Post-Contemporary Interventions *Series Editors: Stanley Fish & Fredric Jameson*

TOKENS of EXCHANGE

The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham & London 1999

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Typeset in Quadraat by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data appear
on the last printed page of this book.

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a pleasurable experience. I am grateful to Kai-wing Chow, Ban Wang, Paula Zamperini, and the two anonymous reviewers for their kind support of this project; and to Larissa Heinrich who proofread the manuscript and helped me compile the index. Kenneth Wissoker has been a wonderful guiding spirit throughout, and I thank him and his staff at Duke University Press for making this happen.

The following essays previously appeared in journals, whose permission to reuse the materials is gratefully acknowledged. Roger Hart's essay was first published in *positions: east asia studies critique* (spring 1999) of Duke University Press under the title "How to Do Things with Worlds." An earlier version of James Hevia's contribution with the title "Loot's Fate: The Economy of Plunder and the Moral Life of Objects from the Summer Palace of the Emperor of China" was published in *History and Anthropology* 6, no. 4 (1994): 319–45 by Harwood Academic Publishers. The illustrated materials that appear in this volume are provided courtesy of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley, the East Asian Library of UC Berkeley, and Yale University Medical Historical Library.

Lydia H. Liu

The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign

Troubled by the uncertainty of commensurability among languages, translators and their critics have a tendency to approach the issue as if the problem resided in the *inherent* properties (value) of individual languages. This seems to suggest a level of intuitive comprehension of value in languages and cultures, although such intuition seldom succeeds in discouraging people from pursuing the possibility of equivalence, finding common ground, or achieving optimal pairing of meanings, and so on. But before dismissing it as harmless intuition too quickly, we might benefit from a heightened awareness that the persistence of this way of thinking has, as a rule, prevented an otherwise fruitful discussion of the dynamic process of meaning-making that often takes place *between* or *among* languages as well as within a single language. If meaning is thus studied as a problem of exchange and circulation, not entirely bound to the evolutionary process of a homogeneous language or culture, we must, then, raise some new questions about language and translatability. For instance, *Can the achieved or contested reciprocity of languages be plotted as the outcome of a given economy of historical exchange?*

Questions like this can, perhaps, take us a step further toward overcoming the circularity of commensurability and incommensurability in translation theory. At the least, the theorist will be less inclined to insist on the plenitude of meaning and begin to articulate the problem of translation to the political economy of the sign. As I have argued elsewhere, Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator" and Derrida's reading of the same in "Des Tours de Babel" are among the few bold attempts in the twentieth century to rethink the problem

of meaning outside the purview of semantics and structural linguistics. Their notion of complementarity, which refuses to privilege the original over the translation, enables a powerful critique of the metaphysical ground of traditional semantics that has long dominated the translation theories of the West. Derrida's attack on Western metaphysics, in particular, has helped clear the philosophical ground for useful critical work, but one of the questions on which the notion of complementarity remains vague is how hypothetical equivalence is established, maintained, or revised among languages so that meaning, which is always historical, can be made available or unavailable to the translator. I wonder whether hypothetical equivalence does not already inhabit the idea of complementarity itself in a subtle but potent form.[1]

Hence, I would like to sketch out a number of intersecting areas for a preliminary rethinking of the production of meaning as value in circulatory relationship with other meanings (as no value can exist by itself). This tentative reworking of meaning-value may lead us to see that the much contested notion of translatability is often a displaced global struggle (displaced onto metaphysics) over the reciprocity of meaning-value among historical languages. I have suggested in the introduction that there are at least two basic questions we need to think about in order to resist such metaphysical displacements and pursue a fruitful study of translatability as a theoretical and historical problem. First, how does the circumstantial encounter of cultures produce and contest the reciprocity of meaning-value between their languages? Second, how does reciprocity become thinkable as an intellectual problem when predominantly unequal forms of global exchange characterize the material conditions of that exchange? Inasmuch as the historical (re)distribution of meaning-value constitutes a major aspect of global circulation, it is of paramount importance, I argue, to pay attention to the granting and withholding of reciprocity of meaning-value by one language vis-à-vis another.[2] (This struggle is proverbial in bilingual situations where a bilingual speaker always learns to deploy the languages he or she knows strategically under varying circumstance. He or she then becomes one of the physical sites of the processes I am trying to describe in this essay.)

One interesting consequence of recent world history is that we can afford *not* to marvel at the miracle of universal communicability. The argument of untranslatability need not contradict this description, because the suspicion of the circulation of meaning and anxiety to exert control over it may be yet another way of endorsing translatability and the plenitude of meaning. Moreover, such posited translatability among the world's languages is never simply a linguistic matter. Like many of the other events that have shaped the modern world, global translatability has inhabited the same order of universalistic aspirations as the invention of the metric system, modern postal service, international law, the gold standard, telecommunication, and so on. The significance of this event is yet to receive the kind of attention it deserves. The fact that we do not normally perceive things in this light goes to show that the mutual intelligibility of languages has been naturalized more than anything else by common dictionaries, repeated acts of translation, and received theories of language that are conceptually and structurally incapable of comprehending the monumental significance of this recent happening. The first step toward reconceptualizing translatability as a historical event is, therefore, to integrate the problem of translation into the general interpretation of so-called civilizational encounters and their intellectual and material outcomes.

From Counterfeit to the Colonial Legacy of Value

Let us examine briefly a moment of "civilizational encounter" in the early eighteenth century, when the modern notion of forgery was still in the process of forging a historical bond between published writing and minted coin. Evidently, fake writing and counterfeit money were widely engaged in the production and circulation of value between Europe and the other civilizations at this time, but, in the business of forgery, no one could beat the record of George Psalmanazar (1679–1763), the notorious imposter of his time or any time. Psalmanazar fabricated a native Formosan (Taiwanese) identity for himself in toto in exchange for patronage by the Church of England.[3] In deciding to "go native" through his writing and other performances, he anticipated the modern anthropologist long before the invention of the discipline itself. A curious prefiguration of the problematic of value, the Psalmanazar story raises some fascinating questions about the meaning of authenticity, parody, and colonial identity, and, more important, the circulation of not just silver, tea, silk, and porcelain but of *meaning as value* between East and West.

Psalmanazar arrived in London in 1703 in the company of Alexander Innes, chaplain to the Scots regiment at Sluys, who introduced him to Bishop Compton as a native of Formosa.[4] The story he and his accomplice Innes told to their new friends in London was that, as a child, Psalmanazar had been abducted by some evil Jesuits from Formosa to Europe. (Psalmanazar was a pseudonym and his real name was well hidden, even after his death.) Their plot worked instantly. Despite the fact that Psalmanazar had authentic Caucasian looks, blond hair and blue eyes (as this episode occurred before the rise of scientific racism in Europe), the physiognomic evidence proved less persuasive than his

extraordinary gift of the tongue and extravagant performance mimicking the so-called cannibalistic behavior of the native barbarians of the remote island.[5]

The British public bought Psalmanazar's story because their imagination had fed on nothing less than the similarly extravagant accounts given by the missionaries, sea captains, and merchants about exotic lands outside Europe. So when Psalmanazar claimed "We also eat human Flesh, which I am now convinc'd is a very barbarous custom, tho' we feed only upon our open Enemies, slain or made captive in the field," the sensational description merely confirmed what the British reader had been consuming all along thanks to the European colonial exploitation abroad and the rise of the popular book market at home.[6] For a period of four years, Psalmanazar was a resounding success. He was even invited by Oxford University to study a variety of subjects and give lectures on Formosan practices, including human sacrifice. When Father Fontenay, a Jesuit missionary who had just returned from China, confronted him at a public meeting of the Royal Society, Psalmanazar effectively rebutted his accusation of imposture.[7]

Had Psalmanazar's subsequent conversion and confession not abundantly redeemed his youthful sins, time and death would have absolved him of the remaining moral stigma attached to his imposture. Twentieth-century scholars take much less interest in establishing who this man really was than how his extraordinary career helps us glimpse the meaning of authenticity, authorship, ethnographic writing, and the European book market in the eighteenth century.[8] One cannot but be struck by Psalmanazar's uncanny understanding of the power of words and their purported face value. His best-selling book, *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* (1704; 1705), attacked the order of what Saussure would call the signifier and signified to fabricate a society for which there was no referent. Even the pseudonym, Psalmanazar, has no corresponding real name that we know of. He took this pseudonym from 2 Kings 17:3—Shalmaneser, one of a line of Assyrian kings by this name—and presented himself to British society as a Formosan pagan converted to Christianity.

More fascinating than the infinite regression of names and referents is Psalmanazar's invention of a fictitious Formosan alphabet and an equally fictitious Formosan currency of which he gives meticulous illustration and description in his book (see figures 1 and 2). The fake alphabet and fake money stand forgery on its head by exploiting the materiality of the sign whose value is the face value on paper (signifying Formosan alphabet and Formosan currency, respectively) and nothing more. The so-called referent turns out to be a phantom called up by Psalmanazar's writing.

Within the fabricated textual universe of his book, Psalmanazar the forger

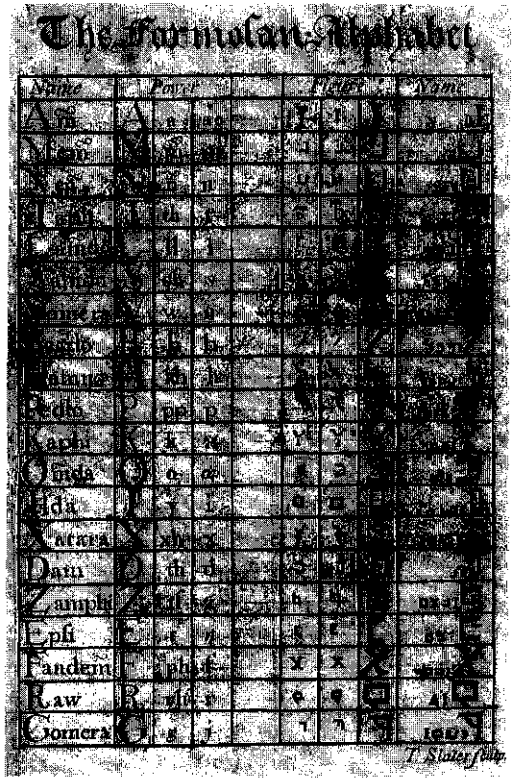

Figure 1. The Formosan Alphabet, in George Psalmanazar, *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

rivals Psalmanazar the plagiarist. For the textual sources Psalmanazar relied on in writing his book had been culled from contemporary popular travel literature and the Jesuits' accounts of the Orient, including authors such as George Candidius, an early-seventeenth-century Dutch missionary to Taiwan, and the French Jesuit Louis le Comte, who was sent to China in the same year (1688) as Father Fontenay by Louis XIV.[9] Candidius's "Short Account of the Island of Formosa" was a major source of Psalmanazar's encyclopedic knowledge of that island.[10] Like Defoe's best-selling novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared fifteen years later, Psalmanazar's imaginative book *Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* was written in the form of a first-person narrative that strove to cover the whole gamut of familiar ethnographic data about the exotic island: geography, climate, costume, architecture, religion, burials, language, and social customs and organizations. Susan Stewart observes that this book "fulfilled an ultimate Enlightenment dream—the dream of animation where logical consistency can itself produce a referent, a world engendered by reason alone, unencumbered by history, materiality, or nature."[11] But it seems

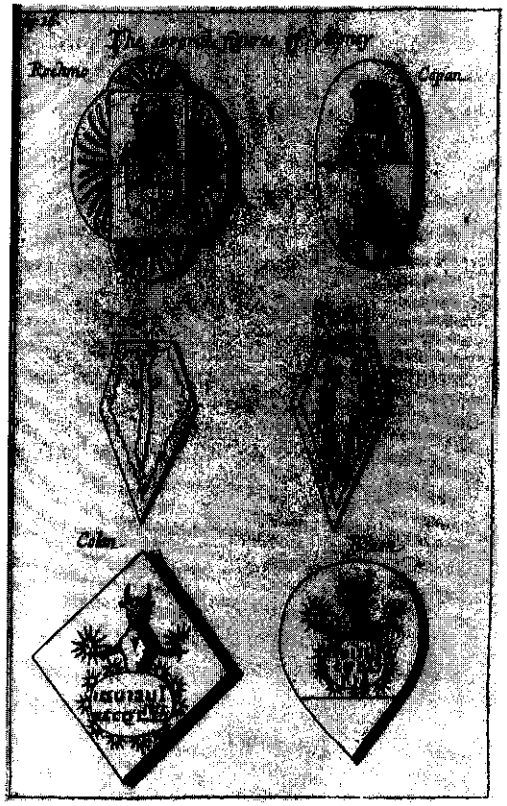

Figure 2. The drawing of Formosan money, in George Psalmanazar, *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

to me that Psalmanazar's elaborate work reads more like a caricature of the Enlightenment dream and a parody of ethnographic imagination than their fulfillment.

Psalmanazar is a supreme parodist. His originality consists in casting himself as a native informant who testifies as he speaks and who goes so far as to use his adopted voice of authenticity to contest the reliability of Candidius's own text, calling the latter a forger. For instance, when some people objected that his extravagant description of human sacrifice in Formosa could not be substantiated by Candidius's report, Psalmanazar wrote in the preface to the second edition of his book that those sacrifices were not as strange as Candidius's own statement that women pregnant before their thirty-seventh year had their bellies stomped until they miscarried.[12] This turning of the tables on Candidius not only reverses the order of authenticity and forgery, referent and sign, true value and face value, but raises some fundamental questions about *meaning as face value* and *writing as parody of other writing*. Michel de Certeau once suggested in a different context that the act of making the sources one's own renders "the general process of fabrication visible: the interlinkage of the imaginary and the collection, in other words the labor of fiction within the library. That invention haunts the 'sources' is everywhere indicated by the citations, from the moment one opens the book. It is the law of the other in the narrative."[13] Psalmanazar's mock narrative inadvertently reveals to us to what extent the original text, Candidius's own "Account of the Island of Formosa," might have already produced *meaning as face value* and *writing as parody of writing* in the manner of Psalmanazar, who copied him in an ingenious and subversive way.

Psalmanazar's extraordinary career as forger, plagiarist, ethnographer/native informant reminds us that the study of meaning in the political economy of the sign needs to be grounded in the actual history of the global circulation of meaning-value. That history is a history of colonialism whose exploitation of exotic difference has erected major obstacles against a historical understanding of difference. Like Psalmanazar, missionaries and orientalists have fabricated powerful fictions about other cultures and their languages. Those fictions, as Edward Said's critique of the Western philological construct of the Orient has made clear, have long inhibited a historical reassessment of the colonial encounter of languages and cultures.[14] The global romanization of the indigenous languages and dialects by missionaries and linguists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was designed to do precisely what Psalmanazar's alphabet had envisioned for the Formosan language.[15] These universalist translations have produced "cultural difference" on the world map as an already translated fact and pretend to speak for that difference in a universalizing idiom.

The articulation of *difference as value* within a structure of unequal exchange thus simultaneously victimizes that difference by translating it as *lesser value* or *nonuniversal value*. To overcome this conceptual barrier, I propose that we substitute the notion of *competing universalisms* for cultural particularity to help understand the modes of cultural exchange and their genealogies beyond the existing accounts of colonial encounter. The ahistorical dialectic of the universal and the particular may, then, be understood as a recent historical manifestation of the will to the universal. As the studies contained in this volume demonstrate very well, the work of documenting and analyzing the various moments of competing universalisms deserves more scholarly attention than they have heretofore received.

The imperatives of competing universalisms demand that we reconceptualize the ways in which meanings circulate *meaningfully* from language to language and culture to culture. As a migrant deixis of potential value, meaning

acquires value in the process of exchange between actual signs. The circumstantial encounter of one sign with another (in a sentence) or another language (in translation) decides the manner in which the actualization or sabotage of meaning takes place. Thus, an original text may be "rewritten," "parodied," and "manipulated" but not "distorted" by its being translated from text to text any more than Candidius's Formosa was "distorted" by Psalmanazar's Formosa. Derrida's critique of the myth of the transcendental signified can be evoked to undo the commonsense understanding of translation as a transfer of the transcendental signified (authentic value) from one language system to another.[16] An alternative formulation of meaning would do well by rejecting the metaphysics of signifier and signified on philosophical ground, though one needs to remain vigilant about the deconstructionists' projection of a self-sufficient intellectual realm of Western metaphysics and their possible recuperation of an imperial view of value and global circulation.

William Pietz's study of the problem of the fetish, among other similar works, is an important intervention in that regard. His research demonstrates convincingly that the circulation of the notion of the fetish as "false value" (parodied verbatim by our Psalmanazar) in Western philosophical discourse is rooted in its own colonial past. In a series of fine studies of the discourse of the fetish, Pietz analyzes the mercantile cross-cultural spaces of transvaluation among material objects of radically different social orders on the coast of West Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He writes: "The mystery of value—the dependence of social value on specific institutional systems for making the value of material things—was a constant theme in transactions on the Guinea coast during this period. The problem was especially expressed in the category of the trifling: European traders constantly remarked on the trinkets and trifles they traded for objects of real value [gold] (just as the socio-religious orders of African societies seemed to them founded on the valuing of 'trifles' and 'trash')."[17] Always initiated and formalized by the moments of translation, these instances of colonial exchange are significant not because they exemplify an earlier moment of civilizational encounters, but because they articulate the condition of possibility of colonial history. Pietz goes on to show how the earlier processes of colonial exchange set the stage for the Enlightenment discourse about value and the fetish, as, for example, when Kant formulated his aesthetic explanation for African fetish worship in 1764, deciding that such practices were founded on the principle of the "trifling" (*läppisch*), the ultimate degeneration of the principle of the beautiful.[18]

Kant's transcendental philosophy is profoundly indebted to the colonial regime of anthropological knowledge. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's recent study points out that, despite his cosmopolitan leanings, Kant never left his hometown Königsberg in his professional career and gathered his information about distant lands exclusively from seafarers and traveling merchants and from reading books such as Captain James Cook's *Voyages*. Out of this vast conglomerate of accumulated anthropological evidence, or "the labor of fiction within the library" in the words of Certeau, Kant derived a philosophical doctrine of "human nature" and assigned the "essence" of humanity to the self-image of eighteenth-century Europe: "white," European, and male.[19] (Psalmanazar was a mere caricaturist, not a philosopher; rather, he enacted the farce of what would be the philosopher's ethnographic "evidence.")

The tautology of the anthropological "evidence" turned out to circumscribe both Kant's doctrine of "human nature" and his aesthetic explanation of African fetish worship as the "trifling." Whereas the latter's "superstitious" understanding of *causality* was held responsible for the "false" estimation of the *value* of material objects in African societies, the discourse of fetishism also articulated a colonial mercantile view of value that caused Europeans to conclude that non-Europeans tended to asign false value to material objects and, therefore, false objective value to their own culture. From this view, according to Pietz, there "developed a general discourse about the superstitiousness of non-Europeans within a characteristically modern rhetoric of realism, which recognized as 'real' only technological and commercial values."[20]

It bears pointing out, of course, that the circulation of meaning involves a great deal of coauthorship and struggle among the dominant and dominated groups over the meaning and distribution of universal values and civilizational resources. In order for the process of circulation to take place at all, the agents of translation on each side start out by hypothesizing an exchange of equivalent meanings, even if the hypothesis itself is born of a structure of unequal exchange and linguistic currency. What this means is that we need to investigate further how a particular sign or object is made into an equivalent of something else during the process of circulation and how, theoretically speaking, this act of translation articulates the condition of unequal exchange.

The Question of Equivalence and Translatability

To study meaning as value is to place the problem of translation within the political economy of the sign. Contrary to forcing a parallel argument about verbal exchange in terms of its monetary counterpart, the linguistic and the economic—as well as their theoretical articulations—have long evoked each other and inhabited each other. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx draws an interesting

comparison between translation and monetary transaction for the purpose of theorizing the problem of the universal equivalent that concerns both: "Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language. Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in the language, but in the *foreign quality* of language" (emphasis added).[21]

This is an important insight. The foreign quality (*Fremdheit*) of language describes a shared process of circulation in translation and in economic transaction, which produces meaning as it produces value when a verbal sign or a commodity is exchanged with something foreign to itself. (Here, the mutual articulation of the linguistic and the economic seems to suggest more than an analogous relationship between two separate spheres of activities. Marx's own analysis testifies against the fiction of a pure theory of political economy untouched by other social considerations. By the same token, we can no longer imagine a pure theory of linguistic exchange uncontaminated by economic models of exchange. See my discussion of Saussure below.)

Marx's insistence on the foreignness (*Fremdheit*) of language is central to his working out of a meaningful connection between linguistic estrangement (*Entfremdung*) and monetary alienation (*Entäußerung*) in *Capital*. As Marc Shell has pointed out, this move derives from Marx's preoccupation with the historical transformation of the commodity gold first into coin and then into paper money. "The act of monetary exchange, like the act of linguistic translation, depends on a socially recognized (gültige) universal equivalent, which seems to homogenize everything, or to reduce everything to a common denominator."[22] Gold became the universal equivalent by a social act (*Tat*) when this commodity began to assume the power to measure or purchase all the others. In this process, the foreignness of the other must be conquered in order for the other to assume exchange-value in the marketplace. (In that regard, the English language of the late twentieth century would be the closest analogue to the gold of the preceding era.)

But exactly how does Marx elaborate the problem of equivalence and exchange-value?

When considering the equation "1 quarter of corn = *x* cwt of iron" in *Capital*, Marx begins by asking: What does this equation signify? "It signifies that a common element of identical magnitude exists in two different things, in 1 quarter of corn and similarly in *x* cwt of iron. Both are therefore equal to a third thing, which in itself is neither the one nor the other. Each of them, so far as it is exchange value, must therefore be reducible to this third thing."[23] What is this third or common denominator that equates 1 quarter of corn to *x* cwt of iron or a potentially infinite number of commodities? The answer lies in abstract labor that produces exchange-value. Marx determines this exchange-value as a quantity of socially necessary labor-time (SNLT) required to produce one unit of any given commodity.

As we know, Marx's labor theory of value was a critical response to classical political economy, which takes "the economy" as a self-regulating market structure and constructs "trade" as an exchange of equivalents among individual traders. Marx considers the trading of commodities as a trade of "labor time." His notion of SNLT demystifies the notion of equal exchange by introducing human activity and its objectification into the analysis of commodity exchange in capitalist society. Because the SNLT is merely an average and not the quantity of actual labor time necessary for the production of the unit of the commodity being exchanged, there is no guarantee that such trade involves equal magnitudes of *actual* labor time. Such is the theoretical problem Marx raises and tries to resolve in *Capital*. As Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari have pointed out, "In fact, these are trades of *unequal* magnitudes of *actual* labor time. But this inequality notwithstanding, for commodity circulation to take place, trade must be conceived by the agents of circulation — by individuals — as an exchange of equivalents. There is thus a contradiction: the same process of circulation is at once both an *unequal* exchange of quantities of actual labor time and an exchange of *equivalents*."[24] In other words, Marx derived an account of the exploitation of labor (extraction of surplus-value) by capital from an analysis of SNLT and, in so doing, reveals a fundamental inequality in "equal" exchange in capitalist economy.

Here we are less concerned with Marx's labor theory of value than with the significance of his formal analysis of commodity exchange which is not limited to the economic behavior of capitalist society. After all, Marx is centrally concerned with the problem of economic value as *social value*, that is, a problem of signification that overflows the exclusive realm of commodity production and exchange.[25] This is precisely where theorists of critical semiotics of our own time intervene to recast the study of the sign as a critique of the political economy of the sign. The problem of inequality in "equal" linguistic exchange also bears directly on our concerns with the reciprocity of meaning as value between historical languages in translation processes. But let us reflect more on the crucial connections that exist between the exchange of commodity and that of the sign in Marx.

In *Capital*, Marx argues that value "does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic."[26] The word hieroglyphic is interesting because it evokes "foreignness," "impenetrability," and "primitivity" typically associated with non-European cultures. Does this figurative turn of language comment on the situation of commodity exchange in colonial conditions? Marx does not ponder the question here, because he is more interested in explaining the abstract relationship between use-value and exchange-value than in the question of language, which he elaborates elsewhere. "As a use-value," he writes, "the linen is something palpably different from the coat; as [exchange] value, it is identical with the coat [*Rockgleiches*], and therefore looks like the coat [*sieht daher aus wie ein Rock*]."[27] The process of transformation that causes different things (the linen and the coat) to look alike is an abstraction process that eliminates difference or use-value for the commodities to become commensurate as exchange-value and be exchanged on that basis. Exchange-value is to political economy what simile, metaphor, or synecdoche is to the linguistic realm of signification, as both involve the making of equivalents out of nonequivalents through a process of abstraction or translation.

This is by no means a fortuitous rhetorical exercise in the service of theory, because the problem of signification within political economy is fundamentally connected with the economy of exchange within the linguistic realm.[28] As Thomas Keenan's rhetorical analysis of *Capital* shows convincingly, for Marx, exchange is "a matter of signification, expression, and substitution."[29] The process of signification and substitution (abstract labor for actual labor, etc.) is what allows commodities to be exchanged not as things but as values for other values, as amply illustrated by Marx in the classic case of how the linen becomes "coat-like or -identical" (*Rockgleiches*) in the exchange process. Not surprisingly, Marx uses the term *der Warensprache* or the "language of commodities" to talk about this process, and we are supposed to take his word figuratively and literally. In *der Warensprache*, the commodity form, of which money is a pure form of general equivalent, bears out the mutual penetration of the problem of signification within political economy and of the economy of exchange within the linguistic realm. Marx chose to verbalize the former in terms of the latter.

Saussure did the converse. If exchange is a matter of signification and substitution, it is entirely possible to bring the economic system of signification within the fold of parallel systems of signification such as language and other semiotic systems. After all, both use-value and exchange-value signify aspects of social value where a ground of "figurative equivalence" among different articulations of value, be it commodity value, linguistic value, or other, can be abstracted and theorized. In formulating a structural linguistics, Saussure pursued this ground of figurative equivalence in a direction very different from that of Marx. Although like Marx he understood political economy and semiology as mutually embedded systems of value and signification, Saussure reversed the order in which Marx had conceptualized the economic and the linguistic.

In *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure begins by characterizing language as a social institution and conceives of semiology (language, symbolic rites, customs, etc.) as a science that studies the role of signs as part of social life. (Lévi-Strauss's important reconceptualization of social institutions and structures as communication systems drew inspiration directly from this formulation.) As a social institution, language must be analyzed with the same degree of rigor as is practiced in other sciences such as law and economics and in the history of political institutions.

Saussure emphasizes, in particular, the proximity of political economy and linguistics because, "as in the study of political economy, one is dealing with the notion of *value*. In both cases, we have a *system of equivalence between things belonging to different orders*. In one case, work and wages; in the other case, signification and signal."[30] This comes very close to the way Marx analyzes exchange-value in *Capital*. Whereas for Marx exchange-value can be analyzed and quantified in terms of abstract labor and labor time, Saussure sees an entirely arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Linguistic value remains for him a matter of internal relations within a linguistic community. "A community is necessary in order to establish values," says Saussure, and "values have no other rationale than usage and general agreement. An individual, acting alone, is incapable of establishing a value."[31]

According to Saussure, two basic conditions are necessary for the existence of any value and these are paradoxical conditions that require (1) something *dissimilar* that can be exchanged for the item whose value is under consideration and (2) *similar* things that can be *compared* with the item whose value is under consideration. To illustrate this point, Saussure goes on to consider the value of money by analogy:

> To determine the value of a five-franc coin, for instance, what must be known is: (1) that the coin can be exchanged for a certain quantity of something different, e.g. bread, and (2) that its value can be compared with another value in the same system, e.g. that of a one-franc coin, or of a coin belonging to another system (e.g. a dollar). Similarly a word can be substi-

tuted for something dissimilar: an idea. At the same time, it can be compared to something of like nature: another word. Its value is therefore not determined merely by that concept or meaning for which it is a token. It must also be assessed against comparable values, by contrast with other words. The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside it. As an element in a system, that word has not only a meaning but also—above all—a value.[32]

In short, linguistic value expresses a horizontal relationship whose existence depends on the simultaneous coexistence of other values within the same system. Just as the signified, or the conceptual part of linguistic value, is determined by relations and differences with other signifieds in the language, so the signifier, or the material counterpart of linguistic value such as sound pattern, also relies on phonetic contrasts to allow us to distinguish among words and semantic units. When considered by itself, sound is merely something ancillary, a material the language uses. The arbitrary and differential relations of the sound pattern within a language are what assign linguistic value to a given sign. "It is not the metal in a coin which determines its value," argues Saussure. "A crown piece nominally worth five francs contains only half that sum in silver. Its value varies somewhat according to the effigy it bears." This structural understanding of value leads to Saussure's most uncompromising opposition to essentialism: "Linguistic signifiers are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in any way. They are constituted solely by differences which distinguish one such sound pattern from another."[33]

Saussure makes a distinction between what he calls "conceptual aspects" (signified) and "material aspects" (signifier) of linguistic value. In this scheme of things, the meaning of a word is assimilated to the conceptual component of the sign that belongs to the vertical order of the signified and signifier, as set out in his famous diagram of the sign (see figure 3). But how does meaning or a concept operate in relation to linguistic value, which, according to Saussure, must be determined in horizontal relationship with other values in the same system? The answer is that a "particular concept is simply a value which emerges from relations with other values of a similar kind. If those other values disappeared, this meaning too would vanish."[34]

Saussure's constant recourse to on-the-spot "translation" and simultaneous failure to theorize his textual operation creates a logical impasse for structural linguistics. This causes no small degree of confusion when he tries to introduce some levels of distinction between meaning and value. In the quote above, Saussure equates meaning with value by saying that a "particular concept is

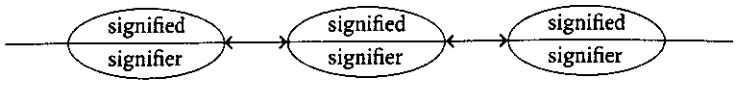

Figure 3. The diagram of the sign, from Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 116.

simply a value which emerges from relations with other values of a similar kind. If those other values disappeared, this meaning too would vanish." In the same space, however, he contradicts himself by arguing that value and meaning are not synonymous terms, one representing the horizontal order of differential relations with coexisting values and the other (meaning) comprising the concept along the vertical arrows of the signified and signifier.

A famous example he uses is the French word *mouton* and its English counterpart "sheep." By way of translation, Saussure decides that the two words may have the same meaning but do not share the same value. The difference in value, he argues, hinges on the fact that in English there is also another word, "mutton," for the meat, whereas *mouton* in French covers both. The differential relation of "sheep" and "mutton" in English, therefore, assigns a different value to each word that does not exist in French.

But if value is different, can meaning remain the same? Why should meaning be a fixed category a priori when the sound pattern and other properties of language are subject to the law of differential relations? How do we know that the French word *mouton* has the same meaning as the English "sheep" until we equate them through *selective translation* and vice versa? Is the reciprocity of meaning always guaranteed between the languages? Saussure treats meaning in translation as a given and deduces from it a radical theory of value but a very conventional theory of meaning based on intuitive translation.[35] His mode of analysis, which is ubiquitous translation, participates directly in what he says about signs and structural linguistics but is not registered as such. Saussure simply finds it expedient to utilize his vast knowledge of French, English, German, Greek, Latin, Portuguese, Czech, and even Sanskrit to illustrate a point or two in the course of demonstrating the general concepts of structural linguistics.

Recognizing the lacuna, Roman Jakobson made a deliberate attempt to integrate translation and translatability into his theory of semiotics. For Jakobson, translation exemplifies *equivalence in difference* that is operative in all semiotic and literary situations. In "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Jakobson argues: "Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem in language and the pivotal concern of linguistics. Like any receiver of verbal messages, the linguist

acts as their interpreter. No linguistic specimen may be interpreted by the science of language without a translation of its signs into other signs of the same system or into signs of another system. Any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability; widespread practices of interlingual communication, particularly, translation activities, must be kept under constant scrutiny by linguistic science."[36] Translation thus becomes the structural principle whereby signs are equated with other signs within the same code or between codes. This is a tantalizing thought, and could be used to explain Saussure's own mode of operation and bring some degree of self-consciousness into semiotic considerations of language. The observation that "any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability" possesses the best potential to develop into a major theoretical argument about translation.

Although that potential is eclipsed by the subsequent anecdotes Jakobson tells about translation, it is interesting to note that the majority of his anecdotes focus on grammatical gender as a point of comparison and translatability. For example, he points out that the Russian painter Repin was baffled by German painters' depiction of Sin as a woman because Repin was apparently unaware that "sin" is feminine in German (*die Sünder*); it is masculine in Russian (*грех*). Jakobson goes on to observe that a Russian child, while reading a translation of German tales, was astounded to find that Death, obviously a woman (*смерть*, fem.), was pictured as an old man (German *der Tod*, masc.). These anecdotes are well told and could be multiplied ad infinitum. But what do they tell us about translatability? Are we brought back to the argument that gender does not travel well across linguistic codes and that translation is impossible? If so, how do we translate gender into a noninflected language where this grammatical category is not available from the viewpoint of Indo-European languages?

Let us consider the gendering of the third-person pronoun in modern written Chinese to test this argument of untranslatability based on a synchronic comparison of linguistic difference. The original form of the written Chinese character for the third-person pronoun *ta* contains an ungendered *ren* radical (denoting "human"). For millennia, the Chinese had lived comfortably with the ungendered written form *ta* and other ungendered deictic forms, until the need to translate the feminine pronoun from European languages was suddenly thrust upon their attention in the early years of this century. Chinese linguists and translators proceeded to invent a written character that would be capable of translating the "equivalent" pronouns in the European languages. After many experiments, they settled on a character that replaced the radical *ren* in the ungendered *ta* with the radical *nü* denoting "woman" to form a new feminine pronoun in the language. That word has since become an inseparable part of the mainstream vocabulary of modern Chinese.

This process is fascinating in that the appearance of the feminine pronoun simultaneously converts the original ungendered *ta* into a *masculine* pronoun, even though the written form of the latter has not undergone the slightest morphological change and is still written with the same radical *ren*. Through the circumstantial contact with the Indo-European languages, the generic radical that denotes "human" now proclaims a masculine essence. In other words, the presence of a gendered neologism in the linguistic system has forced the originally unmarked pronoun to assume a masculine identity retroactively that is, nevertheless, contradicted by the etymology of its otherwise ungendered radical *ren*.[37]

Saussure would probably find in this a perfect example of structural differentiation, because the feminine and masculine pronouns in modern written Chinese have emerged in relation to each other as differential values. I am inclined to think, however, that translation played a pivotal role in the dual process of both introducing the structural differentiation of gender into the deictic category *and* making up equivalents where there had been none with reference to the gendered pronoun in Indo-European languages. Grammatical gender acquires translatability precisely in this limited, historical sense. Of course, my point is not to argue with Jakobson about the translatability or untranslatability of grammatical gender but to reflect on the historical making of hypothetical equivalence that is capable of producing shifting grounds of comparison and translatability.

Baudrillard's Quarrel with Saussure

Contemporary theorists attribute the theoretical impasse of Saussure's structural linguistics to a metaphysical conception of language.[38] Baudrillard, for example, reexamines the double condition of Saussure's theory of value and meaning as discussed above: "(1) the coin can be exchanged for a certain quantity of something different, e.g. bread, and (2) . . . its value can be compared with another value in the same system, e.g. that of a one-franc coin, or of a coin belonging to another system (e.g. a dollar)." Saussure sees a given coin as exchangeable against a real good of some value (bread in condition 1) while at the same time relating it to all the other terms in the monetary system (one franc or a dollar in condition 2). The economic exchange clearly evokes the distinction of the use-value and the exchange-value of the commodity. Although Baudrillard has no problem with the analogy of the economic and the linguistic,

he questions the unexamined notion of meaning and its referent in structural linguistics on the one hand and that of use-value in Marx on the other:[39]

> As if articulating a theory of exchange-value, Saussure reserves the term *value* for this second dimension of the system: every term can be related to every other, their *relativity*, internal to the system and constituted by binary oppositions. This definition is opposed to the other possible definition of value: the relation of every term to what it designates, of each signifier to its signified, like the relation of every coin with what it can be exchanged against. The first aspect corresponds to the structural dimension of language, and the second to its functional dimension. Each dimension is separate but linked, which is to say that they mesh and cohere. This coherence is characteristic of the "classical" configuration of the linguistic sign, under the rule of the commodity law of value, where designation always appears as the finality of the structural operation of the *langue*. The parallel between this "classical" stage of signification and the mechanics of value in material production is absolute, as in Marx's analysis: use-value plays the role of the horizon and finality of the system of exchange-values. The first qualifies the concrete operation of commodity in consumption (a moment parallel to designation in the sign), the second relates to the exchangeability of any commodity for any other under the law of equivalence (a moment parallel to the structural organization of the sign). Both are dialectically linked throughout Marx's analyses and define a rational configuration of production, governed by political economy.[40]

Baudrillard attempts to unpack Saussure's notion of the signified in the same manner as Marx analyzed the commodity in *Capital*, although both Saussure's notion of the signified and Marx's idea of use-value come under attack.[41] He grapples with Saussure and Marx to develop a theoretical vocabulary that can explain the process whereby social privilege and domination are no longer defined exclusively by the ownership of the means of production but also by the mastery of the process of signification whereby equivalences and a hierarchy of values are established and maintained.[42]

The critique of the magical copula in sign production, or "the equal sign in 'A = A' " in Baudrillard's theory, merits special attention because this is where "metaphysics and economics jostle each other at the same impasses, over the same aporias, the same contradictions and dysfunctions."[43] The ideological form that traverses both the production of signs and material production, he argues, often comes with a logical bifurcation theorized in terms of use-value versus exchange-value on the one hand and signified versus signifier on the other. Baudrillard calls this double bifurcation magical thinking.

The binary thinking casts "use-value" and "signified" in the role of content, a given, need, and transcendental value, thus sealing them off from further inquiry and analysis, because the analyst has confined formal value and formal analysis to the domain of "exchange-value" and "signifier" alone. Marx has worked out a critique of political economy at the level of exchange-value but has not extended his theoretical rigor to a similar critique of naturalized use-value. For their part, Saussure and Benveniste have established that the sign presents itself as a unity of discrete and functional meaning, the signifier referring to a signified and the ensemble to a referent.[44] Baudrillard argues, however, that "the separation of the sign and the world is a fiction, and leads to a science fiction. The logic of equivalence, abstraction, discreteness and project of the sign engulfs the [referent] as surely as it does the [signified]."[45] Furthermore, he points out that the homology between the logic of signification and the logic of political economy rests entirely on this shared fiction. The latter exploits the reference to needs and the actualization of use-value as an anthropological horizon and, in so doing, precludes a consideration of their "formal" intervention in the actual functioning and operative structure of political economy. Of its linguistic homologue, Baudrillard writes:

> Similarly, the referent is maintained as exterior to the comprehension of the sign: the sign alludes to it, but its internal organization excludes it. In fact, it is now clear that the system of needs and of use value is thoroughly implicated in the form of political economy as its completion. And likewise for the referent, this "substance of reality," in that it is entirely bound up in the logic of the sign. Thus, in each field, the dominant form (system of exchange value and combinatory of the [signifier] respectively) provides itself with a referential rationale (*raison*), a content, an alibi, and, significantly, in each this articulation is made *under the same metaphysical "sign," i.e., need or motivation.*[46]

Before we consider the interesting implication of this critique for a theory of translation and global circulation, let us dwell further on Baudrillard's attack on the received communication theory as a part of his criticism of metaphysics.

Roman Jakobson's famous model of verbal communication serves as a point of departure for Baudrillard's reconsideration of the sequence of transmitter (encoder)–message–receiver (decoder). The universal sequence was originally schematized by Jakobson as shown in figure 4. Baudrillard regards this "sci-

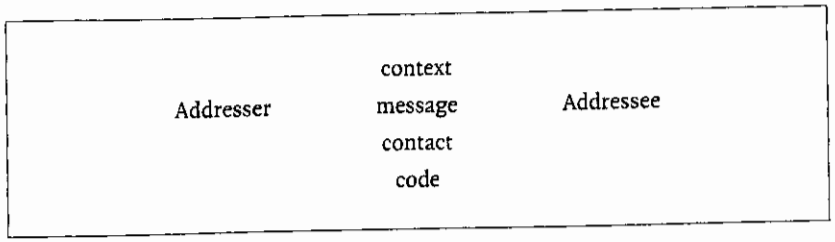

Figure 4. Jakobson's model of verbal communication, from "Linguistics and Poetics" in his *Language in Literature*, p. 66.

entific" construct as rooted in a *simulation model* of communication that allows neither reciprocal relation nor simultaneous mutual (especially conflictual) presence of the two terms. The artificial distance installed between encoder and decoder seals the full and autonomized "value" of the message, excluding, from its inception, the reciprocity and antagonism of interlocutors, and the ambivalence of their exchange. According to Jakobson's model, "what really circulates is information, a semantic content that is assumed to be legible and univocal. The agency of the code guarantees this univocality, and by the same token the respective positions of encoder and decoder."[47]

This critique of the simulation model of communication and structural linguistics brings Baudrillard to the point of a radical break with the received notion of linguistic exchange among his generation of French theorists. The idea of sign exchange-value, in particular, seems to offer a genuine possibility. Nevertheless, like Saussure before him, Baudrillard has excluded the problem of translation from the overall picture of sign exchange and theorizes the circulation of signs as if the world spoke a lingua franca of value and reciprocity. If the long history of mutual borrowing among the European languages and the hegemony of the metropolitan languages in the former colonies are somewhat responsible for his blind spot, it does not sufficiently explain why he reads Saussure the way he does.

Baudrillard takes Saussure to task for holding onto a metaphysical notion of meaning but fails to elaborate to what extent Saussure's modus operandi might be responsible for producing this metaphysics. Let us recall that in *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure renders the meaning of a sign *self-evident* independently of its history and of the translator's own selective appropriation of its meanings through a foreign equivalent. In Saussure's analysis of *mouton* and "sheep," the linguist adopts a circular procedure of glossing the meaning of "sheep" with that of *mouton* and vice versa, and decides that the two words have the same meaning but not the same value. That which his circular move fails to register, however, is an act of translation that actively produces the "same meaning" between the two words just as easily as it could have produced a different meaning in a different context (which Saussure has no way of explaining except by separating meaning from "value") to allow *mouton* to mean "mutton" and not "sheep." Due to the polyvalent etymology of these signs, the French *mouton* does not always have the same meaning as the English "sheep" until one has equated them through *selective* translation and already eliminated the other possibility, "mutton," and vice versa. Moreover, the etymology of the English "mutton" indexes another level of historicity having to do with the original translingual figuring of class relations between the French and the Anglo-Saxons after the Norman conquest of England. As Saussure's textual operation amply demonstrates, the talk of difference and equivalence hardly makes sense until the languages in question are brought together in a reciprocal, differential, and antagonistic relationship by translation, etymology, and history.

Baudrillard's engagement with Saussure and Marx suggests a parallel to what Pierre Bourdieu does with his own categories of symbolic goods, symbolic capital, *habitus*, field, symbolic power, cultural production, and so on.[48] As we know, Bourdieu also emphasizes an integrated understanding of the economic as a symbolic process and of the cultural as a material process. The mutual embeddedness of the economic and the cultural results in an extraordinary degree of interchangeability of linguistic and economic tropes in his language, which in turn feeds back into his understanding of the linguistic sign. Bourdieu writes: "Linguistic exchange—a relation of communication between a sender and a receiver, based on enciphering and deciphering, and therefore on the implementation of a code or a generative competence—is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit."[49]

Bourdieu might not find himself operating in a world of metaphors, because the linguistic and symbolic are just as real as the economic and material. The strength of his position lies in his refusal to define the linguistic and symbolic as any less material than the other forms of capital. But when he goes on to speak of the *value* of utterances as regulated by the market and characterized by a particular law of price formation, there appears to be a curious tautological functionalism.[50] The *functional* problem of how a dominant language confers social distinction on the user of that language becomes the self-same point of departure and arrival of his reasoning. (Let us recall how Marx elaborated the

problem of signification and with what rigor he went about the whole analysis.) Bourdieu asserts that all verbal expressions "owe some of their properties (even at the grammatical level) to the fact that, on the basis of a practical anticipation of the laws of the market concerned, their authors, most often unwittingly, and without expressly seeking to do so, try to *maximize the symbolic profit* they can obtain from practices which are, inseparably, oriented towards communication and exposed to evaluation" (emphasis added).[51]

That argument produces some extraordinary circular statements about capital, value, and exchange that cannot possibly go wrong because they participate in, and derive from, the perfect closure of Bourdieu's conceptual system.[52] What we need to know is just how the value of an utterance functions with respect to market prices and how meaning gets generated in the process of symbolic exchange *within* a relation of power. The closure of Bourdieu's system prevents him from giving a sustained look at the givenness of each of these articulations with the kind of theoretical rigor exemplified by Marx in *Capital* or Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics*. Saussure's elaboration of the meanings of *mouton* and "sheep" is taken by Bourdieu to be a mere theoretical argument about the arbitrariness of the sign and dismissed offhand, whereas we have seen that Saussure's own analysis is much more nuanced and deserves serious critical engagement.[53]

Reciprocity and Power in Cultural Translation

Translation need not guarantee the reciprocity of meaning between languages. Rather, it presents a *reciprocal wager*, a desire for meaning as value and a desire to speak across, even under least favorable conditions.[54] The act of translation thus hypothesizes an exchange of *equivalent* signs and makes up that *equivalence* where there is none perceived as such. The invention of the third-person feminine pronoun in modern Chinese is a case in point. Like the thousands of loanwords and neologisms I have documented and analyzed elsewhere, the existence of this word captures the invention of equivalents in a relation of unequal exchange between Chinese and European languages, and that exchange is further complicated by the changing power relations between Chinese and Japanese caused by the presence of the Western powers in Asia.[55] In contrast, English and the metropolitan European languages have not experienced a similar need in modern times to adapt to the formal characteristics of the other languages by eliminating, for example, one of its gender categories in a reverse mode of operation. The point I am trying to make here is not merely contrastive or comparative. In thinking about translatability between historical languages, one cannot but consider the actual power relations that dictate the degree and magnitude of sacrifice that one language must make in order to achieve some level of commensurability with the other.

In colonial conditions of exchange, commensurability of meaning can sometimes be instituted and kept in place by law and brute military force. As my study of the missionary–Chinese translation of international law in "Legislating the Universal" shows, the so-called Chinese contempt for European "barbarians" arose out of a set of unique circumstances in which the British *insisted* on the translation of the word *yi* as "barbarian." The equating of the meanings of the two words by Britain's official translators became the cognitive ground on which a xenophobic Chinese "mentality" was first erected and then condemned, even though we know very well that the word *yi* had been previously rendered in English as "foreigner" or "stranger" in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.[56] After establishing the first level of commensurability between *yi* and "barbarian," the British felt insulted by the Qing government's use of that word in diplomatic communications and remonstrated against such "unequal" treatment of the British representatives by the Chinese official establishment. As the numerous dispatches between the two governments before the Opium War well testify, the linguistic crusade against the word *yi* became a counteroffensive led by the British to fight the Chinese government's prohibition of the opium trade. In the 1830s–1840s, the British protest against the Chinese use of *yi* escalated into a major diplomatic event and began to be centrally and thoroughly embroiled in the gunboat policy during the Opium War.[57] After the war had lifted the Chinese ban on opium trade, the British lost no time in banning the word *yi* from diplomatic communications by specific treaty provisions. The legal ban was so effective that it has made the word literally disappear from the languages of today's Chinese-speaking world.

The episode of the linguistic crusade against "barbarian" and the invention of the feminine pronoun in modern Chinese each tell a fascinating story about the politics of linguistic exchange and demonstrate that, in this general economy of meaning-value, (in)commensurability can be a contentious affair and impact the course of historical events. The reciprocity of meaning in the case of *yi* and "barbarian" simultaneously secures the nonreciprocity between *yi* and "foreigner," "stranger," or other earlier terms of equivalence. This process of meaning-making is guaranteed by a colonial regime of knowledge that recognizes as value only that which can help reproduce the colonial relations of power, hence the rhetorical value of *yi* and "barbarian" for making war. The circulation of other possible values and other meanings is effectively obstructed—

they are labeled "wrong translations"—when these do not otherwise participate in the production and reproduction of colonial relations.

Even as I emphasize relations of unequal linguistic exchange, I do not wish to suggest that this situation can be reduced to the mere "intentions" of the dominator and depict the dominated always as victims of the situation. To do so would be to underestimate the degree of coauthorship that has been going on between the dominator and the dominated. In the case of the neologism of the feminine pronoun, it was the Chinese linguists and translators, not Westerners, who were troubled by the "lack" of an equivalent pronoun in their own language and proceeded to invent one. The level of commensurability and reciprocity of meaning thus established between modern Chinese and European languages suggests nonreciprocity at yet another level, because few speakers of metropolitan European languages experience a similar need to reform their gendered deixis, except, perhaps, the feminist critics of our own time.

In the West, feminist critics attack the unmarkedness (universal availability) of the masculine pronoun for entirely different reasons from what I have in mind here. The majority of their criticisms borrow strength from the bourgeois discourse of human rights and equality rather than from a theoretical deconstruction of the gendering of deictic markers as a grammatical category. As a result, very few critics are concerned about the presence or absence of gendered equivalents in non-European languages or the possible "contamination" of those languages by Western forms of gender in the recent past. The poststructuralist critique of the unmarkedness of the masculine pronoun does not prevent the critics from taking the (gendered) grammatical categories of French or English as universal and using them as a philosophical basis for their argument. Interestingly, feminist critics in the Chinese-speaking world have themselves forgotten how the gendering of the pronoun in their own language occurred less than eighty years ago. When some decide to follow the new English way of writing the feminine and masculine pronouns with a slash in between, the gendering of these Chinese pronouns becomes twice universalized. This new moment of coauthorship leads to a foreclosure of the possibility of bringing forth an alternative way of doing feminist criticism in gender studies. The latter would require the feminist critic to grapple with the disjuncture of gendered and nongendered articulations of deictic relationships among different languages of the world, so that a new understanding of the grounds of reciprocity and power relationship among different feminisms could be envisioned.

What we observe in these processes is a powerful *coauthoring* of universal commensurability envisioned by the Chinese translators and the metropolitan theorists of universal language in a relationship of unequal exchange. That is to say, both the dominator and the dominated participate in the making of this miracle of universal communication but determine the outcome of such exchanges differently. In the global circulation of meaning as value, *hypothetical equivalence* is scrupulously and vigorously guarded and only occasionally contested by speakers of one or the other language. Equally worthy of attention is a condition of unequal exchange that produces and reproduces the condition of *hypothetical equivalence* and the colonial regime of knowledge. This paradox of equivalence and nonequivalence forms the cognitive basis on which cultural difference becomes articulatable ("A = A" or "A ≠ A," etc.). Such difference in turn becomes naturalized in our languages through repeated usage in everyday life, in the media, and in scholarly writings. The translator is thus able to manipulate difference, to dispense or withhold the reciprocity of meaning-value among the languages to make war or make peace.

Finally, the universalizing tendencies of the modern, which has grown to be the dominant universalism of our world, have worked toward erasing the traces of this recent happening so that we would all agree that modernity is inevitable, universal, and available to everyone. Suppose we treat text and textuality as a genuine historical event and not less than that, certainly not the reverse. The ultimate challenge for a new theory of translation would be to account for the philosophical connection between the universalizing logic of modernity and the invention of *hypothetical equivalence* among the world's languages.

Notes

Sections of this essay were presented at the Comparative Literature Colloquium of Cornell University in April 1998 at an event called "Borderless Wor(l)ds: A Roundtable on Translation at the Turn of the Millennium." I thank Emily Apter, Thomas Conley, Brett de Bary, and the graduate student organizers of the roundtable for the stimulating conversations that led to the strengthening of my thesis.

1 See my critique in *Translingual Practice*, 14–16.

2 James Clifford briefly discusses reciprocity and translation in his recent book *Routes*. He argues that " 'reciprocity' is itself a translation term linking quite different regimes of power and relationality. A capitalist ideology of exchange posits individual transactions between partners who are free to engage or disengage; a Melanesian model may see ongoing relationships in which the wealthier partner is under a continuing obligation to share. It is important to keep these different practices of reciprocity in view" (p. 175). Here, Clifford is more concerned with alternative models of reciprocity than with the articulation of the terms of reciprocity (that is, granting and withholding of meaning) between a capitalist ideology of exchange and the Melanesian model that seems to have enabled his comparison of these two in the first place. The articu-

lation of the terms of reciprocity, hence comparative relationality, is precisely what troubles me in cross-cultural studies.

3 The little we know about the biographical circumstances of this man comes from a few scattered contemporary accounts and Psalmanazar's own confessions published posthumously in *Memoirs of ****, Commonly known by the Name of George Psalmanazar: A Reputed Native of Formosa. Written by himself, In order to be published after his Death.* He was said to have come from France because he spoke Latin with a Gascon accent. His education at the hands of the Franciscans, Jesuits, and Dominicans gave him a good grasp of Latin, a smattering of theology, and a huge fund of general knowledge. For detailed treatments, see Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing*, 33–35. Also see Richard M. Swiderski, *The False Formosan: George Psalmanazar and the Eighteenth-Century Experiment of Identity*; Rodney Needham, *Exemplars*; and Frederic J. Foley, *The Great Formosan Impostor.*

4 The first name of Innes has been consistently misquoted as William by several generations of scholars. The main source of the error is Sidney Lee's article on Psalmanazar in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, in which the chaplain Alexander Innes is called William and the date of Psalmanazar's will is also given incorrectly. Foley, who did extensive archival research on the subject in the late sixties, has tried to correct this important detail, but for some reason his work is not read or cited by scholars who came after him. See Foley, 6 n. 2, and also Swiderski, 10–11.

5 For example, he would put on a show of eating raw meat and doing other shocking things to prove his authenticity to the public.

6 George Psalmanazar, *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, 2d ed., 112–13. His sensational description of child sacrifice in Formosa gave Swift the famous trope of cannibalism in *A Modest Proposal*, where his name is mentioned as "the famous Sallmanaazar, a Native of the Island Formosa, who . . . told my friend, that in his Country when any young Person happened to be put to death, the Executioner sold the Carcass to Persons of Quality, as a prime Dainty, and that, in his Time, the Body of a plump Girl of fifteen, who was crucified for attempting to Poison the Emperor, was sold . . . in Joints from the Gibbet" (Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*, 10).

7 The Psalmanazar–Fontaney confrontation took place at a session of the Royal Society on 2 February 1704 when Isaac Newton was serving as the president of the Royal Society. Psalmanazar began by asking Fontaney to whom Formosa belongs (because he had previously claimed that Formosa belonged to Japan). China, Fontaney replied. Psalmanazar wanted to know how Fontaney, who had, by his own admission, never been to Formosa, could be sure of this, and so on. For a detailed discussion of this meeting, see Swiderski, 27–35. The most damaging test of Psalmanazar's truthfulness was conducted by the astronomer Edmund Halley, who asked the Formosan, who had already mentioned the houses and chimneys of his native land, how long the sun shone down the chimney flue at certain times of the year. Psalmanazar slipped and was taken to task for having not even the most fundamental awareness of solar events in his "native" island. See Swiderski, 40–41.

8 The most sophisticated analysis of George Psalmanazar is found in Stewart's *Crimes of Writing*. See chapter 2, "Psalmanazar's Others," 31–65.

9 Candidius's book and Bernhardus's *Description of Japan* in Latin were the reference books given to him by Innes. See Foley, 21.

10 See George Candidius, "A Short Account of the Island of Formosa," 526–33.

11 Stewart, 54.

12 Ibid., 50.

13 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, 139.

14 Edward Said, *Orientalism.*

15 Both Jesuit and Protestant missionaries designed the romanization systems for non-European languages and dialects, including Cantonese, Vietnamese, Fukienese, and indigenous Taiwanese (in spite of Psalmanazar's alphabet) to replace and contest the established universal script, that is, the written Chinese language.

16 See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, 20.

17 William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 6.

18 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 111, as quoted in Pietz, 9.

19 See Emmanuel Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 103–40.

20 Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, 2," 42.

21 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, 163, as quoted in Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought*, 106.

22 Shell, 107.

23 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1: 127.

24 See Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari, "Marxian Value Theory and the Problem of the Subject: The Role of Commodity Fetishism," 204. Their discussion of value in this article is part of a more extended treatment of how economic rationality, equality, and private proprietorship articulate the self-identity of individuals in the process of exchange.

25 For a juxtapositional reading of Marx's notion of value and contemporary French psychoanalytical theory, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," in *In Other Worlds*, 154–75.

26 Marx, *Capital*, 167.

27 Ibid., 143. The German quotes are from *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1984 [based on the Hamburg 1890 ed.]), 23: 66.

28 For a related study, see Donald N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics.* McCloskey's analysis of rhetoric in economics is mainly concerned with how economists use rhetorical means to make arguments to achieve a certain end. This is not what concerns us here. We are talking about a two-way situation where the linguistic and economic penetrate *each other* at the rhetorical level and at the level of the basic conceptualization of value which is indispensable both to economic theory and to structural linguistics.

29 See Thomas Keenan, "The Point Is to (Ex)Change It: Reading *Capital*, Rhetorically," 174.

30 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 80.

31 Ibid., 112.

32 Ibid., 113–14.

33 Ibid., 117.

34 Ibid., 115–16.

35 In this essay, I consider meaning and value together as a problem in the theoretical elaboration of translingual circulation. It is to be distinguished from "sound value," whose role in translation is not as central as the reproduction of "meaning value" in the host language.

36 Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," 233–34.

37 In 1920, an unsuccessful attempt was made to introduce sound differentiation between the feminine and masculine pronouns as well. For a detailed discussion of the gendering of the Chinese pronoun in the larger context of East-West encounters, see Liu, 36–39, 150–79.

38 Both Derrida and Baudrillard launched their respective theories by criticizing Saussure and his metaphysical conception of language. I choose to discuss Baudrillard here because he seems more attuned to what Saussure is trying to do in his own context than is Derrida, who is interested in Saussure's work insofar as the latter serves as a springboard for his critique of the privileging of the *phonè*, the *glossa*, and the *logos* in Western metaphysics. Saussure's other important contributions that deserve serious critique are passed over in silence. For Derrida's critique, see *Of Grammatology*, 27–73.

39 Baudrillard calls structural linguistics the "contemporary master discipline, inspiring anthropology, the human sciences, etc., just as, in its time, did political economy, whose postulates profoundly informed all of psychology, sociology and the 'moral and political' sciences" (Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 165 n. 3).

40 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 6.

41 Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, 148. For an informed discussion of Baudrillard's complex relationship to Marxism, see Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*.

42 Baudrillard sometimes uses the word "sign value" interchangeably with the word "meaning value."

43 Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, 71.

44 Saussure locates the arbitrariness of the sign between the signified and the signifier. Benveniste modifies this schema by relocating the arbitrariness between the sign and that which it designates. "What is arbitrary," says Benveniste, "is that a certain sign, and not another, is applied to a certain element of reality, and not to any other. In this sense, and only in this sense, it is permissible to speak of contingency, and even in so doing we would seek less to solve the problem than simply to pinpoint it in order to set it aside provisionally. . . . The domain of arbitrariness is thus left outside the comprehension (logical intention) of the linguistic sign" (Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, as quoted in Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, 151). See Roger Hart's discussion of Derrida's critique of Benveniste in this volume (pp. 50–52).

45 Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, 152.

46 Ibid., 153.

47 Ibid., 179.

48 In Bourdieu's earlier Algerian studies, structural linguistics was still very much part of his vocabulary as he was trying to develop a new set of analytical categories for anthropological work on a non-European society. For example, he would speak of the Kabyles' "grammar of honor" in a good old structuralist fashion when describing their elaborate code of honor. The "grammar of honor" is a linguistic trope, and much more. Within the specific theoretical context of Bourdieu's fieldwork, it acquires an ontological status and becomes the *conceptual equivalent* for what structural linguists and anthropologists take to be the totality of a social structure. Thus, "when they spontaneously apprehend a particular line of conduct as degrading or ridiculous," says Bourdieu, "the Kabyles are in the *same* position as someone who notices a language mistake without being able to state *the syntactic system* that has been violated" (emphasis added). Saussure's linguistic model resonates loudly in the form of a simile and conceptual closure. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960: The Disenchantment of the World, the Sense of Honour, the Kabyle House or the World Reversed*, 128.

49 See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language," in *Language and Symbolic Power*, 66. This chapter was originally published as "La production et la reproduction de la langue légitime" in Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: L'économie des échanges*. The original French title of this book, emphasizing the economy of exchange, more directly spells out the theoretical emphasis of the author than does J. B. Thompson's English edition.

50 Ibid., 67.

51 Ibid., 77.

52 Another good example of this tautology is found in the following: "When one language dominates the market, it becomes the norm against which the prices of the other modes of expression, and with them the values of the various competencies, are defined. The language of the grammarians is an artefact, but, being universally imposed by the agencies of linguistic coercion, it has a social efficacy in as much as it functions as the norm, through which is exerted the domination of those groups which have both the means of imposing it as legitimate and the monopoly of the means of appropriating it" (Bourdieu, "Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," 652).

53 See Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 53.

54 The term "reciprocal wager" is taken from Baudrillard out of the immediate context of his discussion of the art auction. See *For a Critique*, 116.

55 See Liu, *Translingual Practice*.

56 For a critical analysis of *koutou* and other related constructions of Chinese contempt for the foreigner before and after the Opium War, see James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, 229–37.

57 See Dilip Basu, "Chinese Xenology and Opium War."

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