been well? I ask again. My son is dead, she replies in a low hesitating voice. I am stunned. I don't know what to say. In the background, my friend stopped moving. Silence falls heavily on us. What happened? I ask. She raises her gaze towards me and speaks: One night ... he goes to bed ... the next morning I find him dead. When? On 24th January, she replies. What can I say? Silence. I am so sorry ... so sorry for you and your family. How old was he? I keep my gaze locked into hers. Her eyes are so weary. He is six. What happened? Do you know the reason he died? No, she says, I was not well. I stayed a long time in hospital ... He is still in a fridge. I don't know what to say.

What happened? Is her son's body still in the hospital morgue? Is there an inquest going on? Is the body waiting to travel back to her country to be buried there? What can I say to her? I am so sorry. She looks relieved when her teacher comes into the room. Hello, long time no see, she says. My son is dead, she tells her. Oh ... I did not know ... I am so sorry, she replies. Come and sit with me. Hello, your friend has come back. She told us her very sad news. Did you know about it? I ask the student she shares the same language with. They often sat together. She nods and walks briskly to the corner where her friend is seating, talking with their teacher. The students come in one after the other, greeting each other, the teacher and me, looking at my friend with curious eyes. The two ladies sit quietly in the corner, holding hands. It is great you came, I say to him. I am not working today, he replies.

I brought your photograph, I say to her. What objects did you bring? I ask the others. Did you forget to bring your painting today? I teasingly ask my friend, their teacher. I have got it in my bag, she replies, smiling. I brought a teapot and a coffee pot, she says, pulling out of a plastic bag a big-bellied tea pewter teapot and a smallish copper pot with a wooden handle. What happened with the jasmine? It is sick, all yellow, the flowers never opened. I have a picture on my phone. She shows the picture to us. Send me the picture, says my teacher friend, I'll send it to a gardener friend of mine. She might know what to do.

Why did you choose to bring these objects? I ask her. She tells us that in her country, at the end of the evening meal, a very hot strong and black tea is brewed in a big pot like the one she brought. We pour tea from that teapot into the cups served to the guests. Here, people make their own individual mugs of tea. You don't prepare tea for everybody.

You brought something this time. Show it to us! says my teacher friend to her. My boss bought it in my country, she replies. What is it? She holds something that looks heavy and precious. It is a golden tiger crouching on an amber object inscribed with a Chinese character. It stands on a crystal base engraved with the drawing of another crouching tiger. The base of the amber part is engraved with the same character. It is a seal, my teacher friend says, gesturing stamping with her hand. My boss has many objects from my country. Why did you choose this one particularly? In China, the tiger protects, she tells us.

She brought another one of her paintings, a watercolour this time. She tells us that she gave the other one as a gift to the manager of the refuge when she left. She has the

football scarf entrusted to her by the student who has gone away. Arrangements have been made for her to give it back to her daughter on Thursday. Her scarf stands for her. So does the pharaoh picture for that student who did not come back but sent the photograph by email. He did not bring the tambourin. You can help us with the photographs and the scarf, I tell him.

Do you remember the film we watched last week? I ask. Can someone explain what we saw to those who were not there? It was very poetic, she says. We watched hands putting up landscapes with objects. Let's watch it again, I say.

This time, I would like to create one composition with all the objects you brought, I tell them. Can you think about the movements our hands could make to position the objects? Think about these movements, these gestures as moments in a conversation. There will be busy moments and quiet moments. The script of the film is made of the different actions our hands do. We have to decide in what order they bring the objects on the set, which one comes from the left, which one comes from the right, when they come together, what they may do together. I give them a list of verbs corresponding to possible actions for our hands:

to hold

to carry

to bring

to grasp

to pick up

to throw

to fling

to flick

to drop down

to move up / down / to the right / to the left / towards the back / towards the front

to push

to slide

to drag something down / up / to the right / to the left

to set something down / up / by

to put something down / up

to lay something down / up

to stand something against something

to place something up /down
to position
to pivot
to turn
to arrange
to adjust
to (un)fold
to fix
to stick
to flatten

As we go through the list of words, I try to show the gesture the verb corresponds to.
Do they grasp what the word means? I ask myself.

I read Richard Sennett's words on the hand:

Two centuries ago Immanuel Kant casually remarked “the hand is the window on to the mind”... Of all the human limbs, the hands make the most varied movements, movements that can be controlled at will. Science has thought how these motions, plus the hand’s varied ways of gripping and the sense of touch, affect how we think.

We think about what we hold in our hands, what it feels in our hands and we talk about it. We care for that which we hold in our hands.

Thinking ... ensues about the nature of what one holds. American slang advises us to “get a grip”; more generally we speak of coming to grips with an issue”. Both figures reflect the evolutionary dialogue between the hand and the brain.... There is a problem about grips... This is how to let go ... We need to let go of a problem, usually temporarily, in order to see better what it's about, then take hold of it afresh.

We get a grip on the things we hold in our hands. We let go of what our hands release. Each object is an enigmatic response to the question: what does it mean to feel at home? It took me a while to find the object that responded to that question. I chose the tortoise because it is small enough to take with me if I had to leave all my belongings behind and because it is a gift from my daughter. I know she thought carefully about what the tortoise might mean to me: a slow but steady, wise and quiet

animal which follows the path it has chosen without faltering and without rushing and carries its home on its back. She gave it to me at a moment I was struggling to find myself. Her gift made me feel better because I felt she understood me. Her tortoise is not home, it evokes home. Looking at it, holding it, I am brought back to a place of safety and joy, where someone I deeply love showed me she understood me. The tortoise carries her presence and the memory of that moment we lived together.

All these objects are transitional objects, I think. They stand for our in-betweens, in-between here and there, in-between our past and our present, in between ourselves and our significant others. They help us cope with the reality of separations. I look towards the back of the room. She sits in complete immobility, her gaze looking at something only she can see, a terrible figure of grief.

I watch them moving the objects, one hand dragging, one grasping, another pulling, another pushing, while they talk to one another to agree on the positions of each object in relation to the others. Each object must remain visible. This one is too big, it should be at the back. This one is small, it must go at the front. Does the photograph look better further up and down the backdrop? I wonder what the combination of speaking, touching, gripping and seeing is creating in their minds as they interact with one another. Will the process help imprint the verbs that describe the actions of their hands in their memories? What do they grasp as they work together? What is it they reach for in engaging with this project? Not all of them have engaged with it. It is not how you learn a language, one of them said to my friend.



She has left her friend at the back of the room and picks up the pharaoh picture. Her long dark hand sticks it on the grey background, flattening the print. She steps back. It would have been great to have your Dill in the picture, I tell her. She nods and smiles to me.

The crouching tiger seal is heavy. She has to hold it with both hands, bending over the tables. I tell her that her head entered the camera's field. Can you redo the same gesture while keeping your head outside the camera's field? If it is easier, push the object rather than holding it.

She placed the little copper coffee pot herself but let someone else hold her teapot and try various positions for it. What should we do with the scarf? Why not throwing it? They agree on what works best. I really like the way the light falls on the belly of the teapot, I tell her. She asks me where I want the tortoise to be. Where you think it looks good, I tell her. I certainly surrender control on the construction of the composition. It will be what it will be. What matters is that they reach a common decision on the positions of the objects. The composition is not perfect. It is a compromise, the fruit of a conversation. It looks good enough. She drops the photograph behind the copper pot, hiding the image of her face. You don't want your face to be seen? I ask her. She nods. Can you be recognized? I don't think anybody can recognize you. Your face is hidden behind the sunglasses. She nods again and moves the photograph up against the grey background above the copper pot. I notice that her fingernails are carefully varnished, one nail a bright red, the other a dark blue. Her pale skin shows through the delicate transparency of her top. I look at her fingers manipulating her print, pressing on the corners to stick it on the background.

During the Easter break, I work on three short silent films based on the images taken during the session. Sound was recorded but I have decided not to use it - not now, perhaps later, and not in relation with the actions they relate to. If I use the words spoken, the sounds produced in these moments, it will be through displacement. Silence is a material I want to work with. I think about the silence of Chardin's still lifes, a silence that enables to listen deeply and reach to that possible meaning, not immediately accessible that Jean-Luc Nancy writes about.

I also work with the rhythm embedded in the movement of the moving images: moments filled with gestures, moments of complete stillness, their succession creating duration and, paradoxically, timelessness. Silence and duration open a place of contemplation where I can remain. I watch my face in profile entering the frame of the

image from the left as I extend my arm and hand to position the tortoise in the centre of the set. Her face also enters the frame of the image as she holds the heavy gold amber and crystal seal with extended arms. The dark back of his head appears from the right as he reaches to grasp the scarf he wants to reposition. Our faces are interruptions breaking the silence of hands and objects. I think about face-recognition. The image of a face is the marker of an identity, a means of identification, a possible step to classification in categories. Hands are not personal in a way a face is, they are both generic and individual. My hands belong to me in the same way my voice does.

I read Roland Barthes' words:

This voice is not personal ... [this voice] is not original ... and in the same time it is individual: [this voice] enables us to listen to a body without civil status, without "personality", but that is a separated body.

The grain he writes a moment later, it is the body in the voice that sings, in the hand that writes, in the limb that executes. Our hands carry the presence, the existence of our bodies in the same way our voices do, beyond assigned identities.

We worked out together another composition that led to another film and other still life photographs. The work we produced throughout the year was shown in the reception area of the community centre during the Community Arts week of the borough and some of the photographs remained on the wall for longer.

Quelque chose se répète dans ces images.

Something repeats and rehearses itself in these images. Something takes shape that renews itself each time we start a new composition, settling in duration.

What do you think people see in these images? I ask them as we look at the exhibition together. They see a lot of objects, all different. I think they are too many of them, she says. I like the photograph, she says.

I remember telling them that there are many objects but we managed to find a place for each of them so they are all visible. They stand together with their differences in the space of the photograph. They belong together because of the way we put them in relation with one another. They talk to another and tell a story together. And you, what do you see in these images? I finally dared ask. I don't remember what they say. I remember silence. Were they caught in the images? I read Daniel Sibony's words on the image as ' noeud de transfert', as 'knot of transference':

To be caught by an image is to be in correspondence with an image one ignores ... to be inside, in the transference the image creates or signals. This transference consists, when two things "converse", in the silences and lacks of one start corresponding with the silences and the lacks of the other; conversations of shadows and lights, of engagements and withdrawals; contact points, even if at a distance.

What shadows, what lights, what engagements and withdrawals are these images drawing them into? Each of us has a different story to tell about what took place in the community centre classroom A, a place we hold in common, lieu commun in which each of us was given a place to speak from and to be listened to, a place woven through our conversations resonating in the chambers of our bodies, through the other common places of the photographs and the films we made together.

To the students I was able to meet on the last session of the year, I gave beautiful prints of our conversation pieces. I put the prints in rigid envelopes and asked the head of the department to post them to those who did not make that session. I think of them as gifts, tokens, remains of belonging to that place we wove together and hold in common. I write from what I remember hearing, from what I remember seeing, from what I remember reading, from what I remember feeling. I write in-between then and now, in-between here and there, in-between you and I. I write by heart, returning to my self, *chez moi*, entangled in the voices I have listened to and with whom I inhabit the place I call home.

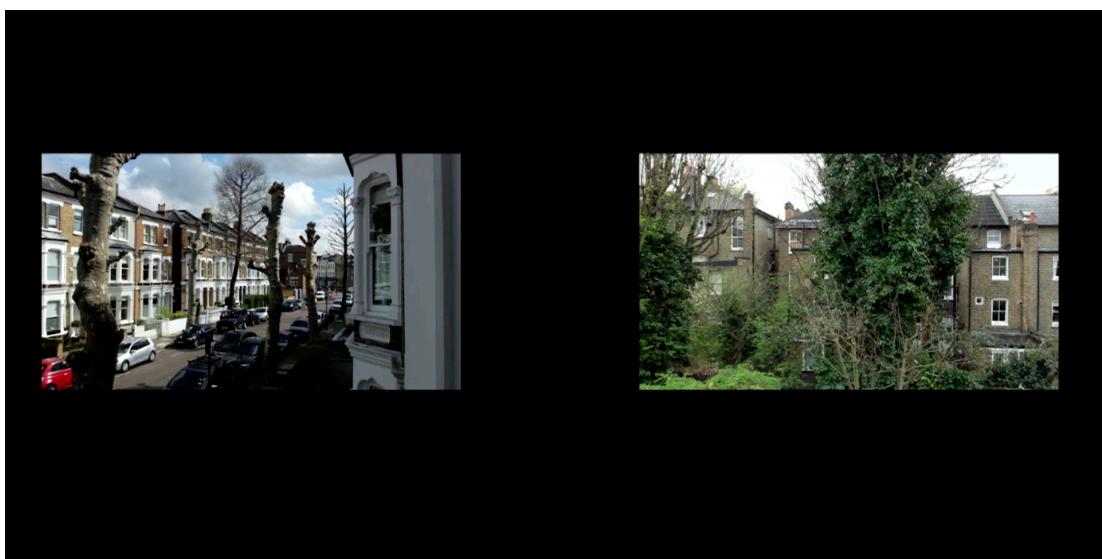
Home is where one can speak and be listened to.

Home is where one feels I belong.

London, January 2016-September 2017



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Birdcalls

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A few weeks ago, I heard then saw for the first time a flock of ring-necked parakeets settle on the tallest branches of a sycamore tree in our block of gardens. They are gregarious birds, always travelling in company. They have since come back regularly, announced by their call.

I first heard the call during one of my frequent walks through a park not too far from where we live. It is a very peculiar call, raucous and strident at the same time. It sounded different and out of place, exotic, foreign. It took me some time to identify which bird produces such a call.

On each of my walks, I looked for the birds that had such a strange cry. One day, I identified the calls with a flock of birds flying high, their bodies silhouetted shapes against the brightness of the sky. They seemed quite big, long-tailed. I thought that they looked like jays but they had pointed wings and their long and narrow tail was split in an unusual way.

Later, in winter, I observed the birds perched high on the tallest trees of the park. With the absence of leaves, I discovered that they were dressed in lemon-green feathers and looking through the binoculars of my youngest daughter, I saw they had a red beak and for some of them, a pink and black ring around their faces and necks.

There are many birds living in my neighbourhood. Their calls are familiar. Recently, they have been waking me up very early. It is mid-winter but they have been strangely active, maybe because of the mild weather. Perhaps they have mistaken it for spring, singing loudly while the night is still pitch-black outside.

I hear similar sounds when I am visiting my parents. House sparrows, great, blue and coal tits, orange-shirted robins and blackbirds with bright yellow beaks dwell in the bushes and low trees of our street front and back gardens. I read that male blackbirds and robins sing during the hours of darkness if street lights glow nearby.

Many birds visit the garden, staying a few days before leaving again for other lands. Last winter, the caw of birds, rooks or crows, tore the deep of the night and woke me up. Invisible and silent during the day, they cawed at the same time for six nights, breaking my sleep. The caw of crows does not disturb me during the day. Their voices are part of the soundscape. But they scare me at night. It feels like an intrusion. The night cawing stopped as abruptly as it started.

Last May, two big chestnut birds the size of woodpigeons stayed for a few days in the garden. They perched on the overgrown Cotoneaster tree, swooping down to the ground only to pick at the gaps between the paving stones, looking for worms. They were very quiet. I did not notice their call. But I could see and hear that their presence disturbed the local squirrels. I saw the squirrels confronting the big birds, their fluffy tails curled in perfect spiral at the end of their tense bodies. They were making an aggressive sound, tchick-tchick-tchick-tchick-tchick.

The birds did not stay long.

In the park where I often go walking, there are many animals living in a sort of tamed wilderness. The most visible are red and fallow deer. They roam the meadows and woods of the parks in herds. They hide in the ferns, their coats blending with the brackens. In the spring, fawns and calves create light patches in the rusty brown of their elders.

I read that the current herds of deer are directly descended from an original herd introduced many centuries ago by a king who wanted a hunting park. The king, escaping from an outbreak of plague in the city, realized that the place gave him the best opportunity for hunting near the capital: an expanse of open grassland with mature oaks, some of which are still standing.

The king ignored the claims of local farmers and people who used to graze cattle or collect timber there. Two thousands deer were introduced. So they did not stray, the eight miles long brick wall that still marks the boundaries of the park was built. The king's action infuriated local people. The king had to pay compensation to some landowners and to restore the right of people to walk in the park and collect firewood. A ladder was installed in the wall. This right was taken away in the 19th century, to help in preserving the park. The natural decay of dead rotting wood supports the life of many scarce and threatened invertebrates.

The deer have shaped the landscape of the park. They graze the leaves and bark of young trees, preventing them from growing, keeping the grassland open. Established trees are pollarded, encouraging the growth of straight tall branches, suitable for timber and protecting them from browsing deer. The lowest branches of trees in the park are all about the same height from the ground, above 1.5 meters, out of a deer's reach.

The deer are culled each year during the long nights of November for the females and February for the males. I read that this is necessary in order to control the number of deer in the park and prevent overgrazing which would ultimately result in starvation. The cull also accounts for the excellent condition of the park's herd.

The ring-necked parakeets are recent inhabitants of the park. They are yet to be listed in the official booklet of the royal parks bird species. There seemed to be more of them year on year. They look for other places to feed and to roost, which is perhaps why they are now roaming our neighbourhood.

The other day, as we were walking back from school, my daughter and I heard the raucous calls of three parakeets flying fast and low over the long street that takes us home. She looked at me, surprised. It is funny, she said, it feels as if we are walking in the park. Yes, I said, it is a strange feeling as if we were displaced just by the sound of their call.

The ring-necked parakeets seem to be settling in our area. I saw a large group roosting on the tallest sycamore in the neighbours' garden a few days ago. They have been regularly coming back . Sometimes a small flock of three, sometimes larger flocks, always announced by their calls.

Their unusual racket seems to call other birds to participate. For a while after they've gone, other birds calls are stronger and clearer.

I wonder whether the parakeets are looking for places to nest. I read that they are hole-nesters, often taking over woodpecker nest holes or larger sized nestboxes. They start nesting as early as January, earlier than the birds with which they compete for holes, owls, woodpeckers and starlings mostly. I am not sure they will find suitable homes in our gardens as I have never heard nor seen owls or woodpeckers. Starlings perhaps but not recently.

I think that the last time I saw a starling was in the spring that followed our move into the house ten years ago. I remember it because at first it had seemed black to me. I took it for a blackbird but, moving closer, I saw it was very glossy with a sheen of purples and greens. It did not sound like a blackbird either, its call was very noisy, more caw-like. I read that starling populations have sharply decreased in the country in recent years. The reasons are not clearly identified. Loss of permanent pasture, increased use of chemicals on farms and a shortage of food and nesting places have been given as possible reasons.

I have not seen starlings in the garden for quite some time but not long ago, during a walk by the river, I saw a murmuration of starlings, thousands of them joined in a fantastic aerial ballet. They traced a kind of Möbius strip over and below the arches of the bridge.

Murmuration, such a lovely word that makes me think of murmur, the whisper of thousands of birds flying together, tracing beautiful patterns in the sky and in the mind. In this country, starlings are protected and have been placed on the red list of endangered species. In many other countries, particularly those where they were introduced, they are considered harmful as they eat crops, damage fruits in orchards and steal grapes in vineyards and, when roosting in large groups, they produce excrements that damage buildings and monuments.

I read that the estimated 200 million starlings that live in North America are descended from sixty birds released in New York Central Park at the end of the 19th century by a man who wanted to introduce all the bird species Shakespeare mentioned in his works. Starlings are one of the only three bird species, with pigeons and house sparrows, not protected by the government there. They can be hunted at all times.

Three parakeets just flew passed my window, announced by their call. Their fast and direct lemon-green flight is a striking event against the dull grey of the winter sky. I have come to expect and wait for their call. I do not know where they come from. When I do not hear it anymore, I wonder if they will return.

I read that there are large well-established colonies of ring-necked parakeets in the South-West of the country. Some people say these green, red-billed birds escaped their cages or were released into the wild by their owners. Parakeets have been imported as popular tropical pets for over 150 years and inevitably many birds must have escaped or been released over the years. There are a couple of amusing theories explaining how they got here. The Bogart theory is that they escaped from the set of the African Queen filmed in studios in the west of the capital. According to the Hendrix theory, Jimi Hendrix is believed to have released a breeding pair of ring-necked parakeets from his girlfriend's flat as a gesture for world freedom.

Ring-necked parakeets are robust animals from the Himalayas, well adapted to the local cold and wet winters. They seem a pretty opportunistic bunch, I doubt they asked permission to settle and breed.

Just behind our garden back wall, a tall sycamore tree has been slowly disappearing, smothered by climbing ivy. The lemon-green robe of the parakeets would create an interesting contrast against the lush dark green leaves that have now reached the tallest branches of the tree. I wonder whether the parakeets have found a hole to nest in the tree and if I will see ring-necked parakeets fledglings in the spring, learning to fly over the gardens and the roofs of the street.

This morning, I saw my friend the robin who regularly accompanies me when I work in the garden, often following me to eat things I unearth. The robin was flitting and tweeting happily in the garden. I think that courtship season may have started. I read that robins pair only for the duration of the breeding season, no life-long attachment like some other species.

The female robin is the nest-builder while the male actively contributes to feeding her as she builds it and lays her eggs. Both parents actively tend for their young for up to three weeks after fledgling. The male frequently takes care of them alone as the female is busy with a second nesting effort, robins having generally two broods a year, sometimes three and even four in a very good year.

Our garden has been a regular nesting place for robins. The Viburnum tree with its round leafy head is their favorite. My son found a nest in it last spring. Luckily he stayed away from it. Robins desert their nest if they think it has been discovered. I read that robins are fiercely territorial against their own kind but that they do not normally bother about birds from other species. They have even been seen feeding fledglings from other species such as blackbirds, spotted flycatchers and willow warblers.

I heard the call of a ring-necked parakeet as I was observing the robin. It was close but I could not see it, whether flying or roosting. The call was low-key and felt lonely. Perhaps it was the call of a female parakeet waiting for her companions to return in the hole where she is nesting. There was something almost human in the tone of the call.

I found little information on ring-necked parakeet breeding. I guess that, as the country favourite birds and with more than 6 million reported territories, robins are likely to be easier to spot. I read that the female ring-necked parakeet lays between two and four eggs and incubates them for three weeks. The young are cared for by both parents and fledge when they are 40 to 50 days old.

The number of ring-necked parakeets reported to be living in the country ranges between 8,600 breeding pairs and a population of over 50,000.

There is nothing that looks more like a robin than another robin and nothing more like a green parakeet than another green parakeet. I read that birds must first be counted in an imaginary block of typical density, keeping it small, to include only 10 to 25 birds. Then the block must visually be superimposed onto the entire flock attempting an estimation of how many times it fits. Finally this number is multiplied by the number of birds counted in the original block. There is little chance counting is accurate with such a method. At best it remains an estimate.

During my latest visit to the park, I found a place where I could observe three parakeets entering and exiting a hole on a large branch of a tall oak tree. Ring-necked parakeets are gregarious and social birds. They could well be living in community. The garden may soon be elected as their home by these new residents and a new generation of lemon-green parakeets may be born here. Which generation will they belong to? The third, fourth, fifth generation to be born in the area?

As I walked down our street this morning, I heard the call of ring-necked parakeets in flight. A neighbour who was walking her dog, looked up disapprovingly. These birds make such a racket, she said to me. I think they are settling into our neighbourhood, I replied. It was the first time she spoke to me in the ten years we have been living here.

Ring-necked parakeets, I read, are not native in the sense of being indigenous. They are not natural to the area but have naturalised over decades as they became acclimatized. In my mother tongue, naturalisation is the name given to the operation by which dead animals are preserved as specimens in the appearance of life. The dead animal's skin is delicately separated from the body and prepared through a complex tanning process. A dummy of the body is fabricated based on drawings and measurements made from the écorché and dressed with the prepared skin. Great attention is given to the elements of the animal's face. The eyes are reproduced in Bohemian crystal that gives them the sparkle of life. I see three very still and very silent ring-necked parakeets looking at me with bright beady eyes, perched on a resin branch in a vitrine of the Natural History Museum.

Naturalisation is the process through which a foreigner is admitted to the citizenship of a country. We were told 'your children are reborn' when they received their certificate of registration as citizens of this country. They were born, they have been growing here but it is this certificate that turned them into natives.

I came across the website of the non-native species secretary –acronym NNSS –created by the government to coordinate the approach to invasive non-native species in the country. A first categorization takes place with the designation of so-called non-native species, a second with the qualification of specific non-native species as invasive.

There is something disturbing in the term non-native, which I also found spelt as nonnative in a scientific paper, strange consolidation of a term constructed through the negation of another. I tried to find a translation in my mother tongue. The closest that comes to mind translates as foreign, alien.

'Non-' has a negative force that does something or rather undoes something. It refuses, it takes away, it denies. It divides into categories all species that live in the country: on the one end, native species and on the other end species that are denied the right to be native, even though their members were born and live here.

The NNSS states that when the Ice Age ended, over 10,000 years ago, the ice that covered most of the country retreated northwards; following behind this retreating ice were waves of plants and animals that slowly colonized the country as conditions warmed up; these plants and animals got here under their own steam as there was still a land bridge attaching the country to the mainland; however, as the ice melted, sea levels rose and the connection was flooded; this effectively stopped colonization by species that could not cross the water; all these plants and animals that established themselves in the country naturally are called native species. The NNSS adds that man first arrived in the country about 8,000 years ago and that virtually all new land animals and plants that have become established since this date have been brought here by man and are all non-native species. I read somewhere else that the Red Lady of Paviland, dated from 33,000 years ago is the oldest known ceremonial burial ground in Western Europe. Man had arrived on the Island long before the moment it broke free of the Continent mainland for good, around 6100 BC, in Mesolithic times.

I am not sure what it means for someone or something to get here on its own steam. New ring-necked parakeets may be born in my garden of parents that got here on their own steam, powered by their wings. But they are neither natives nor not-natives. They are non-natives. They are denied the fact that they are natives. To be born in the holes of this country's trees is not, never enough for the ring-necked parakeets fledglings to be considered natives of this place. They will always be guilty of having the wrong great-great grand-parents, the wrong great-grand parents, the wrong grandparents, the wrong parents because they arrived from somewhere else, they were not born here and therefore were not from here.

How many generations must succeed one another for such a local resident to be considered native? Is anything indigenous?

Three goldfinches are perched on the bare branches of the apple tree, easily recognizable by their bright red faces and yellow wing patches. I listen for their delightful liquid twittering song for a while. They do visit the garden occasionally but I do not think they are permanent residents. I have read that common migrating birds are arriving earlier or leaving later than 50 years ago.

Is it this year very mild winter that has made these goldfinches come back earlier from the Southern lands where they often migrate during the cold season? Some goldfinches choose to leave the country during the winter months while others remain. Are these lovely little birds indigenous? They fly back and forth between the country and the places they winter in, on their own steam, naturally, without human intervention. They are surely considered natives.

The first ring-necked parakeets that settled in this country probably arrived by boat or perhaps in the baggage-hold of a plane, imported by man. Human intervention probably only accelerated their arrival. They would have arrived anyway. They are a wandering species. Ring-neck parakeets travel far, they settle in places where they are able to live and they follow the paths of men migrating through the world. I found a list of places considered to be within their native range. They live far and wide: Africa, China, the Indian Subcontinent. They are common and inconspicuous in Burkina, Benin, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Mali, Myanmar, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo, Uganda and Vietnam. I read in a scientific paper that they thrive in many dense urban areas on the continent.

There is no reason why ring-necked parakeets could not cross the sea on their own steam on a sunny and windless day. When I arrived in this country twenty years ago, a major change had just taken place. The island was not an island any more, not completely. A tunnel built deep below the seabed bridged the island to the continent for the first time in 10,000 years.

I picture a parakeet flying from the continent to the other side on its own steam, escaping border control, braving darkness, oblivious of the danger of electrified fences and collision with trains.

Some non-native species are deemed to be invasive while others are not. The NNSS states that we must not think that all non-native species are bad - indeed it is only a minority of non-native species that have serious negative impacts on native species, human health or the economy.

On a recent newspaper blog, I read this post:

Although attractive and even mildly amusing to observe, they have frightened away just about any other species that used to delight myself and my wife over the years. Robins, tits, jays, sparrows, starlings and a woodpecker or two and even crows have all disappeared since these “invaders” appeared. Only the wood pigeons seem at ease in sharing their surroundings. If they are, indeed, descendants of “pets” released into the wild, I hope that the selfish and ignorant people concerned are pleased with themselves for unsettling our already fragile and finely balanced environment!

This afternoon, sitting on the garden steps, my daughter and I listened to the sound of parakeets’ conversation. I told her that the ring-necked parakeet, as all parrots, can copy the sounds of human languages. I told her the story of Alex, a grey parrot that was taught English words in the same way human parents teach their children language, by showing and telling. Alex had a job like any adult human. He worked for his living in a laboratory, by conversing with his human instructors and going through tests specially designed for him.

I read that dialects have been discovered among many bird species that learn their vocalization by imitating their parents or neighbor, parrots in particular. There is also preliminary evidence that first- or second-generation immigrant birds innovate or imitate other species.

On the cover of the invasive non-native species strategy brochure published by the government, a ring-necked parakeet is frozen in flight above the pictures of an Asian hornet and a so-called killer shrimp.

Both the Asian hornet and the killer shrimp are Alert species. Any sightings must be reported as soon as possible to the NNSS. I read that the Asian hornet is not yet present in the country but is considered likely to arrive soon, most likely in southern parts of the country as it may be able to fly across the sea from the continent where they are said to have been spreading rapidly.

I saw Asian hornets unusual amphora-shaped nest hanging from the high branch of a tall acacia tree over the road leading to my parents' house. Hornets are dangerous, their painful sting can provoke deadly allergic reactions but Asian hornets are said to be even more so because their sting is more potent and they are particularly effective predators of other insects, honey bees in particular, for which they compete with the local European hornet.

I am not too fond of bees. Their sting is as bad as wasps and hornets in case of allergies. They are not aggressive like wasps but they can be dangerous. Bees are useful though: they produce honey and in collecting nectar contribute to the effective pollination of fruit trees. I have read that in the East in areas where they have disappeared, men have to pollinate apple trees by hand. Pollution is responsible for their disappearance, not hornets.

I received the bird feeders I ordered from the royal society for the protection of birds. I have second thoughts about installing them in the garden.

I am not sure it is a good idea to provide supplemental food to the neighbourhood birds. Do they actually need it? They seem to manage well enough with what they find in the gardens. What if it disturbs the balance of the garden environment? I read that ring-necked parakeets intimidate songbirds at birds tables; blue and great tits are more reluctant to feed when a parakeet is present. It is probably better not to intervene.

London, November 2015 – April 2016

NNSS
GB non-native species secretariat

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Welcome to the GB non-native species secretariat website

First published in 2008 and updated in 2015 the GB Invasive Non-native Species Strategy was developed to meet the challenge posed by invasive non-native species in Great Britain. This website provides tools and information for those working to support the strategy.

BE PLANT WISE Be plant wise and don't dump aquatic plants in the wild

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Asian hornet identified in Devon



Asian hornet identified in Devon, more info here

Species alerts! See all alerts

Asian hornet - *Vespa velutina*



News (archived news)

- New post-doc position on the economic cost of invasive species 12 October 2017
- New non-native species job: Marine Ecological Researcher / Project Officer 12 October 2017
- New 3 year post-doc position on ecological modelling of invasive species distributions 12 October 2017
- Asian hornet identified in Devon 26 September 2017
- Global perspectives help scientists to understand why and how invasive species move around the world 15 September 2017
- New Marine Pathways newsletter available 17 August 2017

Twitter

Check Clean Dry GB @CheckCleanDryGB

Great to work together to improve #biosecurity across the UK and Ireland

Check Clean Dry GB @CheckCleanDryGB

Learn to identify key #invasivespecies like

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Envoi

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Dearest A

Yesterday I went for a long walk in the park. It was cold and grey but a robin kept me company for a while, following me as I walked along the bare hedge, past the cemetery, on my way to the river. I stopped for a while to listen to its cheerful tweeting, thinking it was too early for robins to nest.

I started writing this letter four years ago. I have been wanting to find ways to talk to you, to tell you more about my work, how it has always related to the experience of becoming a mother and how my relationship with you has been changed through both. I want to forget, if only for the time of this letter, your other name, the name that came to you later, the name we have given you because you asked us to, because it is the way we should call you. You will always be what that name refers to: my mother. You called me into your life so I could begin mine. You raised me.

By calling you by your first name, I am breaching some of the boundaries that have been keeping us from knowing and loving each other not as daughter and mother but as beings becoming in their singular life journeys.

Naming a newborn child is an extraordinary and strange responsibility. It is the formal way the new, the unknown, the unnamed, the absolute other that was inside your womb is assigned to the world. The names you gave me run in the family: my first name is the name of your mother, my second name that of your sister, my godmother and the third is the name of Papa's mother. I bear family names and I sometimes feel I carry the family tree.

I often think of you and Papa, walking among the young trees you planted not so long ago. Are they growing well, your other grandchildren despite the summer drought and the gluttony of deer? I think of that place you have turned into your place, a place you long to pass on to us so your project continues to live. Transmission is a beautiful and difficult thing.

I came across words Simone Weil wrote not long before she died in England where she had joined the Free French:

L'enracinement est peut-être le besoin le plus important et le plus méconnu de l'âme humaine. C'est un des plus difficiles à définir. Un être humain a une racine par sa participation réelle, active et naturelle à l'existence d'une collectivité qui conserve vivants certains trésors du passé et certains pressentiments d'avenir.

Listen to the sound of her words in English:

Taking root is perhaps the most important and the most unrecognized need of the human soul. This is one of the most difficult to define. A human being has a root by his real, active and natural participation in the existence of a community that keeps alive some of the treasures of the past and some presentiments of the future.

Do her words talk to you in a different way in the music of that other language?

Last summer, I took a photograph of the cover pages of the book, *Prières du Prisonnier*, I have always seen at the bedside of Papa's mother. Her father gave it to her. I read in his elegant handwriting: 10 May 1945, the fourth day of liberation; and on the facing page:

C'est en s'accrochant au sol de France qu'ils sont tombés aux mains de l'ennemi.

Pétain (10 Oct. 40)

It is by clinging to the soil of France that they fell in the hands of the enemy.

I found the speech from which these words come: a speech written by Marshal Pétain, pronounced by Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancourt on French radio, announcing 'l'Ordre Nouveau', 'The New Order' that would be implemented in Non-Occupied France with the programme of the National Revolution.

I imagine my great-grand-father, prisoner of war, listening to those words 'clinging to the soil of France' and thinking about others, who did not and found a way to fight for the freedom of the people they loved, on an Island that welcomed them, a rare beacon of hope in these dark times of war and fascism.

One doesn't belong to any soil – or only, and not always, upon death. One does not belong to 'a people' as Hannah Arendt would perhaps have said. I think about what Yve Lomax recently wrote on the figure of 'a people', a figure truly without ground, emerging in its naming, through the use and abuse of language. One belongs with people to whom one can speak and by whom one can be heard.

On each journey from the Island through the north of France, we drive by the military cemeteries of the first world war that punctuate the land stretching from the Channel to the Rhine, a land regularly invaded and occupied over the last three hundred years and before. I have come to wonder whether the madness that has captured the Island over the past two years is perhaps the effect of a deep unconscious fear, the fear of fighting

for and dying on a foreign soil, surrounded by people one doesn't understand, never to return to the place in which one lived and loved. Being able to return to the place one comes from is perhaps the condition for one to take root in another place, belonging in this in-between.

I had to leave my mother tongue, my mother's tongue and find another one to hold me as I write, I speak to you, as I find words that may talk to you. Deux fois, J'ai traversé la mer et quitté ma mère et pourtant elle ne m'a jamais quittée. Je suis, souvent, la voie de ma mère et je suis, souvent la voix de ma mère. This, I said to a friend whom I met on the Island; our sons started nursery school together and we've been accompanying each other ever since. Do you hear the repetition of sounds that come from the homophony of the words mer/mère, suis/suis, voie/voix? Their homophony blends their polysemy together, a poetry lost in translation: twice, I crossed the sea to leave my mother and yet she has never left me. I often follow my mother's path; and yet, I am often my mother's voice. My mother, so often silent when I have wished we could speak.

Three summers ago, I wrote:

La langue de ma mère
Raisonne
Dans ma parole adressée aux enfants
J'entend ses mots
Répétés venus sans être appellés
Sortis de moi surprise d'entendre
La langue de ma mère
Dans le creux de ma voix

The tongue of my mother
Reasons
In the words I speak to the children
I hear her words
Repeated that come without being called
Coming out of me surprised to hear
The tongue of my mother
In the hollow of my voice

Three years later, I write:

La langue de ma mère
Résonne
Dans ma parole adressée aux enfants
J'entend ses mots
Répétés venus sans être appellés
Sortis de moi joyeuse d'entendre
La langue de ma mère
Dans le creux de ma voix.

The tongue of my mother
Resonates
In the words I speak to the children
I hear her words
Repeated that come without being called
Coming out of me joyful to hear
The tongue of my mother
In the hollow of my voice

I long for your loving silence and for the sound of your voice. I long for my mother's tongue.

London, December 2017



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Appendices

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Plurality of languages

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Plurality of languages is an ongoing project that experiments with the immersive encounter with another language to be experienced as an oscillation between thing and sign, between noise and sound through the reading in canon of translations in many languages of ‘Pluralität der Sprachen’, an entry dated November 1950 in Hannah Arendt’s *Denktagebuch* published in 2003 by Pieper Verlag.

During workshops I organised around the text or simply through conversations, people were invited to contribute translations of Hannah Arendt’s short text, in their mother tongues or in the other language(s) available to them.

Most participants did not read and understand German. They and were provided with English translations by German and French speaking participants to the project who worked from the original and the only published translation of Hannah Arendt’s *Denktagebuch, Journal de Pensée* I had come across, a French translation by Sylvie Courtine-Denamy, published in 2005. No published translation of the *Denktagebuch* is currently available in English.

I came across the English translation of the entry in Barbara Cassin’s *Nostalgia: When are we ever at home?* translated by Pascale –Anne Brault and published in 2016; through the endnotes, I traced an earlier inclusion of that translation in a paper co-written by Barbara Cassin and Andrew Goffey entitled ‘Sophistics, Rhetorics, and Performance: or, How to Really Do Things with Words’ published in *Philosophy & Rhetoric* in 2009.

The translations made for this project reflect the spontaneous engagement of the contributors in the project and do not claim to constitute a scholarly body of translations.

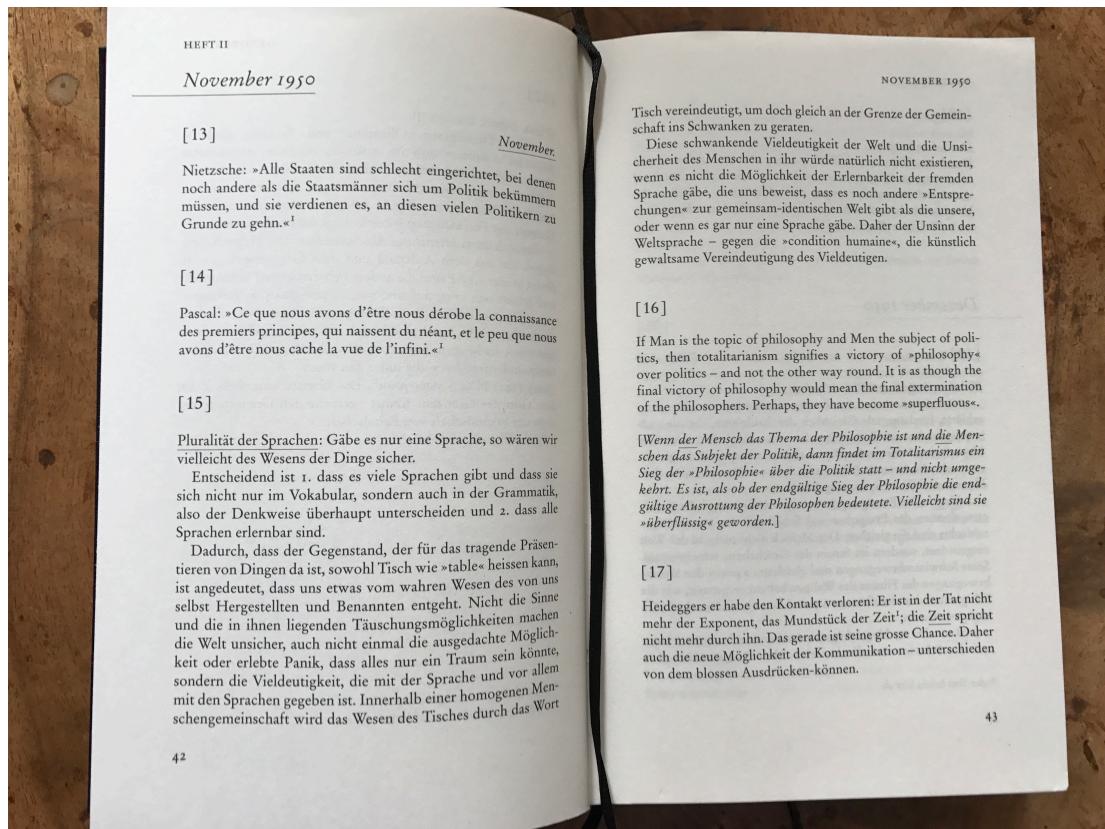
This growing collection of vernacular translations of Arendt’s ‘Pluralität der Sprachen’ currently gathers 19 languages and 20 translations. They formed the score for readings in canon performed in April 2015 during the Royal College of Art Research Biennale *Why Should I lie?* (London), in June 2015 at the French Institute on the occasion of Barbara Cassin’s talk *Europe, Translation and Everything In Between* (London), in March 2016 on the occasion of Copypress Readers Union event *Translation, Friendship* at the Austrian Cultural Forum (London) and in April 2016 at *Writing: an International Conference on Artistic Research* organised by the Society for Artistic Research (The Hague).

I wrote a short essay entitled *Towards an Ethics of Plurality* introducing the project, published in the book edited by the curators of *Why should I lie?* And published by the Royal College of Art.

The performance of *Plurality of Languages* that took place at the Austrian Cultural Forum is documented in a film that can be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/162245643>

The translations are presented in alphabetical order and when there is multiple translations in the same language in the alphabetical order of the contributors' surnames.

GERMAN



ARABIC

الطبعة الإنكليزية

ترجمة روث ماكلين (من النسخة الأصلية المكتوبة باللغة الألمانية ومن النسخة المترجمة إلى الفرنسية)

2015-2-9

تنوع اللغات: لو كانت لدينا لغة واحدة فقط في حياتنا، فربما سنكون أكثر تأكداً من جوهر الأشياء.

ولكن تبقى الحقيقة الحاسمة وهي أن: 1. هناك لغات عديدة، وكل لغة ليس فقط لها كلماتها الخاصة، ولكن لها أيضا قواعدها المحددة.
ويعني ذلك أن اللغات بالضرورة هي طرق مختلفة للتفكير الإنساني. وأيضا 2. يمكن أن نتعلم أي من هذه اللغات.

حقيقة أن الشيء الجماد التي نضع أو نعرض فوقه أشياء أخرى، يمكن بسهولة أن يُسمى منضدة أو^{en allemand} Tisch.
نقد جانباً من الجوهر الحقيقي للأشياء التي تُسمّيها أو نصنعها.

وما يجعل عالمنا شيئاً غير مؤكد، ليس الحقيقة أو الخيال التي تصنّعه هذه اللغات. وليس أيضاً تصور احتمالية أو الخوف من فكرة أن تكون حياتنا ربما ليست أكثر من مجرد خل، ولكن على العكس يأتي عدم اليقين هذا عن طريق المعاني العديدة التي تفرّزها أية لغة، وخاصة عن طريق اللغات الكثيرة.

ففي أي مجتمع إنساني متجانس تشير كلمة منضدة إلى جوهر المنضدة بصورة لا يُبَس فيها، ولكن حينما نذهب إلى أطراف أو حدود هذا المجتمع نجد أن معنى هذه الكلمة يبدأ في الترنح أو التغير. وإذا لم يكن ممكناً تعلم اللغات الأجنبية، فهو سبب لن يكون هناك وجود لهذا الترنح المتعدد التكافؤ أو التشابه للعالم، أو لشعور الناس الذين يعيشون فيه بعدم الأمان. وهذا يبرهن على أننا لو إفترضنا أن هناك لغة واحدة للعالم، فأيضا ستكون هناك "مرادفات" أخرى عديدة حتى داخل ذلك العالم المتجانس والمشابه. ويُظهر هذا عدم معقولية أو سخافة فكرة اللغة الكونية والتي تتعارض مع "الطبعة الإنسانية"، ولكونها أيضا عملية مُصطنعة بصورة كلية لتوحيد المعاني المتعددة.

ترجمة روث ماكلين (من النسخة الأصلية المكتوبة باللغة الألمانية ومن النسخة المترجمة إلى الفرنسية)

Translated by Maria Elliott (from the French published translation and the project
English translations)
(2016)

BAMBARA

Kanw cayali: N'i y'a sɔrɔ Kan kelen dɔrɔn tun bɛ yen, a dɔrɔ a bɛ se k'a fɔ k'an hakililatigelen don kosɛbe fənw baju dɔnni Na.

Min jɔyɔrɔ ka bon o ko la, o ye 1. Kanw cayali ni u danfarali ye ka bɔ ḥɔgɔn na n'i y'u dane jate walima u maben, o kɔrɔ ye ko kɛrenkɛrennenya la u miircogo tɛ kelen ye, o kɔ 2. Kanw bɛɛ bɛ se ka dege.

N'an sɔnna ko minew bɛ sigi fən min kan k'u jirali nɔgɔya, k'o tɔgɔ bɛ se ka kɛ dɔw bolo <<Tisch>>, ka tila ka kɛ dɔw bolo <<tabali>> ye, o b'a jira k'an bɛ minen minnu dilan, ka tɔgɔ da u la, k'olu baju fan dɔ dogolen b'an na. O ye k'a fɔ ko kɔrɔ walima filimayɔrɔ minnu b'u la, olu de tɛ diyen bila filanfilaya la ; wa i kan'a miri ko mirinan caman min se b'an ye, walima ko sirannya min b'an na a kana kɛ sugo oye, olu si tɛ. Nka siganan min sirilen bɛ fənw kɔrɔ la an ka kan, ani tɔw ka kanw fɛ de, o de don ka sago ko wɛrɛ kan. N'i ye hadamadenkulu kelen ta, o mɔgɔw bɛɛ fɛ, tabali baju dɔnnen don dane <<tabali>> fɛ, sigana t'o la. Nka n'a ye o jɛkulu dagayɔrɔ tɛmɛ, ka se dɔwɛrɛ ta ma, baju bɛ yigiycɔ.

Diyenso ka o yigiycɔli, ani sigasiga min bɛ Hadamaden na, olu tun tɛ ke n'a y'a sɔrɔ mɔgɔ tun tɛ se ka kan wɛrɛ dege, k'a dɔn ko <<bɛnŋɔgɔnma>> wɛrew bɛ yen, minnu t'an taw ye, walasa an ka bɛn diyenkelen na, hali n'a y'a sɔrɔ kan kelen de tun bɛ yen. Nin bɛɛ de b'a jira ko diyen bɛɛ ka kan kelenfo, o ye kùnfɛko de ye – min ni <<hadamadenya yɛrɛ taabolo>> tɛ bɛn, o fana kosɔn diyagoya kelenya ni sigasiga setigiya ye.

Translated by Aissata Tall (from the French published translations and the project
English translations)
(2015)

CHINESE: MANDARIN

语言的多元性：如果只有一种语言，我们或许可以对事物的本质更加确定。

决定因素为：

- 1.一种语言和另一种语言的区别不仅是词汇不同，还有语法的不同，也就是说就是思维方式的不同
- 2.所有语言都是可以习得的。

比如放东西的的台子叫做“Tisch”，也可以叫做“桌子”，这表明我们虽然可以命名事物，但不能确定事物的本质，使事物变得不确定的原因并不是人们的感官或者感官可能引起的幻觉，也不是对感觉只是一个梦幻的惧怕，而是语言的模糊性。在同一个语言的人群中，“桌子”确定地表明“桌子”这一事物的本质。但是到了另一语言的人群中，确定性就丧失了。如果人们不可能学习外语，就不会有这种模糊性及不安全感。因为人们学习外语时才意识到自己生活的世界居然还有其它方法命名事物。因此“一个全世界统一的语言”是不可能存在的，统一的语言人为地取缔所有的模糊性，这是违反人的本性的。

Translated by Shaomian Deng (from the project English translation)
(2015)

CHINESE: MANDARIN

语言的复多性：假如只有一种语言，我们也许会对事物的本质更有确信。具有决定性的事实是：1. 语言有若干种，而使它们得以相互区分的不仅是其词汇，还有其语法，也就是说，本质上是思维方式不同。2.所有的语言都是可以习得的。这里支撑物品陈放的物体可以叫“Tisch”*，也可以叫“桌子”，这表明虽然我们可以创造和命名事物，但事物中某些实质性的东西却溜走了。这既不是因为人的感官和感官可能引起的幻觉，使得这个世界变得不确定，也不是想象出的可能性或认为所有一切只是梦的恐惧，而是语言的模糊性造成的，对于不同语言更是如此。在同一语言的人群中，桌子的实质并不像“桌子”这个词一样具有模糊性，然而，一旦超出同一语言人群，它就变得摇摆不定起来。如果无法学习外语，这个世界摇摆不定的模糊性和身在其中的人的不安全感就不会证据确凿地存在，而学习外语的可能性证实了即使只有一种语言，在我们已知的“一致性”之外，还存在其它的同一世界的“一致性”。因此，普世语言是荒谬的，人为地缔造统一全能的语言而取消语言的模糊性，违背“人的本性”。

* “Tisch” 是德语，即桌子。在法语版本中，此处采用了德语词“Tisch”，在德语版本中，此处采用了法语词“Table”。此处作者意在引入一种不同语言对于桌子的命名。

Translated by Zhen Li (from the project English translations)
(2015)

CREOLE: MAURICIUS

Diversité mann langaz: si ti ena ene sel langaz, kit foi nou ti pou capav assiré nou compran natir banne différan kit choz.

Cé ki déterminan, cé 1) ki ena plisire langaz ek nou capav distinc sak langaz non selman par so vokabiler mé ossi par so grammaire, cé-à-dir, par so maniere pansé essentielman, 2) ki ena possibilité apran tou langaz.

Lé fé ki nou capav appell sa kit choz la "Tisch" ou "latab" montré ki nou pa compran tou a fé tou mann zafer ki nou fabriké ek ki nou nomé. Cé pa senz ki nou ine donn ene zafer, ni manne différan interprétation ki nou capav donne li ki ran lé monde insertain; cé pa non pli possibilité imazinair ou la per ki tou sa ene rev, mé plito lé fé ki senz ki mann langaz donné li flou. Dan ene kominoté umene omogen, sa mot "latab" indik klerman natir ene latab, mé dé ki nou arriv au bor kominoté la, so natir vine flou.

Sa natir flou ki nou ena dé liniver ek linsékirité dimoun ki habit li pa ti pou eczisté si nou pa ti capav apran manne langaz etranzere. Sa possibilité la montré nou ki ena encor dan lé zot "correspondances", dé sé ki nou ena, pou fer ene lémonde kommun ek identik, ou mem si ti ena ene sel langaz. Cé la ki nou truvé ki langaz iniversel ene notion absurd - li a lopposé **condition humaine**, ki diffikilté ki nou ena pou définir ene kit choz, li telman puisant ki li iniformize artificielman tou banne zafer.

Translated by Gayle Chong Kwan & Family (from the French published translation and the project English translations)
(2015)

DUTCH

De veelheid van talen: ware er slechts een taal, dan waren we misschien zeker van het wezen der dingen.

Door slaggevend is 1. dat er vele talen bestaan en dat die zich niet alleen in woordenschat, maar ook in grammatica, en daaruit volgend, in denkwijze onderscheiden en
2. > dat alle talen te leren zijn.

Daarom, het voorwerp dat bestaat ter ondersteuning van de voorstelling der dingen, en zowel 'Tafel' als >tisch< genoemd kan worden, ons ervan opmerkzaam maakt dat iets van essentie van de dingen die we maken en benoemen ons ontsnapt. Wat de wereld onzeker maakt zijn niet de zintuigen en de mogelijke deceptie ervan, zelfs niet de ingebeelde mogelijkheid of de ervaring van paniek dat alles slechts een droom zou kunnen zijn, maar gelijkgestemdheid, doorgegeven door taal, en belangrijker, door talen.

Binnen een homogene gemeenschap vindt het woord tafel haar essentie in gelijkgestemdheid, en slechts aan de marge van gemeenschappelijkheid begint dat te haperen.

Ware het niet mogelijk geweest een andere taal te leren dan zou de polysemy van de wereld en de onzekerheid van de mensen die daar in leven klaarblijkelijk niet bestaan, wat aantoon dat wanneer er slechts een taal zou zijn er nog steeds vele andere betekenissen zouden bestaan binnen deze wereld van gemeenschappelijke identiteit. Hierin ligt de absurditeit van een gemeenschappelijke taal, een krachtige artificiële uniformering van meerdere betekenissen, een idee dat tegen de 'condition humaine' indruist.

Translated by Ewoud Van Rijn (from the project contributed English translation)
(2016)

ENGLISH

If there were only one language, maybe the essence of things would be more secure.

What is crucial is:

1. That there are many languages and that they differ not only in vocabulary, but also in grammar, and so in the way of thinking.
2. That all languages are learnable.

The fact that an object designed to bear and present things can be called both "table" and "Tisch" suggests that we are losing something of the 'true essence' of the objects we ourselves make and name.

It is not only the senses and the possibility of the senses being deceived that make the world uncertain, nor the imagined possibility, or experienced panic, that everything could be just a dream, but the 'vieldeutigkeit' (multiplicity, ambiguity, many-interpretations-ness) of language, especially languages. Within a homogeneous human community the essence of 'table' becomes 'vereindeutigt' (bringing-together-of-interpretations/meaning, uniformity, becoming-without-doubt, becoming unambiguous, becoming clear cut)) by the word 'table', although the meaning is already becoming unstable right at its borders.

This fluctuating ambiguity of the world and the uncertainty of people in it would of course not exist if there was not a possibility of learning a foreign language, which proves to us that there are other 'Entsprechungen' (correspondences, ways of speaking) to a common world than our own, or even if were only a single language. Therefore the nonsense of a universal language - against the 'human condition', the artificial and violent 'Vereindeutigung' (bringing together of meaning, dispelling of doubt, uniformising) of 'vieldeutigen' (multiplicity, ambiguity, equivocacy).

Translated by Julian Lass (from the original German text)
(2015)

ENGLISH

The Plurality of Languages: if there was only one language, we would perhaps be more sure of the essence of things.

The decisive fact is that 1. there are several languages and not only do they have distinct vocabularies, but they also have distinct grammars, that is, they are essentially distinct ways of thinking, and 2. all languages can be learnt.

The fact that an object that holds things on it for display can just as easily be a ‘Tisch’ as a ‘table’, suggests that some true essence of the things that we make and name escapes us. It is not the senses and the illusions that they can produce that make the world uncertain, nor is it imagining the possibility and panicking at the idea that everything in our lives might just be a dream, but rather it is the multiple meanings that are given by language, and especially by many languages. Within a homogenous human community, the essence of table is indicated unequivocally by the word ‘table’, but as soon as it reaches the edge of the community the word starts to wobble.

If it wasn’t possible to learn foreign languages then this wobbly multi-valence of the world and the insecurity of the humans who live in it would obviously not be the case, which proves that even if there was only one language there would still be many other ‘correspondences’ within this common, identical world. Hence the absurdity of the universal language—which goes against the ‘human condition’—the totally artificial uniformisation of multiple meanings.

Translated by Ruth MacLennan (from the original German text and the French published translation)
(2015)

ENGLISH

PLURALITY OF LANGUAGES: If there were only one language, we would perhaps be certain of the essence of things.

Decisive is 1. that there are many languages and that they differ not only in vocabulary, but also in grammar, hence in the manner of thinking as such and 2. that all languages can be learnt.

That an object, whose purpose is the supporting presentation of things, can equally well be called Tisch or “table”, implies that something of the true essence of the things we make and name escapes us. What makes the world uncertain lies not in the senses and in the possibility of deception therein, not even in the imagined possibility or experienced panic that all may be but a dream, but in the equivocity given with language and, more importantly, with languages. Within a homogeneous community of men the word table renders the essence univocal, only to start wavering at the community's limit.

Both this wavering equivocity of the world and the uncertainty of men in it wouldn't exist, of course, if there wasn't the possibility of learning a foreign language, which proves that there are other “correspondences” than ours to a common-identical world, nor if there were only one language. Hence the nonsense of a world language – contrary to the “condition humaine”, the rendering univocal of the equivocal with artificial forcefulness.

Translated by Cécile Malaspina (from the original German text and the French published translation)
(2015)

ENGLISH

Plurality of languages: if there were only one language, we would perhaps be more assured of the essence of things.

The decisive fact is that 1. there are several languages and that they are distinguished from one another not only by their vocabulary, but also by their grammar, that is to say essentially by their way of thinking, and 2. All languages can be learnt.

The fact that an object that holds things on it for display can be called “Tisch” as well as table indicates that something of the true essence of the things we make and we name escapes us. It is not the senses and the possibilities of illusion they carry that render the world uncertain, nor the imaginable possibility or the lived panic that it all may be only a dream, but rather the equivocity of meaning that is given with language and even more so with languages. Within a homogeneous human community, the essence of the table is indicated unequivocally by the word “table”, but as soon as it reaches the borders of the community, this word falters.

This faltering equivocity of the world and the insecurity of man who inhabits it would evidently not exist if it was not possible to learn foreign languages, a possibility that proves that other “correspondences” than ours exist for a common and identical world, even though only one language would exist. Hence the absurdity of the universal language – which goes against the “condition humaine”, the artificial and all-powerful uniformisation of equivocity.

Translated by Amélie Mourgue d’Algue (from the French published translation and the project English translation)

(2015, revised 2016)

ENGLISH

Plurality of languages: if there were only one language, we would perhaps be more assured of the essence of things.

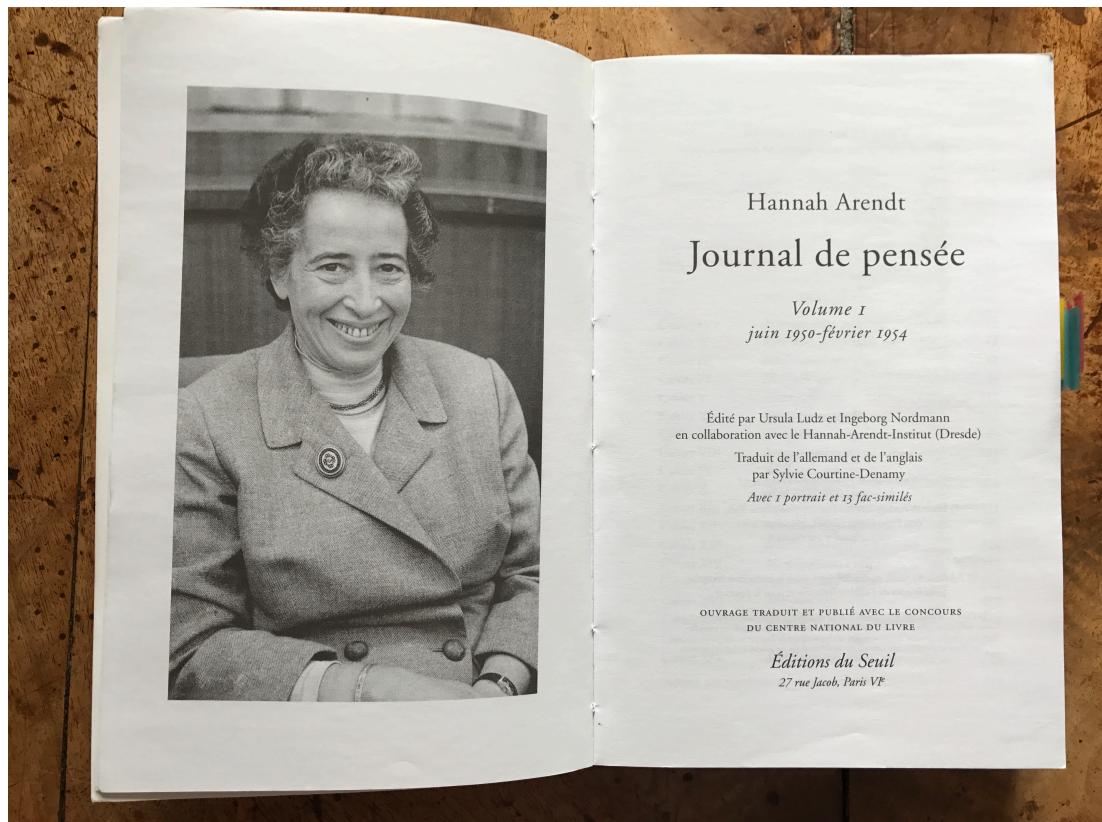
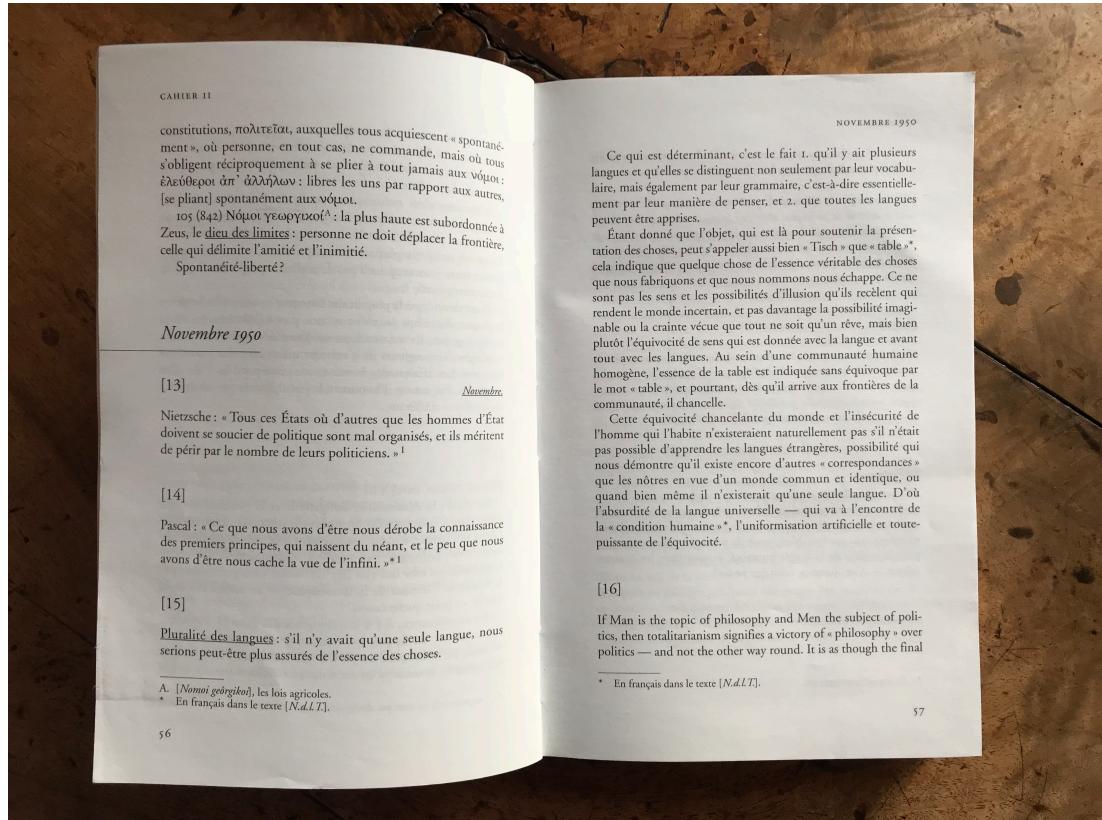
The decisive fact is that 1. There are several languages and that they are distinguished from one another, not only by their vocabulary, but also by their grammar, that is, they are essentially distinct ways of thinking, and 2. All languages can be learnt.

The fact that an object that holds things on it for display can be called a 'Tisch' as well as 'table' suggests that something of the true essence of the things we make and we name escapes us. It is not the senses and the possibilities of illusion they produce that make the world uncertain, nor is it imagining the possibility and panicking at the idea that everything in our lives might just be a dream, but rather it is the multiple meanings that are given by language, and especially by many languages. Within a homogeneous human community, the essence of a table is indicated unequivocally by the word 'table', but as soon as it reaches the edge of that community, this word 's meaning starts to vacillate.

If it wasn't possible to learn foreign languages then this polysemy of the world and the insecurity of the humans who live in it would obviously not exist, which proves that even if there were only one language there would still be many other parallel meanings within this common identical world. In this lies the absurdity of a universal language, a forceful artificial uniformisation of multiple meanings, an idea that goes against the 'condition humaine'.

Translated by Caroline Pridgeon (from the original German text and the French published translation)
(2016)

FRENCH



تکثر زبان : اگر فقط یک زبان وجود داشت، ما شاید بیشتر مطمئن از ماهیت و جوهر آن بودیم.

چیزی که تعیین کننده است این واقیت است که:

1. چندین زبان وجود دارد و آنها تنها از نظر لغت تمایز ندارند، بلکه از نظر دستور زبان، در اصل از نظر راه و روش تفکر شان با یکدیگر متفاوتند.
2. همه زبان هارا می توان آموخت.

از آنجایی که اینجا چیزی هست برای حمایت از ارائه ی چیزها میتوانند انها را "تیش" هم نامیده شوند تا "میز"؛ این نشان می دهد که چیزی از ماهیت چیزهایی که ما می سازیم یا نام گذاری می کنیم از ما فرار می کند. این چیز نه احساس است و نه امکانات و همی که حمل می کنند که جهان را نا معلوم نشان میدهد ، و نه امکان قابل تصور یا ترسی ناشی از این است که شاید همه اش تنها یک رویا باشد، بلکه بر عکس این ابهام معنی است که در زبان و بیشتر در زبان هاست.

درون یک جامعه ی یکدست انسانی، ماهیت میز بدون ابهام توسط کلمه نمایان می شود و هر چند، به محض رسیدن به مرز های جامعه، ماهیت میز بی رمق می شود. این ابهام در حال بی رمق شدن جهان و سنتی کسی که در آن زندگی می کند اشکارا وجود نمی داشت. اگر امکان اموختن زبان خارجی نبود ، امکانی که نشان می دهد به غیر از سازگاری ما، سازگاری های دیگری برای یک جهان همانند و یکسان وجود دارد، حتی اگر یک زبان وجود می داشت.

FRIULANO

La pluralitât das lenghes: S'a esistes une sole lenghe, forsit i podaresin jessi cierts da esistence das robes.

A jessi decisîv a l'è il fat che 1. a esistin tantes lenghes ca si disferencin no nome tal vocabulari, ma encje in ta lor gramadie, valadì essenzialmentri tal lor mut di pensa, e 2. che dute las lenghes a podin jessi imparades.

Il fat che l'imprest chal sta la par sostegni las robas, a po jessi clamat sia “Tisch” sia “taule”, a l'indiche che alc da vere essence das robes chi fascin e nominin, a si scjampe. A no son i sens ne la possibilitat di illusion ca si nascuind in lor a fa il mond inciert, e necje la possibilitat imaginade o la paure provade qualchi volte al pensir che dut a poderes jessi nome un sump, ma pluitost la doplece (equivocitat) ca ven cun la lenghe e, sore dut, cun las lenghes. In une comunitât umane omogenie, l'essence da taule a è segnalade cence malintindûts da paraule “taule”, ma ben propit al confin di che comunitât a comence a clopâ.

Cheste doplece clopadi□e dal mond e la malsigurece da int ca vi viv, a no esistares sa no fos possibil impara lenghes forestes, une possibilitât ca si dimostre che par un mond comun e identic a esistin altres corispondences in plui das nestres, e ca esistaresin encje sa esistes un uniche lenghe. Da chi a ven l'assurditât da lenghe universâl – ca va cuintre la “condition humaine” - l'uniformizâ pusti□ e sfuar□ât da doplece.

Translated by Elisa Adami (from the original German text, the French published translation, her Italian translation and the project English translation)
(2016)

GREEK

Consent pending

HEBREW

עברית

תרגום (חופשי): רונית מירסקי

רבגניות השפה: אם הייתה שפה אחת בלבד, היוינו אולי בטוחים יותר ב מהותם של דברים.

העוכרות המכבריות:

1. קיימות מספר שפות, והן מוחנות אחת מהשניה לא רק על ידי אוצר המילים שלהם, אלא גם על ידי דרכם, כמו ביסודה של דרך החשיבה, ו-2. כל השפות ניתנות ללמידה.

כיוון שהאובייקט הנמצא כאן על מנת לתמוך בהציג הדברים יכול להזכיר שולחן באותה מידה שהוא יכול להזכיר "טיש" (Tisch),^{*} הדבר מציע על כך שימוש ב מהותם האמיתית של הדברים אותם אנו יוצרים ומכנים בשם נעלם מאיינו. אלו לא התחושים עצם רק חלום, אלא רב-המשמעותיות הניתנות עם השפה וייתר מכך עם שפות. בתוך קהילה אנושית הומוגנית, מהות השולחן נבחנת ללא רב-המשמעות של המילה "שולחן", וברגע שהיא מגיעה לגבולות הקהילה, היא מתנדנרת. ונדר רבת משמעותו זו של העולם וחוסר הביטחון של האנשים המאכלסים אותו, בסופה של דבר לא תהיה קיימת אם לא יהיה ניתן למדוד שפות ורות, אפשרות המגימה ש"מכותבים" אחרים קיימים עבורי עולם שכיה וזהה, אפילו אם רק שפה אחת תהיה קיימת. מכאן האבסורדיות בשפה בינלאומית - היוצאה נגד ה-"condition humaine", המלאכותיות בנזין הכווני לאחר את הרבה-משמעות.

* כתוב בצרפתית בטקסט המקורי הגרמני

Translated by Ronit Mirski (from the project contributed English translations)
(2015)

ITALIAN

La pluralità delle lingue: Se esistesse una sola lingua, forse potremmo essere certi dell'essenza delle cose.

Ad essere decisivo è il fatto che 1. esistono molte lingue e che esse si differenziano non solo nel vocabolario, ma anche nella loro grammatica, vale a dire essenzialmente nel modo di pensare, e 2. che tutte le lingue possono essere apprese.

Il fatto che l'oggetto, che è là per sostenere la presentazione delle cose, può essere chiamato sia "Tisch" sia "tavola", indica che qualcosa della vera essenza di ciò che noi stessi fabbrichiamo e nominiamo ci sfugge. Non sono i sensi né le possibilità di illusione che si celano in essi a rendere il mondo incerto, e nemmeno la possibilità immaginata o il panico provato talvolta al pensiero che tutto potrebbe essere nient'altro che un sogno, ma piuttosto l'equivocità che viene data con la lingua, e soprattutto, con le lingue. In una comunità umana omogenea, l'essenza della tavola è indicata senza equivoco dalla parola "tavola", e tuttavia, proprio al confine di tale comunità inizia a traballare.

Questa traballante equivocità del mondo e l'incertezza della gente che lo abita, non esisterebbero se non fosse possibile imparare le lingue straniere, possibilità che ci dimostra che per un mondo comune e identico esistono altre "corrispondenze" oltre alle nostre, e che esisterebbero anche se vi fosse una sola lingua. Da qui deriva l'assurdità della lingua universale – che va contro la "condition humaine"^{*} – l'uniformizzazione artificiale e forzata dell'equivocità.

Translated by Elisa Adami (from the original German text, the French published translation and the project English translations)
(2015)

JAPANESE

複数の言語：言語が世界に一つだけなら、モノの「本来の意味」はより確実に理解することができる。

決定的要因：

1. 言語は複数であり、それぞれの言語は、語彙や文法でも区分される。つまり基本的に物事についての考えは異なる。

2. 全ての言語は修得することができる。モノ（対象）の表現、例えば、「机」は「テーブル」とも呼ぶことができるので、本来の意味の一部は把握できないかもしれない。

世界が不確実な理由は、感覚とそれから生じる幻想の多様さではなく、単なる妄想や恐怖でもない。言語そのものの中に含まれる意味の不確実さが原因であり、言語が複数存在することでより不確実となるのだ。

一つの民族においては、「机」と言う言葉は机の本質を表すが、民族と民族の境界に近づけば、その意味は不確実になる。

この世界の不確実性と、そこに生きる人間の不安を取り除くのは、言語の修得をおいて他にはない。同時に、言語を学ぶことで、同一かつ共通である世界を表現するには「異なる反応」があるということが明らかになる。

ゆえに普遍的な言語の存在は不条理ということになる。人工的で全能による、あいまいさ、および多義性の一元化が不可能であり、普遍的な言語は「人間の条件」に反するのだ。

Translated by Carol Mancke abd Keiichi Ogata (from the project English translations)
(2015)

KOREAN

언어의 복수성: 만약 오직 하나의 언어만 존재한다면, 아마도 우리는 사물의 본질에 대해 보다 더 확신할 것이다.

결정적인 사실은 다음과 같다.

첫째로, 어휘뿐만 아니라 문법적인 면에 있어서 명백하게 구별되는 여러 언어들이 존재한다. 그리고 그 언어들은 본질적으로 다른 사고방식에 기인한다.

둘째로, 모든 언어는 습득될 수 있다.

사물을 보여주기 위해 올려들 수 있는 물체가 ‘티しゃ(Tisch)’ 또는 ‘테이블(Table)’라고 불릴 수 있다는 사실은 우리가 만들어내고 이름 붙이는 것의 진정한 본질을 놓치고 있음을 암시한다. 세계를 불확실하게 만드는 것은 다른 언어들이 만들어내는 감각과 환상의 가능성 혹은 상상되는 가능성도 아니고 우리 삶의 모든 것이 꿈일지도 모른다는 생각에 의한 공포도 아니다. 그것은 오히려, 언어, 특히 많은 언어에 의해 주어지는 다의성 때문이다. 하나의 단일민족 공동체 내에서, 책상의 본질은 ‘테이블(table)’이라는 단어에 의해 명백하게 나타나지만, 이 공동체의 경계에 도달하는 즉시 이 단어의 의미는 불안정해지기 시작한다.

만약 외국어를 배우는 것이 불가능하다면, 이 세계의 다의성과 이곳에 살고 있는 사람들의 불안감은 분명히 존재하지 않았을 것이고, 이는 비록 오직 하나의 언어만 존재하더라도 공통적이고 동일한 세계 내에서 다른 많은 평행적 의미들이 존재할 가능성을 증명한다. 여기에는 보편적 언어의 모순, ‘인간의 조건’에 반하는 다의성의 강력하고 인위적인 단일화가 숨어있다.

Translated by Kyung Hwa Shon (from the project English translations)
(2015, revised 2017)

NORVEGIAN

Språkenes mangfold: Om det bare fantes ett språk, så ville vi kanskje vært sikker på tingenes vesen.

Det avgjørende er 1. at det finnes flere språk, og at disse ikke bare skiller seg fra hverandre når det gjelder vokabular, men også med hensyn til grammatikk, det vil si at de representerer ulike måter å tenke på, og 2. at alle språk kan læres.

Det faktum at et objekt som er til for å sette ting på, like gjerne kan hete «bord» som «table», antyder at noe av vesenet til de tingene vi selv har navngitt og laget unnsliper oss. Det er hverken betydningene eller de mulighetene til forveksling de rommer, og heller ikke den teoretiske muligheten eller panikkfølelsen ved tanken på at alt kanskje bare er en drøm, som gjør verden til et uforutsigbart sted. Det skyldes snarere flertydigheten som oppstår gjennom språket, eller rettere sagt språkene. Innenfor et homogent menneskelig fellesskap gjøres bordets vesen entydig gjennom ordet bord, selv om det blir ustadic med en gang man nærmer seg fellesskapets grenser.

Denne ustadicheten som preger verden og menneskenes usikkerhet overfor den, ville naturligvis ikke eksistert hvis det ikke var mulig å lære seg fremmede språk, som beviser at det finnes flere «forbindelser» til vår felles, identiske verden enn de vi selv har, eller flere enn om det bare hadde funnits ett språk. Dermed blir ideen om et universelt språk absurd, den strider mot «la condition humaine» – på kunstig vis prøver den å tvinge det flertydige inn i entydigheten.

Translated by Nina Schjønsby (from the German original text and the project English translations)

(2016, revised 2017)

PORtuguese

A pluralidade das línguas: se existisse apenas um idioma, talvez pudéssemos estar mais seguros da essência das coisas.

O que é determinante é o facto de:

1. Existirem vários idiomas e se distinguirem uns dos outros não só pelo seu vocabulário mas também pela sua gramática, isto é, essencialmente, pela sua maneira de pensar, e 2. Todas as línguas podem ser aprendidas.

Uma vez que o objeto que serve para apoiar a apresentação das coisas pode ser chamado "Tisch" ou "table"*, isso indica que algo da verdadeira essência das coisas que fazemos e nomeamos nos escapa. Não são os sentidos ou as possibilidades de ilusão que as coisas transportam que tornam o mundo incerto, nem a imaginável possibilidade ou o medo vivido de que tudo possa ser apenas um sonho, mas sim a equivocidade do significado que é dado através da língua ou idioma e, mais ainda, através das várias línguas. Dentro de uma comunidade humana homogénea a essência da mesa é indicada inequivocamente pela palavra "mesa" e, no entanto, assim que atinge as fronteiras da comunidade, ela hesita e esmorece. Esta equivocidade vacilante do mundo e a insegurança do homem que o habita, evidentemente não existiriam se não fosse possível aprender línguas estrangeiras, uma possibilidade que demonstra que existem outras "correspondências", para lá das nossas, num mundo comum e idêntico, embora apenas existisse uma língua. Daí o absurdo da linguagem universal - que vai contra a "condição humana", a artificial e todo-poderosa uniformização da equivocidade.

(246 palavras).

* Em francês no texto original em alemão.

Translated by Joana Pereira (from the project English translations)
(2015)

RUSSIAN

Множественность языков: Если бы язык был только один, мы наверняка были бы более уверены в сути вещей.

Решающим тут является то, что 1) существуют различные языки, и они отличаются друг от друга не только своим словарем, но и грамматикой, а значит, существенно отличаются способом мышления, и 2) всем языкам можно научиться.

Тот факт, что объект, на котором располагаются предметы для обозрения, может быть назван как “Tish”, так и “Стол”, указывает на то, что некоторая часть истинной сущности вещей, которую мы производим и именуем, ускользает от нас. То, что делает мир неопределенным, лежит не в плоскости смысла, и не в возможности заблуждения, которое оно порождает, и даже не в возможном или испытанном чувстве паники, что все это, возможно, является сном, а скорее в множественности значений, которые даны нам языком. В рамках однородного сообщества людей, сущность стола задана однозначно словом стол, но как только она достигает пределов сообщества, слово начинает колебаться.

Если бы изучение иностранных языков было бы невозможно, если бы не было возможности доказать, что соответствия, отличные от наших, существуют в общем и идентичном мире, тогда бы не было бы этой колеблющейся многозначности мира и ненадежности человека, который его населяет. Отсюда вся абсурдность идеи универсального языка, абсолютно искусственной униформизации множественности значений, идущей вразрез с “condition humaine”.

Translated by Natalja Vikulina (from the project English translations)
(2015)

SLOVENIAN

Consent pending

SPANISH

La pluralidad de lenguas: si existiese una sola lengua, estaríamos quizás más seguros de la esencia de las cosas. Lo que es determinante es el hecho de que: 1. existen varias lenguas y se distinguen unas de otras, no solamente por su vocabulario sino también por su gramática, es decir, esencialmente por su propia forma de pensar y; 2. todas las lenguas pueden ser aprendidas.

Dado que el objeto, que está ahí para dar apoyo a la presentación de las cosas, puede designarse tanto “Tisch” como “table”*, esto es indicativo de que algo en la verdadera esencia de las cosas que fabricamos y que nominamos nos elude. No son los sentidos ni las posibilidades de ilusión que conllevan los que generan que el mundo sea incierto, ni siquiera la posibilidad imaginada o el miedo real de que todo pudiera ser solo un sueño, sino más bien la equivocidad de sentidos que conlleva la lengua, más aún con la existencia de tantas lenguas. En el seno de una comunidad humana homogénea, la esencia de la table queda indicada sin lugar a equivocación por medio de la palabra “table,” y sin embargo en cuanto ésta alcanza las fronteras de su comunidad, se tambalea.

Esta equivocidad tambaleante del mundo y la inseguridad del hombre que lo habita, evidentemente no existirían si no fuese posible el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, una posibilidad que nos demuestra que existen otras “correspondencias” además de las nuestras frente a un mundo común e idéntico, aún cuando sólo existiese una sola lengua. He aquí el absurdo de una lengua universal — que va en contra de la “condición humana”*, la uniformidad artificial y potente de la equivocidad.

* Términos en su versión original como aparecen en el texto original en alemán.

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Documentation of work: *Home?* exhibition
Masbro Community Centre, London W14 0LR
(3rd-14th June 2017)

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Home?
Masbro Community Centre
3rd-14th June 2017

When are we ever at home? When we are welcomed, we ourselves along with those who are close to us, together with our language, our languages.

Barbara Cassin, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault, in *Nostalgia, When are we ever at home?* Fordham University Press, 2016, p.63.

For the past two years, artist Amélie Mourgue d'Algue has been in conversation with the students and teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes at the Masbro Community Centre. Conversations about what it means to feel at home took place around familiar objects and images. The experience of home is profoundly linked to a feeling of belonging to a place – a place to go to, to dwell in, to leave and to return to. To belong also means to feel part of a meshwork of lived and positively remembered relationships. The Masbro Community Centre fosters such relationships by providing the context and the means by which one is given the ability to speak out, to be listened and responded to - especially in its language classes.

The language students, their teacher and the artist have looked at images of still lifes, an art historical genre often associated with the domestic, and talked about what looking at these images made them feel and think about. One of these images, *Glass of Water and Coffee Pot*, a painting by 18th century French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin, holds significant resonances for the artist's current research.

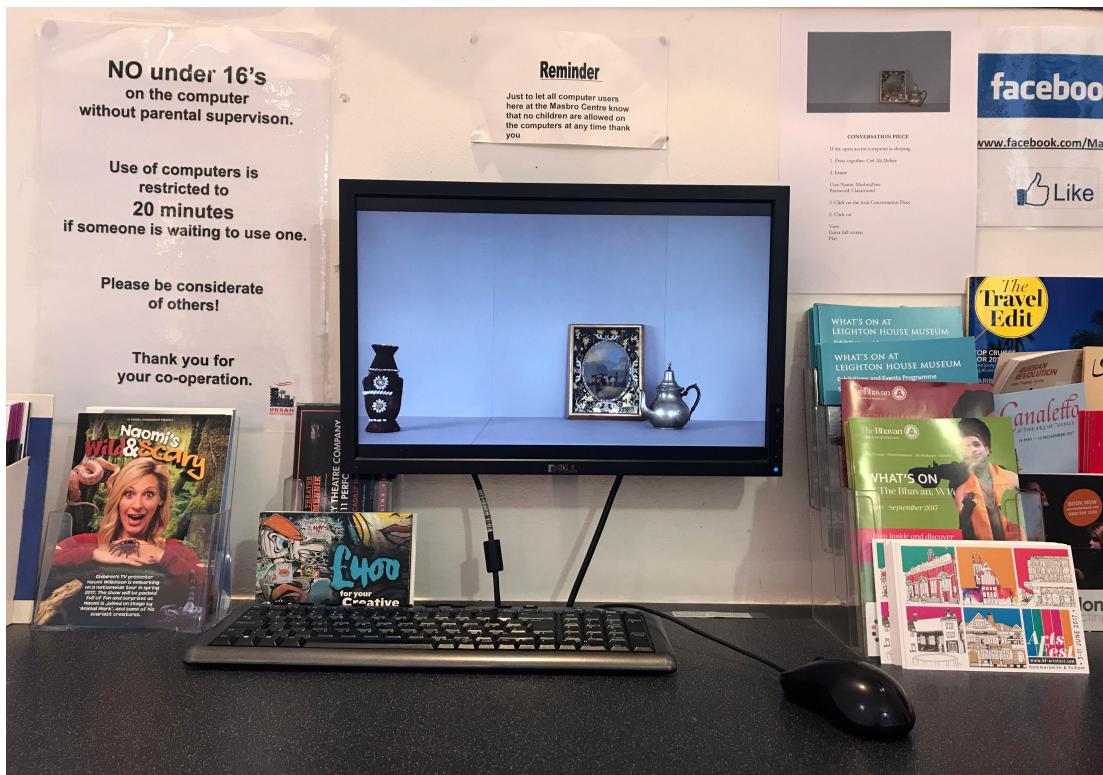
The artist has invited the students and their teacher to bring along objects that evoke 'home' for them. Together, they created still life compositions photographed in the context of the class. Revisiting the genre of the still life, this collaborative work refers back to the *xenia*, paintings and mosaics decorating the walls and floors of the room in which wealthy ancient Greeks welcomed their guests for a first meal.

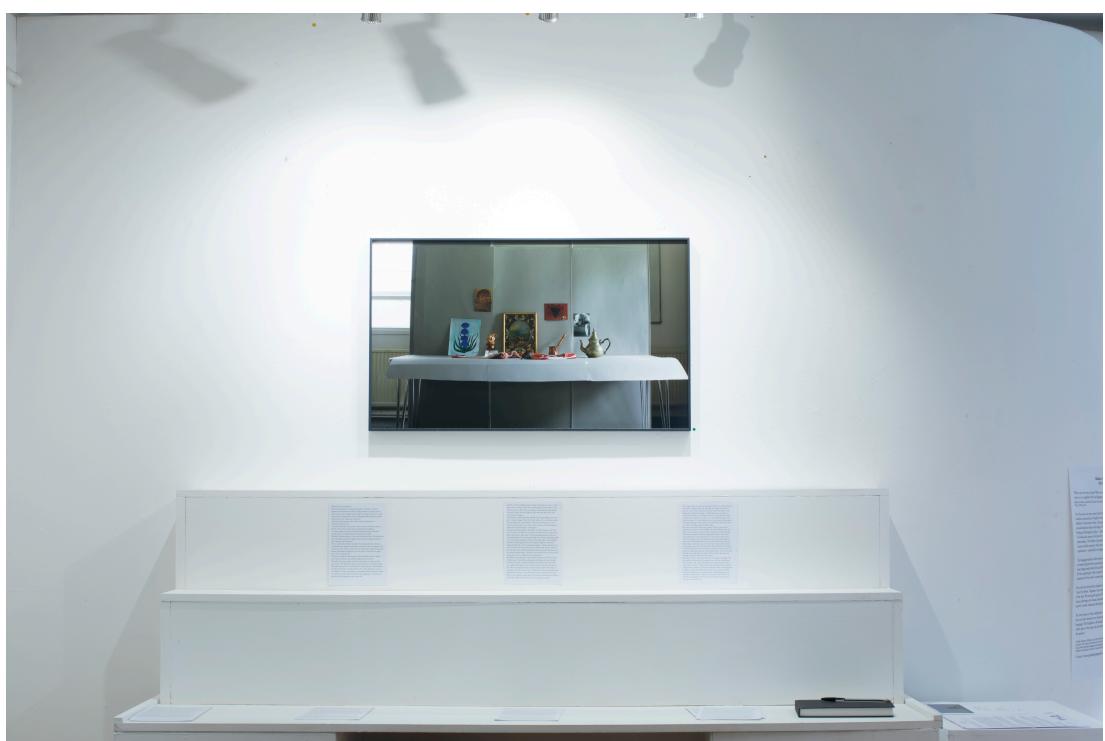
The time frame of this collaborative work with the artist allowed for a meshwork of relations to form between very diverse people gathering together in order to learn a common language. The English art historical term for a group portrait is conversation piece. *Conversation piece* is the name the artist has given to a short film produced with the participants of the project.

Amélie Mourgue d'Algue is an artist and researcher based in the School of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art in London. Her current work focuses on what it means to belong, exploring this question through the experience of living with multiple languages and through a social art practice in which participants explore the poetic, emotive, reflexive and phatic function of words and the image, still and moving.

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