

# **Translating in the Age of the Global Anthropos**

by

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Most readily grasped and discussed as a process of transference, translation bears the marks of history it conveys and necessarily submits to the constraints of contemporaneity. These constraints, both limiting and enabling to varying degrees, apply equally to the principles of faithfulness according to which translation is judged, to the notion of technical mastery it implies, the worldview it fosters, and the historical understanding it mobilizes. The translating activity of modernity cannot be considered in isolation from modern political economies, which include the concepts and dynamics of historical understanding and the discourses it permits. It belongs to the modern configuration of knowledge informed by the rise and grammatical conceptions of vernacular languages, the zealous building of national cultures, discrete state economies involved in global commerce, and the securing of territorial borders, both real and imagined. In sum, thinking about translation in the context of an ever expanding globalism, which characterizes both political and discursive economy, entails reflection on the presuppositions of modernity coextensive with translation, whether conceived as a cultural product or as an ongoing activity.

On a most abstract level, (linguistic) translation in modernity implies a global vision, however rudimentary it might be, a notion of difference, and an operative understanding of how that difference might be bridged. Furthermore, bridging these differences, often attributed to culture, to language, and to community, including the beliefs and values belonging to it, requires a strong vision of the human being, a key concept in the modern schema of global historical understanding. Without the universal notion of the human being, which embodies characteristics that are supposedly shared by all individual humans, translation would be an unthinkable endeavor with no *raison d'être*. Only a conception of underlying human similitude allows for assuming the reduction or outright elimination of differences that serve as an obstacle to understanding and that make translation necessary in the first place.

In this context I want to refer to a text that played a major role in founding modernity's concept of the human even as its fate in translation succinctly expresses the primary presuppositions of modern translating. This text, John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), traces the modalities of understanding that belong specifically to the human being as a universal concept projected throughout the entire globe from the 18th century on. In attempting to analyze how cultural and religious beliefs run counter to the faculty of reason shared by all humans, Locke offers an example to explain how history, authority, habit, and experience contribute to human errors of knowledge. This lengthy section contains the following passage which will be directly relevant to the issue of translation, globalization, and the human being:

The great obstinacy that is to be found in men firmly believing quite contrary opinions, though many times equally absurd, in the various religions of mankind, are as evident a proof as they are

an unavoidable consequence of this way of reasoning from received traditional principles. So that men will disbelieve their own eyes, renounce the evidence of their senses, and give their own experience the lie, rather than admit of anything disagreeing with these sacred tenets. Take an intelligent Romanist that, from the first dawning of any notions in his understanding, hath had this principle constantly inculcated, viz. that he must believe as the church (i.e. those of his communion) believes, or that the pope is infallible, and this he never so much as heard questioned, till at forty or fifty years old he met with one of other principles: how is he prepared easily to swallow, not only against all probability, but even the clear evidence of his senses, the doctrine of *transubstantiation*? This principle has such an influence on his mind, that he will believe that to be flesh which he sees to be bread. (...) Whoever, therefore, have imbibed wrong principles, are not, in things inconsistent with these principles, to be moved by the most apparent and convincing probabilities, till they are so candid and ingenuous to themselves, as to be persuaded to examine even those very principles, which many never suffer themselves to do.<sup>1</sup>

Locke's firm belief in the priority of empirical experience, in addition of course to his own religious beliefs, leave no doubt about where his own sympathies lie: With regard at least to transubstantiation, experience demonstrates that the Romanist, that is, the Roman Catholic, is in error because in the truth struggle between experience and beliefs, experience wins.

The brute reasoning can be summarized: Bread is bread, after all, and only wrong principles, imbibed without question, can make it seem to be other than it is. What gives this absolute empirical priority its force is the human conceived as generically capable of decoding that empirical reality. This novel notion of the human being, which thinks the human as a secular actor who sloughs off (religious) tradition in prizing individual reason and the experience serving as its fodder, has come to be synonymous with modern consciousness itself. While Locke's philosophy was instrumental to « Enlightenment » rethinking of human history, tradition, and agency, the thrust of this passage lies elsewhere. Wrong principles -- which today we would be more likely to call « ideologies » -- lead to a perpetual misrecognition of the real, a disjunction between senses and mind, what Locke calls the « internal oracles .» This misrecognition or « error » becomes possible as error, recognizable as a potential error, only as the fictional Romanist encounters one of « other principles ,» one not belonging to his communion or community.

This encounter with a stranger possessing other principles creates the conditions for a movement of self-reflection that would presumably lead to correction of the error or at least to a greater commensurability between mind and senses. Locke, perhaps best known today as the philosopher of tolerance, places at the center of his theory of knowledge the notions of otherness, recognition of difference, and experience of the unknown which challenges unquestioned authority and tradition, whether collective or individual. In this passage, for example, the notion of otherness, of an encounter with another who acts according to other principles -- or other cultural beliefs or imperatives -- takes

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<sup>1</sup>John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1959), 450-51.

center stage; even though it mentions transubstantiation, Locke's illustration wholly ignores debates about the Eucharist's implications for theories of discourse and meaning, debates that were prevalent in the 17th century (for instance, among those of Port Royal).<sup>2</sup> Locke judiciously avoids such controversies precisely because they inhabit the realm of tradition and belief, which in his view have an arbitrary aspect that distorts experience.

Translation, on the other hand, which derives its very possibility from the otherness rendering it necessary, negotiates the fractures and fissures between traditions and the paradigms of knowledge and belief they project through time. The French translation of Locke's *Essay* was completed by Pierre Coste, translator as well of works by Newton and Shaftesbury in addition to numerous works from classical Greek and contemporary Italian and the most accomplished French translator of his time. Moreover, Coste was Locke's amanuensis during his final years, and Locke was involved in reviewing and revising the translation.<sup>3</sup> From a global perspective (in this case, primarily European), which envisages the limits for a potential diffusion of Locke's work, the question of religion was intertwined with that of tradition. In the 17th century, human thought critical of centuries of institutionalized knowledge was most likely to be of protestant inspiration. In view of an eventual translation of the *Essay*, this bundle of concerns and interests loomed in the background. As one critic puts it, « Obviously the Catholics did not entirely approve of Locke's ideas; a good Catholic would have been unable to be as absorbed in Locke's thoughts as was Coste. Such a book required a protestant translator. »<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the religious issue per se diminishes in importance to make room for the new conception of human agency and thinking that emerged in the wake of Roman Catholic hegemony, even though the critical frame of mind vis-à-vis tradition remains pertinent.

In Coste's French translation, the rendering of the central section of this passage offers a linguistic enactment of its argument, although the differences between the English and the French require deciphering:

Prenez un *Luthérien* de bon sens à qui l'on aît constamment inculqué ce principe, (dès que son Entendement a commencé de recevoir quelques notions) *Qu'il doit croire ce que croyent ceux de sa Communion*, de sorte qu'il n'ait jamais entendu mettre en question ce Principe, jusqu'à ce que parvenu à l'âge de quarante ou cinquante ans, il trouve quelqu'un qui ait des Principes tout différens; quelle disposition n'a-t-il pas à recevoir sans peine la Doctrine de la *consubstantiation*, non seulement contre toute probabilité, mais même contre l'évidence manifeste de ses propres Sens? Ce Principe a une telle influence sur son Esprit qu'il croira qu'une chose est Chair & Pain tout à la fois, quoi qu'il soit impossible qu'elle soit autre chose que l'un des deux...

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Louis Marin's discussion of the terms of the debate in *La critique du discours. Sur la « logique de port-royal » et les « pensées » de Pascal* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), esp. chapter 2, « Du mot, valeur d'échange aux corps-langages », 37-77.

<sup>3</sup> See Locke, *Essay*, vol. 1, 24n2 and Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne, 1680-1715*, 70-71; Margaret E. Rumbold, *Traducteur huguenot. Pierre Coste* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Rumbold, 59; translations of this and other passages from this book are mine.

[Take a Lutheran with common sense who has been constantly inculcated with the principle (from the time his understanding began receiving certain notions), *that he must believe what those of his communion believe*, such that he has never heard this principle put in question until, reaching the age of forty or fifty, he comes across someone with differing principles. Is he not predisposed to accept straightaway the doctrine of *consubstantiation*, not only against all probability, but even against the clear evidence of his own senses? That principle has such an influence on his mind that he will believe one thing to be flesh and bread at the same time, even though it is impossible for it to be more than one of the two things...]<sup>5</sup>

Judging this translation, pronouncing on its accuracy, has little interest for understanding the issues it articulates. It clearly does not follow the original English very closely: in the French version, the « intelligent Romanist » becomes a « Lutheran with common sense » (a phrase seemingly approaching irony), while the translation logically suppresses the sarcastic reference to the infallibility of the pope, just as « transubstantiation » becomes its contrary « consubstantiation. »

These divergences are not mistakes, however; Locke was closely involved in producing this translation, as he himself indicates:

Mr. Coste read me this version from the beginning to end before sending it to you, and ... all the places where I noticed it straying from my thoughts have been redirected to the original meaning, which was not any easier in notions as abstract as some of those in my essay, for the two languages don't always have words and expressions that correspond so precisely to one another that they satisfy all philosophical exactness...<sup>6</sup>

On the contrary, the passage and its translation equally represent Locke's thought about human understanding, even if the two versions conveniently critique neither the Calvinists (which includes the Huguenots and, therefore, Coste) nor the Anglicans (Locke). Regarding the passage in question, if the reader could make abstraction of the issue of religion, the gap between translation and original becomes merely a formal question capable of being resolved according to cultural and belief differences conveyed, as it is described in modern jargon, by the source and target languages. Moreover, this agrees fundamentally with Coste's own theory of language (and, therefore, of translation); for example, in the preface to his translation of Xenophon's *Hieron*, Coste states that there are « in the language of every country, certain turns of expression based on opinions, customs, events and deeds that are particular to that country... »<sup>7</sup> Commensurate with this view, in producing a French translation, it makes perfect sense to shift the supposed bias of Catholicism to that of the Lutherans, to change transubstantiation to

<sup>5</sup> Locke, *Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement humain*, trad. Pierre Coste (Amsterdam: chez Pierre Mortier, 1742 [4th ed.]), 596; my trans.

<sup>6</sup> Locke, *Essai*, 2nd. ed. (1729), xlii; cited in Rumbold, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Xenophon, *Hiéron ou Portrait de la Condition des Rois* (Amsterdam: Schelte, 1711, vi; cited in Rumbold, 69.

consubstantiation, even if the conflict between the two visions of the Eucharist could not -- and cannot even today -- be reduced to symbolic quibbling.

Perhaps the author's own acceptance of the French formulation proves even more illustrative of this translation paradigm; Locke, who detested Roman Catholics so vehemently that he felt they should be outlawed along with atheists, willingly endorsed a translation whose example seems directly to contradict *what* he originally indicated as error. This translation divergence allows for sketching out the modalities of Locke's modern human being. Locke does not propose a discussion of *what* one thinks but of *how* thought proceeds; however flawed the notions, the universalism Locke underwrites, in conjunction with the global sphere that such a universalism endorses, proposes a worldview in which humans share a way of thinking, not a particular set of beliefs, whether in the religious domain or elsewhere.

Coste's translation, published with Locke's approval, offers insight into modernity's human understanding that marks the conceptual parameters of global cultural circulation. Furthermore, it seems wholly appropriate in political, historical, and linguistic terms. The immediate context and the considerations informing any contemporary translation are evident. Simply regarding the religious aspect of the translation, Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed freedom of religion for protestants, made it more feasible to use a protestant example than a Catholic one (at that point there wasn't a large community of protestant readers left in France in any event). Moreover, in choosing from among the protestants, referring to a Lutheran rather than a Calvinist minimized the chances of offending a Francophone reader.

Yet another reading of this passage places the issues in a different perspective. In the late seventeenth-century context, switching from transubstantiation to consubstantiation in this passage of Locke's *Essay*, known on the continent primarily in French translation, creates certain absurdities that prove instructive for understanding the mindset underlying modern globalism and the translating that traverses its boundaries. In reaction to Locke's *Essay*, Leibniz wrote his *Nouveau essais sur l'entendement humain* (published posthumously in 1765). Leibniz's commentary on Locke's text was based on the French translation; although Leibniz is in general well disposed to Locke's description of human understanding, his rejoinder to this particular passage turns around the modalities and misunderstandings of consubstantiation doctrine. Ironically, Leibniz, like Locke, is protestant; more specifically, however, he is Lutheran. As Leibniz states under the name of Théophile in the dialogue of the *Nouveaux essais*:

It seems obvious, Sir, that you are not sufficiently instructed in protestant sentiments, which admit the real presence of our Lord's body in the Eucharist. They have repeatedly explained that they in no way want the consubstantiation of bread and wine with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and even less that flesh and bread taken together are a single thing. They teach only that in receiving the visible symbols, one receives the Lord's body invisibly and supernaturally, without it being contained in the bread. And the presence that they understand is not at all local, i.e.,

spatial or determined by the dimensions of the body that is present: so that whatever the senses can oppose has no bearing at all on them.<sup>8</sup>

In the most general sense, this sort of response to the translation, to what it utilized in illustrating its underlying argument, was unforeseeable and should undoubtedly be considered anomalous.

Leibniz, however, was not aware of these reflections on culture and value that lay behind the translation, nor did he know that he, being a Lutheran, was not expected to read it in French. Obviously irritated by the reference to Lutheran error, he argues somewhat pedantically from the example itself to produce his opposing view of sensory experience. Despite the translation's strangeness, though, Leibniz's argumentation can be reduced neither to his irritation nor to some form of misunderstanding. In fact, many precautions were taken to guard against Leibniz's potential misreading. For example, after Locke's death, Coste wrote Leibniz with a list of corrections:

I was told that you were basing yourself on the French translation. Therefore I must inform you of some corrections I made on the advice of Mr. Locke to whom I reread my translation after its publication. He pointed out to me mistakes of which some are considerable. It is absolutely necessary for you to see them for fear that in following my translation you might refute things that Mr. Locke did not say.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the variance between the two versions would seem to be a moot point, at least from the perspective of Locke and his translator Coste. But it is important to understand the nature of Leibniz's comments and their significance for the largely victorious view of modernity for which Locke's text laid the groundwork.

Whatever the reasoning behind Leibniz's commentary, it represents a contrary view of the human agent and helps to bring into focus Locke's -- and, by extension, modernity's -- notion of human consciousness, including its implications for grasping the bond between translation and worldview. Rather than taking on Locke's assertions directly, Leibniz refutes the example -- itself wholly arbitrary and dependent only on the supposed dominant beliefs of a Francophone readership -- and claims that the relationship between body and bread cannot be resolved by reference to human perception. In other words, Leibniz argues for preserving religion and religious transformations as a sphere separate from the human senses, as a domain inaccessible to human perception; since these transformations cannot be witnessed, they are deemed present only by virtue of an authority that claims them to have taken place or to be actually present. Locke's point was, in fact, that authority should be subjected to the experience of the human agent and that the claims of religion are not exempt from this verification. In spite of the translation's reversed illustration, Leibniz, in the end, seems to prove Locke's theory of translation and of human understanding: he understood the significance of Locke's model of human and historical

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<sup>8</sup> Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, intro. Jacques Brunschwig (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1990), 405-6; my trans.

<sup>9</sup> Coste, letter to Leibniz (20 April 1707); cited in Rumbold, 100.

consciousness, as well as its consequences for the global circulation of culture and the sociopolitical disequilibrium it entails.

In effect, Locke's text advances a different paradigm for knowledge production; it presupposes a core essence to the human being that transcends religious, cultural, political, and linguistic differences (stopping short of including sexual difference, a thematic that appears in full force only centuries later). Coupled with this conception of the human as an agent of history and of knowledge, experience accessible to the human agent takes precedence over the unfathomable truths of tradition. The resulting model of understanding provides the ground of modernity and anchors a new global vision and a new economy of knowledge production. In this model, thought travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries, projecting a unity of understanding explicable in terms of the very differences it combats. Difference becomes recognized even as it becomes relative; the underlying homogeneity of « humanity » becomes absolute. In the case of this passage from Locke, content of the error has little importance for the notion he asserts; in substituting Lutheran for Catholic, Locke's text calls for a more general view of human understanding. Wrong principles and, therefore, error belong to all traditions, and -- from Locke's perspective -- the only possibility for shortcircuiting the power of authority and tradition resides in the vigilant human being who can supposedly subject those principles to reason. Leibniz's counterargument gets bogged down in the details of substance and religious authority precisely because his worldview and model of knowledge production places human consciousness in a position subsidiary to that of divine action. In sum, Leibniz holds to a different model of globalism.

As translation of the Lockean passage stresses, therefore, the truths of human understanding, the ways in which individual human beings fall into error, are contingent on one's culture, one's configuration of values and beliefs, and one's language which is their vehicle. This is merely a cultural rendering of the classical theory of linguistic representation that has been identified with modernity and that has underlain the principal currents of modern translation theory: there is an inert content, in this case the modalities of human error, that can be transmitted, that is, represented in an infinite variety of ways. In Locke's own linguistic practice, which derives from his theory of signification and of human understanding, the general truth must be expressed in relative terms according to the culture, language, and beliefs of the intended recipient. Despite what seems today to be the self-evident nature of this transcendental human concept, which finds expression in the secular multiplicity of its cultural and linguistic difference, it is a specific world view that emerged in a specific historical context and that provides the parameters for the translating activity accompanying it. What is self-evident at one historical moment may not necessarily remain so at another.

In the early 18th century, the global circulation of knowledge was a western concept, and its center of gravity was Europe. Translation produced and held open this global space; the global consciousness that emerged out of the universal conception of the human being was in the vernacular French rather than in more restrictive Latin. As one historian remarks about translator Coste, « Attentive and enthusiastic, he puts *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* into French and paves the way for

Europe's access to English philosophy. »<sup>10</sup> Up through the end of the 19th century, the intellectual hegemony of modernity was mediated by the French language, and, as the translation of Locke's text indicated, translation was more than a linguistic transferral; it was an ideological transformation both conceptually, in the secular vision it elaborated, and culturally, in its adoption of the relativity of belief and value.

As symbolic monarch of Enlightenment thought, with all its universal aspirations, France « will transmit [cultural productions] not as a simple courier, indifferent to what he transports; on the contrary, it will clean them up and accommodate them to the 'common practices of Europe': that is, to the taste that reigns in Europe by virtue of it, to French taste » (73). The emergence of modern translation, linked to the concept of human being, to a strong impetus toward secularization, and to the domination of vernacular (soon to become nation-state) languages, was intertwined with Enlightenment history and thought as well as with the French language that was its primary vehicle. 20th-century globalization, more intense and far-reaching than the rudimentary beginnings of globalism in early modernity, has effaced French hegemony, reducing its claims to the state of anachronism and nostalgia. But the modalities of translation it introduced remain, and the figures of thought it fosters have taken on deeper significance in the global economy of cultural and knowledge production.

The transformation inherent in projecting an underlying human unity and its infinite cultural expression comes into greater relief against the backdrop of an earlier worldview and its corresponding understanding of translation. In 4th-century Europe, Saint Jerome, renowned translator of the Vulgate, reflected at length before assuming the task of preparing a new corrected translation of the Bible. In a letter to Damasus I, then pope and Jerome's immediate superior, Jerome responds to the pope's inquiries about his correcting the translation of the Gospels:

You want me to make a new work out of an ancient one. You want me to be the judge of copies of the Scripture that are disseminated throughout the entire world, to examine their variations, and to pronounce on where to find the lesson [the reading] that agrees with the Greek truth. There is undoubtedly merit, but also danger, in pronouncing about others a judgment that public opinion will judge in turn, in changing the language of the ancients, and in taking the decayed world back to its early infancy.<sup>11</sup>

In brief, Jerome's task was to do away with variation, find the correct reading and embody it in a Latin text that was to serve as *the* basis for the globe. However rudimentary this view of translation might seem at first glance, it is a worldview, as Erich Auerbach remarked about the notion of history resulting from it; as Jerome's letter suggests, the concomitant view of history displays a vertical relationship to the universal rather than a temporally unfolding one; it is, in fact, a model of globalization that worked exceedingly well for many centuries and lent ideological support to various waves of global colonization. The universalism inherent in this view of translation seems to run directly counter to the view enacted in Locke's text.

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<sup>10</sup> Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome, *Pat. Lat.*, xxix, 525; cited in J. Turmel, *Saint Jérôme* (Paris: Librairie Bloud et Cie, 1906), 69.

Particularities -- such as local culture and language -- are irrelevant or, at worst, impediments, and particularities that prove to be obstacles must be shed or diminished to acquire access to its universality. In the secular political and historical economies of modernity, as indicated in the passage taken from Locke's text, particularities themselves express a universalism that is embodied in the figure of human understanding.

As my examples indicate, the confrontation between these two models of global translation has historically played itself out as a conflict between religious and secular visions of the world. But rather than a matter of religion versus secularization, it entails two visions of globalization that, for very specific social, political, and historical reasons emerged as a debate about religion. Medieval Christianity, whose European hegemony over knowledge production is well known, maintained long-term stability through a series of transnational institutions taking the form of religious, political, and economic orders. The global model presented in Locke's text and, in particular, by its translation, a model that by the 18th century becomes generalized, belongs to a different hegemonic order. Concepts and knowledge, premised on an understanding of human reasoning separate from divine will, are impermeable to the potential vagaries of cultural and linguistic difference, whereas they find expression in the multiple variations of human cultures. From the perspective of translation and a theory of meaning, this basic presupposition is the backbone of scientific objectivity. Contrary to the universalizing precept that underlay Catholic hegemony, the institutions of knowledge have a national foundation. Their theoretical underpinnings and accompanying model of knowing serve as the touchstone of discourses in the humanities or human sciences and, most specifically, of reflections on literary and cultural production at large.

## 2

The modern version of the universal human, which has far less to do with the « soul » than with the « reason » processing experience, anchors a new configuration of thinking and articulates an unprecedented vision of the other. Translation, the mediation between collectivities that have their territorial as well as linguistic and cultural boundaries, occupies a key relay in that configuration. In the context of early modernity, the figure of the translator provides the conceptual means for thinking this global expanse of exchange and interrelation. Regarding, once again, Locke's text, Coste himself attempts to grasp the translator figure in an adequate image:

I have therefore made it a point to follow scrupulously my author without diverging from him even the least bit. If I have taken some liberties (something that cannot be avoided), it as always been with the good agreement of Mr. Locke who understands French well enough to judge when I rendered his thought exactly, even when I have taken a slightly different turn of phrase than he had taken in his language. Perhaps without this permission I would not have dared in certain places to take the liberties necessary to represent the author's thought satisfactorily. In this respect it comes to mind that a translator could be compared to a plenipotentiary. The comparison is grandiose, and I well fear being reproached for overvaluing an occupation that

doesn't enjoy great credit in the world. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the translator and the plenipotentiary would be unable to profit from their advantages if their powers were too limited. I have nothing whatsoever to complain about in this regard.<sup>12</sup>

As Coste's formulation intimates, the translator figure is also a figure expressing the circulation of power in the symbolic as opposed to the executive realm. This figure, as agent operating in the name of another (in this specific instance, of an author), is the personified mechanism of transfer between conflicting or dissimilar representations of the world, even if in the epoch of modernity they share the same « worldview. » The translator is a semiotician *avant la lettre*, a « diplomat of representation » who must be granted the full power to negotiate divergent representations. In this sense, Coste's seemingly grandiose description of his own activity does not at all miss the mark: the translator and the plenipotentiary express the same figure of thought. The most far-reaching power of the translator is not that of the ability to make empirical decisions, but the power encapsulated in its figure to activate a new global projection.

In the late 20th century, the transformed modalities of globalization, along with the institutions that promote and monitor it, have provoked renewed reflection on translation as a general mechanism of confronting the strange, the foreign, the dissimilar, and rendering it knowable; the contemporary explosion of writings on anthropology, on the place of the "anthropos" on this planet and in the universe, belong to this general phenomenon, in part because they must face the question of otherness that resides at the heart of translating. Rather than enumerating the multiple contemporary works that attempt to paint a unitary human image underlying global differences and their interplay<sup>13</sup> -- a fruitless task that would rapidly become bogged down in enumerating mindless details -- I want to return to some of the fundamental presuppositions on which these views rest.

Because it is emblematic of this rapidly emerging discourse on the global anthropos (that is, on the conception of the « universal » human), I will refer to a recent essay by Wolfgang Iser, a mainstream literary critic who has recently developed the notion of "literary anthropology," which creates a methodological amalgam of literary criticism, cultural anthropology and -- as a result of his own training -- phenomenology. The term Iser chooses to represent this new vision of global cultural production is, not surprisingly, "translatability." Globalization, particularly with regard to cultural experience, produces the need for this notion and for the sociohistorical condition it describes. In the words of the essay:

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Coste, « Avertissement du traducteur, » Locke, *Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement humain*, trad. Pierre Coste (Amsterdam: chez Pierre Mortier, 1729 [2nd ed.]), xvi-xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Examples of this tendency include Luc Ferry's *L'homme-dieu: le sens de la vie* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), but the list of such efforts is virtually interminable and includes Tzvetan Todorov, *La vie commune: Essai d'anthropologie générale* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), Marc Augé, *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains* (Paris: Aubier, 1994), Pierre Lévy, *L'intelligence collective: Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1994), and Eric Gans's *Anthropoetics* project, an electronic journal (<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/home.htm>) whose diverse contributors are united in their drive to refurbish humanist ethics by merging anthropological and literary concerns.

In a rapidly shrinking world, many different cultures have come into close contact with one another, calling for mutual understanding not only in terms of the culture to which one belongs, but also in terms of the specificity of the culture encountered. [In this confrontation] a kind of translation is bound to occur.<sup>14</sup>

The passage, clear and direct in its formulation, indicates the key characteristics of this cognitive vision of translation: cultures are discrete, display an identifiable coherence and specificity, and metaphorically bump into other cultures that also exhibit these fundamental characteristics. Furthermore, in this kinder and gentler epoch characterized by transnational aspirations, the essay indicates as well that this model of translation runs counter to the "idea of cultural hierarchy" (6) and to that of "the hegemony of one culture over the other" (5). Up to this juncture, the logically rigorous picture of intercultural relations does not seem to stray from the Lockean vision of cultural confrontation. In this projection of modernity, one possesses a system of beliefs, is a product of a particular culture; one encounters an otherness; one reflects on that difference and thus on one's own beliefs; and then one continues on one's merry way, perhaps in error but unable to shake one's cultural beliefs, even if they seem irrational. These differences are absolute and must be recognized and respected, as revealed by the peculiar translation practice that produced the French version of Locke's text. Seemingly in accord with the Lockean view of human understanding and its cultural patina, Iser's more formalistic rendering characterizes culture as "an autopoietic system that continually generates its organizations..."(12). It is apparently its systematicity that provides each culture -- different by definition -- with its own specificity.

Against the backdrop of contemporary globalization, however, translation no longer derives from a static conception of linguistic and cultural difference. Instantaneous communication channeled through a multiplicity of media -- visual, written, and digital -- wreak havoc in cultural or political units that achieve their autonomy against other supposedly distinct entities. The global simultaneity at the edge of the 21st century, increasingly moving toward collapsing the distinction between time and space, breeds contamination. In the current context of knowledge, the notion of translation has come to occupy a new status, to express a complex model of otherness no longer resumed within the purview of 18th-century means. Translation, in fact, names the global process whereby difference is both dismantled and, paradoxically, multiplied and rendered indiscrete, heterogeneous. Unlike Locke's notion, which sees differences as mutually exclusive organizations of others to which translation must adapt itself, globally projected translatability demands a notion of transformation as well. Iser's text offers a tame and abstract nod in this direction: « Translatability...requires construing a discourse that allows for transposing a foreign culture into one's own. Such a discourse has to negotiate the space between foreignness and familiarity... » (11). In this passage, the presuppositions that produced these renewed reflections on translation finally run aground. The new discourse on translation, here exemplified by Iser's essay, although its presuppositions are widely shared, emerged in response to a radically transformed global situation in which cultures are no longer homogeneous, shielded from the onslaught of otherness, of a cultural, military, institutional, epistemological production that increasingly comes from elsewhere. This

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<sup>14</sup>Wolfgang Iser, "On Translatability," *Surfaces* 4 (1994), 5.

supposedly new model of translatability, which should serve to give a new ground to humanities and cultural studies, as Iser briefly mentions, depends in its very conception on the specificity of cultures that the rapidly accelerating process of globalization renders less and less possible.

Moreover, although in this formulation translation is a mode of thought grounded in cultural difference, it goes beyond any notion of translation between two distinct linguistic entities -- languages, if you will -- guaranteed by a panoply of political, cultural, and educational institutions. Ultimately, language has been displaced from the apex of the translation pyramid, for the globalization of the late twentieth century necessarily implies the global circulation of media, which are both the agent and product of globalism. Again, Iser's essay mentions this aspect only briefly, in an aside: "Translatability turns out to be the hallmark of any cross-cultural interchange and -- to mention it only in passing -- for the mutual interpenetration of the media as well" (8). Even if mentioned only in passing, the consequences of this observation are staggering for any theory of translation negotiating the global heterogeneity of the 21st century. Their world circulation not only disrupts but hampers the constitution of autonomous cultures; in addition, media refer to a plurality of media that are translated into each other, often without even passing through a linguistic mediation. The temporal, spatial, and linguistic foundations of culture are simply not reducible to the modern fictions of identity.

The present-day attempt to revitalize translation, its refurbishment as a model of knowledge in an age of globalized cultural production, reflects a conceptual necessity to apprehend and express a transformed sociopolitical economy. This economy, characterized by a technological and media explosion that drives a new worldview and mindset, has created fault lines in the conceptual and political structures of modernity. The current conundrum of the globalization phenomenon resides in the gap between the conceptual paradigm of translation and the process it is utilized to depict. For example, in contrast, the two models of translation I have briefly sketched by referring to Locke and Jerome, respectively, evince a number of similarities. They each rely on a notion of the universal. The medieval European model, exemplified by Jerome, entailed the hegemony of an overarching transnational culture, based on a single text that represented the universal divinity through the mediation of ecclesiastic institutions. Members of this transnational culture shared a common language (even if they were not able to read or write it), values, and beliefs, even as they had very different local origins, beliefs, and languages; the model of modernity, on the other hand, exemplified here by Locke's text and by the translation that diffused it, embedded a universalism, the universalism of the human being, in collectivities established through the unity of territory, language, history, and culture. Each collectivity, carefully policed in the epoch of the nation-state, in principle enjoys access to the universal without giving up its apparent homogeneity. These respective models -- which include a notion of translation both as a practical activity in transposing between languages and as a cognitive processing of the other -- at the same time enabled and accompanied specific sociopolitical formations, organizations of knowledge, and views of globalism.

The global view of modernity, rendered in ever greater detail by technological and economic change, has forcefully relied on a transhistorical idea of the human being, an understanding of the

relativity of differences, and a cognitive and linguistic notion of translation to mediate their interplay. The hegemony of the worldview in modernity has drawn its form, its unitary perspective, from the ascendance and dominance of the « human. » In the new millenium in the making, technology has displaced the human as the ultimate point of reference, forcing a reconsideration of the symbolic or figural anchor of historical understanding. The necessity to rethink this universal reference to the underlying human is no less historical than the human concept, which emerged at a particular historical moment to stabilize modernity's worldview. This historicity, as constraining as it is enabling, becomes readily apparent in the gradual elaboration of modernity's prevailing concepts. For example, less than a hundred years after Locke's attempt to universalize human experience, Kant first ordered and expressed the project of what he described as the science of man (that is, the science of the human being: what he will also refer to as « anthropology »); that science was supposed to permit "the knowledge of man as a world citizen."<sup>15</sup>

Like Locke's understanding of how to arrive at this new universal, of how to rid historical thought of the divine, that of Kant exhibits a striking similarity with Iser's assertions about translatability. Unfortunately, precisely those similarities underscore the irrepressible anachronism inherent in fishing a concept out of the past without transforming it, giving it new life. For Kant, developing this new human science requires a great deal of experience of otherness, which can only be obtained under certain conditions; he notes the advantages of

a large city at the realm's center, which houses the country's governmental institutions, which has a university (for cultivating knowledge) as well as a disposition for maritime trade that, thanks to its river network, favors both a circulation coming from the interior and exchanges with distant or bordering countries, with different languages and customs.... Such a city, like Koenigsberg on the Pregolya, for example [Kant's home!], can already be considered a site well adapted to increasing the knowledge of man as well as the knowledge of the world (400n).

Far-removed from contemporary simultaneity, the conception that Kant articulates remains rudimentary and grounded in empirical experience. One place, preferably at the heart of commercial and cultural empire, serves as a site for receiving « others » who stream through on their way elsewhere. This notion of the monopole belongs to modernity's conception of colonization, its economic backbone, and Kant paints the conceptual accompaniment to empire, the political economy based on the force of mediating institutions -- military, commercial, and epistemological. Therein lies the debilitating contradiction in the attempt to revive the Enlightenment notion of cultural difference to underwrite translatability.

Globalization is undoing the collective differences that have in any event only come to be as a result of enormous political and institutional investment. The mere existence of television disrupts this placid Kantian mode of global thinking: the world of images simultaneously courses through countless living rooms, obliterating the temporal lag so important to historical understanding, as well as scattering the unicity of place into millions of loci. Nonetheless, the heterogeneity of the local -- becoming ever smaller at the time as the globe becomes ever more omnipresent -- steps up its rhythm. The logic of translation,

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<sup>15</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatisches Hinsicht*, vol. 2 of *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 400.

considered as a model of understanding, operates according to transmutation, not the transferal of homogeneity clothed in inconsequential difference. Whereas the sociopolitical and cultural investment in the global model of modernity has far from ceased -- whether one refers to reinforcing state identity by determining the "sans papiers" in France, to the move to make English the only legal language in the US, or to the erection of nation-state boundaries for La Padania in northern Italy -- the global economies of knowledge are clearly moving along other vectors and require a very different notion of translatability.

In the contemporary epoch, confronting translatability and the phenomenon of global understanding it is to describe means dispensing with the tired model of Enlightenment history and with modernity's conceptual reliance on human universalism. In this vein, for example, Walter Benjamin's essay on translation, "The Task of the Translator," proclaims the inefficacy of modern presuppositions about translating. In the opening paragraph, which sets the stage for his approach to the question of translatability, the essay addresses the import of cultural production in general -- music, painting, and literature are evoked -- and bluntly states that referring to the public or some fictitious "receivers" is of no use precisely because they are linguistic idealizations. According to Benjamin, such a tendency merely proclaims "the existence and essence of humankind as such."<sup>16</sup> Benjamin's assertion about the uselessness of personification for understanding translation -- whether the personification evokes some ahistorical human being, a cultural identity, or transcendent divinity -- grounds his own attempt to understand translation as a process that defies homogeneity and reveals hairline cracks in the world picture it underwrites. This observation remains an important starting point for rethinking translation in the age of globalization: a global understanding of translatability, inescapably tied to an understanding of history and political economy, must necessarily be thought from the very outset in relation to the heterogeneity that is its precondition and not from a supposed underlying unity, whether it be that of human essence, experience, or historical understanding.

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<sup>16</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, 9. English translation, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 69, translation slightly modified.