

Hélène Cixous
Ex-Cities

Ex-Cities

Hélène Cixous

Edited by Aaron Levy and Jean-Michel Rabaté
Foreword by Eric Prenowitz

Philadelphia: Slought Books

With the Alice Paul Center for Research on Women and Gender

Contemporary Artist Series, No. 5

© 2006 Hélène Cixous, Maria Chevska, Contributors, Translator, Slought Foundation

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or parts thereof, in any form, without written permission from either the author or Slought Books, a division of Slought Foundation. No part may be stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in reviews for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

We gratefully acknowledge the translation of Hélène Cixous' "Promised Cities" by Laurent Milesi. Images and artworks reproduced in this book courtesy of artist María Chevska and Slought Foundation. The audio recording accompanying this volume is derived from a reading by Hélène Cixous at Slought Foundation in October 2005, also available online at <http://slought.org>

This publication, and the exhibition and event from which it was derived, was made possible in part through the generous financial support of the British Council USA; the *Mission du livre* program of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Alice Paul Center for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Pennsylvania, under the direction of Rita Barnard; and Dean Rebecca Bushnell and former Associate Dean Joe Farrell at the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania.

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper by Coach House Books, Ltd. Set in 11pt Arial Narrow by Sinder Design, Philadelphia. For more information, <http://slought.org/books/>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cixous, Hélène, 1937-
[Villes promises. English & French]
Ex-cities / Hélène Cixous ; edited by Aaron Levy and Jean-Michel Rabaté; foreword by Eric Prenowitz.
p. cm. -- (Contemporary artist series ; no. 5)
In English and French.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-9714848-8-0 (pbk., audio cd : alk. paper)
I. Levy, Aaron, 1977- II. Rabaté, Jean-Michel, 1949- III. Title.

PQ2663.I9V5513 2006

843'.914--dc22

CONTENTS

The Archive Song of Ruins: Introducing <i>Ex-Cities</i> <i>Aaron Levy</i>	9
A Biographicosmopolitan Note <i>Eric Prenowitz</i>	17
Promised Cities <i>Hélène Cixous</i>	27
Vera's Room <i>Maria Chevska</i>	73
Villes Promises <i>Hélène Cixous</i>	89
Eight Paragraphs for Hélène Cixous <i>Jean-Michel Rabaté</i>	135
Companion Audio CD <i>Hélène Cixous reads Promised Cities</i>	

The Archive Song of Ruins: Introducing *Ex-Cities*
Aaron Levy

The destruction of the city. Is it a good thing is it a bad thing? It is a bad thing which causes an art. A sorrow that causes. Literature is a field of destruction a field in ruins, the song of ruins, the archive song of ruins.

—Hélène Cixous

We undertook this publication not just to document a memorable visit to Philadelphia by the celebrated author Hélène Cixous, but to also convey and reproduce her singular presence in book form. It is in part for this reason that we have reproduced her handwriting and image on the cover, and included an audio recording of her reading.

Acts of documentation often reduce presence to a sentimental collage of disjointed gestures. It is our hope that we do not merely reduce Hélène Cixous to a series of impressions or the grain of her voice, and that the very nature of her practice makes this an appropriate way to convey her work.

In an afterword to this volume, Jean-Michel Rabaté refers to Hélène Cixous' writing as a sort of "fiction" in which language comes as close as possible to a poetic register without losing the thread of a narrative.¹ We intend for this publication to facilitate an experience of this form of writing. But how does one devise such a publication?

We can think of no better way to convey her style of writing—

what Jean-Michel Rabaté describes as “always double, punning, in the wake of innumerable idioms and locutions”—than to join in one publication several permutations of “Promised Cities.”² This project is unique among Hélène Cixous’ numerous publications in that it features not only English and French versions of the same text, but also an audio recording by the author. In so doing, we offer readers and translators an opportunity to observe the ways in which Hélène Cixous reads and writes across languages and her fearless expansion of linguistic conventions.

While it is not unusual to encounter a bilingual publication, it is unusual to encounter one that features a series of simultaneous translations such that they illuminate an issue of central importance to the author’s work. In this case that issue is translation itself. The work of Hélène Cixous so thoroughly plays with different languages across many levels of meaning as to problematize our very understanding of translation, challenging us to rethink the practice anew.

In *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, Jacques Derrida remarks that Hélène Cixous’ work is “literally [...] untranslatable, therefore not far from being unreadable, if reading still remains a kind of translating [...].”³ Eric Prenowitz has suggested that Derrida’s comment “does not mean that [her work] is simply untranslatable, but neither is it *simply* translatable.” Shuttling back and forth between the simply translatable and the simply untranslatable, Eric Prenowitz argues that acts of translation become “creative in the manner of a reading.”⁴ He also notes her intense and

“foreign” relationship to the French language itself and the way her texts necessitate careful readings that are “capable of interpreting subtle displacements of the French language within the French language.”⁵

Reading Hélène Cixous’ work thus requires not only interlingual but also intralingual acts of translation. As Jacques Derrida has noted, her work demands of the reader an ingenuity and flexibility not dissimilar from what is asked of the translator. Readers who approach her work with a translator’s ingenuity gain access to a multi-profound dimension of her oeuvre. In Hélène Cixous’ work, reading and translating are inseparable acts.

A shared concern for displacement and exile in the work of Hélène Cixous and British artist Maria Chevska resulted in a program at Slought Foundation. Visual documentation of “Vera’s Room,” Maria Chevska’s installation in the galleries, is interspersed throughout this publication.

“Vera’s Room” incorporated real objects—functional furniture, for example—and a number of phantasmatic sculptures of both found and made objects. The phantasmatic objects, simple forms made from cloth or paper rendered solid in kaolin, looked familiar and functional. By virtue of being mere abstractions, they were not quite the same as the articles they resembled and had an uncanny and abstract quality. The installation evoked a sense of transience and precariousness and

conveyed the nomadic domesticity of a displaced person or refugee. In this way, Maria Chevska's work presented visitors with the fragile existence of a stranger who achieves visibility only on account of her sheer resourcefulness.

The very manner of constructing the installation explored displacement, creativity, and collaboration. The artist established a relationship with the curators premised on her physical displacement from the site, such that her absence until the exhibition opening became a defining feature of the project. The artist met with the curators abroad and prepared meticulous renderings in notebook form detailing the installation, as if in homage to Marcel Duchamp's *The Green Box* (which permanently resides in The Philadelphia Museum of Art). These materials were beautifully and delicately prepared by the artist, although their execution was colored by the curators' interpretations.

The opening marked the end of Maria Chevska's displacement from the site of her work, and an opportunity for the two artists to view "Vera's Room" together in Philadelphia. It also served as the occasion for Hélène Cixous to read "Promised Cities," the featured text in this publication, before a capacity audience. Her reading that evening addressed "Vera's Room" and was a profound meditation on memory and mourning that enriched our understanding of the installation.

"Promised Cities" takes displacement and exile as its points of departure in exploring the relation of art and literature to cities and their destruction. We can begin to read this meditation by remembering that

cities are more than just habitats or geographical entities. They extend beyond networks of communication, commerce, sociality, or politics.⁶ Cities often exist in the form of memories and aspirations, and these cities are no less real despite their intangible nature. We always carry with us the memories of the cities that we have lived in or lost, abandoned or destroyed. These memories permit us to rebuild them from their ruins; we build new cities upon the memories of others.

In an age marked by urban catastrophe (Baghdad and New Orleans, to name just two that were in our thoughts), Hélène Cixous reminds us that the destruction of cities is "a bad thing which causes an art. A sorrow that causes."⁷ Melancholy is the result of the city in ruins, and mourning is the text that follows. In this sense, literature becomes an archive that preserves the memory of all that has already been lost. The destruction of a city does not just give us cause for sorrow. It is a condition of possibility that causes literature to be written and art to be made.

Notes

1. Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Eight paragraphs for Hélène Cixous," in this book, p. 141.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, tr., with additional notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 65-67.
4. *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Eric Prenowitz, London, Routledge, 2004, p. viii.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Cities Without Citizens*, ed. Eduardo Cadava and Aaron Levy, Philadelphia, Slought Books, 2004, p. xv-xvi.
7. Hélène Cixous, "Promised Cities," in this book, p. 66.

A Biographicosmopolitan Note¹

Eric Prenowitz

If biography means the writing of (a) life, if it means life in writing, then all of Hélène Cixous' writing is biographical. Indeed doubly autobiographical: not just the writing of the self, an author's written account of her life, but life itself writing itself *as it lives*, such that the reader can never separate the written from the lived, the life written from the writing of life. Hélène Cixous' dates, for example, have all been fictionalized in her writing: even when they seem to correspond to dates in her personal history ("She was born in....," etc.), they have invariably been changed, transmuted into bits of text, poems, and offered up to dissemination. Her family history too, her father, her mother, her brother, her cats and dogs, her friend Jacques Derrida, even certain flowers, have all gained new lives in and as literature through her writing.

This generalized autobiographicality is intimately related to another trait of Cixous' writing, its extreme poetic performativity. Her texts—and even her most apparently staid, "theoretical" essays—are forever *saying* something and *doing* something simultaneously: the philosophical or theoretical content cannot be disentangled from the most singular poetic invention which out-thinks thought, challenging it, goading it, sublating it perhaps, though never appropriating it or reducing it.

One effect of this poetic harnessing of the work of the signifier (which functions as an unmistakable signature of Cixous' work even where the conscious authorial instance must cede the place of the master), and particularly insofar as it is allied with an uncompromising

philosophical-ethical project, is the implacable resistance that Cixous' writing offers to translation. Not only do her texts make use of all the idiomatic resources of the French language, and thereby demand an enormous creative interpretative effort on the part of the translator, but they also, in turn, fictionalize French idiomatic expressions, folding them in on themselves or unpacking them, deconstructing them and over-determining them, exiling them from the French language, but within it, in relation to it. Such that the said language finds itself speaking in tongues: foreign tongues of its own.

Hélène Cixous was born in Oran, Algeria in 1937. Algeria was then part of France, having been colonized more than a century earlier. Cixous' father, Georges, came from a family of Algerian Sephardic Jews, with distant Spanish origins, who had been French citizens for several generations. Georges Cixous, himself from Oran, studied medicine in Algiers, specializing in the treatment of tuberculosis. In the early 1930s, while in Paris to defend his dissertation, he met Eve Klein, Hélène's future mother, a German Ashkenazi Jew born in Strasbourg when Alsace belonged to Germany. Eve's mother's family was from Osnabrück, in Hanover, and her father had come to Strasbourg from Trnava, a small town between Vienna and Prague in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Eve's father volunteered to serve in the German army during the First World War, and was killed in 1916 when

she was a young child. Her mother then moved back to Osnabrück with the children. But in the early 1930s, after finishing school, and (fore)seeing Germany's descent into Nazism, Eve moved to Paris, where she worked as a stenographer and translator between German, French and English.

Eve Klein and Georges Cixous were married in Oran, where he established his practice. However during the Second World War, the collaborationist French Vichy regime in Algeria revoked the citizenship of French Jews (in spite of the fact that the Nazis never occupied North Africa). Georges Cixous was forbidden to practice medicine by the anti-Jewish laws of Vichy and Hélène and her brother were excluded from school until the arrival of the Allied troops in 1942. This experience of precarious citizenship—in the context of the terrible hypocrisy and the brutal injustice of the colonial relation, in which the Algerian Jews had a particularly unstable position, being neither French-from-France nor in any simple way indigenous Algerians, combined with the unusual Sephardic-Ashkenazi composition of the Cixous-Klein family—certainly contributed to Hélène Cixous' profound mistrust of nationalism and patriotic ideologies of native appropriation. After the war, when Hélène was nine years old, the family moved to Algiers, and her father set up a new radiology clinic. But he died from tuberculosis in 1948. Her mother then trained as a midwife to support the family.

The first European city Cixous lived in was not Paris but London, where she was sent by her mother to learn English for several

months in 1950. After obtaining her baccalaureate in Algiers and completing a further intensive year of *Hypokhagne* (at *Lycée Bugeaud*, where Derrida had studied several years earlier), Hélène Cixous moved to France in 1955 to continue her schooling. Her mother, who had remained in Algeria after Independence, was expelled virtually overnight in 1971.

Cixous' first meeting with Jacques Derrida took place in 1962; thirty-five years later, in *H.C. for Life*, an extraordinary meditation on his reading of and friendship with "H.C.," Derrida says, "it is *as if* we have *nearly* never left each other."² By both of their accounts, their friendship—literary, philosophical, political—was vital for them throughout their careers, and they have each re-inscribed it at length in their texts.

In 1963 Cixous was presented to Jacques Lacan: he was looking for an introduction to the work of James Joyce, and for two years she gave him informal tutorials. In 1964, she went to the U.S. on a Fulbright scholarship to consult Joyce's manuscripts, visiting libraries across the country. Cixous' doctoral thesis, which was published in 1969, was the first major study of Joyce to appear in French.

As an author of fiction, a playwright, a professor, a theorist and a critic, Hélène Cixous has been a central figure in the profound reassessment of prevailing intellectual paradigms that has swept

through virtually every domain of the humanities since the 1960s. She taught in Bordeaux—not far from Montaigne's château—and then at the University of Paris, where she was a young professor of English Literature when France exploded in May 1968. She was nominated to devise the academic structure of a new experimental university, and in consultation with Derrida she brought together a team of innovative academics to form the core teaching staff: the turbulent saga of what would later become the *Université de Paris 8* began in 1969 in a group of prefab buildings hastily assembled in a wooded park on the outskirts of Paris, the *Bois de Vincennes*. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze were among Cixous' friends and colleagues who came to teach at *Paris 8*. In 1974 Cixous created a doctoral program in Women's Studies (*Études Féminines*) at *Paris 8*. It was the first such program in France, and Cixous has taught there ever since.

Starting in 1971, Cixous collaborated with Foucault in the *Group Information Prisons* (GIP), protesting the conditions in French prisons and demanding a profound transformation of the justice system. With Ariane Mnouchkine, the founder of the *Théâtre du Soleil*, they invented a form of protest theatre, composing mini-plays which they attempted to perform in front of prisons, invariably provoking the violent intervention of the police.

In the 1970s, Cixous became deeply involved in the Women's movement. Her much-anthologized essay-manifesto "The Laugh of the Medusa" appeared in 1975. In the same year, Antoinette Fouque,

founder of the women's organization *Psych et Po* (Psychoanalysis and Politics) and of the *Éditions des Femmes* publishing house, asked her for a manuscript to publish, and for the next 25 years Cixous published most of her work with *Des Femmes*. Cixous' theoretical essays of this period contributed to her reputation, particularly in the English-speaking world, as a "new" French feminist theorist. But she is first and foremost a "creative writer": her first novel,³ *Dedans*, appeared in 1969 and received the prestigious *prix Médicis*. She has published on average one major book of fiction per year ever since. In the early 1980s, Ariane Mnouchkine asked Hélène Cixous to write a play for the *Théâtre du Soleil*. Thus began Cixous' on-going collaboration with this remarkable theater. At the same time it is true that Cixous has been a prolific and unrelentingly original theorist and literary critic for more than four decades. Along with her celebrated seminar at *Paris 8* and the *Collège International de Philosophie*, she lectures regularly throughout Europe, North America and beyond.

Indeed, Hélène Cixous is an inveterate traveler. In books, those she reads and those she writes; in dreams (she published a sampling of her dreams in *Dream I Tell You*); and of course in languages (she speaks French, English, German and has a reading knowledge of several other languages). But also in "reality": she made extended trips as a poetic ethnographer to the Cambodian-Thai border and to India while writing her first two plays for the *Théâtre du Soleil* ("The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia" and "The Indiad or the

India of Their Dreams"). And even her frequent teaching and lecturing voyages seem to involve studies in cultural difference that often leave traces in her writing.

Cities appear frequently in Cixous' texts, and yet the figure of the city, which is both a theme and a character in her works, inevitably plays an ambivalent role. A few telegraphic examples of cities, and titles, in Hélène Cixous' oeuvre will perhaps clarify this point.

In *Manhattan*,⁴ for instance, which is a kind of portrait of the artist as a young woman, New York is the setting of a doubly literary primal scene. It takes place in literature, about literature, but it also anticipates the future as if the author-to-be were already writing, as she lives, as if she were already *in writing*, before writing. The distinction between fiction and reality (or rather book and city) is effaced as the city becomes an oneiric space par excellence, channeling the as-yet unrealized potentiality of poetic writing. But it is also, and by the same token, a place of terrifying madness. It is true that the irrecoverable loss of (the) self in the dis-articulated subject may later be harnessed active-passively as the very source of the artist's creative energy. But here, in the author's prehistory, it is a life-threatening motif of insanity.

Osnabrück,⁵ on the other hand, is the forever-lost city of the mother, a city that exists (for the daughter) only in and through the maternal narrative. It is thus the paradigm of the desirable city, and yet

it also conveys a deeply menacing, deadly image. On the one hand because it cannot help being, in historical and biographical terms, an infanticidal figure, having destroyed its own offspring (its Jewish community annihilated during the War). But on the other hand because the city that exists in reality and goes by the name of Osnabrück today threatens to destroy the remembered, fantasized, recounted and rerecounted city (and signifier) that inhabits Cixous' writing.

A final example is *The Perjured City*,⁶ a play Cixous wrote for the *Théâtre du Soleil* and which opened in 1994. The play is set in a Cemetery that is just outside the City. The Cemetery is a place of death, but also of intensely vivacious and tenacious life, a place of resistance to the profound injustice of the City, which is all the more unjust in that it attempts to monopolize the discourse on "justice."

It is tempting to read a similar ambivalence into Hélène Cixous' "life": she has lived and worked in Paris for some forty years and yet she has always maintained an eccentric position within the literary, political and intellectual life of the city. This is reflected symbolically in the fact that her university (*Paris 8*) and her theater (the *Théâtre du Soleil*) are both located, like the cemetery in *The Perjured City*, just outside the city limit. And more importantly, for many decades she has gone to write every summer in her "house of books," in a patch of forest by the ocean, as far as can be from any city.

Notes

1. This note has been prepared using information from several sources, including *Portfolio: Hélène Cixous*, ADPF Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, 2005, *Rootprints*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, and H.C. herself.
2. Jacques Derrida, *H.C. pour la vie, c'est-à-dire...*, Paris, Galilée, 2002, p. 12.
3. As Cixous has herself noted, the term "novel," insofar as it refers to a highly codified literary form, is inappropriate for her books of fiction—which refuse to submit to the rules that the novel form imposes.
4. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan, Lettres de la Préhistoire*, Paris, Galilée, 2001.
5. Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück*, Paris, Des Femmes, 1999.
6. Hélène Cixous, *La ville parjure, ou le réveil des Erynies*, Paris, Théâtre du Soleil, 1994.

Promised Cities
Hélène Cixous

In homage to the author from Dublin, who was both my hunter and my prey for so many years, I mean to the thief from Dublin to his translator, and his *transhater*, by way of epigraph I shall take my first steps in Cities via a small detour through *Finnegans Wake* where on p. 301 an air of nostalgia for Trieste awaits us. Trieste, the at least triple city where as a young man Joyce used to pass on languages [*était passe-langue*] at the Berlitz School.

Dear and he went on to scribble gentlemine born,
milady bread, he would pen for her, he would pine for her,
how he would patpun fun for all with his frolicky frowner so
and his glumsome grinner otherso. And how are you,
waggy? My animal his sorrafool! **And trieste, ah trieste
ate I my liver!** *Se non é vero son trovatore.* O jerry! He
was soso, harriot all! He was sadfellow, steifel! He was
mistermysterion. Like a purate out of pensionee with a
gouvernement job.

Whereupon I could stop my lecture, for everything is plurasaid [*pluridit*] in one go, how a city is like another one how a language always speaks more than another language, that Babel is not bababbeaten [*babattue*], and that there is always more than one animal wagging at the end of a tail, and how, as a dog I eat and gnaw at myself, my own bone, as both a vulture and Prometheus I tear my own liver to pieces.

Promised Cities.

I am from Oran. I translate: I am from *Hors En* [Out In]. I go from *Or* [gold] in *Hors*. I translate: I go from *Hors* in *Hors*. To start with I am from without [*du hors*]. I am and follow [*suis*] to the letter and to the voice. Then I am an adoring being. I could take all my life by his/her letters of gold [*d'or*]. Letters came to me before the book. The first letters, the first sounds were my city, my land, my family. Since I started feeling and turning my mind to thinking [*me tourne à penser*], I have not been able to distinguish the city theaters from the word theaters. Word and cities swap places, the city makes a theater for words, the words make place, city, mines. The word city has always incited me to sing search for double. I write: I cite. To put it otherwise: I translate. I was born in translation, with translation.

Everything I write and say, here,—first I say it in my head, straightaway, from my head to fingers with pen I write, everything that gets *out* and that I get out of *En/In*, all that today stands in front of me outside me, a few years ago still stood—back, behind my thought, before me. I did not think of city, I was in it, and I was with it, with my cities. We were only one city which translated itself into twelve cities as well as into dreams of cities. Oran and myself are inseparable. And yet—I quote from *Savoir, Veils*:

Everyday she had to pass by the castle. Help came from the statue of Joan of Arc. The great golden woman brandished her flaming lance and showed her the way to the castle. By following the golden sign she would finally get there. Until the day when. One morning in the square there was nothing. The statue was not there. No trace of the castle. Instead of the sacred horse a world of shadow. All was lost. Every step would increase the confusion. She stopped, petrified, deprived of the statue's help. She found herself stalled at the heart of the invisible. Everywhere she saw this limitless pale nothingness, as thought by some false step she had entered, living, into death. The here-nothingness stayed, and no one. She, seized up, fallen upright into the fathomless expanse of a veil, and *voilà* all that remained of city and time. The catastrophe had happened in silence.

And now who was she? Alone. A little nail stuck in the gap.

Later in the gap someone abruptly come from the nothing told her that things hadn't fled at all. They were definitely in their place. So was it she who could not see the statue or the castle or the edges of the world or the bus?¹

As one can see, she cannot see where she is. She is so lost that she is in the third person of herself, far from me and I.

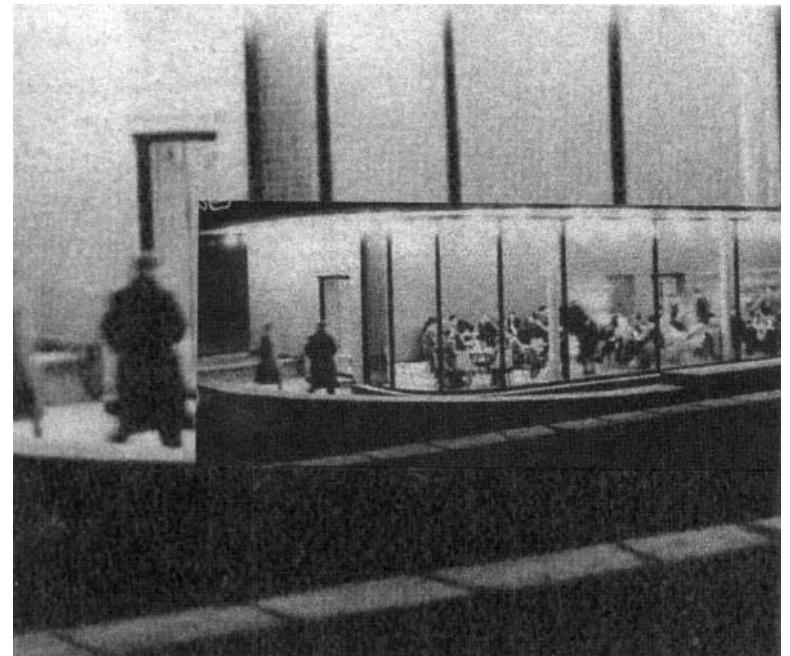
She is lost in the lost city. Of the whole city there only remains a remainder of Gold [*Or*]. She is outside [*dehors*] inside. And it will always be like that.

And the word *ville* in French, this present, not *cité*, not *city*, not *Stadt*, no *ville* not *vile*, *villa*, not *domus*, not *domus aurea*, neither family mansion nor house of gold, but *villa* of pleasures. *Ville-villa*. *Ville*, expansion and extension of *villa*. In Algeria we lived in the Clos-Salembier villa in the upper districts of Algiers. One said *villa* in Algeria. Our houses with gardens were gilded with the Roman word. J.D. El-Biar villa.

Later on I called my house with a garden in Arcachon villa Eva. It was natural. A city within a city.

And yet, between city and myself, there has always been a veil. I said Oran in the first place, as one would say Ouranos or Gaia. But Oran has always already been complicated occupied contained fabulated by whom? And by what? By Osnabrück.

But before coming back to Oran, I shall call up the cities that live in me and that have made their nests their knots their walls and citadels in my work: congenitally at first, then sometimes cultured, at first underground then more and more overground until they took control of writing, all unbeknownst to me. There they were, fomenting for decades until the day when there was Osnabrück.



But before and ever since there have been Algiers, Pompeii, Manhattan, Prague, in other words: Jerusalem, Babel, Ur, and even a little later Elsinore and its ramparts. All my cities have their mythical doubles, their models and my roots.

I see I have omitted Paris. This will call for an explanation. And I should not forget Strasbourg. What makes a city be? The promise. What does the promise promise? Threat, paradise, ruin, loss, reunion, salvation, destruction, the end of errancy, alas the end of errancy, the end of history; no, expulsion, prohibition, exile, Ovid's *Tristia*, Tristia, Mandelstam's *Tristia*, the no-arrival, the no-return, the no-reunion. One does not come back, not in reality. By dint of not finding (oneself) again while coming back and not coming back, one produces cities which come back in dreams, cities on the horizon, serial Cities. By dint of repeating the names of the desired and never hoped-for Cities, one causes the movement of literature. Next year in Venice. But in order to get to Venice you will have to fulfill twelve conditions and pay the full price for admission: you will go to Venice but only without Albertine. It is the choice of the two caskets. One enters a city half dead.

So there was a book called *Osnabrück*. Now that was not done on purpose. I do not give names, they are given to the books, and this very late, once the book has departed from me, by some god or other. So there was a book which bore the name of a city. And conversely. Maybe the book is a city? True there are books that are kinds of cities. Memoirs, archives, plans, monuments. *Ulysses*, as they say, "takes

place" [se passe] in Dublin which passes through *Ulysses*. In passing the character Ulysses Homerizes and Odysseizes Dublin in an imperceptible movement of comeback and haunting [revenance], of spectral colonization, of elevation and lowering which reminds us first of all that a city is such only if it bears within its wall-girt sides the traces of another city, its ancestor, its archaic model. A city worthy of being sung always *sites cites* another city.

What is beautiful and surprising is that, when a city dies in order to be reborn, the same happens to it as to the Tibetan or Egyptian dead. It travels, transmigrates, reincarnates in a most faraway city, but one which can harbour it in its bosom, that is to say receive it in translation, through acquaintances or connivances, which are either topological or thematic or literal, and quite often small, tiny in appearance.

So then there was a book which advanced under the title of *Osnabrück* and the character that inhabits it is my mother, Eve Klein. Osnabrück my mother's name as a native city. The name of a small city in the province of Hanover. Name: foreign. The titles of my books always remain foreign to me, like the cities—no matter how I pretend to inhabit them. A city takes me. Captures me. Hunts me. I am afraid of cities.

That was a city. Now when I say Osnabrück I no longer know whether I am in the book or in the city.

This book when in French was nearly not called *Osnabrück*. That would have been a French book's suicide. For a book, I am keen

to stress, is somehow contained entirely in its title.

Yes, that's the mystery: the title makes the being. The title—for me at any rate—is the essential and sublime translation of the book. Now I nearly didn't. And why? I analyse after the fact: Osnabrück, a barbarously sounding name. Just as Babel sounds well in all languages. Osnabrück: unpronounceable in French. Like Cixous. Osnabrück Cixous, what a name! More and more foreign, brutal, brück, cix scissors... O Phonemes. Onomatopoeiae! At the last minute I clung to the principle of anti-cowardice loyalty that drives me. —What is that? Well precisely: it is my treasure and my heritage. I note that I do not have a book with Oran in its title. I did not do it on purpose.

I said I would come back to Oran, at least in these pages. I'll come back to it.

Whereupon came *Manhattan*. It is then that this insistence of cities, of names of books of cities of bookcities, drew my attention. There appeared to me in fiction what I had always known and practised in the theater: places are powerful and decisive characters. They do half of fate's work. They are deities, active hidden powers. Places archive us and act upon us. Chance and necessity. To be born and to die. One falls in order to be born, in such and such a city and the die is cast. To die one can think about it. Montaigne wanted to die on horseback, a marvelous death without a roof. I myself do not know yet. *Manhattan*, subtitled: Letters from the Prehistory. Manhattan would therefore be the site and the city of the prehistory of my (hi)story? I'll be able to think so.

It could be the first of my ruin cities, the place of the first runes would therefore be American.

Immediately I ask myself what is the city of the prehistory of my prehistory.

There is no simple city in my books and in my life. What is the first city? There are several, obviously. Let's say it would be Troy. Trois three. There are at least three cities in each of my cities.

I was born in Oran and I lived in a double city there. For historical reasons Osnabrück had come to find shelter in Oran. On my double city there was War and the shadow of Pétain with Hitler. In our flat rue Philippe I never knew whether I was in Oran, Algeria, or in Osnabrück, Germany. I said: I am from Oran. I should say: I am from Oran with Osnabrück, from Oran in and out of [*en et hors*] Osnabrück. An impossibility made possible in a very specific place, 54 rue Philippe on the 3rd floor.

In Oran Osnabrück hidden Oran slipped into Osnabrück I lived within without and I still live, in my first house where the christians the jews and the muslims lived in keeping with the cruel reality, all refugees fresh from exile, within was the kingdom of my father the fair doctor, and in the street was France a word in front of which, all those living at no. 54, the Spaniards the French Jews (the Arab), the german jews the Arab were taking identity tests. Within no. 54 there was a grace.

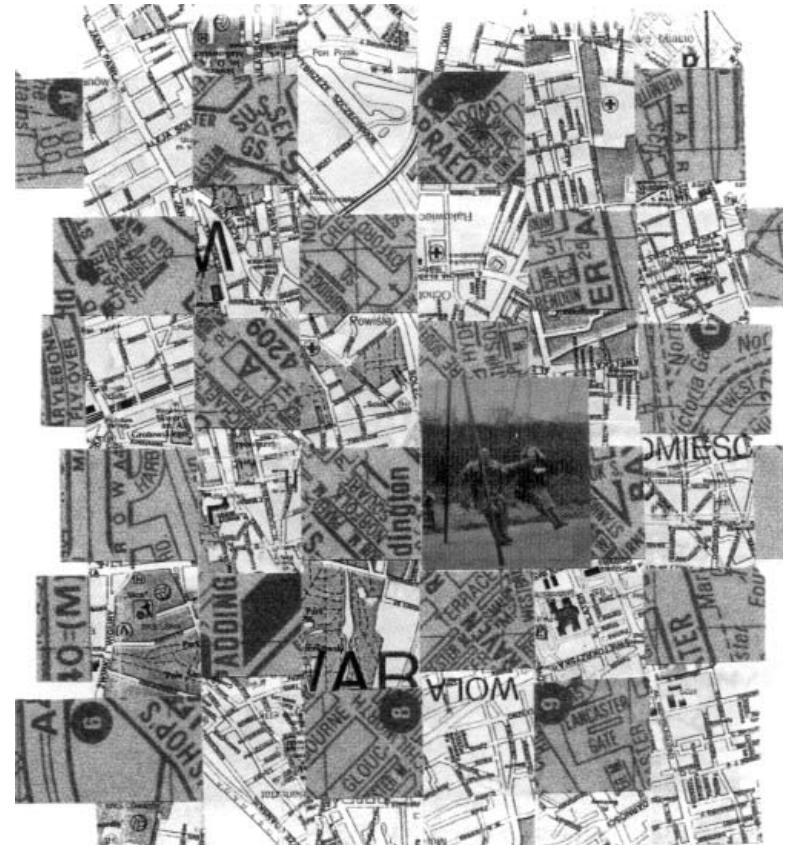
I was in the one and in the other scene at once and separately North in South, man in woman, the masculine in the feminine, together

and separately. My German mother and grandmother were recounting about Osnabrück. The staircases in the buildings of Osnabrück were using the staircases of Oran. I described the mythical structure of my native city in *Osnabrück*.

The moment when I was born in Oran, I was adopted by Osnabrück. My understanding began with two O's and two A's. I was living in Algeria *Allemagne* [Germany] or in *Allemagne* Algeria anagrammatically, in several languages. My countries begin with *AI*, aleph, alfa. Everything has always been a stage and a theater. This is peculiar to the City: the City is a theater, on whose doorstep the place where the drama, that is to say the theater, is played out (again), stands erect. The theater, Shakespeare's, Aeschylus', the war theater, the one which translates the fate of the city into a work of art and rebellion, is a hut which *stands erect*, directing its words to the sleeping inhabitants in the city, right on the city gate, against the deaf wall of the city. The Theater which is put outside, the prophet, directs its warnings to the deaf and blind theater which resides within the constructions put up inside.

My double city with a double childhood had a center, a central stage. It so happens that my family lived twice in the first row of seats which overlook the stage. Once in the Nikolaiort building in Osnabrück. Once at no. 54 rue Philippe, second gallery on the right facing the stage of the Place d'Armes.

All the Algerians know the Place d'Armes. One cannot imagine anything more theater-like, more Arabo-Greek, more Shakespearian.



The backdrop: a town hall flanked by two lions. On the right, the theater, on the left in the background, Plato's Pharmacy, run by my pharmagicians, stage left the Military Academy [*Cercle Militaire*] where all that makes me enraged, ethically astounded politically foreseeing etc. happened to me.

Up in the flies "The mountain," on which santa crousse is seated... The marabout etc.

The theme of Oran-as-theater: "how to enter?", a theme with a double stage and a double plot, one reflecting, relieving or sublating translating the other: how to enter the desired city which can never be found, always never there veiled commanded by a *fort da?* And how to enter among the inhabitants of the city among whom one is without being one finds oneself but crossed out, barred with bars [*barré de barreaux*], struck through, thrown spat out.

My theme: how to enter, how to *arrive* and *manage* [*arriver*] to enter, how to get out of the outside in which one is locked up within the inside?

Kafka's theme: how to get out of the burning bush which one did not enter? My theme: land as one may on the shore on the other side of the sea, or in the middle of the country, one does not arrive.

This is the theme of translation: one does not arrive. There is the "arrival" or target language [*langue d'arrivée*], one paces it, one rents it, one is a tenant, one adopts and is adopted, one tastes in it the delights of new surroundings one is not of one's blood. At least this is my

case. The idea of "doing" a translation frightens me. The idea of rendering a text in another, to secure (as Jacques Derrida says) the survival of the body of the original:

It would thus secure the *survival* of the body of the original (survival in the double meaning given to it by Benjamin in "The Task of the Translator", *fortleben* and *überleben*: prolonged life, continued life, *living on*, but also life beyond death).

Is it not what a translation does? Does it not secure these *two* survivals while losing its flesh during an operation of exchange? While elevating the signifier towards its meaning or its value, but while keeping the mournful, indebted memory of the singular body, the primal body, the unique body which it thus elevates, saves and relieves or sublates? Since it is a work, even, as we were saying, a work of the negative, this sublation [*relevance*] is a work of mourning, in the most enigmatic sense of this word, which deserves another development which I attempted somewhere else but which I must give up doing here. The measure of relief [*relève*] or sublation, the price of a translation, is always what one calls meaning, even value, keeping [*garde*], truth as keeping (*Wahrheit, bewahren*) or the value of meaning, that is what

elevates itself above the body from which it frees itself, internalizes it, spiritualizes it, keeps it in memory. A faithful, mournful memory. One does not even have to say that translation keeps the value of meaning, the meaning of meaning, the value of kept value is born from the mournful experience of translation, from its very possibility.²

The experience of Cercle Militaire that is the Military Academy.

There were two worlds and I knew it, (she knew it) what I did not yet know was that it was forever impossible for me to pass (live) into the other world, impossible as much as forbidden even if (perchance) *one belonged*,

even if, perchance, by some extraordinary chance, I found or find myself overnight *in* the world on the other side, even if by some *extraordinary* chance the ban was apparently lifted, and I could believe the messages of the senses: believe that a portal opened that I entered the garden, that I was inside,

even if I could believe and had believed that by entering Canaan I would become an inhabitant of the inside of Canaan. Here I could believe my definition as a foreigner different from others would thus have ended. The outside which was in me had from then on stayed outside, outside the garden. This being—of the out(side) [*du hors*] I could think I had stowed it in a cupboard from the outside, this state of

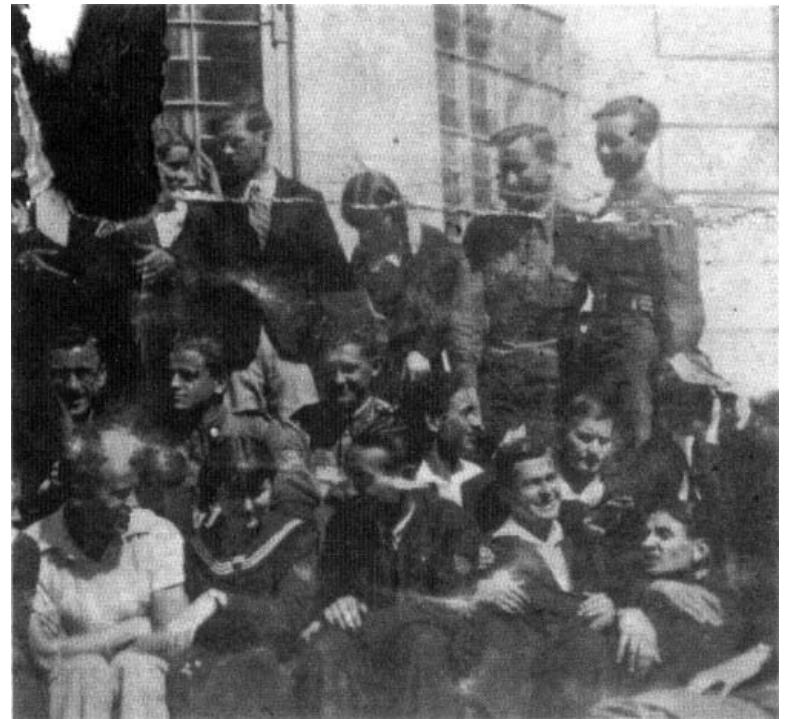
banishment from birth would have stopped at the portal, I had believed, it will be enough, it is going to be enough I thought for me to enter the garden, to take a few steps for the internal mutation to keep up with the change already performed by my personal envelope.

Let's say I was expecting a birth of myself, to be born in the garden, my being brought into the world, to bring myself (*in*)to it, I felt full of promise and of exulting anticipation, I squatted in the paths of rich earth lined with flower beds in bloom and it was not coming. The sudden magical metamorphosis was not coming.

I took the entrance exam in the language or in the codes of the other so many times. Each spectacular, failed attempt, working through the voice, signs and discourses; I told ten times and shall still do so ten or a hundred times my attempts my failures my obstinacies for all the wound and all literature will be drawn from these traumatic moments later. How aged three I was initiated within the Military Academy in Oran into as much negative philosophy as there is in Dostoyevsky, I killed and was killed, I was inside and I wasn't. How aged four I had the honour of singing "*Marechal here we come*" out of a pleasure of doing like all the other children and how my father exorcized me, how aged five I saw marching in with great pomp those that enter by right and might as in Shakespeare, the Americans De Gaulle Fortinbras Henri Vth Giraud all parading in tanks and on horses right in front of my sandals. How I was on the balcony, a hen by my side, *the hen and its egg*, like a Scandinavian divinity which follows the human world events while crying

powerlessly. How I danced on the stage of the Oran theater, almost blind following the thick chalk strokes drawn for me on the floor so I would not hurl myself into the pit, a scene which started over and over again all my life as a puppet, last time it was at the BN (National Library) two years ago I was dancing on (my) words, clinging to my paper and I could not see anything. How each time I have been inside I was radically outside, when I entered the University I came in by the way out. I could add that this movement of a needle which pricks passes enters exits pricks again, or of a fish, is my destinal signature. I will always be found at the door. I know all the secrets of doors. Keyholes.

Now I am going to talk about the hole in the door, this pupil on the face of the wood through which one must imagine looking for it is while sneaking a furtive glance between all these marvelous words of the locks and keys of the psyche, from the *seredure* which clasps the key, a little marvel of eroticism, to the *bold* [*pêne*], striking plate, mortise, the whole scene which translators play ceaselessly, and which make of me as a translator a born locksmith—thus it is while threading one's way (J.D.'s metaphor in *Veils*) and while twisting and turning that, following my child mother wherever she went, I never stopped moving from Oran to Osnabrück, from Osnabrück to the Niebelungen and back. When my mother/and thus myself/were six years old, there was an Osnabrück epiphany through the keyhole. An epiphany in the Judeoworld. One day, my mother and therefore I saw, through the keyhole of the bedroom door in Osnabrück, a whole station. A population of dwarfs was busying itself



loading and unloading a train. Then the train left. What my mother believed she saw [cruvoir] I also believed I saw. Osnabrück is *to believe to have seen* and there is no difference between believing one sees and seeing. Where were these active dwarfs from, who were carrying promised yet unavailable treasures? Later on I had my own station, my trains, syntax, rhetoric, poetics and a profusion of verbal dwarfs. We had seen the journey of language. I said *had*. I will add the plane to the train, naturally. Travel tickets spring from language. All of us here today, no matter how glued we may sometimes be at our tables, we are on a journey, entravelled [*envoyagés*], sent journeying we pass through the keyholes of sentences, through the doors of words, through the panes of frames. I mean the window panes.

Two words about Osnabrück. This city has a twin: Münster. In two cities at once the treaty of Westphalia was signed. Europe starts here. All the future of the world passed through the tiny city, in 1648.

Oran Osnabrück city-worlds/world-cities, have I ever seen them? I desired to see them face to face. I think I never saw Oran. I left it. I never came back. Will I be back? Have I ever seen Osnabrück? That's the enigma. I think I went there with my grandmother Omi, in 1952, we were again in Germany for the first time I think but maybe it is a dream, but dream is also a reality.

Osnabrück-Jerusalem or *next year in Osnabrück*

From the 1990s onwards arose the thought of going to Osnabrück, to get lost now—or previously [*voir si j'y suis, ou si j'y fus*]. I

did not go. I still have not been there. Always I don't go there. It would be terrible if I didn't go I say to myself it would be terrible if I went. When I completed *Osnabrück* or when *Osnabrück* was *done* (as Balzac would say—*A Passion in the Desert*) I only had to resurrect the small city which had turned into my mother's book. That was the least I could do. But before telling you what happened to my trip to Jerusalem Osnabrück I must introduce to you our Osnabrück as I experienced it through the stories my mother and my grandmother told. According to me it was a gigantic Jewish city, some Lodz or Odessa. Until the day when I discovered that Jewish Osnabrück was made up of 450 people or so up to the days of Nazism, about fifty families, that must be the number of families in the *Iliad*. I started writing the book of what remained of Osnabrück it was *Benjamin à Montaigne*. When I completed this remainder I said to my mother and her sister : *next year in Osnabrück in reality*. Nobody wanted to go. Nobody said to nobody that nobody wanted to go. We thought of going to Osnabrück during a whole year, and when the day came to do the suitcases, we undid them.

But for a year I was afraid of the end: the end of the sentence *next year in Jerusalem*. All the while I was afraid of going to Osnabrück and it was not only the book that would be *done* completed, it would be life itself. Then my mother said: Eri (her sister) does not feel like going to Osnabrück. And nor do I. We are not interested. That day I understood that for them too the return to the beginning is the end, the pilgrimage on one's own grave. We felt relieved but none of us said

anything. We left everything outside translation. I could write a book on the impossible, what is deferred, promised, hoped for, next year, I could write next year, we'll see.

I never wanted to go to Jerusalem-Jerusalem. I had a few cities where not to go. Among which Prague, Pompeii, Jerusalem delivered. Cities too precious in fantasy to risk sinking them to the bottom of reality. Ten thousand times in thought, in dream, in the imagination. Venice for Proust, how much does it cost him? To go there? Not to go there.

I have known for a long time that one does not go anywhere. It is the cities or the countries that come or do not come to you. Cities are fateful letters. They only arrive lost. They only arrive posthumously.

Though I never saw my cities with-my-eyes-of-flesh, I would at least have "seen" them with my ears, I inhabited their names, their sounds, I tasted them through all my senses, traveled them spelling them out, I received everything in gold as an angel [*en or en ange*], I sucked their juice, their bones, I did not inhabit the name Paris, it never came to my mind, I cried enormously in Oran, I never laughed in Paris never, I never got there I have never been there and I am not coming back from there. One of my lives eventually took place in Ris-Orangis. The word-nouns are our fateful commanders, one cannot escape them. Before fleeing from Paris as I do secretly everyday, I must still acknowledge a debt to it. It is in Paris, not in Algiers, nor in New York City, that I met J.D. We were both in exile in Paris, both terrified, each of

us in our own way, both hidden under the belly of the French language in order to try and escape from the Cyclops. This appalling condition with its cunning remedy must have contributed to bringing us closer. What we feared above all else was the word France, we wanted French the French language and its abundant brilliance but not France. We were each differently hidden pariahs who had stowed away from one clandestine state to another on board the City of Algiers. Cities are also boats.

Is there a more forceful metaphor, a boat which is a city or rather a city which comes and goes from one end to the other. One left the city of Algiers for the City of Algiers the ground was shaking, one did not know one was in a metamorphosis. The being in a trance that we were was spewing its guts out, one was changing bodies.

Later on when I went to the United States for the first time, and since it was said that here over there I would be admitted into literature, I voyaged myself between two lives on the *France*. A fine steamer that was [*pas-que-beau*].

My languages: I cannot say like J.D. that I only have one language and it is not mine.

I lived in a languaged house [*maison à langues*], on the second floor Spanish Mrs Rico, on the third German with French, on the fourth French with Spanish, on the fifth the Hispano-French of Mr Emile and

Mrs Alice Carisio, sibling pharmagicians, makers of potions and liqueurs for the Oran Town Council, under the stairs Mohamed's Arabic, on the galleries Spanish, all these languages tasted of spices, kitchens and languages communicated, fortunately I desired them all except aubergines I don't know why, and grouper's heads I know why. I ate cabbage in German *Kraut* and carrots in cumin in Hispano-Arabic. I could—I should do a lecture on my way of cooking. It is exactly like my way of working a language. I can say that I have never wished to eat-speak pure French. I love and practise French as a foreign language.

My father too (the Larousse dictionary)—I sow to the four winds.

I never did anything but translate that is to say want to taste the taste of *all* the tastes, try all the words, invent new mixtures, bring extremes closer, go to the roots, return to the sources of sources. Geff earth Oklahoma. Since we can no longer speak-enjoy in Montaigne's language, except by solitary enjoyment, Montaigne who wrote foreign Greek Latin Italian in French, we must then foreignize [*forainer*] forward and on all sides.

Since I was a child I have always eavesdropped on words because they were all equally foreign to me, French neither more nor less than German. Still today as in Oran and at the Clos-Salembier, I can hear their declensions, their gradations, their articulations just as they were pronounced, once long ago, for the first time. Still today as in Oran I am hurled into the hunting of the Snark and what a delight when I hear



at the end of a ride that the Snark is a Boojum, "after all", as Lewis Carroll says. My grandfather Samuel Cixous who aged eleven went from the street barefoot to the counter founded the family's first play of signifier-without-doing-it-on-purpose by opening a hat shop bearing the name HighLife. Iglif. First hieroglyphs. Later on I found it hard then a pleasure to move from my language gemtoys [*bijoujoux*] to English and school German. What languages, so much alive and droll, were for me first refused to let itself be spelt. I thus started and ended up by always having two languages to play with, one having come to me by air the other shemblable and freer arriving by letter.

Do you know Wilhelm Busch? When I was six years old in Oran
Wilhelm Busch was my other Bible. Homer, the Bible, Wilhelm Busch.

Wilhelm Busch is the *Iliad*.

Wilhelm Busch is *Vilaine Bouche* [Naughty Mouth].

(I adored him) Wilhelm Busch is Hokusai Daumier Hugo Blake
and Chaplin for children and criminals.

Max and Moritz, in other words my brother and me, more than once fell into the impenetrable Busch as scoundrels or as rogues, J.D. would say, and as dogs. Let me introduce to you briefly Plisch and Plum our fellow four-legged creatures:

1st chapter—
A pipe in his mouth,
Under arm two young dogs
That old Kaspar Schlich was carrying. –
He can smoke awfully.
But though his pipe is glowing
Oh, how cold is his nature!
"What for" say his words
"What do I need this breed for?
Does it perhaps give me pleasure?
Not at all is my reply.
But when there's something I don't like
Get rid of it is my principle."

In front of the pond he stands still
For he wants to drown them.
Anxiously with their legs
The two young quadrupeds thrash about;
For the inner voice speaks:
This affair I don't trust!

Oops! One is sent flying already.

Plisch! - there it slips into the water.

Oops! The second right behind.

Plum!! thereupon disappears.

Job done! shouted Kaspar Schlich,
Puffing and going away.

But here, as ever,
Things don't turn out as one thinks.
Paul and Peter, who it so happened
Had stripped for a bath
Watched still in hiding
What evil Schlich was doing.

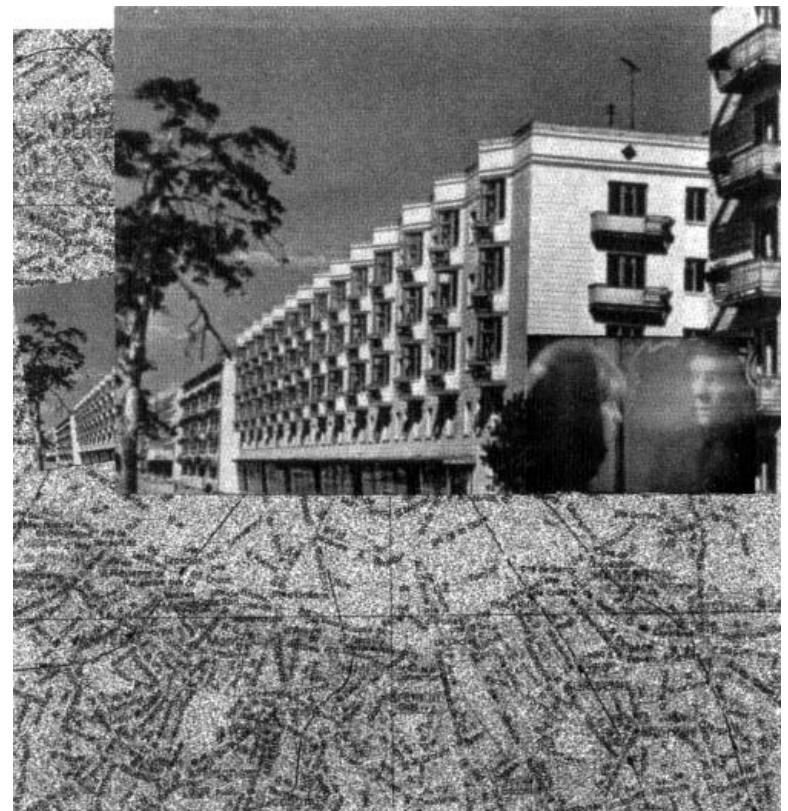
Swift and like frogs
Hopped they both into the pond.
Each carries in his hand
A little dog to the shore.
"Plisch!" shouted Paul "I name mine thus"
Plum—is how Peter named his.
And thus Paul and Peter carry
Both their little puppies
With haste, yet not without full care,
Toward the parental abode.

2nd chapter—

Papa Fittig, faithful and peaceful,
Mama Fittig, very homey
[*gemütlich* - untranslatable in English],
Are sitting tenderly linking arms,
Carefree and well contented
Shortly before their evening feast
A little bit longer in front of the house,
For the day was a mild one,
And they are waiting for their children.
Look, here they both come,
Plisch and Plum are also with them. —
But this is not to Fittig's liking.
Who violently shouts: "Now I say!"
But Mama with a tender mien
"Fittig!!", she begged, "don't begrudge them that!!"
Already prepared was the fresh
Evening milk on the table.
With joy they rush to the house,
Plisch and Plum swiftly in front.
Ah! Here they are shamelessly
In the middle of the sweet cream
And let their well-being be known
By a noisy clapping of their tongues.

Schlisch, who was looking through the window,
Shouts astonished: "Now look at that!
This sure is annoying.
Eh eh! but not for me!!"

3rd chapter—
Paul and Peter, unmoved,
Just as if nothing had happened,
Rest in their bedchamber,
For they could not care less.
In and out through their noses
A soft snore is sighing.
Plisch and Plum on the contrary seem
Not yet quite decided
On the subject of their bed.
Finally they too go to sleep.
Our Plisch, as is his wont,
First three times in a circle turns round.
Our Plum unlike him shows
Himself inclined to tenderness.
To those who like their rest,
Most are a nuisance.
"Off with you!" — With this curt word
Are they driven outside. —



The coolness awakens activity;
Activity makes time shorter.
Most welcome are to that effect
Here the trousers, there the shoe;
Which, before the day begins,
Are already transformed.
For the father what a fright
When he came to wake them up.
The thought makes him pale
When he asks: How much will it cost?
Already he wants to punish the boys,
Who pretended they were asleep.
But the mother beseeches: "I beg you,
Don't be cruel, dear Fittig!"
These loving words
Melt his paternal wrath.
Paul and Peter don't much care.
Peter sets off first in front
In two slippers,
Paul in his jagged trousers.
Plisch and Plum, because they lack manners,
Go into the dog kennel.
"Tis fatal"—remarked Schlich—
"Eh eh! but not for me!"

4th chapter—
Finally in the wired trap
The cockiest of mice got caught,
Which made Mama Fittig always,
Now in the cellar, now in the room
And especially at night
Terribly nervous.
This gave Plisch and Plum
A hoped-for amusement;
For now this means: "Now come out,
You nasty old nibbling mouse!"

Quick, Peter's trouser leg,
It thought, ought to provide shelter.
Plisch follows it in the pipe;
Plum stands in front at the other end.
Snip! into its smell organ
The mouse bores its gnawing tooth.
Plisch wants to pull it by the tail,
Snip! it grabs him by the ear.
D'you see, there it scampers
Into the neighbour's flower bed.
Crick-crack, woe to you,
Beloved flower ornament!

Mrs Kümmel is just about
To put oil in her lamp.
Her heart almost broke
As she glanced into the garden.
She quickens her step,
And brings her watering can along.
Furious but with pleasure
She gives each of them a shower:
First to Plisch and then to Plum.
Stinging is the paraffin;
And the effect it has,
Mrs Kümmel had not contemplated.
But what happens now
Makes Mrs Kümmel so aggrieved
That she, as if fanned by wild delusion,
Closes her eyes and smiles.
With a sighing breath, Aah!
Passes out unconscious.
Paul and Peter, cocky and cold,
Show little compassion;
The pains of strangers' souls
They do not take to their hearts.
"Tis fatal"—remarked Schlich—
"Eh eh! but not for me."

(Born 15 April 1832 at zu Wiedensahl)
Doing silly things with language
Wilhelm Busch, theater of cruelty,
Eater of dogs' tails during the 1870 war-famine
How my mother, a genius for military doggerel [*mirliton mirlitaire*], translated him during the war. Just as she also translated the times into puppets. This is how we got a theater of dolls with bodies made of electric wire among which some little Hitler was lashing out.

My father, a marvelous speaker of French, set about learning an invented German language, a kind of hilarious, pantomimed Aliengerman [*autre allemand*]. It is not Joyce but he who initiated me into embodied wordplay [*jeu de mots incarnés*], into transsubstantiation, into signifying acrobatics.

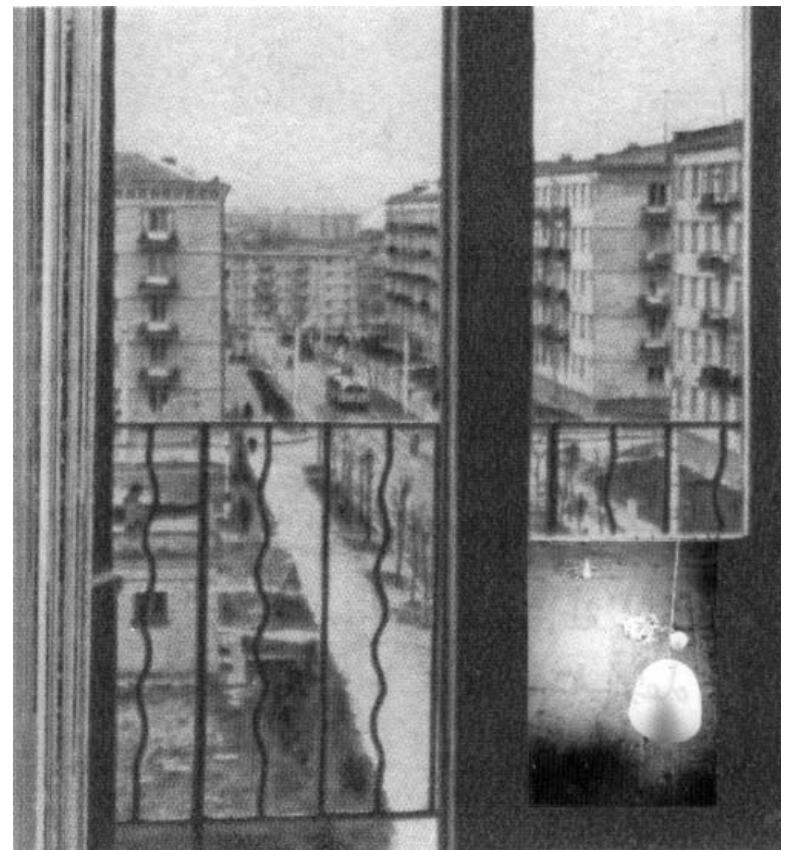
(the story of ichweißnicht—Schweiß)
At table, in Oran, we played (at) languages

And so I was initiated into homophony and homonymy by the sweat [*sueur*] of my father, sweating it out as he was translating himself into my mother's language

Homonymy will also be the place of all metonymies, of all the substitutions operated by this great opus of

substitution. Well, if I already insist on the homonymy, as I will again and again, it is because I would like, much later, I do not know exactly when, during the course of this session, to select this question of homonymy and therefore of untranslatability as a main thread. For homonymy is, as you know, the crux of translation; it is what, in a language, signals and signs the untranslatable. [...] if I was given the time, I could demonstrate scientifically not only that *address* is not, far from it, the only example in this work, not only that there are many other, spectacular ones, but that the entire work of Hélène Cixous is literally, and for this reason, untranslatable, therefore not far from being unreadable, if reading still remains a kind of translating (paraphrase, circumlocution, metaphrase). Yes, I would like later, I do not know when but I hope today, to select this question of homonymy as a main thread [...]

And this miracle would come about in the writing of her own language, whose coming, event, and *arrivée* would lie precisely in this effectiveness, in this *coup*, which abolishes the difference between *making come* and *letting come*. The grace, the address, would lie in making while letting, in making come while letting come, in seeing come without seeing come.



Naming thus the writing of her language, I ask myself whether I am not already summoning, before her father, her mother, whose presence radiates over all of us here—and not her mother tongue, which was French, but her mother's language, which she knows like no one else, and in which, as you well know, the difference between *making come* and *letting come* remains at times indistinguishable: *kommen lassen*, means at once *letting come* and *making come*, letting arrive and ordering to come.³

Ichweiß nicht, I do not know how this primal scene of acrobatranslatability which inaugurated my eyes of writing, how I could decide which of my languages was the most motherly, that of my father great specialist of tongue in cheek or that of my mother.

All that took place at the table in Oran, which was always endowed with numerous functions and magical powers and on whose top—yet another theater—one could find now a chicken's skeleton—thanks to which my father taught us the rudiments of anatomy—now a chess game, now the sewing machine called Singer or *Singer* depending on whether one felt on the side of my aping [*singeur*] father or of my mother. The result of these duets, duels, these acrobatics of trapeze artists these wordliftings [*vols de mots à la tire*] is that—to repeat here one of the definitions of deconstruction which J.D. gives of its own

movement: deconstruction is no more of/more than one language [*plus d'une langue*]—we were Babel and already having fun deconstructing our idioms, seasoning them, tossing them, without being able to say which one was the spice which one was spiced.

I feel nostalgia for a language which would speak several languages freely, without apologizing, according to my whim, unexpectedly. It is a dream: this language, we would be several to speak it, this would mean or *want* to say [*voudrait dire*] that the players would have several equally foreign and familiar languages at their disposal. This hardly exists. This is not done. Save for exceptions, of course, like *Finnegans Wake*, but I do not know whether Joyce *spoke* Wakese at home. One wipes one's feet apologetically when one feels one is borrowing a word from the neighbours. One is committing one feels a breach of hospitality.

I feel nostalgia for the word *Sehnsucht*, its languid appetites, its phonemes.

To tell the truth I do not feel any nostalgia properly speaking. On the contrary. Using the word nostalgia bothers me, betrays me. What I meant was "yearning."

To come back to my cities and their languages.

Why am I telling you these stories? I feel that the idea of City is my overexcitement my hyperviving. At the beginning of literature there is a city, a city-to-be-destroyed. That's what literature is: to destroy the city.

The destruction of the city. Is it a good thing is it a bad thing? It is a bad thing which *causes* an art. A sorrow that causes. Literature is a field of destruction a field in ruins, the song of ruins, the archive song of ruins.

I should tell you later about the first destroyed bombarded-gutted city I saw, it was London in 1950, it was still eviscerated. There I felt my first emotion of a foreign language in my mouth. First kiss: to speak the other language, to suck its phonemes, to appropriate and snap up, the most common idioms, to enter a language whose walls have collapsed without the effort of knocking at the door. I entered the English language as an innocent conqueror and I helped myself, without plundering.

I loved to say: *gorgeous* or *tremendous*, I revelled with the sounds of visa-words in my throat, in other words these shibboleths through which one is admitted into the camp of a teenage gang, like *grave* [the pits—literally: serious], *cassé* (owned-argument: you're wrong, *you're owned*), cool (for super, great), *ap-cimer* (afternoon and thanks in French back slang)—she rocks—when there's something great, one says oh it's big.

For like *cassé* there's *haché* [minced].

Thirty years ago one would say it sucks, nowadays it's top or not top, even tip top—as my son says but my grandson says it's no longer in.

Grave is used indiscriminately, like a gravy that goes with everything, as it were [à toutes les sauces]. *Grave* is the universal

pejorative.

I'm gonna bash your face in, *kisser* is out of date and replaced by (literally translated) I'm going to put you in misery.

From the most run-down estates come the most powerful phrases. Money: a "bag" [*sac*], a buck said bock and recently in the suburbs: sequin!

It's brilliant: it's mortal. Less literally = it's balls [*c'est de la balle*]. For "to find a job" one says *trouver un taf*—*j'ai du taf* = plenty on my hands—a mutation of "tough."

Mec [bloke] is still used, fortunately for Genet.

One no longer says *nana* [chick], *gonzesse* is back in use.

How can one translate buck top tough or big or cool into English? Since they became native to the lingo spoken in Paris and its northern suburbs [*du 93 ou du 75*]?

From London to Manhattan there will only be one step left later on. London, I say here. I was thirteen. I lived in Golders Green, London. And here's something curious: the fate of this proper noun, which is so proper to England, submitted to translation, like a certain number of other names of capitals, are gallicized whereas other aren't. Why London, why not Berlin or Madrid, why Prague and why not New York City? *And what of Algiers?* I lived in a city brought before a translation tribunal for on-the-spot colonization [*traduite en procès de colonisation*].

I went to Manhattan by sea and in texts. I went there to the letter, to the word. I go to Manhattan as one goes to *Monomotapa*, this

country where the *true friends* live as La Fontaine tells us, if there is such a thing. I go there in pursuit of Joyce and following Kafka. Himself following Karl Rossman on the Hamburg. Me following Benjamin Jonas from Osnabrück, on the *France*, like my grandmother's brother on the *Hamburg*. I am always already in text, when the Statue of Liberty appeared to me in a sudden burst of light, and everything was already written. One cannot talk about Manhattan, one can only try and write it in translation one writes it and that's not it. Manhattan is a non-finite amount of sleep inhabited by dreamers, Manhattan is also Leviathan or Dreamyathan, one tries to dream the dream but it is impossible, one is dreamt, one is the dreamt subject of the dream, and likewise as soon as one enters Manhattan one is metamorphosed into what? Into a walk-on or a puppet in the grand Oklahoma theater one feels like an atom played in a play where millions of atoms bustle about, a word in a cosmogonic Narrative, an ant from Lilliput transported on to Brobdingnag Avenue (i.e. as Fatima "translated" it: Broadingway Av.). A walk-on in the Citiest of Cities, the City itself and the Figure-City of any City, like the City big with more than one City, the Old-Young, promised and threatened one, seducing and impregnable, eminent therefore vulnerable.

—it is on this word that this text was cruelly interrupted in October 2004 by Jacques Derrida's death.

I went there so often with Jacques Derrida or at the same time as Derrida, we were going there, that is to say by plane on 9th October 2004, during the whole of September we said to each other and

wondered, shall we make this journey to New York City can we do it and by dint of wondering and conjuring up we made the journey a hundred times without doing so in reality.

We had already "outlived" Nine Eleven we had suffered it, thought it, turned it inside out in every direction, we had transformed the two towers we loved into ghost characters in our works

yet another loss of a member of our body, of a family member. Then I lost Jacques Derrida my double, my twin, my selfsame. One believes one has lost everything. But one can still lose what one has lost. One can still lose even more. I have never been to New Orleans. And yet I lost it. Yet another city which not only its inhabitants lose but us too, yet another buried Babel, another destroyed Troy, another city not to be forgotten. Another Chicago burnt in order to be reborn from its ashes. If Jacques Derrida were here we would have circulated amongst us the legend of N.O., we would have deconstructed the No, relaunched the yes to life. I would have reinscribed the *or* [gold] in Orleans in Oran. Each city lost or doomed is the first Jerusalem.

"*Each Time Unique, the End of the World*" [a book whose English title is *The Work of Mourning*], says my friend. There are lots of "unique times." How can what is *unique* be numerous?

Because we are the subjects of memory and of metaphor. There is only one city. There is only one mother. Yes. But each city bears within itself the face of another city, each city is haunted by another city.

Because we are beings, actors or spectators, or both, who officiate at the *Sacrificial Scene* which the *world* is, as Shakespeare used to say

Why did I suddenly decide to speak to you about Cities, in a place which is dedicated to art, to the search for the secrets of creation?

Because the work, the ideal, dreamt work, does not exist without its stage, its support, its subjectile, its earth. The "stage" of the visual work of art is double: 1) the work (painting, photo, installation, sculpture, etc.) is born in a genealogy, in a vast time, a sort of library-landscape which remembers-and-forgets, which keeps and brings back to life all the previous works. 2) The other stage is its genetic geography, its spatial context, its urban, political site.

We are heirs and haunted, unknowingly. We are the descendants of a body-city. What I do, or dream, or live, what I flee from or find back in Chicago as well as in Mnahattan results from the cross between my cities and my lives. I found and lost beings in Chicago, I found myself and lost myself in Chicago. In Chicago I am both Chicagoing and Chicagone by necessity. And what shall I say about New Orleans? Beyond the thousands of political reflections which spring from the catastrophe, there is the specter of the Flood (I wrote a lot about the Flood) and the themes of chaos and hospitality. It is the twentieth time in my existence that I have to return a figure to a city and its inhabitants, that is to say to a shattered, disjoined, exiled people. We owe New Orleans a reply. We must invent it. Politically of course, and

artistically. Not forget it. Not bury it. Translate it. Recall it. Continue to live it. *Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich Tragen*. We must work *towards* the end. With the end, by transfiguring and traversing it.

Translation by Laurent Milesi

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 5-6 (tr. slightly modified).
2. Jacques Derrida, "Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction 'relevante'?", *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1999, p. 46 (tr. mine).
3. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, tr., with additional notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 65-67.

Vera's Room
Maria Chevska





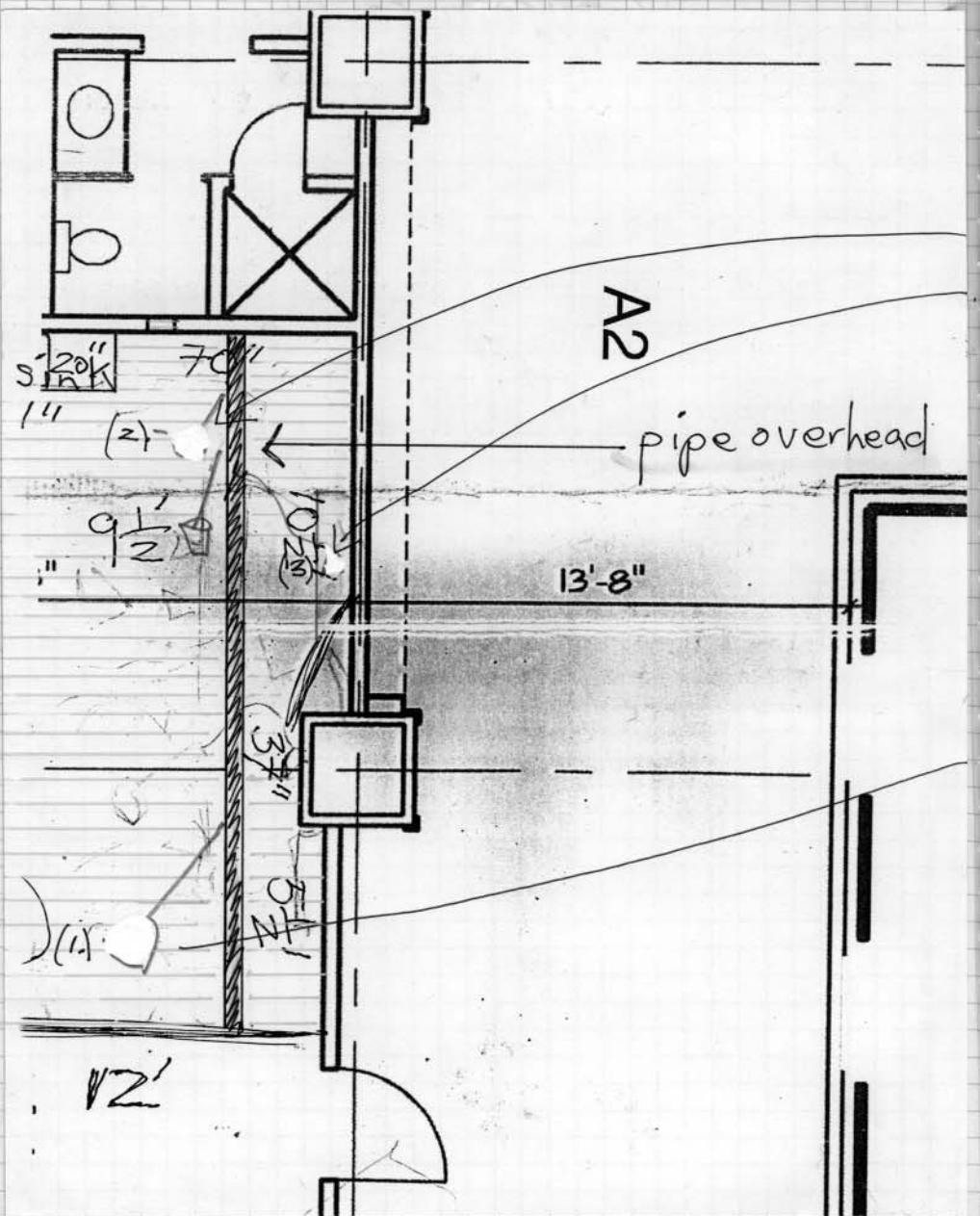








16.



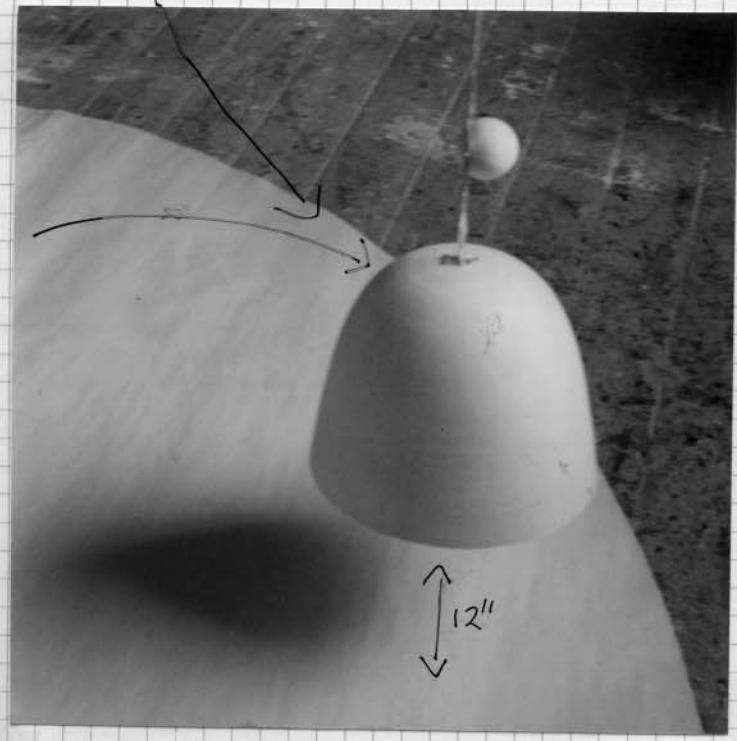
17.

3

Forms: (as) Light-shades
suspended from overhead
pipe.

- (1) 12" from floor
 - (2) circle - from bucket on floor over pipe above. 1' above head-height
 - (3) small cone pulled onto desk.

(1.)



Villes Promises
Hélène Cixous

En hommage à l'auteur de Dublin, qui fut mon chasseur et mon gibier pendant tant d'années, je veux dire au voleur de Dublin à son traducteur, et son *transhater*, en guise d'exergue je ferai mes premiers pas en Villes par un petit détour du côté de *Finnegans Wake* où nous attend p. 301 un air de nostalgie pour Trieste. Trieste, la triple ville au moins où Joyce tout jeune était passe-langue à l'école Berlitz.

Dear and he went on to scribble gentlemine born,
milady bread, he would pen for her, he would pine for her,
how he would patpun fun for all with his frolicky frowner so
and his glumsome grinner otherso. And how are you,
waggy ? My animal his sorrafool ! **And trieste, ah trieste**
ate I my liver ! Se non é vero son travatore. O jerry ! He
was soso, harriot all ! He was sadfellow, steifel ! He was
mistermysterion. Like a purate out of pensionee with a
gouvernament job

Sur ce je pourrais arrêter ici ma conférence, car tout est pluridit d'un coup, comment une ville en est une autre comment une langue parle toujours plus d'une autre langue, que Babel n'est pas babattue, et qu'il y a toujours plus d'un animal en train de remuer au bout d'une queue, et comment su en tant que chien je me ronge et me mange, moi-même mon os, en tant que vautour et Prométhée en même temps je me déchiquète mon foie.

Villes promises.

Je suis d'Oran. Je traduis : je suis d'Hors En. Je vais d'Or en Hors. Je traduis : je vais d'Hors en Hors. Pour commencer je suis du hors. Je suis à la lettre et à la voix. Ensuite je suis un être adorant. Je pourrais prendre toute ma vie par ses lettres d'or. Les lettres me sont arrivées avant le livre. Les premières lettres, les premiers sons ont fait ville, terre, famille pour moi. Je ne peux distinguer, depuis que je sens et me tourne à penser, les théâtres des villes des théâtres des mots. Mots et villes s'échangent, la ville fait théâtre à mots, les mots font lieu, cité, mines. Le mot cité m'a toujours incitée à chanter chercher double. J'écris : je cite. Autrement dit : je traduis. Je suis née en traduction, avec traduction.

Tout ce que j'écris et dis, ici,—d'abord je dis dans ma tête, aussitôt, de ma tête aux doigts à stylo j'écris, tout ce qui *sort* et que je sors de En, en cet an 2004, tout ce qui aujourd'hui se tient devant moi hors de moi, se tenait il y a encore quelques années—en retrait, derrière ma pensée, avant moi. Je ne pensais pas ville, j'y étais, et j'étais avec elle, avec mes villes. Nous ne faisions qu'une ville qui se traduisait en douze villes comme en rêves de villes. Oran et moi nous sommes inséparables. Et pourtant... je cite *Savoir, Voiles* :

Elle devait passer tous les jours au large du château. L'aide venait de la statue de Jeanne d'Arc. La grande femme en or brandissait sa lance flamboyante et lui montrait la direction du château. En suivant l'indication d'or elle finissait par y arriver. Jusqu'au jour où. Un matin sur la place il n'y avait rien. La statue n'était pas là. Il n'y avait pas trace de château. A la place du saint cheval une pénombre mondiale. Tout était perdu. Chaque pas augmenterait l'égarement. Elle resta pétrifiée, privée de l'aide de sa statue. Elle se vit arrêtée au sein de l'invisible. De toutes parts elle voyait ce rien pâle sans limites, c'était comme si par un faux pas elle était entrée vivante chez la mort. L'ici néant durait, et personne. Elle saisie, tombée debout dans l'étendue insondable d'un voile, et voilà tout ce qui restait de la ville et du temps. La catastrophe s'était produite en silence.

Et maintenant qui était-elle ? Seule. Un petit clou de travers dans l'intervalle.

Plus tard dans l'intervalle quelqu'un abruptement surgi du rien lui affirma que les choses n'avaient pas fui du tout. Elles étaient à leur place assurément. Ainsi c'était elle qui ne voyait pas la statue ni le château ni les rebords du monde ni l'autobus ?¹

On le voit, elle ne voit pas où elle est. Elle est tellement perdue qu'elle est à la troisième personne d'elle-même, loin de moi et de je.

Elle est perdue dans la ville perdue. De toute la ville ne reste qu'un reste d'Or. Elle est dehors dedans. Et ce sera toujours comme ça.

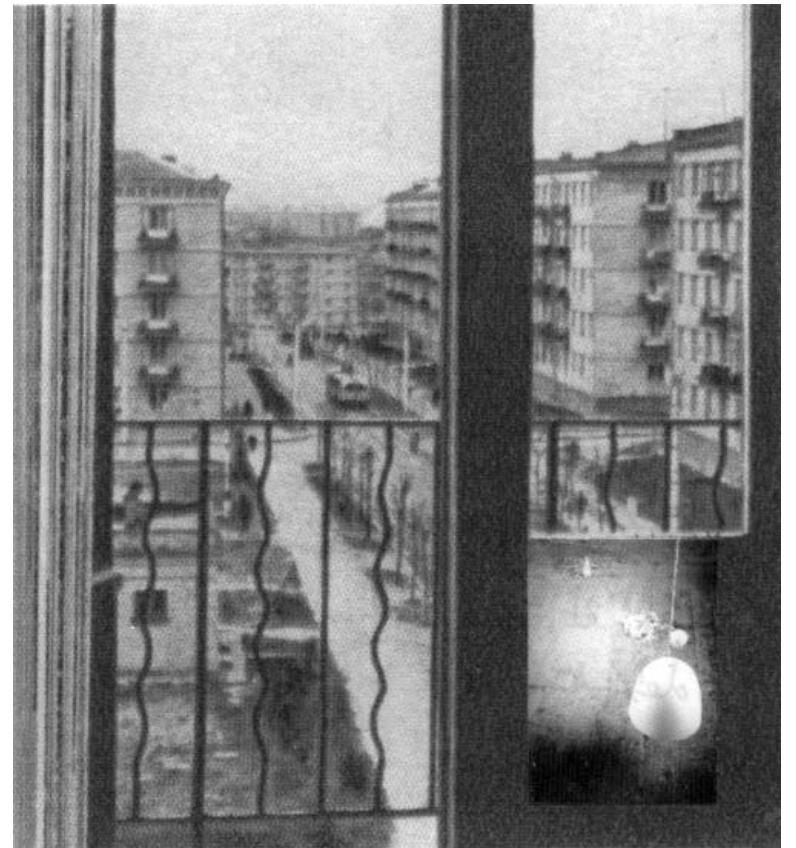
Et le mot *ville* en français, ce cadeau, pas *cité*, pas *city*, pas *Stadt*, non *ville* pas *vile*, *villa*, pas *domus*, pas *domus aurea*, ni maison du maître ni maison de dieu, mais *villa* des plaisirs. *Ville-villa*. Ville agrandissement extension de *villa*. Nous, en Algérie, nous vécûmes à la *villa* du Clos-Salembier en haut d'Alger. On disait *villa* en Algérie. On dorait nos maisons avec jardin du mot romain. J.D. *villa* d'El-Biar

Plus tard j'ai appelé ma maison avec jardin d'Arcachon *villa Eva*. C'était naturel. Une ville dans une ville.

Et pourtant entre ville et moi il y a toujours eu voile. J'ai dit Oran en premier lieu, comme on dirait Ouranos ou Gaïa. Mais Oran a toujours déjà été compliquée occupée contenue affabulée et par qui ? et par quoi ? Par Osnabrück.

Mais avant de revenir à Oran, je vais faire l'appel des villes qui vivent en moi et qui ont fait leurs nids leurs noeuds leurs enceintes et citadelles dans mon œuvre : de manière congénitale d'abord, puis parfois cultivées, d'abord souterraines puis de plus en plus surterraines jusqu'à prendre la tête, la direction des opérations d'écriture et cela totalement à mon insu. Elles étaient là à fomenter pendant des dizaines d'années jusqu'au jour où il y a eu Osnabrück.

Mais avant et depuis toujours il y avait Alger, Pompéi Manhattan,



Prague, autrement dit : Jérusalem, Babel, Ur, et même un peu plus tard, Elsinor et ses remparts. Toutes mes villes ont leurs doubles mythiques, leurs modèles et mes racines.

Je vois que j'ai omis Paris. Cela demandera une explication. Et ne pas oublier Strasbourg. Qu'est-ce qui fait ville ? La promesse. Que promet la promesse ? La menace, le paradis, la ruine, la perte, la retrouvaille, le salut, la destruction, la fin de l'errance, hélas la fin de l'errance, la fin de l'histoire, non l'expulsion, l'interdit, l'exil, *Tristia*, *Tristia* d'Ovide, *Tristia* de Mandelstam, le sans arrivée, le sans-retour, le sans-retrouver. On ne revient pas, pas en réalité. A force de ne pas (se) retrouver en ne revenant pas et en revenant, on produit des villes à revenir en rêve, des villes à l'horizon, des Villes à répétition. A force de répéter les noms des Villes désirées et jamais espérées on cause le mouvement de la littérature. L'an prochain à Venise. Mais pour arriver à Venise tu devras remplir douze conditions et payer le prix fort de l'entrée : tu n'iras à Venise que sans Albertine. C'est le choix des deux coffrets. On entre en ville à moitié-mort.

Voilà qu'un livre s'est appelé *Osnabrück*. Alors ça on ne l'a pas fait exprès. Les noms je ne les donne pas, ils sont donnés au livre, et très tard, une fois le livre parti de moi, par un dieu ou un autre. Voilà qu'un livre portait le nom d'une ville. Et inversement. Le livre est peut-être une ville ? Certes il existe des livres qui sont des genres de villes. Mémoires, archives, plans, monuments. *Ulysses* « se passe » comme on dit dans Dublin qui passe dans *Ulysses*. Au passage, Ulysse le

personnage homérisé et odysséisé Dublin dans un mouvement imperceptible de revanche, de colonisation spectrale, d'élévation et d'abaissement qui nous rappelle d'abord qu'une ville n'est une cité que si elle porte en ses flancs ceints de remparts les traces d'une autre ville, son ancêtre, son modèle archaïque. Une ville digne de chant site *cite* toujours une autre ville.

Ce qui est beau et surprenant c'est que lorsqu'une ville meurt pour renaître, il advient d'elle comme des morts tibétains ou égyptiens. Elle voyage, transmigre, vient se réincarner dans une ville très lointaine, mais qui peut la loger dans son sein, c'est-à-dire la recevoir en traduction, par des accointances ou connivences, lesquelles sont soit topologiques soit thématiques soit littérales, et très souvent de petite taille, minimes, en apparence.

Voilà donc qu'un livre s'est avancé sous le titre *Osnabrück* et le personnage qui l'habite c'est ma mère, Eve Klein. Osnabrück nom de ma mère en tant que ville natale. Nom d'une ville, petite, du Hanovre. Nom : étranger. Les titres de mes livres me restent toujours étrangers, comme les villes—quelle que soit la façon dont je fais comme si j'habitais. Une ville me prend. Me capture. Me chasse. J'ai peur des villes.

C'était une ville. Maintenant quand je dis Osnabrück je ne sais plus si je suis dans le livre ou dans la ville.

Ce livre a failli ne pas s'appeler *Osnabrück*. C'eût été un suicide de livre. Car, je tiens à le dire, un livre tient d'une certaine manière tout

entier dans son titre.

Oui, c'est le mystère : le titre fait l'être. Le titre—en tout cas pour moi,—est la traduction essentielle et sublime du livre. Or j'ai failli ne pas. Et pourquoi ? Après coup j'analyse : Osnabrück : nom à résonance barbare. Comme Babel sonne bien dans toutes les langues. Osnabrück : imprononçable en français. Comme Cixous. Osnabrück Cixous, quel nom ! De plus en plus étranger, brut, brück, cix ciseau... O. Phonèmes. Onomatopées ! Je me suis raccrochée in extremis au principe de loyauté antilâcheté qui me commande. — C'est quoi ça ? Eh bien justement : c'est mon trésor et mon héritage. Je note que je n'ai pas de livre au titre d'Oran. je ne l'ai pas fait exprès.

J'ai dit que je reviendrais à Oran, du moins dans ces pages. J'y reviendrai.

Là-dessus arrive *Manhattan*. C'est alors que cette insistante des villes, des noms de livres de villes de villelivres, a attiré mon attention. Il m'est apparu en fiction ce que je savais et pratiquais depuis toujours au théâtre : les lieux sont des personnages puissants et décisifs. Ils font la moitié du travail du destin. Ce sont des déités, des puissances actives cachées. Les lieux nous archivent et nous agissent. Hasard et nécessité. Naître et mourir. On tombe pour naître, en telle ou telle ville et tout est joué. Pour mourir on peut y penser. Montaigne voulait mourir à cheval, merveilleuse mort sans toit. Moi, je ne sais pas encore. *Manhattan*, sous-titre : Lettres de la préhistoire. Manhattan serait donc le site et la cité de la préhistoire de mon histoire ? Je pourrai le penser.

Elle pourrait être la première de mes villes-ruines, le lieu des premiers runes serait donc américain.

Aussitôt je me demande quelle est la ville de la préhistoire de ma préhistoire.

Aucune ville dans mes livres et dans ma vie n'est simple. Quelle est la première ville ? il y en a plusieurs, évidemment. Disons que ce serait Troie. Il y a au moins trois villes dans chacune de mes villes.

Je suis née à Oran et j'y ai vécu dans une double ville. Pour des raisons historiques Osnabrück était venue s'abriter dans Oran. Sur ma double ville il y avait Guerre et l'ombre Pétain avec Hitler. Dans notre appartement rue Philippe (lequel ?) je ne savais jamais si j'étais à Oran, Algérie, ou à Osnabrück, Allemagne. J'ai dit : je suis d'Oran. Je devrais dire : je suis d'Oran avec Osnabrück, d'Oran en et hors Osnabrück. Une impossibilité possibilisée en un lieu très précis, 54 rue Philippe au 2^{ème} étage.

Dans Oran Osnabrück cachée Oran glissée dans Osnabrück je vivais dedans dehors et je vis encore, dans ma première maison où habitaient en accord avec la cruelle réalité les chrétiens les juifs et les musulmans, tous fraîchement exilés et réfugiés, dedans c'était le royaume de mon père le docteur juste, et dans la rue c'était la France un mot devant lequel, tous les habitants du 54, les Espagnols les Juifs (l'Arabe) français, les allemands juifs l'Arabe passaient des examens d'identité. Dedans le 54 il y avait une grâce.

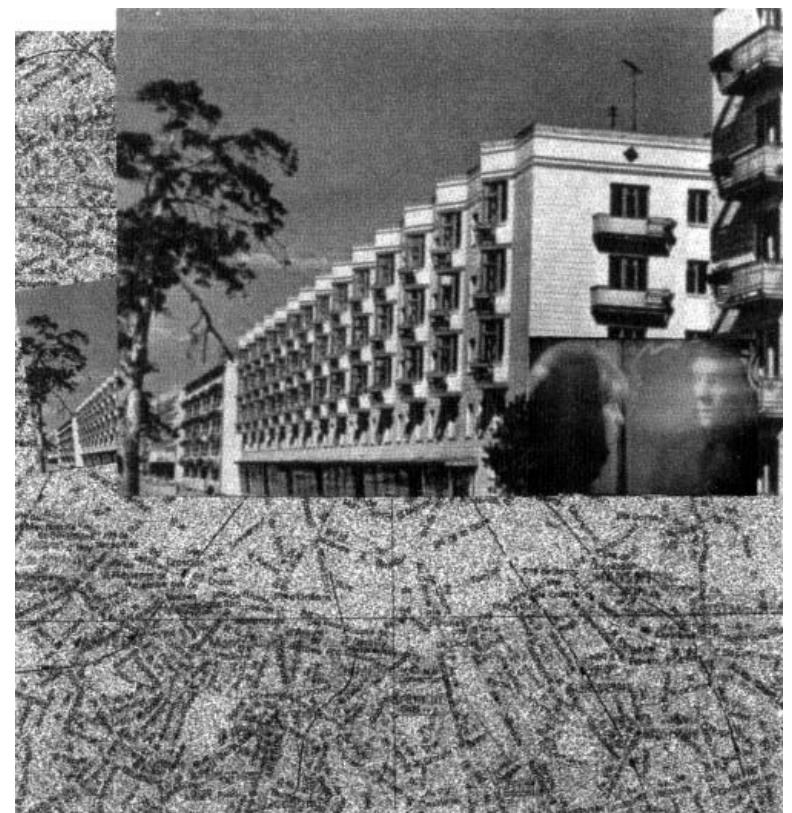
J'étais dans l'une et l'autre scène à la fois et séparément le nord

dans le sud, la femme dans l'homme, le masculin dans le féminin, ensemble et séparément. Ma mère et ma grand-mère allemandes racontaient Osnabrück. Les escaliers des immeubles d'Osnabrück empruntaient les escaliers d'Oran. J'ai décrit la structure mythique de ma ville natale dans *Osnabrück*.

Au moment où je suis née à Oran, j'ai été adoptée par Osnabrück. Mon entendement a commencé par deux O et deux A. Je vivais en Algérie Allemagne ou en Allemagne Algérie anagrammatiquement, en plusieurs langues. Avec *A/*, aleph, alfa commencent mes pays. Tout a toujours été scène et théâtre. C'est le propre de la Ville : La Ville est un théâtre, à la porte duquel se dresse le lieu où se (re)joue le drame, c'est-à-dire le théâtre. Le théâtre, celui de Shakespeare, celui d'Eschyle, celui de la guerre, celui qui traduit le destin de la ville en œuvre d'art et de révolte est une hutte qui *se dresse*, s'adressant aux habitants endormis dans la ville, juste à la porte de la ville, contre le mur sourd de la ville. Le Théâtre qui est mis dehors, le prophète, adresse ses avertissements au théâtre sourd et aveugle qui loge dedans les constructions élevées à l'intérieur.

Ma ville double à double enfance avait un centre, une scène centrale. Il se trouve que ma famille a vécu deux fois au premier rang des fauteuils qui donnent sur la scène. Une fois dans l'immeuble de Nikolaiort à Osnabrück. Une fois 54 rue Philippe, deuxième galerie à droite face à la scène de la Place d'Armes.

Tous les Algériens connaissent la Place d'Armes. On ne peut



imaginer plus théâtre, plus arabogrec plus shakespeareien. La toile de fond : un hôtel de ville gardé par deux lions. A droite, le théâtre, à gauche au fond, la Pharmacie de Platon, tenue par mes pharmagiciens, à gauche côté cour le Cercle Militaire où tout ce qui me fait, rage, stupéfaction éthique prévoyance etc. politique, m'est arrivé

En haut du côté des cintres « La montagne », sur laquelle est assise santa crousse... Le marabout etc.

Thème d'Oran-théâtre : « comment entrer ? », un thème à double scène et double intrigue, l'une reflétant, relevant traduisant l'autre : comment entrer dans la ville désirée toujours introuvable toujours jamais là voilée commandée par un *fortda* ? Et comment entrer parmi les habitants de la ville parmi lesquels on est sans être on se trouve mais barré, barré de barreaux, raturé, jeté craché.

Mon thème : comment entrer, comment *arriver* à entrer, comment sortir du dehors dans lequel on est enfermé à l'intérieur du dedans ?

Le thème de Kafka : comment sortir du buisson ardent dans lequel on n'est pas entré ? Mon thème : on a beau débarquer sur la côte de l'autre côté de la mer, ou atterrir au centre du pays, on n'arrive pas.

C'est le thème de la traduction : on n'arrive pas. Il y a la langue d'arrivée, on l'arpente, on la loue, on est locataire on adopte on est adopté, on y goûte les délices du dépaysement on n'est pas de son sang. Du moins c'est mon cas. L'idée de « faire » une traduction

m'effraie. L'idée de faire passer un texte dans un autre, d'assurer (comme dit Jacques Derrida) la survie du corps de l'original :

Elle assurerait ainsi la *survie* du corps de l'original (*survie* au double sens que lui donne Benjamin dans *La Tâche du traducteur, fortleben* et *überleben* : vie prolongée, vie continuée, *living on*, mais aussi vie par-delà la mort).

N'est-ce pas ce que fait une traduction ? Est-ce qu'elle n'assure pas ces *deux* survies en perdant la chair au cours d'une opération de change ? en élevant le signifiant vers son sens ou sa valeur, mais tout en gardant la mémoire endeuillée et endettée du corps singulier, du corps premier, du corps unique qu'elle élève et sauve et relève ainsi ? Comme il s'agit d'un travail, voire, nous le disions, d'un travail du négatif, cette relevance est un travail du deuil, au sens le plus énigmatique de ce mot, qui mérite une réélaboration que j'ai tentée ailleurs mais à laquelle je dois renoncer ici. La mesure de la relève ou de la relevance, le prix d'une traduction, c'est toujours ce qu'on appelle le sens, voire la valeur, la garde, la vérité comme garde (*Wahrheit, bewahren*) ou la valeur du sens, à savoir ce qui, se libérant du corps, s'élève au-dessus de lui, l'intériorise, le spiritualise, le garde en mémoire.

Mémoire fidèle et endeuillée. On n'a même pas à dire que la traduction garde la valeur du sens ou doit y relever le corps : le concept même, la valeur du sens, le sens du sens, la valeur de la valeur gardée naît de l'expérience endeuillée de la traduction, de sa possibilité même.²

L'expérience du Cercle Militaire

Il y avait deux mondes et je le savais, (elle le savait) ce que je ne savais pas encore, c'est qu'il m'était impossible à jamais de passer (vivre) dans l'autre monde, impossible comme interdit même si (d'aventure) *appartenir*

même si, d'aventure, par extraordinaire, je me retrouvais ou me retrouve du jour au lendemain *dans* le monde de l'autre côté, même si par *extraordinaire* l'interdiction était levée en apparence, et que je pouvais croire aux messages des sens : croire qu'un portail s'ouvrirait que j'entrais dans le jardin, que j'étais dedans,

même si je pouvais croire et j'avais cru qu'en entrant dans Canaan je devenais une habitante de l'intérieur de Canaan. Ici pouvais-je croire aurait donc cessé ma définition d'étrangère, de dissemblable. Le dehors qui était en moi, était désormais resté dehors, hors du jardin. Cet être – du hors, je pouvais croire l'avoir déposé dans une armoire du dehors, cet état de bannissement de naissance se serait arrêté au portail, avais-je cru, il suffira, il va suffire pensais-je que j'entre dans le

jardin, que je fasse quelques pas pour que la mutation intérieure suive le changement déjà effectué par mon enveloppe personnelle

Disons que je m'attendais à une naissance de moi, à naître dans le jardin, à ma mise au monde, à m'y mettre, je me sentais pleine de promesse et d'une exultation anticipatoire, je m'accroupissais dans les allées de terre grasse bordées de plates-bandes fleuries et ça ne venait pas. La métamorphose soudaine féérique ne venait pas.

J'ai passé tant de fois l'examen d'entrée dans la langue ou les codes de l'autre. Chaque tentative spectaculaire, manquée, en passant par la voix, par les signes par les discours, j'ai raconté dix fois et je raconterai encore dix ou cent fois mes essais mes échecs mes obstinations car de ces moments traumatiques on tirera plus tard toute la blessure et toute la littérature. Comment à trois ans j'ai été initiée dedans le Cercle Militaire à Oran à autant de philosophie négative qu'il y en a dans Dostoïevski, j'ai été tuée et j'ai tué, j'étais dedans et je n'y étais pas. Comment à quatre ans j'ai eu la gloire de chanter Maréchal nous voilà par plaisir de faire comme tous les autres enfants et comment mon père m'a exorcisée, comment à cinq ans j'ai vu entrer en pompe ceux qui entrent par la force et le droit comme dans Shakespeare, les Américains De Gaulle Fortinbras Henri V Giraud tous caracolant en chars et chevaux juste devant mes sandales. Comment j'étais au balcon avec une poule à mon côté, *la poule et son œuf*, comme une divinité scandinave qui suit les événements humains mondiaux en pleurant d'impuissance. Comment j'ai dansé sur la scène du théâtre d'Oran,

presqu'aveugle en suivant les gros traits de craie tracés pour moi sur le plancher pour que je ne me précipite pas dans la fosse, scène qui a recommencé toute ma vie de marionnette, la dernière fois c'était à la BN il y a deux ans je dansais sur mes (les) paroles, accrochée à mon papier et je ne voyais rien. Comment chaque fois que j'ai été dedans j'étais radicalement dehors, quand je suis entrée dans l'Université je suis entrée par la sortie. Je pourrai ajouter que ce mouvement d'aiguille qui pique passe entre sort repique, ou de poisson, est ma signature destinale. On me trouvera toujours à la porte. Je connais tous les secrets des portes.

Maintenant je vais vous parler du trou dans la porte, cette pupille dans la face de bois par laquelle il faut s'imaginer regarder car c'est en glissant un regard subreptic, furtif, entre tous ces mots merveilleux de la serrurerie psychique, depuis la *seredure* qui serre la clé, petite merveille d'érotisme, jusqu'à *pêne*, gâche, mortaise, toute cette scène que les traducteurs jouent sans arrêt, et qui font de moi une traductrice serrurière-née – c'est donc en se faufilant (métaphore de JD dans *Voiles*) et en se tournant et se retournant que, suivant ma mère enfant à la trace je n'ai cessé de passer d'Oran à Osnabrück d'Osnabrück chez les Niebelungen et retour. Quand ma mère/et donc moi/eûmes six ans, il y eut épiphanie d'Osnabrück par la serrure. Une épiphanie dans le judéomonde. Un jour, nous vîmes, ma mère et donc moi, par le trou de la serrure de la chambre d'Osnabrück toute une gare. Une population de nains s'activait chargeant et déchargeant un train. Puis le train partit. Ce



que ma mère avait cruvoir je crus aussi le voir. Osnabrück c'est *croire avoir vu* et il n'y a aucune différence entre croire voir et voir. D'où venaient ces nains si actifs porteurs de trésors promis non disponibles ? Plus tard j'ai eu ma propre gare, mes trains, la syntaxe, la rhétorique la poétique et une profusion de nains verbaux. Nous avions vu le voyage de la langue. *Avions* dis-je. J'ajouterai l'avion au train, naturellement. De la langue surgissent les billets de transport. Tous ici aujourd'hui, si collés que nous soyons parfois à nos tables, nous sommes en voyage, envoyagés, envoyés nous passons par les serrures des phrases, par les huis des mots.

Deux mots sur Osnabrück. Cette ville a une jumelle : Münster. Dans deux villes à la fois on signa le traité de Westphalie. Ici commence l'Europe. Par la toute petite ville passa tout l'avenir du monde.

Oran Osnabrück villes-mondes, les ai-je jamais vues ? J'ai désiré les voir face-à-face. Je pense n'avoir jamais vu Oran. J'en suis partie. Je ne suis jamais revenue. Reviendrai-je ? Ai-je jamais vu Osnabrück ? C'est l'éénigme. Je crois y avoir été avec Omi ma grand-mère, en 1952, nous étions à nouveau en Allemagne pour la première fois, je crois mais c'est peut-être un rêve, mais le rêve est aussi une réalité

Osnabrück-Jérusalem ou *l'an prochain à Osnabrück*

A partir des années 90 s'est levée la pensée d'aller à Osnabrück voir si j'y suis, ou si j'y fus. Je n'y suis pas allée. Je n'y suis toujours pas allée. Toujours je n'y vais pas. Ce serait terrible si je n'y allais pas me

dis-je ce cerait terrible si j'y allais. Quand j'ai *achevé Osnabrück* (comme dirait Balzac – *Passion dans le désert*) je n'avais plus qu'à ressusciter la petite ville qui s'était transformée en livre de ma mère. C'était la moindre des choses. Mais avant de vous dire ce qu'il advint de mon voyage à Jérusalem Osnabrück je dois vous présenter notre Osnabrück telle que je l'aie vécue par les récits de ma mère et de ma grand-mère. Selon moi c'était une gigantesque ville juive, un Lodz ou un Odessa. Jusqu'au jour où je découvre qu'Osnabrück juive se composa jusqu'au nazisme de 450 personnes environ, une cinquantaine de familles, ce doit être le nombre des familles de *l'Iliade*. J'ai commencé à écrire le livre du reste d'Osnabrück c'était *Benjamin à Montaigne*. Quand j'ai achevé ce reste j'ai dit à ma mère et à sa sœur : l'an prochain à Osnabrück en réalité. Personne ne voulait y aller. Personne n'a dit à personne que personne ne voulait y aller. Nous avons pensé aller à Osnabrück pendant toute une année, et le jour venu de faire les valises, on les a défaites.

Mais pendant un an j'ai eu peur de la fin : la fin de la phrase l'an prochain à Jérusalem. Pendant tout le temps j'avais peur d'aller à Osnabrück et ce n'est pas seulement le livre qui serait achevé, ce serait la vie même. Alors ma mère a dit : Eri (sa sœur) n'a pas envie d'aller à Osnabrück. Et moi non plus. Ça ne nous intéresse pas. Ce jour-là j'ai compris que pour elles aussi le retour au commencement c'est la fin, le pèlerinage sur sa propre tombe. Ça nous a soulagées mais aucune n'a rien dit. On a tout laissé hors traduction. Je pourrais écrire un livre sur l'impossible, le différé, le promis, l'espéré, l'année prochaine, je pourrais

écrire l'année prochaine, on verra.

Je n'ai jamais voulu aller à Jérusalem-Jérusalem. J'avais quelques villes où ne pas aller. Parmi lesquelles Prague, Pompéi, Jérusalem délivrée. Des villes trop précieuses dans le fantasme pour qu'on se risque à aller les couler au fond de la réalité. Dix mille fois en pensée, en rêve, en imagination. Venise pour Proust, ça lui coûte combien ? D'y aller ? De ne pas y aller.

Il y a longtemps que je sais qu'on ne va nulle part. Ce sont les villes ou les pays qui vous arrivent ou ne vous arrivent pas. Les Villes sont des lettres fatidiques. Elles n'arrivent que perdues. Elles n'arrivent que posthumes

Si je n'ai jamais de-mes-yeux-de chair vu mes villes, je les aurai du moins « vues » de mes oreilles, j'ai habité leurs noms, leurs sons, je les ai goûtes par tous les sens, parcourues en toutes lettres, j'ai tout reçu en or en ange, j'ai sucé leur jus, leurs os, je n'ai pas habité le nom de Paris, cela ne m'est jamais venu à l'esprit, j'ai pleuré énormément à Oran, je n'ai pas ri à Paris jamais, je n'y suis pas arrivée je n'y ai jamais été et je n'en reviens pas. Une de mes vies a fini par se passer à Ris-Orangis. Les noms-mots sont nos commandants fatidiques, on ne peut pas leur échapper. Avant de fuir Paris comme je le fais chaque jour en secret, je dois quand même lui reconnaître une dette. C'est à Paris, non à Alger, ni à New York, que j'ai rencontré J.D.. Nous étions tous les deux en exil à Paris, tous les deux terrifiés, chacun de son côté, tous les deux

cachés sous le ventre de la langue française pour essayer d'échapper au Cyclope. Cette condition épouvantable avec son remède rusé a dû contribuer à nous rapprocher. Ce que nous redoutions par dessus tout c'était le mot de France, nous voulions le français la langue française et ses abondances géniales mais pas la France. Nous étions chacun différemment des pariahs cachés passés d'une clandestinité à l'autre à bord du Ville d'Alger. Les Villes sont aussi des bateaux.

Y a-t-il plus forte métaphore, un bateau qui est une ville ou plutôt un ville qui va et vient d'un bord à l'autre. On quittait la ville d'Alger pour la ville d'Alger le sol tressaillait, on ne savait pas que l'on était en métamorphose. L'être en transe que nous étions vomissait tripes et boyaux, on changeait de corps.

Plus tard pour me rendre aux USA pour la première fois, et comme il était dit qu'ici là-bas j'entrerais en littérature, je me voyageai entre deux vies sur *le France*. Un pas-que-beau.

Mes langues : je ne peux pas dire comme J.D. que : je n'ai qu'une langue, et elle n'est pas la mienne.

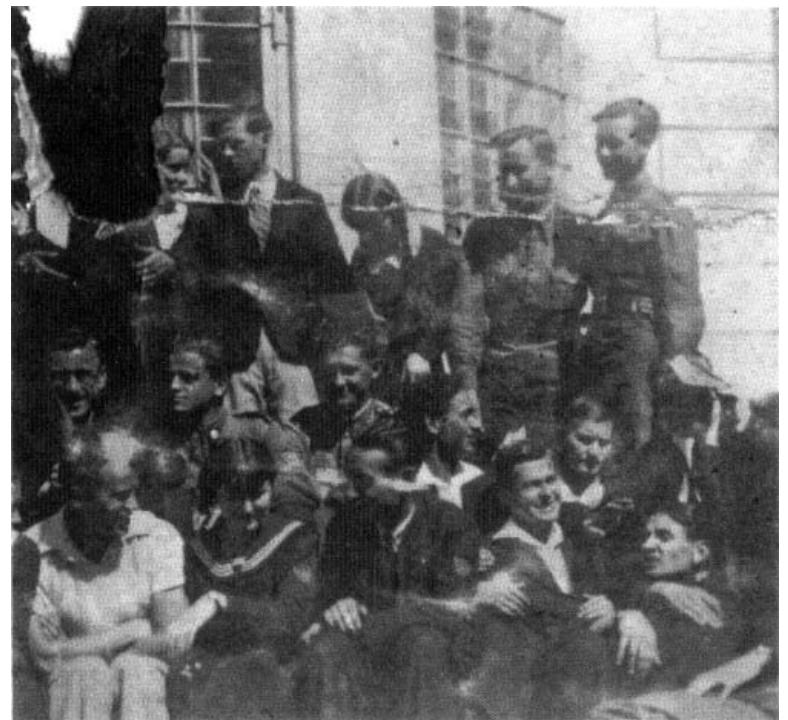
J'ai vécu dans une maison à langues, au premier étage l'espagnol Mme Rico, au deuxième l'allemand avec le français, au troisième le français avec l'espagnol, au quatrième l'hispano-français de Mr Emile et Mme Alice Carisio, pharmaciens frère soeur, fabricants de philtres, liqueurs pour la Mairie d'Oran, sous l'escalier l'arabe de

Mohamed, sur les galeries l'espagnol, toutes ces langues avaient un goût d'épices, les cuisines et les langues communiquaient, par chance j'avais envie de toutes sauf des aubergines je ne sais pas pourquoi, et des têtes de mérou je sais pourquoi. Je mangeais du chou en allemand Kraut et des carottes au cumin en hispanoarabe. Je pourrais—je devrais faire une (conférence) sur ma façon de faire la cuisine. C'est exactement comme ma façon de travailler la langue. Je peux dire que je n'ai jamais désiré manger-parler pur français. J'adore et je pratique le français langue étrangère,

Mon père aussi (le Larousse)—Je sème à tous vents

Je n'ai jamais fait que traduire c'est-à-dire vouloir goûter le goût de *tous* les goûts, essayer tous les mots, inventer de nouveaux mélanges, rapprocher les extrêmes, aller aux racines, remonter aux sources des sources. Puisque nous ne pouvons plus parler-jouir dans la langue de Montaigne, sauf par jouissance solitaire, Montaigne qui écrivait latin grec italien forain en français, alors il nous faut forainer en avant et de tous les côtés.

J'ai toujours, d'enfance, eu l'oreille à l'huis des mots parce qu'ils m'étaient tous également étrangers, le français ni plus ni moins que l'allemand. Encore aujourd'hui comme à Oran et au Clos-Salembier, j'entends leurs déclinaisons, leurs dégradés, leurs articulations comme lorsqu'ils furent prononcés, un jadis, pour la première fois. Encore aujourd'hui je suis élancée comme à Oran dans la chasse au Snark et quel ravissement lorsque j'apprends en/fin d'une chevauchée que le



Snark est un Boojum, « after all » comme dit Lewis Carroll. Mon grand-père Samuel Cixous qui passa à onze ans de la rue pieds nus au comptoir fonda le premier jeu de signifiant-sans-le-faire-exprimé de la famille en ouvrant une chapellerie à l'enseigne de HighLife. Iglif. Premiers hiéroglyphes. Plus tard j'eus du mal puis du plaisir à passer de mes bijoux de langues à l'anglais et l'allemand scolaire. Ce qu'étaient les langues si vivantes et drolatiques pour moi refusa d'abord de se laisser orthographier. Je commençai donc et j'ai fini par avoir toujours deux langues à jouer, l'une venue à moi par air l'autre shemblable et freer m'arrivant par lettre.

Connaissez-vous Wilhelm Busch ? Quand j'avais six ans à Oran Wilhelm Busch a été mon autre Bible. Homère, la Bible, Wilhelm Busch.

Wilhelm Busch c'est l'Illiade.

Wilhelm Busch c'est Vilaine Bouche.

(Je l'ai adoré) Wilhelm Busch c'est Hokusai Daumier Hugo Blake et Chaplin pour enfants et criminels

Max und Moritz, autrement dit mon frère et moi, nous sommes plus d'une fois tombés dans l'impénétrable Busch en tant que vauriens ou voyous dirait J.D. et en tant que chiens. Laissez-moi vous présenter brièvement Plisch et Plum nos semblables à quatre pattes :

1^{er} chapitre—

Une pipe à la bouche

Sous le bras deux jeunes chiens

Que portait le vieux Kaspar Schlich
Il peut fu-mer terriblement
Mais bien que sa pipe rougeoie
Oh que son esprit est froid
« Pour quoi » disaient ses paroles
À quoi me sert cette espèce ?
Me fait-elle peut-être plaisir ?
Mais pas du tout me dis-je
Mais lorsque quequ'chose me plaît pas
Débarrasse-t'en c'est mon principe

Devant l'étang il s'arrête tranquille
Parce qu'il veut les noyer pile.
Angoissés remuent les deux petits
Quadroupèdes avec leurs jambes
Car une voix intérieure leur parle
Cette histoire je m'y fie pas

Hups ! L'un s'envole déjà d'un grand arc

Pouf ! Le voilà qui glisse dans la vague

Pouf

Hups Le deuxième derrière lui.

Pouf ! Plum. Sur ce il disparaît

Bon débarras ! Bien fait ! s'écrie Kaspar Schlieh
En fumant il s'éloigna.

Mais ici comme souvent, ça vient tout autrement
qu'on croit
Paul et Peter qui justement
Se sont dénudés pour un bain
Avaient surveillé tranquillement en cachette
Ce que le méchant Schlich faisait

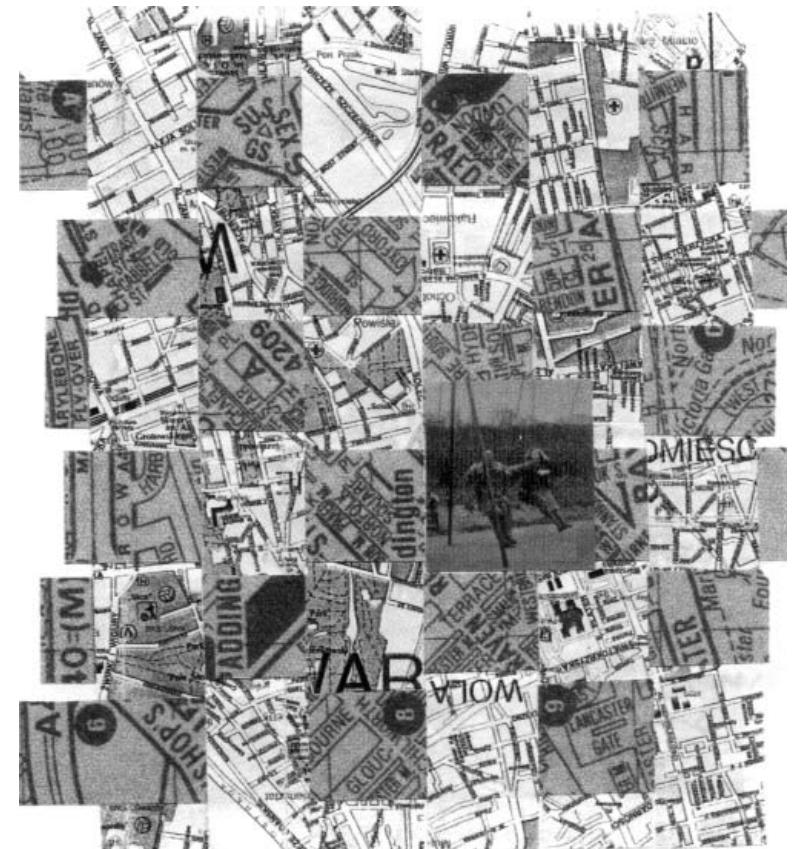
Rapides et comme des grenouilles
Tous les deux sautent dans l'étang
Chaam porte dans sa main
Un petit chien (au sec) sur le bord.
Plisch ! crie Paul ainsi je nomme le mien
Plum ! c'est comme ça que Peter appelle le sien
Et c'est ainsi que Plisch et Plum portent
tous les deux leurs chiots.
Vite mais en toute prudence
vers la maison paternelle

2^{ème} chapitre—

Papa Fittig fidèle et pacifique
Mama Fittig—très gemütlich—das wort gemütlich
[on peut pas le traduire en français]
Sont assis bras dessus bras dessous geschmiegt
penchés
Sans soucis et bien contents
Peu avant leur dîner du soir
Encore un peu devant la maison
Car la journée était douce
Et ils attendent les enfants
Regarde. Les voilà tous les deux
Plisch et Plum sont aussi là.
Cela lui dit rien à Fittig.
Viollement dit : mais alors là je dois me
demander !
Mais mama avec une tendre mine
Fittig, le prie-t-elle, laisse-leur ce plaisir
Préparé se trouvait le lait
frais du soir déjà sur la table
Gaîment se hâtent vers la maison
Plisch et Plum rapides en avant
Ah ! Les voilà sans honte
Au milieu de la crème sucrée.

Et annoncent leur bien-être
par un sonore claquement de langue
Schlich qui regarde à travers la fenêtre
Cria tout étonné : Eh bien regardez-moi ça!
Ça c'est évidemment fâcheux
Mais pas pour moi.

3^{ème} chapitre—
Paul et Peter pas touchés
Juste comme rien ne se serait passé
Se reposent dans leur chambre à coucher
Qu'est-ce qu'ils s'en fichent
A travers leur nez souffle un doux air
Plisch et Plum par contre semblent
Pas tout à fait décidés
- Ce qui concerne le lit de repos
Enfin ils vont aussi se coucher
Notre Plisch d'après son habitude
Se retourne d'abord trois fois en rond
Notre Plum par contre une certaine tendresse
montre
A ceux qui ont l'habitude (de la tranquillité) du
repos
Ça semble (pas) hors de propos



« Marche ! » Avec ce mot cruel
On les pousse vers le dehors
La fraîcheur réveille l'activité
L'activité abrège le temps
Très bienvenus sont alors ici le pantalon
Et là le soulier
Qui avant que le jour commence
Aussi déjà sont transformés
Pour le père quel effroi
Lorsqu'il arrive
Et veut les réveiller
L'idée le fait pâlir
Lorsqu'il se demande qu'est-ce que ça veut me coûter
Déjà il veut punir les garçons
Qui faisaient comme s'ils dormaient
Mais la mère pleut le supplie
Je t'en prie ne sois pas cruel, cher Fi
Ces mots affectueux fondent sa grogne paternelle
Paul et Peter ça leur est égal
Peter marche en avant
Dans deux grandes pantoufles
Paul dans son pantalon effrangé
Plisch et Plum parce que sans manières

Viennent dans la niche à chien
C'est fatal remarqua Schlich.
Voyez ? Mais pas pour moi.

4ème chapitre—
Enfin s'attrapa dans la boîte grillagée
La plus impertinente de toutes les souris
Que Mme Fittig tantôt dans la cave
Tantôt dans la chambre et surtout la nuit
Etais rendue terriblement nerveuse
Ceci donnait pour Plisch et Plumm
Un plaisir espéré
Parce que maintenant il s'agit
Dehors vieille et méchante souris grignoteuse !

En avant ! Le pantalon de Peter pensait-elle
Pouvait lui donner protection
Plisch la suit dans ce tuyau—
Plum se trouve devant de l'autre côté.
La souris, dans son organe sentant,
Vrille la dent qui gratte
Plisch veut la tirer par la queue
Knipp elle l'attrape par l'oreille
Tu vois ! La voilà qui court dans la plate-bande de

la voisine
Kritze-Kratze ! Cric-Crac gare à toi pauvre
garniture de fleur adorée
Mme Kümmel voulait justement mettre de l'huile
sur sa lampe
Presque son cœur s'est arrêté
Lorsqu'elle a regardé dans le jardin
Elle accélère son pas
Et porte en même temps son arrosoir
Furieuse mais avec Plaisir
Elle donnait à chacun une bonne douche
D'abord au Plisch ensuite au Plum
Piquant est le pétroleum
Et l'action que cela cause
N'était pas dans l'esprit de Mme Kummel
Mais ce qui se passe maintenant
Rend Mme Kummel si malheureuse
Que entourée d'hallucinations
Elle ferme les yeux et elle sourit
Avec une expiration soupirée
Oh elle tombe dans les pommes
Paul et Peter impertinents et glaciaux
Montrent très peu de commisération
Les douleurs de l'âme des étrangers

Ne touchent pas leur cœur
C'est fatal remarqua Schlich—
Voyez ! Mais pas pour moi—

(Né 15 April 1832 zu Wiedensahl)

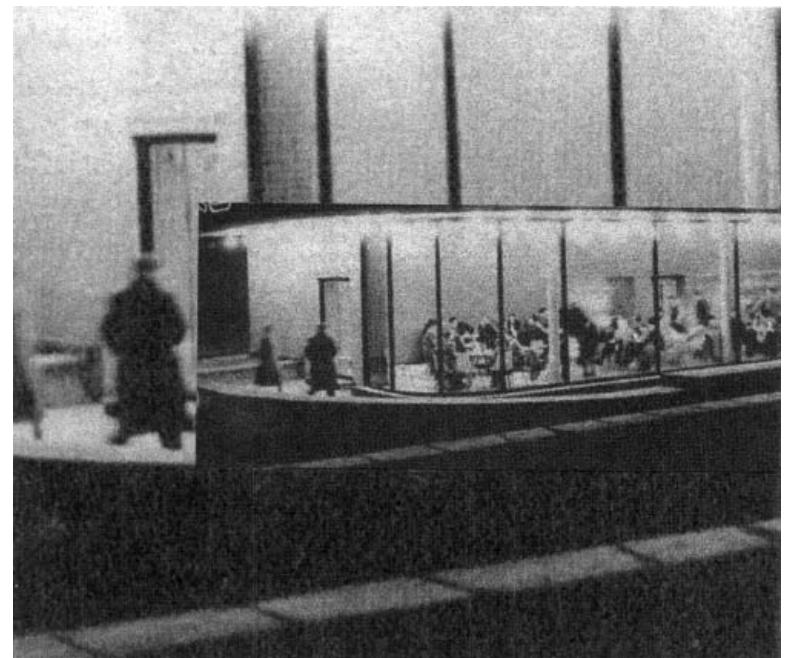
Faire des bêtises avec la langue
Wilhelm Busch, théâtre de la cravate,
Mangeur de queues de chiens pendant-la-famine-guerre 1870
Comment ma mère le traduisait, génie du mirliton mirlitaire,
pendant la guerre. Comme elle traduisait aussi l'époque en
marionnettes. C'est ainsi que nous eûmes un théâtre de poupées aux
corps en fil électrique parmi lesquels se débattait un petit Hitler.

Mon père merveilleux parleur en français, s'est mis à un
allemand inventé, une sorte d'autre allemand hilarant, pantomimé. Ce
n'est pas Joyce c'est lui qui m'a initiée au jeu de mots incarnés, à la
transsubstantiation, à l'acrobatie signifiante.

(histoire de ichweißnicht—Schweiß)
A table, à Oran, on jouait des langues

Et c'est ainsi que je fus initiée à l'homophonie et à l'homonymie à la sueur de mon père, sa sueur en français, suant à se traduire dans la langue de ma mère

L'homonymie sera le lieu aussi de toutes les métonymies, de toutes les substitutions opérées par ce grand opus du remplacement. Eh bien, si j'insiste déjà, comme je le ferai encore et encore sur l'homonymie, c'est que je voudrais, beaucoup plus tard, je ne sais pas encore quand dans le déroulement de cette séance, faire de cette question de l'homonymie et donc de l'intraductibilité un fil conducteur. Car l'homonymie est, vous le savez, la croix de la traduction ; c'est ce qui, dans une langue, signale et signe l'intraduisible. [...] si vous m'en donnez le temps, je ferais la démonstration scientifique que non seulement *adresse* n'en est pas, loin de là, le seul exemple dans cette œuvre, non seulement qu'il y en a beaucoup d'autres et spectaculaires, mais que tout l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous est littéralement, et pour cette raison, intraduisible, donc non loin d'être illisible, si lire reste encore un espèce du traduire (paraphrase, périphrase, métaphrase). Oui, je voudrais plus tard, je ne sais pas quand, mais je l'espère aujourd'hui, faire de cette question de l'homonymie un fil conducteur [...]



Et ce miracle adviendrait dans l'écriture de sa langue à elle dont la venue, l'événement, l'arrivée consisteraient justement en cette efficace, en ce coup qui abolit la différence entre *faire venir* et *laisser venir*. La grâce, et l'adresse, consisteraient à *faire en laissant*, à faire venir tout en laissant venir, à voir venir sans voir venir.

Nommant ainsi l'écriture de sa langue, je me demande si je ne convoque pas déjà, avant son père, sa mère dont la présence rayonne ici sur nous tous – et non pas sa langue maternelle, qui fut le français, mais la langue de sa mère, qu'elle connaît comme personne, et dans laquelle, vous le savez bien, la différence entre *faire venir* et *laisser venir* reste parfois indiscernable : *kommen lassen*, c'est à la fois *laisser venir* et *faire venir*, laisser arriver et ordonner de venir.³

Ichweiß nicht, je ne sais pas comment cette scène primitive d'acrobataductibilité ayant inauguré mes yeux d'écriture, comment je pourrais décider laquelle de mes langues fut la plus maternelle, celle de mon père grand spécialiste du tongue in cheek ou celle de ma mère

Tout cela se passait à la table d'Oran qui fut toujours dotée de nombreuses fonctions et pouvoirs magiques et sur la plateau de laquelle

—encore un théâtre—on trouvait tantôt un squelette de poulet, à l'aide duquel mon père nous enseignait les rudiments de l'anatomie, tantôt un jeu d'échec, tantôt la machine à coudre appelée Singer ou Singer selon que l'on se sentait être du côté de mon père singeur ou de ma mère. Le résultat de ces duos, duels, ces voltiges de trapéziste ces vols de mots à la tire, c'est que,—si je reprends ici l'une des définitions de la déconstruction que donne J.D. de son propre mouvement ; la déconstruction c'est plus d'une langue—nous étions babel et bien déjà en train de nous amuser à déconstruire nos idiomes, à les assaisonner, les faire sauter, sans pouvoir dire laquelle était l'épice laquelle l'épicée.

J'ai la nostalgie d'une langue qui parlerait plusieurs langues librement, sans s'excuser, à ma fantaisie, à l'improviste. C'est un rêve : cette langue, on la parlerait à plusieurs, cela voudrait dire (*voudrait dire !*) que les joueurs disposeraient de plusieurs langues également étrangères et familières. Cela n'existe guère. Cela ne se fait pas. Sauf, bien sûr, exception, genre *Finnegans Wake* mais je ne sais pas si Joyce *parlait* le Finnegans Wake chez lui. On s'essuie les pieds et on s'excuse lorsqu'on a le sentiment d'emprunter un vocable chez les voisins. On se sent en faute d'hospitalité.

J'ai la nostalgie du mot *Sehnsucht*, de ses langueurs de ses appétits, de ses phonèmes

A vrai dire je n'ai pas de nostalgie proprement dite. Au contraire. User du mot nostalgie me contrarie, me trahit. Ce que je voulais dire c'est yearning

Pour en revenir à mes villes et à leurs langues

Pourquoi vous raconté-je ces histoires ? Je sens que l'idée de Ville est ma surexcitation. Au commencement de la littérature il y a une ville, une ville-à-détruire. La littérature c'est ça : détruire la ville. La destruction de la ville. Est-ce bien est-ce mal ? C'est un mal qui cause un art. Une peine qui cause. La littérature est un champ de destruction un champ de ruines, le chant des ruines, l'archive chant des ruines.

Je devrais vous raconter plus tard la première ville détruite bombardée-éventrée que j'ai vue, c'était Londres en 1950 elle était encore éviscérée. J'y ai eu ma première émotion de langue étrangère dans ma bouche. Premier baiser : parler l'autre langue, sucer ses phonèmes, m'approprier happen, les expressions idiomatiques les plus courantes, entrer dans une langue aux murs effondrés sans l'effort de frapper à la porte. Je suis entrée en anglais en conquérante innocente et je me suis servie, sans piller.

J'adorai dire : gorgeous ou tremendous, je me gargarisais de mots-visas, autrement dit ces schibboleths par lesquels on est admis dans le camp d'une tribu ado, genre grave, cassé (dispute : t'as tort, t'es cassé) cool (pour super, chouette) ap- cimer (en verlan)—elle est canon—quand il y a un truc qui est bien, on dit ah c'est big

Du genre cassé y a haché,

Y a trente ans on disait ça craint, aujourd'hui c'est top et pas top, voire tip top—dit mon fils mais mon petit-fils dit que c'est périmé

Grave est à toutes les sauces. Grave est le péjoratif universel.

Je vais te péter la gueule, la tronche est dépassé par je vais te mettre dans la misère

Des cités les plus glauques sortent les expressions les plus puissantes. L'argent : un sac, un buck dit bock et récemment dans les banlieues : sequin !

C'est génial : c'est mortel. Au second degré = c'est de la balle. On dit trouver un taf—j'ai du taf = de quoi faire—mutation de tough

Un *mec* se dit toujours, heureusement pour Genet

On ne dit plus une nana, gonzesse revient.

Comment traduire buck top tough ou big ou cool en anglais ? depuis qu'ils sont devenus du 93 ou du 75 ?

De Londres à Manhattan il n'y aura plus tard plus qu'un pas. Londres, dis-je ici. J'avais treize ans. J'habitais à Golders Green London. Et voilà une curiosité : le sort de ce nom propre et si propre à l'Angleterre soumis à traduction, comme un certain nombre d'autres noms de capitales sont francisés alors que d'autres, non. Pourquoi Londres pourquoi pas Berlin ou Madrid, pourquoi Prague pourquoi pas New York ? *Et quoi d'Alger* ? Je vivais dans une ville traduite en procès de colonisation sur place.

Manhattan, j'y suis allée par mer et par textes. J'y suis allée à la lettre, au mot. Je vais à Manhattan comme on va au Monomotapa, ce pays où vivent les vrais amis, s'il existe de vrais amis. J'y vais à la poursuite de Joyce et à la suite de Kafka. Lui à la suite de Karl Rossman sur le Hambourg. Moi à la suite de Benjamin Jonas d'Osnabrück, sur le

France, comme le frère de ma grand-mère sur le Hambourg. Je suis entrée en texte d'avance, lorsque la Statue de la Liberté m'est apparue dans un sursaut de lumière, et tout était déjà écrit. On ne peut parler de Manhattan, on peut seulement essayer de l'écrire en traduction on l'écrit et ce n'est pas ça. Manhattan est une somme non finie de sommeils habités de rêveurs, Manhattan c'est aussi Leviathan et Rêvyattend, on essaie de rêver le rêve mais c'est impossible, on est rêvé, on est le rêvé du rêve, et de même dès que l'on entre dans Manhattan on est métamorphosé en quoi ? en figurant ou marionnette du grand théâtre d'Oklahoma on sent que l'on est un atome joué dans une pièce où s'agitent des millions d'atomes, un mot dans un Récit cosmogonique, une fourmi de Lilliput déportée sur Brobdingnag Avenue (*i.e.* comme l'a « traduit » Fatima : Broadwingway Av.). Un figurant dans la plus Ville des Villes, la Ville même et la Ville-Figure de toute Ville, comme la Ville grosse de plus d'une Ville, la Vieille-Jeune, la promise et menacée, séductrice et imprenable, éminente donc vulnérable

—c'est sur ce mot que ce texte s'est interrompu.

J'y suis allée si souvent avec ou en même temps que Derrida, nous étions en train d'y aller c'est-à-dire en avion le 9 octobre, pendant tout le mois de septembre nous nous sommes dit et demandé, le voyage à New York le ferons-nous pouvons-nous le faire et à force de nous demander et d'évoquer nous avons cent fois fait le voyage sans le faire en réalité

nous avions déjà " survécu " au 11 Septembre nous l'avions souffert, pensé, retourné dans tous ses sens, nous avions transformé les deux tours que nous aimions en personnages fantômes de nos œuvres

encore une perte d'un membre de notre corps d'un membre de la famille. Puis j'ai perdu Jacques Derrida mon double, mon jumeau, mon même. On croit avoir tout perdu. Mais on peut toujours encore perdre ce qu'on a perdu. On peut toujours perdre encore plus. Je n'ai jamais été à la Nouvelle-Orléans. Et pourtant je l'ai perdue. Encore une ville que non seulement les habitants perdent, mais nous aussi, encore une Babel atterrée, encore une Troie détruite encore une ville à ne pas oublier. Encore un Chicago brûlé à faire renaître de ses cendres. Si Jacques Derrida était là nous aurions fait circuler entre nous la légende de N.O., nous aurions déconstruit le No, relancé le oui à la vie. J'aurais réinscrit l'or d'Orléans dans Oran. Chaque ville perdue ou condamnée est la première Jérusalem.

Chaque fois unique la fin du monde, dit mon ami. Il y a beaucoup de Fois unique. Comment ce qui est unique peut-il être nombreux ?

Parce que nous sommes les sujets de la mémoire et de la métaphore. Il n'y a qu'une ville. Il n'y a qu'une mère. Oui. Mais chaque ville porte en elle le visage d'une autre ville, chaque ville est hantée par une autre ville.

Parce que nous sommes des êtres, acteurs ou spectateurs, ou les deux, officiants à la Scène sacrificielle qui est le monde, comme Shakespeare nous le disait

Pourquoi ai-je soudain décidé de vous parler de Villes ? Dans un lieu qui est voué à l'art, à la recherche des secrets de la création ?

Parce que l'œuvre, l'idéale, la rêvée, n'existe pas sans sa scène, son support, son subjectile sa terre. La " scène " (stage) de l'œuvre d'art visuel est double : 1) l'œuvre, (peinture, photo, installation sculpture ...) naît dans une généalogie, un vaste temps, une sorte de paysage-bibliothèque qui se souvient-et-oublie, qui conserve et ranime toutes les œuvres précédentes. 2) L'autre scène est sa géographie génétique, son contexte spatial, son site, urbain et politique.

Nous sommes héritiers et hantés, sans le savoir. Nous sommes les descendants d'une ville-corps. Ce que je fais, ou rêve, ou vis, ce que je fuis ou ce que je retrouve, à Chicago est un résultat du croisement entre mes villes et mes vies. J'ai trouvé et perdu des êtres à Chicago, je me suis trouvée et perdue à Chicago. A Chicago je suis nécessairement Chicagoing et Chicagone. Et que dirai-je de la Nouvelle-Orléans ? Au-delà des milliers de réflexions politiques, il y a le spectre du Déluge (j'ai beaucoup écrit sur le Déluge) et le thème du chaos, et celui de l'hospitalité. C'est la vingtième fois dans mon existence que j'ai à rendre une figure à une ville et ses habitants c'est-à-dire à un peuple fracassé disjoined, exilé. Nous devons à la Nouvelle-Orléans une réponse. Nous devons l'inventer. Politiquement bien sûr, et artistiquement. Ne pas l'oublier. Ne pas l'enterrer. La traduire. Continuer à la

vivre. Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich Tragen. Travailleur à la fin. Avec la fin, en la transfigurant et la traversant.

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Voiles*, Paris, Galilée, 1998, p. 11.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction 'rélevante'?", *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1999, p. 46.
3. Jacques Derrida, "H.C. pour la vie, c'est à dire...", *Hélène Cixous, croisées d'une œuvre*, Paris, Galilée, 2000, p. 60-61.

Eight paragraphs for Hélène Cixous
Jean-Michel Rabaté

1. I took a look at Hélène Cixous' books in the University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt library: 82 entries, plus 6 theses. Total 88 books!, I repeated with ravishment. The double sign of infinity, the flat projection of a Moebius strip in its dedoubled shape. I found all at once the concrete confirmation that I could never finish reading her, and an incentive, the need to keep on struggling with an inexhaustible material. Even if I spent a life-time with these 88 books, they would split into one another, create loops, lassoes, quote themselves, send me to other books by Derrida, Joyce, Kafka, Clarice Lispector, and many others; 88 is the number of the babelized library, of the infinitely expanding pluralized book. Derrida's final homage to Hélène Cixous—*Genèses, genealogies, genres et le génie. Les secrets de l'archive*¹—develops a sustained evocation of her archive. It starts with an autobiographical confession: in 1964, as Hélène Berger (as she was called then) was reading as many Joyce manuscripts as she could in American libraries, from Yale's Beinecke to Buffalo, she was already entering the allegorical Library. *Manhattan, Lettres de la Préhistoire* provides only one of these accounts, all her other books are in one way or other inscribed in the double lasso, little 8's of the big 88.

2. I can admit that, in a sense, I have spent all my adult life with Hélène Cixous, at least since the winter of 1968. I was then 19, still "yung and easily freudened," as Joyce had it, and was delighted that she accepted to supervise an all too ambitious MA on "Parody in *Finnegans Wake*"

that I sprang on her. It is rare to have a supervisor who is a prolific author, and one whose advice was always: "Write!" Being a writer nevertheless left her time to read—it was as a reader that she guided me, and it took me some time to realize that she was an exception in the French university. The typed chapters of my thesis would always be returned a week or so later heavily marked, replete with annotations. In exchange, I also read her novels, but they belonged to a different time, corresponded to different investments. I remember reading in rapid succession *Prénoms de Dieu* (1967) and *Dedans* (1969). Their list soon grew; all these novels, plays and essays first published by Grasset; Seuil, Denoël, and then Editions des Femmes, would go to a different shelf (it is still, although not in a chronological order, in my Paris apartment) than the Joyce shelf in which *L'Exil de Joyce ou l'art du remplacement* (1968), this massive thesis of more than 800 pages, but less than 888, which, by its rumpled light gray binding, looks so much like my first French edition of Vico's *New Science*. Now, I collect the elegant creamy volumes published by Galilée, and I count one or two a year.

3. Then there were the books in English, those I would teach in the US after 1992: mostly "theory" books, books made up of innumerable readings, all sharp, astute, clinging to the letter of the other authors she would read. These were the groundbreaking dialogue with Catherine Clément, *The New Born Woman* (1991), and include *Readings: The*

Poetics of Blanchot; Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetayeva (1991), *Coming to Writing* (1991), *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993), *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (1997), *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (1998) and *The Third Body* (1999). Favorites of mine are those books that include dialogues with the editor, like Verena Andermatt Conley's *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (1991) and the English version of *Hélène Cixous, Photos de Racines*, with Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (1997). They belong to another setting, another culture, in which Theory is still alive despite its proclaimed demise, and thrives even in that mode half-way between creative writing and philosophical meditation—a genre brilliantly illustrated by books like *Veils* (2001) with Jacques Derrida, and *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* (2001). These books I annotate, make selections from, to be able to teach them to undergraduates who literally need them.

4. In October 1990, I was invited to speak at a conference entitled "Readings of Sexual Difference" which was in fact a conference devoted to Hélène's work. I arrived one night before my talk, which was a joint presentation with my friend Daniel Ferrer on Joyce, Molly Bloom, and the neuter. As I was sitting in the crowded amphitheater of the Collège de Philosophie, a woman next to me asked me slyly: "Have you noticed that you are the only man in the room?" I hadn't, indeed, I looked around, saw that this was true. I turned to her and asked: "No, but why

should that matter?" Close to the end of the conference, Daniel and I talked about Molly's Yes. I explained that I had first counted 88 "yeses" in the last episode of *Ulysses*, which fitted very well my intuition that this chapter, written in eight unpunctuated sentences (I claimed that there should be a period at the end of the fourth section) aimed at embodying textual infinity through a female voice. Then I had to admit there were 89 "yeses." Which does not totally disprove the thesis since Molly is often confused about her main life-dates, which triggers interesting hesitations: "... and the 8 of diamonds for a rise in society yes wait it all came out and 2 reds 8s for new garments (...) I wonder is he too young hes about wait 88 I was married 88 Milly is 15 yesterday 89 what age is he then at Dillons 5 or 6 about 88" (U, 18: 1319-28).² I cannot sum up our talk here, I'll just recall here the moment of silence which followed Daniel's section (he had introduced us, I had given the first part and he had concluded). Were we right when we claimed the dominance of a certain "neutrality" for a fictional character like Molly? Hélène responded, humorously: "I always knew that Joyce's buttocks were hidden behind Molly's buttocks." The huge peal of laughter that greeted this sally told us that we were, from then on, perfectly safe.

5. What I admire most about Hélène Cixous is her absence of fear—fear being the most obviously rampant French disease. By this, I don't mean physical cowardice, of course, but a moral cringing, a social timidity which is taught very early on: the *peur du qu'en dira-t-on*, the

social fear of not being adequate to superegoic norms, of being "ridiculous" or looking excessive, in the wrong tone. This was emphasized by the generation that reacted against their elders, the flamboyant but at times shallow prophets of liberation spawned by May 1968. The generation born in the late 1960s has tended to be timorous and conformist, and the cult of the logo in clothes was the other face of a new religiosity hidden as a defense of human rights. The humanitarian crusades brought positive changes abroad but confirmed a barely sublimated conformism at home. For the 1968 generation, on the other hand, once the big party was over, to keep on acting politically demanded more than recklessness, it required acting upon the strength of one's convictions. Thus I remember the news of Hélène being *matraquée* (clubbed unconscious) by cops, next to Foucault, as they denounced the conditions of life in French prisons. This took place in Nancy in 1972, but could have happened later in India, Cambodia, in Chicago or in Serbia. To define Hélène's courage, no adjective is adequate, since "bold," "impetuous," or "fearless" too quickly point to either fake heroism or sheer recklessness. One would need a word that captures the courage of one who knows the risks, who is not willing jeopardize it all on a whim, yet feels impelled to go on, to militate as a way of actively exploring the world of history that we are all making together. This means looking at the world with fresh, unblinking eyes. A sentence from Saint John Perse's poem *Vents* condenses this well: "*Tout à reprendre. Tout à redire. Et la faux du regard sur tout l'avoir*

menée." To have passed the scythe of one's gaze on everything—this defines well Hélène Cixous' desire, her strenuous and interminable program.

6. This program is also, evidently, a writing program, a program that factors in other fears, fears that have to do with other people's fates, especially all the loved ones, or with the writing itself. Among many similar admissions and declarations, I'll quote the preface to the fifty dreams collected in *Rêve je te dis* (2003). Hélène mentions that at times she is afraid of losing her dreams or of not remembering them. "This fear came to me when, as I started to write, I discovered with terror that this gesture, to write, that had become my life, my permission, my possibility, my reason to live, was unhappily at the mercy of and in thanks to dreams, as a child is at the mercy of the mother's breast."³ When literature becomes your dominant passion, it requires power, speed and a readiness to give everything for it. Here again the preliminary note to *Manhattan*: "Everything takes place in the pre-Work, where characters, in love with great dead authors, see themselves in a dream as turned into books, as volumes, and step closer to the dreamed Work stealthily, craftily, insanely."⁴

7. The previous quote is a good example of a reductive translation, or of an impossible translation. I needed three adverbs to try and translate two French phrases that ring like an echo of each other: "...s'approchent

de l'"Oeuvre" rêvée à pas de loups, à pas de fous..." Unlike Mallarmé, who had to be content with dreaming *Le Livre*, Hélène Cixous writes it, but in such a way that its writing is always double, punning, in the wake of innumerable idioms and locutions, which, to be translated in other languages, will request similar feats of the linguistic imagination. This is why it is wrong to say that she writes novels—she writes "fiction" in which language comes as close as possible to a poetic register without losing the thread of a narrative—no matter how looping, discontinuous, and digressive it may be. What we used to call "the materiality of the signifier" has never ceased determining part of these effects if not the meaning itself. In that sense, Hélène is one of the most direct successors of Lacan, since she has blown up long ago the last remainders of "phallogocentrism" from psychoanalytic discourse while enacting with a vengeance the logics of signifier. This logic sums up a whole literary life. It is determined by the metamorphic power of language, and this is what catches the reader and empowers her or him so much in these texts. This in a wonderful passage of *L'Amour même dans la boîte aux lettres*, one sees Balzac's cat insensibly turn into a woman's cunt and a wild lover. The text is quasi untranslatable, since all its signifiers (*chatte, queue, bande*) have an obscene meaning in French, while keeping as well their usual denotational function.

8. This constant attention to the letter of the text or the literality of the name was brought home to me on the day of my thesis's defence.

Hélène, the supervisor, started by asking me why I had chosen three names with an "o" in the middle: Joyce, Broch, Pound. Surprisingly, I had never thought about this coincidence, and muttered something about the sea and fluidity (as we say in French "*Que d'eau!*"). The true answer came to me as I was leaving the university: there is an "o" in the middle of her name. The codicil to these stray remarks is a worry: no doubt, this book will soon be acquired by my university's library. The total of entries for Hélène Cixous will be 89, a double infinity plus one and one and still one...

Notes

1. Paris, Galilée, 2003. This was the talk delivered by Jacques Derrida for a full morning to open the conference "Hélène Cixous: Genèses Généalogies Genres" at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France on May 22, 2003.
2. I have developed this in "Molly's Gordian Knot", *Joyce Upon the Void*, London, Macmillan, 1981, p. 43-68. I quote Joyce's *Ulysses* in the Hans Walter Gabler version, Garland, New York, 1984, by chapter number and line number. See *Lectures de la Différence Sexuelle*, ed. Mara Negron, Paris, Des Femmes, 1994, p. 245-282.
3. Hélène Cixous, *Rêve Je te dis*, Paris, Galilée, 2003, p. 14.
4. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan, Lettres de la Préhistoire*, Paris, Galilée, 2001, prière d'insérer, p. 3.

US \$25.00 / \$30.00 CAN

Literature / Philosophy / Contemporary Art

A bilingual publication by Hélène Cixous, with an audio CD of the author reading

In collaboration with Maria Chevska's installation "Vera's Room"

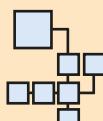
Contributions by Jean-Michel Rabaté, Eric Prenowitz, and Aaron Levy



Maria :

I have known for a long time that one does not go anywhere. It is the cities or the countries that come or do not come to you. Cities are fateful letters. They only arrive lost. They only arrive posthumously.

Hélène



SLOUGHT FOUNDATION
Contemporary Arts

ISBN 0-9714848-8-0



9 780971 484887

Front: Performance notes, Hélène Cixous at Slought Foundation (2005)