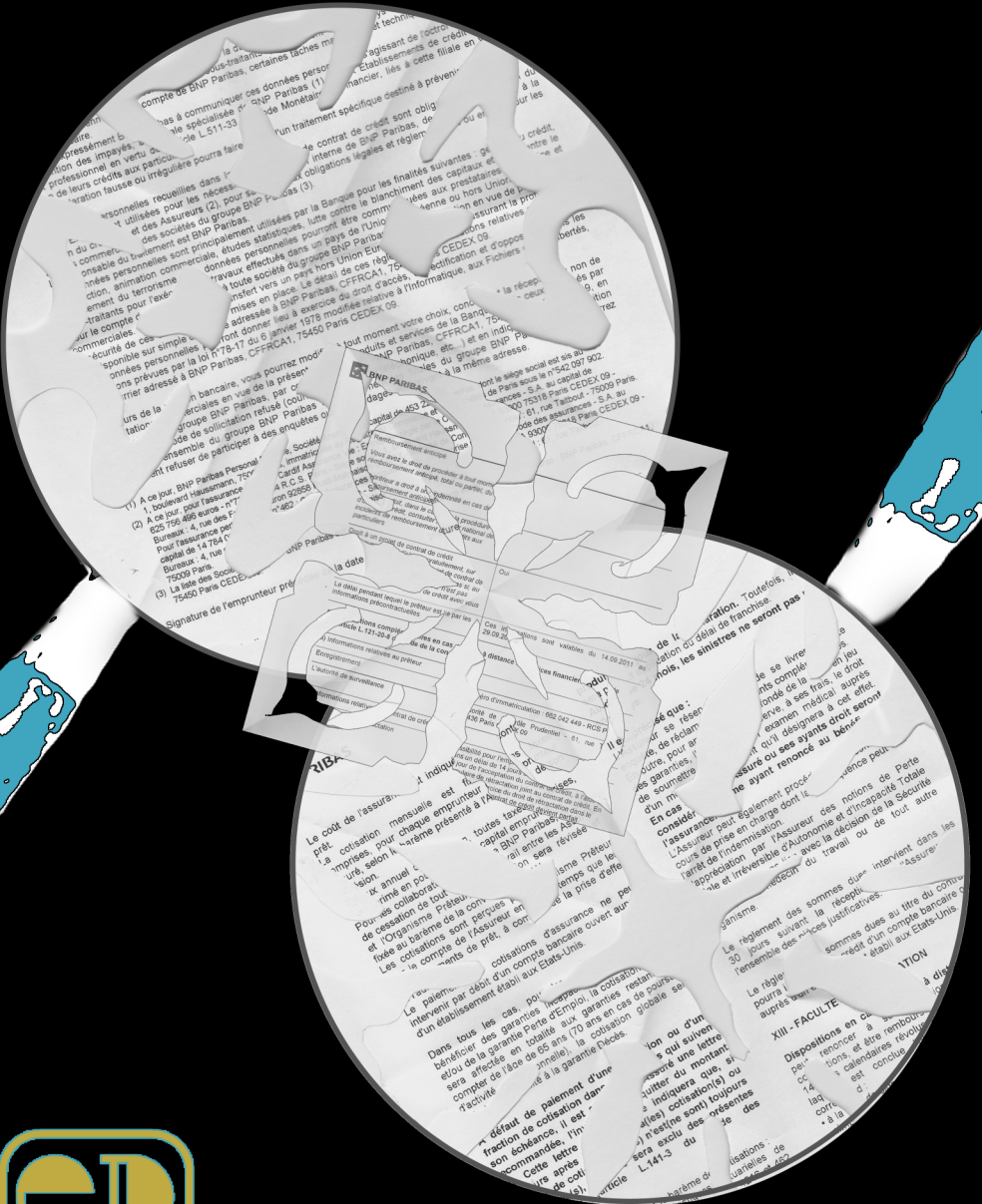
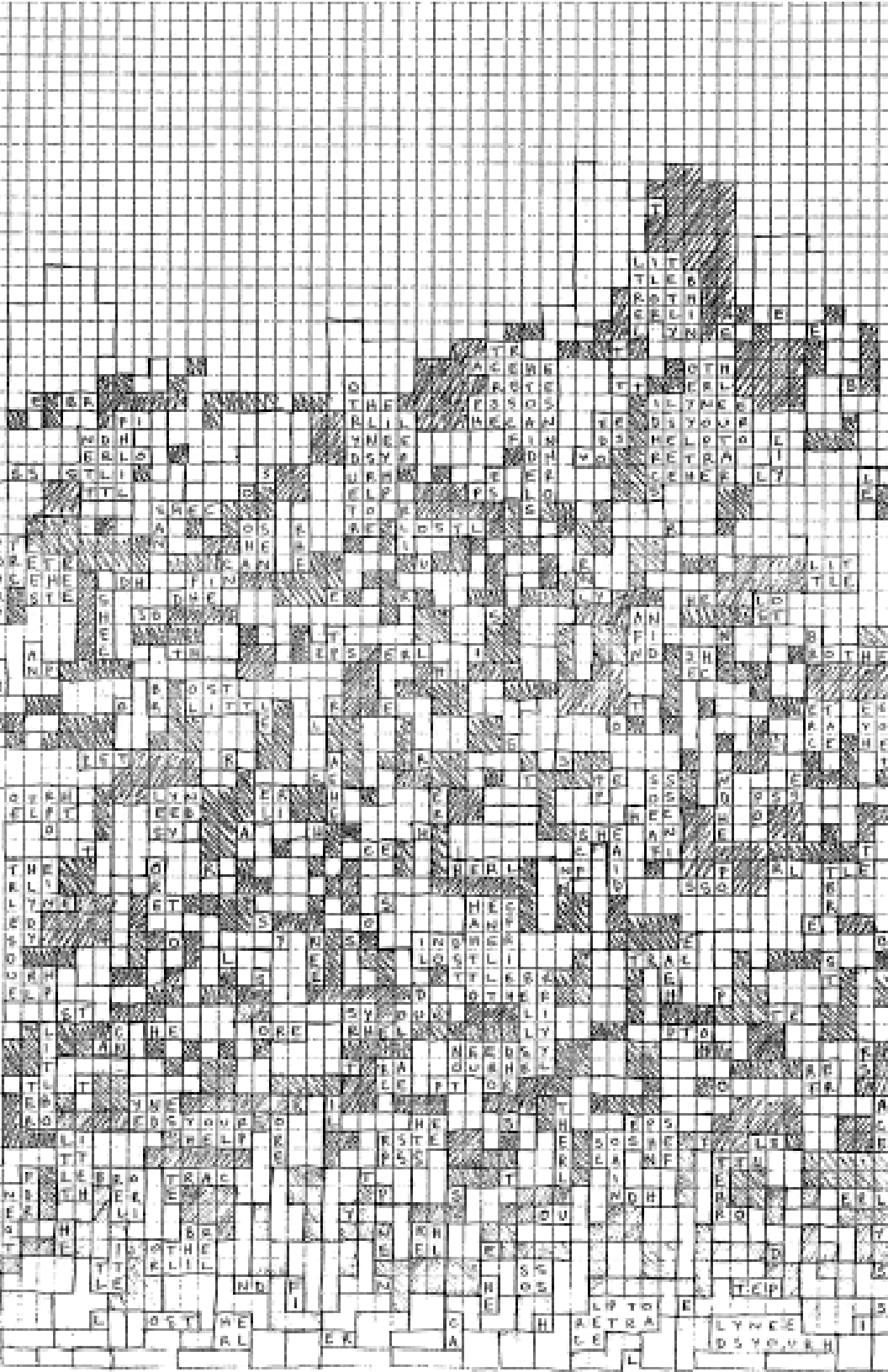


MONEY, MATH, & MEASURE

Miscalculations in the Third Text of Translation



Lily Robert-Foley
with an Introduction by Craig Dworkin



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LILY ROBERT-FOLEY

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CRAIG DWORKIN



#78

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Introduction

– Craig Dworkin

Money, Math, and Measure constitutes one installment of Lily Robert-Foley's recent investigations into the politics and poetics of what she terms *le tiers texte*.¹ Like Marcel Duchamp's concept of *l'inframince*, the "third texte" resists definition but adduces examples. Nonetheless, one can conclude from the proliferation of those examples that the procedures of the third texte involve non-binary linguistic negotiations that are never simply exhausted by the introduction of an additional term. Accordingly, the third texte enacts a performative metamorphosis of signification; it deforms words between the twin pulls of the signifier and the signified, rather than making a mere substitution of one denotation for another. In the process, *le tiers texte* proposes a second-order translation (a translation of translations). Presented here in a series of brilliantly imaginative and unimaginably precise close readings of the congruencies and discrepancies between the English and French novels self-translated by Samuel Beckett, these meta-translations add up to a genuinely radical new theorization of the relationship between reading and writing more generally. Robert-Foley's readings demonstrate a practice of what it means to translate while simultaneously recognizing the impossibility of translation. But as she shows, the impossibility of translation can itself reveal an opportunity rather than an impasse. John Ashbery's summation of Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation* describes the situation perfectly:

“and if, on laying the book aside, we feel that it is still impossible to accomplish the impossible, we are also left with the conviction that it is the only thing worth trying to do.”² Or, as Beckett narrativizes this paradox at the close of *L’innommable* [*The Unnamable*]: “je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer [I can’t go on, I’ll go on].”³

The impossibility of going on, in fact, finds itself inextricably bound with math and measure in the very idea of the countable and the relation of number to infinity (and all those maths, such as the smooth curves approximated by calculus, on which the idea of infinity depends). “Incalculable’ can seem to mean ‘infinite,’” Lily-Foley cautions, but it can also mean the opposite: the impossibility of the infinite. As Brian Rotman has argued, some numbers can be named, but not arrived at by counting. In the terms of his anti-idealist argument, “the integers are defined to be the result of counting. But counting is a certain kind of computational process, a sequence of physical steps.”⁴ In the case of infinity, for instance, the endless N+1 procedure of simply adding one to any number, and then to the number arrived at by that sum, and so on, *ad infinitum*, runs up against the thermodynamic limits of a physical universe in which the energy requirements of even the most efficient computer exceed that of the world in which it would perform its Sisyphean task.⁵ Moreover, counting implicitly raises the question of subjectivity, of what counts as a subject. Rotman interrogates: “numbers are inseparable from counting,” but “who or what is counting?”⁶ The answer, if we follow Robert-Foley’s argument attentively, would be found at the intersection of an embodied reader cognizant of the embodied enunciations made by the signs of languages—including the ciphering languages of mathematics—themselves.

The impossibility and necessity of (a) number is also the crux of Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés*. In the autograph maquette prepared in April or May, 1897, for the printers at Firmin-Didot,

Mallarmé altered “le nombre unique” [“the singular number” or the “unsurpassable number”] as it read in the *Cosmopolis* edition, to “le Nombre unique.” Whether these are equivalent lines despite the alteration of what textual scholars refer to as an “accidental” is all to the point in a poem whose author was concerned about the thickness of the minims of different typefaces and their various founts, and who gridded the proofs for precise positioning in a poem that—moreover—discursively addresses themes of accident and chance. Regardless, the line was changed yet again to “l’unique Nombre [the only number],” momentarily opening the suggestion that “nombre” might be the conjugation of the verb (as in “the single example reckons” or “the sole thing enumerates”). Mallarmé thus introduces the most unstable textual variance at the very point at which the text describes a condition that cannot be otherwise: the singularity that “ne peut pas être un autre [cannot be another]” (or “qui ne peut pas en être un autre [that cannot be any other],” as the line reads in *Cosmopolis*).⁷ Depending on how the lines are parsed against the implicit period of Mallarmé’s sentence(s), the unique number cannot exist, cannot be any other number, or cannot be another principle of thought [“L’Esprit”].

In the context of the titular dice, the number in question would seem to be twelve. Twelve sums not only the number of feet in the Alexandrine line so dramatically rejected by Mallarmé’s poem, but also the number of sheets quired together to form the folded pages that open his phrasing to such indeterminate ambiguity. No matter what those words might mean, their physical disposition over the printed page, in the layout and fount specified by Mallarmé, requires that twelve be the number of folded sheets—and that imposition cannot be otherwise. Moreover, *douze* in French is synonymous with *pica*, the 12-point printers’ measure that meters Mallarmé’s visual prosody of typographic precision. The Didot text was to be set in 2, 3, and 5 *douze* sizes. Although the twelve audible feet of classical prosody

have been lost, *Un coup de dés* retains an insistently visual and spatial dodecametric verse. Like Rotman's innumerable integers (the limit on counting which cannot be otherwise), the tension in Mallarmé's poem between an imagined ideal and the physical contingencies of its expression motivates a new kind of poetic counting. Moreover, in that deformation of content by its form, we can start to see the powerful potential of Robert-Foley's *tiers texte*, which—as I hope to have suggested here—extends far beyond the novels of Beckett. According to the final line of Mallarmé's poem, "Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés [every thought issues a throw of the dice]." The very idea of those dice, however, seems already encoded in the autotranslative, third-texte prospect of Mallarmé's diction, in which the die [*dé*] is cut [*coup*] from the heart of idea [*idée*] itself, but in which this thought—the literary theme sketched or *jeté sur le papier*—emerges only from the material particulars of the signifiers' chance linguistic forms.

Let me bracket this excurses on *Un coup de dés* and end by noting that in tying together texts in these ways—ways that allow for both secure readings and sufficient play (in both senses of the word), ways that sequester in order to make available, that put to use by putting at a distance, and that in the process grant a writerly movement which permits the reader to tack with deft turns between the prevailing forces of the signifier and the signified—Robert-Foley's text brings her back to her subject with a self-reflexive, not quite equivalent countersignature that would make the third *texte* proud. A *becket*, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is the name for:

a simple contrivance, usually a loop of rope with a knot on one end and eye at the other, but also a large hook, or a wooden bracket, used for confining loose ropes, tackle, ropes, oars, spars, etc. in a convenient place, and also for holding or securing the tacks and sheets of sails, and for similar purposes.

The word is probably a corruption of *bracket*.⁸ And brackets, of course, are one of the key signifiers in the languages of the various mathematics that try to forget their physical constraints and the motivating, opportune closures of even their sheer hieroglyphic signifiers.

On your marks; get set; the order of operations has been herein rewritten.

Notes

1 Robert-Foley, Lily. *Politique et poétique du tiers texte: une expérience de lecture de L'Innommable/The Unnamable de Samuel Beckett*, Thèse. Université Paris VIII, 2014.

2 Ashbery, John. "The Impossible." *Poetry Magazine*, 90, 4, 1957, p. 254.

3 Beckett, Samuel. *L'Innommable*. Éditions de Minuit, 1953, p. 213; *The Unnamable*. Grove Press, 1958, p. 179.

4 Rotman, Brian. *Mathematics As Sign: Writing, Imagining, Counting*. Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 132-133.

5 *Ibidem*. pp. 85-97 *passim*.; cf. p. 135.

6 *Ibidem*. p. 92. Cf. his reiteration: "Who or what is adding or counting? Who or what is assigned the task of endless counting?" (p. 131).

7 See Cohen, Robert. *Mallarmé's Masterwork: New Findings*. Mouton, 1966, p. 79.

8 Confer: William Falconer's *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine, or Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms and Phrases Employed in the Construction, Equipment, Furniture, Machinery, Movements, and Military Operations of A Ship*. Cadell, 1784.

| | |
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Money, Math, & Measure

How many texts are there in a translation? The question of translation is naturally one of equivalence, as translators seek to make one text equivalent to another. Rhetoric in the meta-discourse on translation has often posed the question of loss and gain in the seeking of this equivalence, in the tabulating, weighing, and accounting for the credits and debits that accrue as languages are exchanged for one another (Bassnett, Berman, Venuti). But how is the language measured, how is it divided and counted?

One of the earliest writings on translation offers one account:

I did not translate [Aeschines and Demosthenes] as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the “figures” of thought, but in language that conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were. (Cicero)

It is always tempting to imagine words like coins: flat, round, countable, and stable, representing an agreed-upon value. But translation, for Cicero, pays out in bulk weight. In order for translation to be equal, it cannot simply hold to the reifying math of $1 = 1$, it must tamper with the calculation.

Just tabulation is not exact tabulation. From the outset, translation theory proposes a problem of calculating: of exchange equivalence, of how value is measured, and the paradox of counting words like numbers.

In an article by Norma Cole on Samuel Beckett's translation of Rimbaud's "Le Bateau ivre", Cole shows the slippery, unstable math carried out in the interliminal (Gaddis Rose) space between translations:

we have Rimbaud and Beckett, "Le Bateau ivre," and "Drunken Boat," the nine and the ten.

There is no original of the encounter, only the encounter representing itself. The nine and the ten are close enough but not the same and can't help each other.

La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes.

Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots

Qu'on appelle rouleurs éternels de victimes,

Dix nuits, sans regretter l'œil ni ais des falots.

—from "Le Bateau ivre" by Arthur Rimbaud

I started awake to tempestuous hallowings.

Nine nights I danced like a cork on the billows, I danced

On the breakers, sacrificial, for ever and ever,

And the crass eye of the lanterns was expunged.

—from "Drunken Boat",

Beckett's translation of "Le Bateau ivre" (Cole)

Beckett has chosen in this example to privilege the sonorous prosody of "dix nuits"¹ with "nine nights," rather than simply translating the sense: "ten nights," which falls phonetically flat. But Cole does something more

¹ *Editors' Note:* quoted French words in bold and italics throughout are additions of the author and were not necessarily formatted as such in the source text.

interesting in her commentary by proposing a strange poetics of the bad math of translation in which nine does not necessarily equal nine and ten does not necessarily equal ten, but indeed, nine may equal ten. The uninitiated might have hoped numbers to be the easiest thing to translate. The first things an English speaker learns in a foreign language are the alphabet (or other writing system), and how to count to ten. The French *un* = one would seem to be the happy place where language sloughs off its interferences and achieves a more reliable, purely mathematical meaning, universally equal across all languages. But even here, *un* = one, it is not so simple, because *une* (French feminine form of *un*) also = one. Indeed, it is in a sense more equal to one, containing the same number of letters and actually sharing more of them in common. In fact, if it's letters we're counting and not numbers or words, *une* = one but *un* does not. If it's meaning we're counting *un* + *une* = one. If we count the terms in this equation, this gives us three.

I would like, then, to propose a reading taking place in the "third texte" of Beckett's novel(s) *The Unnamable/L'innommable* of the "bad math" of translation, and of the disturbances it creates in the economy of language. This third, however, is not to be taken as the perfect sum of two texts, as their annihilation in unification, nor as the tabulation of their losses and gains, but rather as a supplement in the binary of translation, opening out into incalculable newness. This is why I have added the "e" to the end of "third texte." It represents the disturbance in the binary that the French grammatical feminine represents in translation—a messed-up world where letters can travel the way meanings are intended to.

Sometimes "incalculable" can seem to mean "infinite," or "infinite because indeterminate," but this is not the sense I wish to give it here. I mean literally incalculable in that, once calculated (and we are always calculating—we feel we must), twice calculated does not come to the same number. The reliability of its calculation cannot be determined. It is always surprising. It can even be surprising by occasionally remaining the same. There's really no telling:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>“troisième couplet, comme le premier, quatrième, comme le second, cinquième, comme le troisième, en voulez-vous encore, à volonté, à volonté, nous voilà cent, mille, il y a de la place.” (39)</p> | <p>“third verse, as the first, fourth, as the second, fifth, as the third, give us time, give us time and we’ll be a multitude, a thousand, ten thousand, there’s no lack of room.” (310)</p> |
|---|--|

In this example, a hundred (“cent”) is translated with a “thousand,” and a “thousand” (“mille”) with “ten thousand.” There is an odd exponential effect in the stereoscope (Gaddis Rose) of the third *texte*, much like the films *Powers of Ten*. The third *texte*, then, does not only calculate badly—it creates its own aberrant equations, tending towards proliferation. Let’s return briefly to the question I posed to begin this paper: how many texts are there in a translation? That is perhaps even further complicated in this case, since we’re dealing with Beckett’s self-translations, which brackets the problem of dual authorship of an original in translation. *The Unnamable* was written first in French (Beckett’s second language) and published in 1951, and then self-translated by the author and published in English (Beckett’s first language) in 1955. We have first of all a problem of locating the original in space and time: where is the original? In the French text published in 1951? In the English one in 1955? Is the first an original and the second a rewriting, or is the first a draft and the second a revision? It is not possible to definitively answer these questions, and so we have therefore a problem of counting. Is each text one half of a whole, and together do they make one whole work? Or is there one primordial text for which the other is an imitation or a preparation?

These questions do not find definitive answers, neither here nor in other research on Beckett’s self-translations (Chamberlain, Fitch, Oustinoff, Montini, Bousquet). That is because these questions must be asked at the boundary limits of the definition of text, at its liquid modernity (Bauman). How is any text counted? Meaning, where can it be separated and differentiated from other texts? If we count the French as the 1 of the text, and the English as the 2, shouldn’t we then count translations in other languages? And what about the readings, the

commentaries, the adaptations? And if the French is a just a draft, an outline of the final work, shouldn’t we then count all of Beckett’s discarded translations leading up to the published one? All the eraser rubbings, blurred lines, wadded papers? All the advice and influences he received? Others’ corrections, edits, and re-readings? A hundred becomes a thousand, a thousand, ten thousand.

What we are seeing here is the third *texte*’s funny way of imitating itself in the meta-discourse: the exponential multiplication of its metaphors, so that, much like translation itself, its theory mimics its practice and vice-versa. This has to do with the instability of the third *texte*: its performativity (that it does what it says) that prevents a single, fixed definition of it. Its definition is the way it carries itself out in the making of metaphors.

Let’s see this again:

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|---|---|
| <p>“encore une fois, une dernière fois” (394)</p> | <p>“once more, just once more, one last time” (179)</p> |
|---|---|

How many times does the *texte* speak in this example? Two times (“*encore une fois*,” once more; and “*une dernière fois*,” one last time)? Or three times (“once more, just once more, one last time”)? Once again, the math of equivalence fails in the third *texte*, sprouting a strange, monstrous calculation, giving us “once more,” once more: the supplement in the binary of translation. The extra element in the third *texte*’s strange notion of equivalence disrupts the construction of sameness. We see again here the mirroring of the practice of translation in its meta-discourse: that once more is literally translated “one extra time,” giving us a metaphor for the not exactly equal equivalence of the third *texte*.

In their introduction to *Posthuman Bodies*, Judith Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingstone place correct calculations on the side of the opposition between singularity and universality. The possibility to make discrete, countable units relates to a structural fixity of same vs. different, which is founded on the Law of a violent hierarchy. They insist instead on the

“someness” of human body assemblages, rather than of singular discrete human identities pledging allegiance to a general rule. In many of the works they cite, strange numbers and erroneous equations destabilize violent binary hierarchies: Irigaray’s “The sex which is not one,” as well as “Haraway’s “cyborgs,” “one is too few but two are too many” (177); Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial “hybridity” is “less than one and double” (179); Deleuze and Guattari’s “assemblage” is enumerated as “n minus one” (8):

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| “il n’y en a qu’un, qu’un seul” (167) | “There is only one” (346) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|

Miscalculations in the third *texte* also then have to do with the inequivalence of one and one. In the third *texte* $1 \neq 1$. As we saw earlier, *un* = one, but not only. Here, “*un*” et “*un (seul)*” equals “only one”: $2 = 1$. Or if we add them = 3. We uncover the paradox of singularity here—that singularity is dependent on being identified as singular, as different from others, which means that it must have been seen elsewhere. There is always a strange, ghostly elsewhere in the “only” of the “one,” which is the many that permits it to be identified as one. This is the ghostly elsewhere of sameness, of the paradox of sameness, that it must appear many times, over and over again, and differently, in order to achieve its sameness. The show of this is given in stereoscopic reading, and in the writing of the third *texte* of translation.

This is perhaps also why the third *texte* has chosen *The Unnamable/L’Innommable* as its raw material. Because perhaps this paradox of the supplement, of being able to say something unique while simultaneously being understood, begins with the paradox of the unnamable, that it must be named to be unnamed. That’s a discussion for another time.

Let’s go back to square one, to one squared, the untranslatability of one:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| “il n’y en a qu’un, qu’un seul” (167) | “There is only one” (346) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|

“And” = or (“*Ou*”), both one and the other and one or the other, two become one and/or one become two. “One” in English is both pronoun and

number. It is both “*un*” (the number 1 in French) and “*on*” (an impersonal pronoun in French). It is both who counts and what is counted. Both speaker and what is spoken. And who is this one? There is never only one *seul*, or *un seul* one:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| “de deux choses l’une” (186) | “it’s one or the other” (398) |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|

Is it “*un (homme)*” or “*une (femme)*”? It is the Self or is it the Other? Is it “*deux*” or is it “one”? In this example, $2 (deux) = 1 (one)$ and $1 (une) = the other$. Now we see, in the third *texte*’s proliferations, its uncanny ability to provide commentary on itself. In this case, the two gives us a gender-neutral pronoun whose confusion lies in the homophony between person and number, speaker and spoken. Translate it back and you start to unravel the strings knotting together material and sense, language and text, that would produce the apparently single fabric of a text read from only one side of a translation. And in so doing, one unweaves the French language’s obsession with preserving masculine domination as and along with a universal “neutral”—tied up with an intellectual mechanism that seeks to preserve the European subject as the fundamental and therefore dominant and dominating, colonizing form of subjectivity known as objectivity. For as two become(s) one and one becomes Other in this example, it (they?) must first become feminine. In this example, numerical inequivalence, as a commentary on the instability of sameness, aligns itself with a rewriting of gender identity within a discourse that suspends opposition between singular and universal. We could recall Hélène Cixous’s “*de lune à l’autre*”, playing off the homophony of “*lune*,” both “moon” and “*l’une*”—*the one*, counting the moon, the other of the earth, as the one, and the earth as the Other. To bring this back to Halberstam and Livingstone’s posthuman bodies, we need merely to note the complexity of the relationship between Self and Other in this example. The other is the other of its other, where the feminine “*e*” is the mark of the translation of one:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| “c’est peut-être le seul” (212) | “perhaps there is no other” (414) |
| “Un seul, puis d’autres” (100) | “One alone, then others” (346) |
| “non, de l’autre” (202) | “no, the other” (408) |

When we try to make a count of the one or the other, we come up with different calculations each time. As we saw above, one can be two and then three, or even five (*deux* + one + *une* + other). Here, “*le seul*,” the only one, is also the other or “no other,” so $1 = 0$, or $1 =$ the other, which makes two, and if we count in the third text, 1, 2, 3. In the second example, we may add others, or the others of others, “*les autres*,” who are “*les autres*” of the others, who are the others of “*les autres*.” As I am counting material (what else would I count?), this gives me seven. This formula, of the others who are the others of the others, however, is the formula for an infinite regress, counting off into eternity, much like numbers do themselves. The translation of others—like any translation really, if we shade it with the commentary of the other translation—is a hall of mirrors, sending itself back across the corridor of the third *texte* as far as the eye can see (is this endlessly?). The supplement of the binary gives out to incalculability.

A part of this incalculability comes from the problem of identifying what is to be counted in translation, of how to count language:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| “le centième” (168) | “the hundredth” (387) |
|---------------------|-----------------------|

Following the example cited above, Norma Cole in her “talk on nines and tens” relates the problem of translating numbers as words (and as it is taken in much translation theory, translating words as numbers) to what she calls the “first translation”: “how does the listening get translated into seeing, into writing, the material visibility that exists.... There is the writing generating itself from its

own materiality. Space for time.” In the above example, as though in allegory to the irreconcilability of “hundred” = 100 and “*cent*” = 100, we have “*ième*” = “th.” The question of how we talk about numbers, how we say numbers and how we write them represents both the (im)possibility of counting or weighing words, as well as a limit for mathematics. For a number, like “*cent*” or a “hundred,” is both number and word, and, as a word, it is both heard and seen, spoken and written, and therefore translatable. As perfectly translatable as numbers themselves are intended to be, the translation of numbers *as word*, multiplies them furiously, before they get anywhere near a mathematical equation:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| “vingt suffiraient” (202) | “a score would be plenty” (408) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|

How, then, can we construct a mathematics of the third *texte*? Should we count the words, or the pages, as translators themselves do, when they are tallying up their fee? Or could we count the meanings, so that 20, in this example “*vingt*,” could be 1 (one) meaning, equivalent to 1 (one) meaning for 20 (“a score”)? Does twenty have twenty meanings (or more?), the meaning of twenty, or one meaning? And if so does $20 = 1$? In this example, one way to achieve numerical equivalence would be to count the letters 5 (*vingt*) = 5 (score).

Or we could count languages:

How do we recognize the identity of each language—that is, justify presuming that languages can be categorized in terms of one and many? Is language a countable, like an apple or an orange and unlike water? Is it not possible to think of languages, for example, in terms of those grammars in which the distinction of the singular and the plural is irrelevant? What I am calling into question is the unity of language, a certain positivity of discourse or historical a priori we apply whenever a different language or difference in language is at stake. How do we allow ourselves to tell one language from another, to represent language as a unity? (Sakai)

We can hear/see in this quote some echoes of Halberstam and Livingstone's take on the countable unity and fixity of singular and universal. Sakai crafts his metaphor of the one and the many around the grammatical distinction between "countable" (apples) and "uncountable" (water). A happy metaphor, because of the school-book image that apples recall against the fluidity of water (we saw this rhetoric of fluidity earlier with reference to Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*). Trying to count languages could be likened in a way to the imprecise groping needed to bob for apples. The word "language" in English is among those that can be either countable or uncountable. Language may be taken in general as the totality of language, or the deep structure of language, or it may be taken as *they*, the languages of the world: one language, two languages, three languages.... You could perhaps liken this to the difference between *langage* and *langue* in French, where *langage* is a linguistic structure capable of being seized or transferred independently of language itself, and *langue* is a matter of nation or identity, languages taken by their proper names. In translation then, the difference between countable and uncountable shatters apart like a broken vase. What tertextually (the adjective of third *texte*) reading difference in translation reveals, is that the breakdown of the unity of the linguistic signifier in translation is merely a performance or a metaphor for the lack of unity within one *single* language.

This breakdown in the identity of a language must be likened to the breakdown of identity itself, as Halberstam and Livingstone have done, as it is the Self and the Other who are identified and identify themselves within this very language, these very languages. We return here to the question of one \neq one:

No such thing as *a* language exists. At present. Nor does the language.
Nor the idiom or dialect. That, moreover, is why one would never be able *to count* these things, and why if...we only ever have one language, this monolingualism is not at one with itself. (Derrida)

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida explains that one language is always defined in relation to others, by distinguishing itself from others, so that one single language cannot be said to exist on its own. This is also taken as a metaphor for the multiplicity within one single language, both as the hybridity and heterogeneity of linguistic influences that go into making up a language. One might relate this to Antoine Berman's reading of the way languages create themselves by translating from other languages, and also of the problem of the singularity of the linguistic unity as we described it above: that singularity always exists as a representative of generality, and the inverse, in such a way that singularity and generality come to deconstruct one another:

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| "Je résume" (96) | "I shall now sum up" (344) |
|------------------|----------------------------|

The third text always leaves a remainder:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| "Je n'y compte pas" (177) | — (393) |
| "faute de mots" (210) | — (413) |

Algebra and trigonometry

Déluge ends with a scene in a train where the characters become algebraic. But this is not at all because that is my dream. It is because in the scenes of our existence there is a mathematics. This mathematics is always at work in reality. But at times it is more pronounced, and ultimately, it is perceptible in all the scenes of intersubjectivity properly speaking. That is to say: I see you, I see you seeing me, I see myself see you seeing me, etc. (Cixous)

The rhetoric that comes from mathematics or that invokes a vague logic of numbers and figures in literary or critical texts often tends to assemble all

mathematical operations under the same sign. The previous section treated arithmetic, countability, and numerical succession, and gave us contradictory or false sums (or different from what one might normally expect from numbers). To say that the third *texte* is algebraic, in the sense given by Cixous in the passage above, is an equation of a different color. In algebra, the terms are abstract. Instead of 9 or 10 apples, there are A or B apples, an indeterminate quantity, until determined according to a real variable in the equation. The rhetoric of algebra is thus quite different from arithmetic, more syntactical than symbolic. In the case of arithmetic, translation passes through like a whirlwind in an allegory of translation, as translation between words and letters. But the figural economy of algebra works differently, having more to do with structure than with sign, like a kind of dream of the grammar of deep structure, in which words would be finally emptied of meaning and context, of the problems of misunderstanding, to give way to a pure architecture of language, which would then finally have the last word in the war between language (*langage*) and languages (*langues*). The variables of algebra propose to resolve the confusion between number and word which gave us the material of troubled arithmetic in the third *texte*. It therefore follows that *tertextual* algebra would already be a site for the confusion between words and numbers, between letters and figures:

| | |
|---|--|
| “C’est ainsi que je vis A et B aller lentement l’un vers l’autre, sans se rendre compte de ce qu’ils faisaient.” (M 9) | “I saw A and C going slowly towards each other, unconscious of what they were doing.” (M 8) |
|---|--|

“*Sans se rendre compte*” in French translates as “without realizing”—as Beckett gives it, “unconscious.” However, a currency exchange-type translation (coin for coin or word for word) might give something like: without rendering oneself count. A classic equivalent translation might be “without taking account.” To be conscious then is to be able to take account: to count, tally. But the miscount extends here to create its own algebraic

equation, whereby $A + B = A + C$ and therefore, $B = C$. In this example, the translation miscounts, but nevertheless gives us in exchange an operation of equivalence. The mathematics of the third *texte* cannot be carried out like a transcription of a symbolic universal. It must involve an operation of transformation. It does not uncover equivalence. It creates it, an imaginary, delicate one. This is the operation of the interruption generated in a language when it is crossed by other languages, of languages crisscrossing each other:

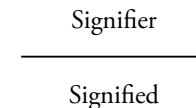
| | |
|--|--|
| “Ce qu’ayant de moins changeant on croit avoir de plus réel” (100) | “Who seems the truest possession, because the most unchanging” (346) |
|--|--|

In rhetoric this might be called a chiasmus; in mathematics, cross multiplication:

$$\frac{\textit{moins changeant}}{\textit{truest possession}} = \frac{\textit{most unchanging}}{\textit{de plus réel}}$$

$$(\textit{moins changeant})(\textit{de plus réel}) = (\textit{truest possession})(\textit{most unchanging})$$

We might take this to the abstract by applying it to a traditional signifying model:



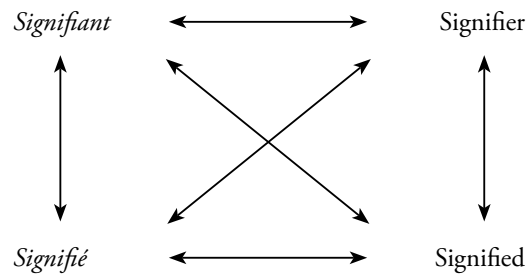
Which means, when put thus in the third-*texte* model, we can say that if:

$$\frac{\textit{Signifiant}}{\textit{Signifié}} = \frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{Signified}}$$

then:

$$(\textit{Signifiant})(\text{Signified}) = (\text{Signifier})(\textit{Signifié})$$

This may be read as an allegory or a diagram of a horizontalizing movement of the third *texte*. The cross-multiplying operation contaminates the effect of synecdoche (part – whole) by interrupting the organization of pairs. As we saw in the first section on arithmetic, what gets corresponded in translation is not $1 = 1$ but rather one complicated, incalculable assemblage to another. In this example, one pair may be said to be equal to another—a deceptively simple phrase, because if two pairs are equal, this is not to say two terms are equal but rather four. So the relationships of correspondence between two equal things must attach each item in the pairs to one another, making for six correspondences instead of two, or twelve if the correspondences are taken as different depending on which direction they go:



Although since *signifiant* ≠ *signifiant*, *signifier* ≠ *signifier*, *signifié* ≠ *signifié* and *signifié* ≠ *signifié*, to say that *signifiant* = *signifier*, or *signifiant* = *signifié*, or that *signifié* = *signifier* or *signifié* = *signifié*, and so on, is completely absurd. Yet, equivalence is somehow achieved, if translation is possible. Only, equivalence is not given in the third *texte*. It is made from a condition of non-equivalence (careful, I do not say that non-equivalence is made from a condition of equivalence): a wonky, uneven, approximative and tenuous equivalence. Since especially obviously things bear repeating: we are not talking about an equivalence consisting in unifications of significations of both texts into an absolute signification in a transcendent text. This equation does not seek a hermeneutic solution. This is an approach to reading that

tries to maintain a constant mobilizing of the lines of correspondence at play in linguistic representation.

In bold paradox to the incalculability of language in translation, the work of translation often requires the counting of words. This is certainly the case for professional translation, and therefore for a large part of all written translation. So let's count:

| | |
|--|---|
| “comme du gaz, balivernes, l'endroit, l'endroit, après nous aviserons” (188) | “like gas, balls, balls, the place, then we'll see” (399) |
|--|---|

balivernes x 1, balls x 2; the place x 1, *l'endroit* x 2.

$$balivernes + \frac{2(l'endroit)}{2} = \frac{2(balls)}{2} + \text{the place}$$

$$balivernes + l'endroit = balls + \text{the place}$$

This activity of the third *texte* ignites a symbolic dimension to the signifier. Not only words and morphemes, but letters and sounds may be read here in a mathematico-symbolic way. Counting the words in this example, a first inequivalence is uncovered, with one “*balivernes*” translated as two “balls.” However, a second inequivalence, with one “the place” and two “*l'endroit, l'endroit,*” when submitted to a mathematical operation of the third *texte* which allows the material of words to be counted as though they made cents/sense, gives us an absurd mathematical equivalence.

This is the poetics of misreading set off by reading in translation—what I've been calling the third *texte*. It mobilizes the economy of words so that parts of them may come together in improbable recombinations, as they concomitantly rebel against hierarchies of word and meaning. Fixed meaning always implies a domination. To immobilize meaning is to submit

it to colonial regimes of sense (this is why I would rather not “define” the third *texte*). The equation operated above is not intended to simply reduce language to a mathematical equivalence of material, but rather to open the order of referring operations to an anarchic multiplicity that occurs when languages are cross multiplied. In other words, the exponential proliferating of meaning inhabits the space of the “foreignness of languages” (Bhabha):

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| “dans ses grandes lignes” (170) | “in the main drift” (388) |
| “les grandes lignes” (170) | “the principal divisions” (389) |

It’s an interruption occurring in one language that arises when it comes into contact with another language:

if *grandes lignes* = the main drift
and if *grandes lignes* = the principal divisions
then main drift = the principal divisions

In other words, the possibility in the third *texte* for signifier = *signifiant*, etc. (see above) attains signifier ≠ signifier as its consequence (or at least that signifier = signifier is no more essential a correspondence than signifier = *signifiant*). In this last example, we see how an algebraic symbolism of the third *texte* (that letters may be taken as numerically symbolic and capable of standing in for one another or being equivalent) may also open out onto a trigonometric one, as the signifying register moves from visible to invisible (but this does not change the status of what is signified or what signifies it!). The calculation of the two different variables “the principal divisions” and “the main drift” allows us to deduce the function of one same line: “*les grandes lignes*,” plural in its linguistic expression and yet selfsame in its mathematical one, much like a recognizable mark on a sheet of paper.

The economic crisis

This logic of non-equivalence or of troubled, interrupted equivalence in the third *texte* can also be read as disturbing a quantitative logic that reifies unities in its obsession to make everything accountable so that profits may be measured. I want to now take a look at some real-world applications of the abstract mathematics of the third *texte* detailed in the first two sections. It follows that accounting in and for the third *texte* represents a precarious and unsteady economics. As with mathematics, the poetics of money is almost as often used in thinking on translation as it is left unproblematized in thinking on translation:

As always, when one set of models and spatial metaphors breaks down, foundering on new material, the theoretically minded critic casts about for new ones, both to help organize the material and to characterize it more clearly for readers.... We have therefore adopted the monetary metaphor that contemporary language historians often use. Lia Formigari remarks that “It is its capacity to abstract from the sensible world while maintaining its capacity to represent it that makes languages resemble money” (Formigari 1990:106). As tokens or representative signs of real values, especially in the proliferation of linguistic-economic metaphors from the 1760’s through the 1820’s, languages and money both entail a kind of semiotic commerce, and there are frequent mentions of precious metals which are not the real referents of money but the signs of labor and industry. (Hokenson and Munson)

The economic metaphor adopted in Hokenson and Munson’s *The Bilingual Text* indeed belongs to the rhetorical imagination of “free market” discourse. And just like the free market, it does not work the same in practice

as it does in theory. The monetary metaphor taken up in the third *texte* often seems to wind up in an unjust, rigged exchange, in which the math just doesn't seem to add up. The reductive representational violence that likens money to language is analogous to the one likening money to work. At the end of the passage, this analogy is connected to the narrative of the evolution of commodity money towards that of the exchange economy, in which the loss of material equivocality is the very game of reification itself. The “semiotic commerce” of the last sentence in the passage above itself acts to reify “languages” in the same breath as “labor and industry,” under the “referents of money.” The math of the third *texte*, as we have seen, does the very opposite. Instead of unifying and essentializing meaning in a numerical value, it splits meaning open into mobile, proliferating, incalculable homophonies and misreadings where multiple meanings may coexist without canceling each other out, much as they actively do in a relationship, a conversation, or in a reading or translation of a text. Hokenson and Munson start to signal this: “Equality, commensurability, equivalence in linguistic terms, this venerable translation standard is nowhere so problematic as in the bilingual text.” They stop just short of applying this critique to their own currency exchange model. We cannot count language just as we cannot count languages. Counting words like we count numbers, as we have seen, makes for strange sums.

This is neither to condemn Hokenson and Munson's very useful and rigorous work on bilingual writing (in which translation metaphors are not the main focus), nor to try to prevent a reflection on language from accompanying a reflection on money. The history of monetary representation and of economic circulation has always gone hand in hand with seeking structure in language—as Hokenson and Munson's references to contemporary language history (which escapes our scope here) show. What I am proposing here instead is to consider alternative metaphors for the relationship between money and language in translation. Rather than thinking language(s) like a well-“oiled” currency exchange, thinking (of) it/them in tandem with monetary

malfunctions and interruptions: inequalities, counterfeits, scams, debts, crises, and gifts. The moment when exchange erupts into the breakdown of equality between terms.

Let's see for example what happens when we try to “count” translation:

| | |
|---|--|
| “Je compte bien pouvoir balayer tout ca en très peu de temps” (9) | “I flatter myself it will not take me long to scatter them, whenever I choose to the winds.” (292) |
| “tantôt avancant, tantot reculant, tantot deviant, mais en fin de compte grignotant toujours du terrain” (45) | “gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway” (314) |
| “À mesure que moi je tournais à l'extérieur, eux ils tournait à l'intérieur, compte tenu de la différence de courbure.” (52) | “So we turned, in our respective orbits, I without, they within” (318) |
| “débarassé à si bon compte d'un tas de consanguins” (60) | “delivered so economically of a pack of blood relations” (323) |
| “de choses qui ne me regardent pas, qui ne comptent pas” (63) | “things that don't concern me” (324) |
| “en rendre compte ” (97) | “announce” (345) |
| “se rendre compte ” (114) | “observe” (355) |
| “qui compte ” (132) | “that matters” (366) |
| “Qu'il ne compte plus que sur lui pour pallier ce qu'il est, sans qu'il y soit pour rien” (135) | “Simply to find within himself a palliative for what he is, through no fault of his own.” (367) |
| “il m'en aurait été tenu compte ” (136) | “they would have spoken in my favour” (368) |
| “mais ne compte pas peut-etre, exceptionnellement” (136) | “one perhaps that doesn't count , exceptionally” (368) |
| — (138) | “the words that count ” (370) |
| “c'est la [présentation] qui compte ” (145) | “that's what matters” (374) |
| “tout compte fait” (147) | “all things considered” (375) |

| | |
|--|---|
| “que ca compte , comme vie, comme tuerie, c’est établi, avouez-le” (154) | “for the excellent reason that counts as living too, counts as murder, it’s notorious, ah you can’t deny it.” (379) |
| “c’est tout ce qui compte ... la question n’est pas là... seule l’ombre compte ” (160) | “that’s all that matters.... it doesn’t matter... only the shadows matter (383) |
| “Je n’y compte pas” (177) | — (393) |
| “fin de compte , c’est la fin, la fin du compte ” (202) | “in the end, it’s the end, the ending end” (408) |

In the above examples, I have attempted to tally up the “count”: *faire les comptes* (do your accounts, do the sums). For 20 “*compte(nt)*”s in the French *Innommable* (19 shown here), we get only fifteen in the English (four shown), which makes a difference of five. This can either be taken as a theft or a gift, taking or giving more than is shown—the unit of measure, the word (10 centimes/word), exceeds itself. Measure, and what is measured, get scattered across the translation, as in the first example, where the sonic “scatter” of the “*compte*,” “flatter,” becomes one of the incalculable excesses of homophony in translation (that a single word can be translated in an incalculable number of ways gives it an incalculable meaning), scattered out across the third text. This may be applied likewise to land: “gaining ground, losing ground...in the long run making headway” (314); “*tantôt avançant, tantôt reculant...en fin de compte grignonant toujours du terrain.*” How long is this run exactly? Can it be counted, and how? By word? By parcel of land? By “ground” (2) or “*terrain*” (1)? By its “headway” getting nibbled away (“*grignoter*”)? In this example we see an accounting similar to the books of a land-speculation deal, a house sold with a sub-prime mortgage, costing far more than it is worth. The question of ownership (of property) likewise appears in the fourth example, a “*si bon compte*” translated by “economically,” bringing us back to the etymological relationship between “economics” and the “household”:

What is economy? Among its irreducible predicates or semantic values, economy no doubt includes the values of law (*nomos*) and of home (*oikos*, home, property, family, the hearth, the fire indoors). *Nomos* does not only signify the law in general but also the law of distribution (*nemein*), the law of sharing or partition (*partage*), the law as partition (*moira*), the given or assigned part, participation. (Derrida)

Translation gifts, or steals, rents, occupies and reappropriates the house of economy.

In the third example, another strange geometric figure appears, in which the “measure” of the turn, and the “*compte*” of the “*courbure*” (curve), seems to lose their lines in a dizzying spiral, its ends unseen. How can this curve, or this turn (turn = *vertere* in Latin, *verser*, *version*, a French word for translation) be measured? Is it the same in both texts? Or indeed does it lead from one text to the other, link them together? And in that case, will it line up if the systems of measure that attend to it are not the same? This is a kind of impossible operation, a function of a line that doesn’t add up, an unsolvable equation.

But so we also see in these examples that the meaning of counting/*compter* itself is uncountable, as it can be “concerns” (324), speech (“announce” 345), observations (“observe” 355), or “matter” (366): matter that can be counted, weighed, distributed and yes, exchanged. But what is the matter of the third text? What is it made of and how can it be measured? Is it made of words and letters, for example c-o-u-n-t? Litterality and figurality performatively mime each other. The very matter of the language serves both as a unit of measure and as a metaphor for its own bad tally, for the untranslatableness of its translation. The count that doesn’t count one (136/368), or counts two for one (154/379), the “words that count” (370), that you can’t count (page 138 of the French translation, where the “count” is

not translated). This material unaccountability, the lit(t)eral inequality in the balance sheet tallying word for word, acts as a metaphor for the incalculable homophonies, equivocities, and iterabilities of language (in translation), a “*compte*” whose “*fin*,” whose “end,” whose “ending end” (408), is not a stable, precise, measurable location “*en fin de compte*.”

This very confusion between the material and the figural dimensions of the word allows us to see metaphors of this bad accounting in other instances of counting up words. The translation of *compter*/count is not the only example of cooked books and fiscal fraud in the third text:

| | |
|--|---|
| “comme une bête née en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées et mortes en cages nées et mortes en cages de bêtes nées en cage mortes en cage nées et mortes nées et mortes en cage en cage nées et puis mortes nées et puis mortes comme une bête dis-je disent-ils” (386) | “like a caged beast born of caged beasts born of cages beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage born and then dead born in a cage and then dead in a cage in a word like a beast in one of their words” (166) |
|--|---|

Performing this precise audit of third-texte chattel allows us to see something like money laundering happening in the translation. If we count the words in the above example $26 \neq 16$; letters (without spaces): $276 \neq 169$; letters (with spaces): $335 \neq 209$. This is reminiscent of *Rob’s Word Shop*, Rob Fitterman’s word selling performance in which he sold an individual letter for 50 cents and a word for a dollar. Like Cicero, Fitterman juxtaposes the price of individual units to that of a bulk rate (although, in his case, letters are

coins and words sold at bulk rate, as opposed to Cicero, for whom words are coins and the text sold at bulk rate). Although the absurdity of this may lead one to think of the absurdity of translation modeled on currency exchange, it is also no more absurd than employees who exchange their uncountable time (their life) for money that represents only a fraction of the “value” they “produced” during the time they spent working:

| | |
|--|--|
| “Mais si, au lieu de souffrir moins, à mesure que le temps passe , il souffre toujours autant, précisément, que le premier jour ? Ça doit être possible. Et mais si, au lieu de souffrir moins, ou autant, que le premier jour, il souffre plus, à mesure que le temps passe , de plus en plus, à mesure que le transfert s’effectue, de l’avenir inchangeant à l’inchangeable passé. Autre chose, mais dans le même ordre d’idées .” (134) | “But suppose, instead of suffering less, as time flies , he continues to suffer as much, precisely, as the first day. That must be possible. And but suppose, instead of suffering less than the first day, or no less, he suffers more and more, as time flies , and the metamorphosis is accomplished , of unchanging future into unchangeable past. Eh ? Another thing, of but of a different order .” (385) |
|--|--|

The repetition: “à *mesure que le temps passe*...à *mesure que le temps passe*”/ “as time flies...as time flies,” repeats an extra time in the third texte, meaning that it is not only each phrase that repeats, but the translation, translated both times in the same way. If we can count letters and words literally (by letter), why not translations (enter multiplication)? This passage transforms the measure of time into a measure of time. The syntagm repeats, and continues to repeat endlessly, translating its instinct for repetition, and, with this repetition, making syntagms equal: counting syntagms as though they were seconds. This is no longer simply a translation of a phrase, but the putting into motion of the cogs, the logos (clogs?) of time, its machination. In so doing, it makes a figure of time, of the measure of time. It’s no longer translation; it’s transcription: a clear, exact translation, perfectly transparent, making quantities of translation equivalent and countable, reducing words to their placement, their structure—or almost. It should be because it could be.

The third *texte* unravels equivalence by giving littorality a figural dimension and the inverse: time flies, word for word in French, *le temps vole*. The translation of flight gives us both flight and theft (*vol*). As Cixous would say, “Flying is woman’s gesture—flying in language and making it fly...turning propriety upside down” (Cixous, trans. Keith and Paula Cohen). Time thus not only flies but *steals* in translation. It interrupts the measurement of time in a way that gives back some equivalence, like employees fudging their time sheet, or “stealing” a candy bar, taking back a bit of what is rightfully “theirs” (a little of the value of their stolen time). It is why I am always deliberately (at least) one month behind on rent. I think of it as my landlord’s gift to me, but (much like in translation, depending on your perspective) I don’t think he thinks of it in the same way. “*Il souffre plus*,” his suffering added or subtracted—in the third *texte*, this can be both or either. “Eh?” I didn’t hear you. Translate again. It’s the supplement of translation, the gesture of trying to understand someone else— although you never really do, even if the “metamorphosis is accomplished,” and it really is (metamorphoses into “*le transfert s’effectue*”), changing its order performatively so that it may be both same “*même ordre*” and “different order” (and this is the same order!):

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| “une douzaine, une quinzaine” (133) | “a dozen to a dozen and a half” (367) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

When we invest in the third *texte*, we must be very careful not to be taken in by an unwieldy interest rate. For usury is too often the name of the third *texte*, that or unregulated profit margins, speculations that may lead to financial bubbles. You must be careful to not pay for something that you’ll never receive: here “*quinzaine*” (literally, about fifteen, but often the measure used to refer to two weeks’ time) gives us eighteen (“a dozen and a half”). This is much like salaried contracts in the United States, where 40 hours may too often easily give way to 50 or 60 hours, as employees compete to keep their jobs.

And after work of course, there’s the bar:

| | |
|--|--|
| “Une demi pinte impériale de porteur et une chique” (<i>MM</i> 136) | “an imperial half-pint of porter and a plug of tobacco” (<i>MD</i> 256) |
|--|--|

In “The Poetics of Tobacco,” Derrida’s reading of Baudelaire’s “La Fausse Monnaie” (“Counterfeit Money”), tobacco represents first of all a luxury or a “pure loss,” and thus in a sense that which “goes up in smoke,” and like the gift, exceeds the logic of exchange. Smoking, as Derrida points out, is often associated with poets and with poetry, which also bear a similar kind of paradox to tobacco. Poems are conceived of as something that may be given away for free, gifted perhaps, and therefore something which exceeds, escapes, or interrupts exchange. Meanwhile, these very poems are appropriated into the system of exchange. This rejoins his reading of the gift, which “is annulled...each time there is restitution or counter-gift.” Poets sell books, hold titles and domains, the rights to their work. And there is a logic of exchange and indebtedness in the construction of a canon, the tracing of genealogies. Derrida ironizes this in “The Poetics of Tobacco” by citing an ad for Gitane cigarettes on the back of an issue of the review *Poésie* dedicated to the theme of poets and tobacco.

This paradoxical gesture of excess reappropriated into an exchange logic is similar to the symbolizing process itself, according to Derrida:

the reinscription of tobacco in the economic cycle of exchange—contract, gift/countergift, alliance—necessarily follows the incessant movement of *reappropriation of excess* in relation to the system of simple natural need and to the circular equivalence between so-called natural need and the labor of production that corresponds to it. But this excess in relation to so-called natural need does not mean that the passage to the symbolic suspends the economic movement. Tobacco is a symbol of this symbolic, in other words, of the agreement of the sworn faith, or the alliance that commits the two parties when they share the two fragments of a *symbolon*, when they must give, exchange, and obligate themselves one to the other. (Derrida)

This inescapable reinscription of that which interrupts or exceeds economy, such as the gift, tobacco, poetry (Derrida also cites alcohol and drunkenness) is similar in a way to the excesses of translation—the incalculable losses and gains of its bad math, which nonetheless seem to return in the end to a certain equivalence, if we are to recognize something as a translation of something else. In the above example this is played out in the translation between different cultural systems of measurement. Between “plug” and “*chique*” but also between “pint” and “*pinte*.” As loan words nearly always acquire a different meaning in translation, the measurement “pint” in English becomes the word “*pinte*” in French (meaning roughly, an English-shaped glass of beer), marked by the sign of the supplementary feminine *e* in translation. A pint, translated into the French system of measure, gives roughly 66 centiliters. However, as anyone who has ordered a “*pinte*” in a French café before will know, *pinte* ≠ pint, and comes in 50cl. (*pinte*) or 25 cl. (*demi*). In the translation again, you get more or less than you bargained for. You may pay tourist prices, or someone else’s taxes, the price of a green card. “Love is not duty free,” Heta Rundgren says (in her song “Periferia”). Is there any escape from the logic of exchange?

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| <p>“Car si je suis en mesure de calculer à quelques pouces près l’orbite de Malone, en admettant qu’il passe à trois pieds de moi, ce qui n’est pas sûr, par contre je ne possède sur le parcours de l’autre qu’une notion des plus confuses, vu l’impossibilité où je suis, non seulement de mesurer le temps, ce qui suffit déjà à empêcher tout calcul à ce sujet, mais aussi de comparer leurs vitesses de déplacement respectives” (20)</p> | <p>“For if I can work out to within a few inches the orbit of Malone, assuming perhaps erroneously that he passes before me at a distance of say three feet, with regard to the other’s career I must remain in the dark. For I am incapable not only of measuring time, which in itself is sufficient to vitiate all calculation in this connexion, but also of comparing their respective velocities.” (299)</p> |
|--|--|

The third texte, once again, is this site where different systems of measure come into conflict: a space of negotiation and bargaining, where

prices may be fixed but not stable. In this case, that takes place in the translations between “*pouce*”/“inches” and “*pieds*”/“feet.” This is also, as we have mentioned, an allegory for the conflict and negotiation at stake in the quantifying of words, a metaphor between uncountable materiality and incalculable figurality. In English you can measure with your thumb (rule of thumb), and even with your foot, although a foot is rarely if ever a “foot.” In this case, measurement passes through the body, through the homophony between “foot” and “foot,” or through the body of the king: when “*pouce*” (both “inch” and “thumb”) was used in French speaking countries, it was meant to refer to the standard measure of Charlemagne’s thumb. In order to measure well, measurement must be taken in its historical context. The metrical system was instituted in France just after the Revolution on April 7, 1795, and became the exclusive system of measurement on July 4, 1837, meaning that the “*pouce*” and the “*pied*” in French are antiquated, whereas “inches” and “feet” are contemporary. The English language took longer to standardize. Standard imperial measure (inches, feet) was used simultaneously alongside metric units until 1985 in England, and to this day weight is often still measured in stones. At the moment in French history when measurement was being standardized, the different systems of measure used in England were too various for us to describe here. In other words, they were closer to resembling individual feet and hands in their diversity than to feet and inches in their standardization. In the above example, the translation of translation crosses the body, plays out along the translatability (untranslatability) of the body as it is inscribed into the body of words. And thus a time-traveling translation plays out as it goes in search of an equivalence not of measure but of signification. This is not a case where “inch” (“*pouce*”) is translated with “2’54 centimeters” or even approximately “three feet” by “*mètre*.”

A point here may be made about measuring according to the body of the king—and the way that, in the end it is belief that holds up not only the authority of the king but the stability of currency. This discussion of the

foreignness of measure then brings us to our last point on the translation of the foreignness of money. To cite Derrida again:

Everything is an act of faith, phenomenon of credit or credence, of belief and conventional authority in this text which perhaps says something essential about what here links literature to belief, to credit and thus to capital, to economy and thus to politics. Authority is constituted by accreditation, both in the sense of legitimation as effect of belief or credulity, and of bank credit, of capitalized interest. This recalls a very fine saying of Montaigne's who knew all this in advance: "Our soul moves only on credit or faith [*crédit*], being bound and constrained to the whim of others' fancies, a slave and a captive under the authority of their teaching."

This pronouncement is connected of course to Derrida's reading of Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money." In the story, the narrator's friend gives a counterfeit coin to a beggar on the street—which leads to a series of speculations in the mind of the narrator concerning his friends, intentions, and the ends that this coin might come to, the effects it might have for the beggar. The counterfeit coin in Derrida is thus a machine for producing hypotheses and speculations, at the same time as it is a machine for producing capital: the counterfeit coin in circulation produces real wealth so long as it is *believed* to be the real coin. The engendering of speculation and the proliferation of capital are allegories for one another. In the end, the counterfeit coins begs the question: is there any real difference between a false coin and a real one? Are not all coins "false" in a sense? "Is there a real difference here between real and counterfeit money once there is capital? And credit?"

Where is the true referent of the "Counterfeit Money"? What is it to refer to money or to a monetary sign? And when money gets

dematerialized (checks, credit cards, coded signatures and so forth), what becomes of the act of giving, for example to the poor man in the street? What is "credit" in this case and to cite Montaigne once again, What is faith? What is credit in literature? Can one tell the story of money? And will this story participate or not in literature of some sort? Can one quote money? Can one quote a check? What is it worth?

The counterfeit coin (much like the translation of money) thus engenders a proliferation of speculations into the meaning and uses of money. Let's return now to Hokensen and Munsen's currency metaphor, putting it into the context of shifting monetary representation—the way in which the mode of representation of money changes throughout history, just like the theories of language which are connected to them. Following a well-known narrative as it is proposed by Jack Weatherford in his *History of Money*, the exchange of commodities gave way to an exchange of other materials (shells, or beans for example), which then became both commodities and symbols. Meaning, at least where beans are concerned, that if the currency took a dive, you could literally put your money where your mouth was. This hybrid commodity/symbol system then gave way to another intermediary, metal. Finally, paper became the symbol for metal, in particular gold, until 1972 in the U.S. when Nixon closed the "gold window" and the dollar became "no longer that massive, stockpiled incarnation of a secure and calculable value, but a fleeting, transitory sign, resurrected continuously in circulation and in speculation which always differs its fulfillment" (Goux, my translation). Electronic money was not far off. In the article where the above citation appears, Jean-Joseph Goux treats this change in the signifying relationships of money as a change in the way of thinking about the linguistic sign. As opposed to the model where money is tied to a commodity it represents, an external referent, the sign is built on exchange alone. The sign empties out, gaining meaning only in relation to other signs, and not in relation to

an object. It thus becomes infinite, incalculable according to the resources which would have served as its referents. This dissociation of money from the concrete referent of gold marks, for Goux, a philosophical breaking point: “Whether this be a question of inflation or of operations playing instantaneously on profit differentials on the global level, the digital nature of contemporary money, and its continuing creation beyond state control, calls for another philosophy.”

I’m reminded here of the very beginning of the Beckett trilogy (of which *The Unnamable/L’Innommable* is the final installment), the first pages of *Molloy*:

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| “Il me donne un peu d’argent et enlève les feuilles. Tant de feuilles, tant d’argent.... Cependant je ne travaille pas pour l’argent. Pour quoi alors ? Je ne sais pas.” (M 7) | “He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money.... Yet I don’t work for money. For what then? I don’t know.” (M 7) |
| “il avait payé ses trois ou six pence et gravi jusqu’à la plate-forme l’escalier en colimaçon” (M 10) | “he paid his few coppers to climb, slower and slower up the winding stones” (M 9) |
| “Un coup signifiant oui, deux non, trois je ne sais pas, quatre argent, cinq adieu. J’avais eu du mal à dresser à ce code son entendement ruiné et délirant, mais j’y étais arrivé. Qu’elle confondît oui, non, je ne sais pas et adieu, cela m’était indifférent, je les confondais moi-même. Mais qu’elle associât les quatre coups avec autre chose qu’avec l’argent, voilà ce à quoi il fallait obvier à tout prix.” (M 22) | “One knock meant yes, two no, three I don’t know, four money, five goodbye. It was hard to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end. That she should confuse yes, no, I don’t know and goodbye, was all the same to me, I confused them myself. But that she should associate the four knocks with anything but money was something to be avoided at all costs.” (M 18) |
| “D’ailleurs, je ne venais pas pour l’argent. Je lui en prenais, mais je ne venais pas pour cela.” (M 23) | “In any case I didn’t come for money. I took her money, but I didn’t come for that.” (M 18) |

What the third texte presents here, straying from its strictly native terrain (*The Unnamable/L’Innommable*), is a kind of breakdown in the representational regime of money. In the first example, this concerns the breakdown of the paper symbol for money, as “money” is exchanged for “*argent*,” “pages” for “money,” “money” for “*feuilles*,” “pages” for “*argent*,” and so on according to the proliferating, incalculable third-texte model. Paper itself becomes multiple, no longer a sheet, but a torn-up, unrecognizable journal. It is exchanged as commodity object at the same time that it is exchanged between the two texts: an allegory for money. The question of commodity value (are “pages” and “*feuilles*” equal to each other?) becomes synonymous with the question of the equivalence of national currencies. The character Molloy may very well be able to exchange paper for money, or *feuilles* for *argent*, but can he exchange paper for *feuilles* (commodity market), or money for *argent* (exchange market)? There is an interruption in the monetary system in the third texte, as when Romanians used cigarettes as a monetary sign during the Ceausescu regime (Weatherford). In the second citation, the problem of measure may be observed in a different form, “few coppers” (9) for “*trois et six pence*” (10), in which entire systems must be translated placing singular words into contradiction, as in the numerical imprecision between “few” and “*trois et six*” (three and six). The third texte interrupts the unbreakable bond between nation and currency. Even if a “few coppers” have the same market value as “*trois et six pence*,” it cannot be so simply so in the third texte, since “coppers,” at home in its texte, is “exchanged” against “*pence*” which, in the French text, is a foreign currency. It is only here that we may begin to think of currency exchange as an allegory for language exchange. The “knock”/“*coup*,” knocking on the door, opening to the other text could serve as bitcoins (or perhaps rather as guerrilla ringer coins in a bitcoin system—Banksy’s famous bank notes with his face on them) representing a demonetization of “money”/“*argent*” as national currencies based on the opposition between home and foreign. These are signs translated into the play of foreignness in the third texte which resists the blind belief that stabilizes a currency. “Pages” and “*feuilles*” are like “money”

and “*argent*,” not as signs in the language of money, but as signs on the language of money. The confusion of representational correspondences in the third *texte* asks: can you read the writing on the money? (“Can one quote a check?”)

As important as what money represents, is what is represented on the money. The face of Caesar or Washington, of bridges, arches, and maps. “*Trois et six pence*” already mixes up the account and the money: the money has already been translated as the money of the other (language), the language of the other. One translation of the French “*monnaie*” is “change.” Third-*texte* money is like a coin collection coming from many lands and historical moments, in which each coin has taken on a price relative to its symbolic value as a collector’s item, decontextualized from its own system and reappropriated into another. Thus not only are the sums not equal, but money itself is not equal—neither to its signification nor in the context of the nation where it comes from. From the moment language is not presumed to be stuck to its nation, neither is money. The nationalization of money is also the moment of economic breakdown, or of currency devaluation, where “*trois et six pence*” does not equal a “few coppers.” A good example of this is the value of the dollar in Bolivia’s economy during the 1984-1985 hyperinflation, when a material dollar was worth more than its conceptual value as a countable unit, for example in a one hundred dollar bill. “Customers eagerly exchanged a hundred-dollar note for ninety-seven one dollar bills” (Weatherford). Inflation was so elevated that one hundred dollar bills circulated more widely than small bills, which in turn took on a disproportionate value in their capacity to make change. In this example $100 \neq 100$, in a disjunct between body and spirit of the dollar. As though in homage to Cicero, packets of one hundred single-dollar bills were then weighed in bulk to measure the exchange.

Money and measure are thus articulated along with the problem of foreignness: is the text foreign, and foreign with regard to what native text? Foreign to itself? Foreign to the foreigner? Who would thus be foreign with regard to...? Treating translation like a currency exchange is to give a neutral

status to translation. But let us recall “*traduire n’est jamais neutre*” (Lotbinière-Harwood). It would be like forgetting the supplement of foreignness which attaches onto every process of translation, and to thus presuppose sameness of identity, the selfsame identity of the same, as hierarchically opposed to the other. However, more dangerously, it gives a neutral status to money, emptying it out of the unequal power relations inscribed in its structure, sign, and play.

The story of translation has often been told as a loss or a gain. As we know, old-fashioned notions of translation establish it as a poor imitation or a copy, and only see where translation loses. These discourses also assert the primacy of origin, of original language and banner wave for monolingualism, or at its worse xenophobia and cultural superiority. More recent accounts have tried to see translation in a more positive light, as a gain:

I am aware also that translating one’s work into another language often reveals the poverty, the semantic but also the metaphorical poverty of certain words in the other language. There is no doubt that the process of self-translating often results in a loss, in a betrayal and weakening of the original work. But then, on the other hand, there is always the possibility, the chance of a gain. Yes, the possibility that certain words or expressions in the other language may have the advantage of metaphorical richness not present in the first language. So that even though the self-translator always confronts this possibility of loss, he also hopes for a chance of gain. It seems to me that the translation, or rather the self-translation often augments, enriches, and even embellishes the original text—enriches it, not only in terms of meaning, but in its music, its rhythm, its metaphoric thickness, and even in its syntactical complexity. (Federman)

Although Federman is speaking of self-translation here, couldn’t the same be said to be true (more true, even?) for translation taking place between

two subjects? The famous example of Poe rendered “better” for some in Baudelaire’s translation reminds us that the translator may very well be just as “good” or “better” than an author of an original (if we choose to see literature in such Manichean fashion). This idea of the gain in translation may also be related to shifting ideas on how a text is counted and delimited. As Borges writes, “Our superstition that translations are inferior...is the result of our naïveté: all great works that we turn to time and again seem unalterable and definitive.” (Borges) A text may experience a gain in translation, not only because we appreciate the work of a good translator but, because the text may be conceived of as a totality of its incarnations, rather than according to a sacralization of the original. Translation adds to a text because it adds texts. As Dosse states, this is nowhere clearer than in reading practice: “our way of reading has changed. We read a lot, perhaps more and more translations... because there is indeed a gain in reading in translation” (Dosse). In other words, translation is a gain for the simple fact that more readers have more access to more texts.

However, reading texts stereoscopically as we do in the third text, is it still necessary to perpetuate a discourse of loss and gain? Many comparative studies that read translation side by side do just this: they set one translation against another in tables (as we have done here), and calculate losses and gains, as though tallying up a spreadsheet of credits and debits. The history of language read through translation may be better allegorized in the dichotomy of red and black than in that of presence and absence. Indeed, accounting, more than Orpheus and Eurydice, is probably at the roots of writing. But—are other economies possible?

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| “c’est un bon fromage” (125) | “it’s a soft job” (362) |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|

Perhaps, given the close structural and rhetorical proximity between histories of thinking about language and thinking about monetary representation, translation might offer some alternatives for conceiving value

in exchange. What are some alternatives for economic models based on a reifying $1 = 1$ of currency exchange? What possibilities might open if we think about language—and therefore economy—beyond the binary of loss and gain?

Elle vole.

Attention sur les conditions de garanties proposées :

| Garanties | Quelles conditions serez-vous indemnisé ? | Jusqu'à quel âge serez-vous indemnisé ? | Quelle est la date d'échéance du plan d'amortissement (calculé sur la base de la date d'édition de l'offre de prêt) ? |
|---|--|---|---|
| Incapacité Totale et Réversible d'Autonomie | Si vous êtes reconnu inapte par l'assureur à tout travail à la suite d'une maladie ou d'un accident et définitivement incapable de vous livrer à une activité, même de survie, susceptible de vous procurer un profit, et vous imposant, à l'assistance d'une tierce personne pour effectuer au moins 3 des 4 actes de la vie courante (se laver, se déplacer). | 75 ans | |
| Incapacité Totale de Travail | Si vous êtes contraint de cesser votre activité professionnelle sur prescription médicale par suite de maladie ou d'accident et si votre état de santé vous interdit l'exercice de toute activité professionnelle, sous réserve qu'au moment de votre départ de travail, vous exerchiez une activité professionnelle ouvrant droit à l'attribution de allocations du Pôle Emploi des allocations assimilées. | 65 ans, ou 70 ans en cas de poursuite d'activité, ou la date de départ à la retraite ou mise en préretraite (sauf pour raisons médicales), ou la date de cessation de votre activité professionnelle (sauf pour raisons médicales). | 28 ans |
| Perte d'Emploi** | Si vous perdez votre emploi à la suite d'un licenciement et que vous êtes indemnisé par le Pôle Emploi, ou les organismes assimilés, ou, si vous êtes chef d'entreprise en nom personnel ou dirigeant d'entreprise mandataire social : si vous perdez votre activité professionnelle et que vous êtes indemnisé par un régime d'assurance privé d'assurance chômage réservé aux dirigeants d'entreprise. | 60 ans ou le moment de votre mise en préretraite ou en retraite ou la cessation de votre activité professionnelle ou la liquidation de toute pension de retraite. | |

Si vous êtes gravement atteint, vous pouvez bénéficier d'une garantie décès seule sans formalité médicale sous réserve de l'absence de tout effet au terrain. Délai de carence : 30 jours, à compter de la date d'effet de la garantie.

Vous attirons également votre attention sur le fait que les primes sont proportionnels au montant de la garantie.

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BNP PARIBAS

- dans tous les autres cas, la suite est considérée comme une suite du précédent sinistre (la prise en charge se fera dès le 1er jour du nouvel arrêt de travail),
- la prise en charge ne pourra excéder 6 mensualités dans les cas suivants : les atteintes disco-vertébrales, leurs conséquences n'ayant pas nécessité d'intervention chirurgicale dans les 6 mois suivant le 1er jour d'arrêt de travail, les troubles anxio-dépressifs, psychiques, neuropsychiques, la mobilité et leurs conséquences n'ayant pas nécessité d'hospitalisation de plus de 30 jours consécutifs dans les 6 mois suivant le 1er jour d'arrêt de travail,
- aucune prise en charge ne pourra intervenir ou continuer dès la fin du mois où survient l'un des quatre événements suivants :
 - 65ème anniversaire de l'Assuré (70ème anniversaire en cas de poursuite d'activité),
 - liquidation de toute pension de retraite, pour quelque raison que ce soit,
 - départ de l'Assuré en préretraite ou en retraite pour raisons médicales,
 - cessation d'activité professionnelle, sauf pour raisons médicales.
- en cas de reprise du travail à titre définitif ou sur prescription médicale, les indemnités versées par l'Assureur sont réduites de moitié.

Après la consolidation de l'état de santé de l'Assuré, au moins trois ans se sont écoulés depuis le début de l'arrêt de travail, le Médecin Conseil de l'Assureur apprécie l'état de santé de l'Assuré et détermine le taux d'incapacité. De cette appréciation dépend le maintien ou non de l'indemnisation.

À l'issue de l'examen pratiqué par le Médecin Conseil :

- si le taux contractuel d'Incapacité Totale de Travail est supérieur à 66 %, les indemnités sont maintenues,
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VIII - GARANTIES

L'Assureur règle les mensualités de l'Assuré des montants de mensue à partir du 91ème jour suivant l'indemnisation par franchise de 90 jours

Les mensualités prises en charge par l'Assureur sont plafonnées à 2 500 euros par mois et par Assuré, pour l'ensemble des prêts souscrits auprès de l'Organisme Prêteur.

Tout licenciement notifié durant un délai de 180 jours à compter de la date d'effet de l'indemnité ne peut jamais donner lieu à indemnisation que soit la durée de chômage.

Le sinistre est pris en charge si :

- l'Assuré est demandeur d'emploi et que les allocations chômage versées par le Pôle Emploi, l'extension, est également considéré comme un chômage d'emploi, tout Assuré pour lequel le service chômage visée ci-dessus est susceptible d'être pris en charge dans un centre de formation professionnelle où il bénéficie d'allocations chômage, l'Assuré perçoit des prestations au titre du régime d'assurance chômage réservé aux dirigeants d'entreprise en tant que dirigeant d'entreprise mandataire social ayant exercé son activité professionnelle.

Le licenciement retenu est celui de la lettre de licenciement émise par l'employeur. L'Assuré est tenu pour apprécier la mise en jeu de la garantie est celle du 1er jour de paiement des allocations de chômage par le Pôle Emploi ou prestations au titre d'un régime d'assurance chômage réservé aux dirigeants d'entreprise.

Il est précisé que :

- les mensualités prises en compte seront celles du(des) plan(s) de remboursement à la notification du licenciement. Toute modification du(des) plan(s) de remboursement initial pour effet d'augmenter le montant des mensualités pendant une période de chômage ne peut être prise en compte,
- en cas de remboursements ramenés sur une base mensuelle, l'Assureur garantit les prestations depuis la première mensualité attribuée au sinistre suivant le 90ème jour de chômage,
- le montant de l'indemnité ne pourra, en tout état de cause, excéder le montant du capital restant dû au titre de l'emprunt,
- la prise en charge ne pourra excéder 24 indemnités par sinistres.



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