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The Translational Life of Cities

Examining photographs taken in the 1930s in the city of Cz-ernowitz, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer try to imagine which language the men and women are speaking as they stride confidently down the main street.[1] Would it have been Romanian, the language of the nation which took over the city in 1918, or German, the language of the former Habsburg rulers, or Yiddish, the language spoken by many of the city's Jewish population, or Polish, the language of another significant minority?

The city was renowned for its exuberant mixture of languages—even the tourist brochures made note of it. In 1908, in his opening remarks to the landmark conference held in Czernowitz on the future of Yiddish, Yitzchak Peretz (1852-1915) praised a place where "We stroll in the eve-ning streets, and from different windows the tones of different languages waft out, all different kinds of folk music."[2]

Yet by the time the authors accompanied their parents in 1998 on a first return visit to the city since the Second World War, they heard only one language, Ukrainian. The linguistic hodgepodge of store signs, shop names, placards, and advertising billboards was gone, and the "Café de l'Europe" and the "Café Habsburg" had become spectral presences in a city where informal trade and barter among Ukrainians were the most prevalent forms of commerce.

Although the built environment of the city remained largely the same, the meaning and function of these urban spaces had been transformed. The links that identified street names and street patterns as replicas of Viennese originals had been severed. The main street once called the Herrengasse became the Strada Iancu Flondor during the Romanian regime, then, after the Second World War, was renamed for the Ukrainian writer Olha Kobylyanska. The fact that returning visitors like Marianne Hirsch's parents continued to refer to the city's street names in German underlined the fact that the city for them remained a mental construct, experienced and interpreted through language.

One city with three names? Three different versions of a city? Each Czernowitz is a variation on a theme: the multicultural Habsburg city, the interwar Romanian city called Cernauti, (the birthplace of Paul Cel-an, Aharon Appelfeld and Rose Auslander), and the post-war Ukrainian city called Cernivitsi. Advancing through states of translation, the city has become a reproduction of itself, a replica both the same and different. Statues were replaced (the statue of Schiller gone, Kobylyanska in his place), buildings repurposed (the synagogue turned into a movie theatre), and additional narratives layered over previous strata of urban memory.

Czernowitz is one example of a translational city—where, as a result of violent conflict, the soundscape is altered. The city is a movie that has been given a new sound track. The dubbed version comes with a disconnect between visuals and sound, and it takes time for the familiar synchronicity to be restored. Perhaps cities that have experienced such language remakes are condemned to a perpetual state of dissonance, the harmony of the original forever lost.

Violent takeover is one way in which cities come to experience language dissonance. But the forces that create the translational city—a space of heightened language awareness, of forced substitutions or accelerated exchanges—these are multiform. The first decades of the twentieth century, as multilingual imperial cities were reborn as national cities, were particularly prolific in creating such urban translational relations—and in this essay I will wander the globe, from Cernowitz to Salonica, from Calcutta to Trieste, to explore this productivity. I'll linger in Trieste to observe the ways in which that city, suffused with a Mitteleuropean sensibility, experienced in 1918 an intensely desired "return" to Italy. In this place of acute language anxiety, the attractions of German did not disappear. Psychoanalytic ways of thinking were welcomed and the Freudian unconscious found itself curiously at home.

AFTER CZERNOWITZ, which was the most easterly outpost of the Austro-Hungarian empire, consider a city at the edge of the Ottoman empire. Salonica was an Ottoman city until it became Thessaloniki in 1912, as a result of the first Balkan war. The social and political disruptions of these wars, following by the First World War, resulted in a transformation of the city's population—which had been barely one-third Greek in 1912.[3] Thessaloniki's emancipation from the Ottoman empire and its new Greek identity was consolidated by population transfers which began as early as 1913 and were followed by the massive exchanges

of Christians and Moslems of 1923—exchanges through which some 100,000 Christians from Asia Minor filled the city, taking the place of the thousands of Muslims who were forced to cross the Aegean into Turkey. In addition to these colossal population shifts, the city was transformed physically. A great fire destroyed the city center in 1917 and allowed for the Hausmann-like imposition of a modern and rational city plan. The French urban planner Ernest Hébrard planned a grand new design in the neo-Byzantine style, as a celebration of the city's recovery of its pre-Ottoman, Byzantine past. The results were one of the first great works of European urban planning in the twentieth century, and its goal was to impose the imprint of the new Greek state by eliminating all trace of histories which were no longer relevant. Selected Byzantine monuments were given prominence at the center of new large avenues, while all signs of the densely packed Jewish quarters that had dominated the core of Ottoman Salonica were eliminated. Not even the layout of the streets today indicates where the numerous synagogues were once situated. In few cities can one see such a radical renewal of the city's identity, and the realignment in parallel of both linguistic and built heritage. The city was translated out of its cosmopolitanism: the once polyglot city, where Turkish and Ladino had been the most prominent languages, was by 1928 almost entirely Greek-speaking.

Czernowitz and Thessaloniki are among a legion of cities that experienced language flips in the wake of imperial collapse. These were traumatic transformations, where one identity was obliterated in favour of a more modern affiliation, destined to make the city more truly itself.

Language takeovers are the result of violent conflict, one power imposing its linguistic regime over newly conquered territory. But competition and rivalry among languages obtain in all urban settings: in fact multilingualism and friction among languages could be said to be one of the defining elements of urban-ness. Languages jostle on urban terrain, occupying public spaces, attaching themselves symbolically to sites and landmarks, influencing the creation of architectural form. This is the broader sense we can give to translational cities—and the one that allows us to understand all cities as driven by translational forces, where translation is understood as a *process*, as an ongoing condition which shapes intellectual and cultural life.

WHAT I AM CALLING the translational city proposes a new angle of approach to the multilingual city, accentuating the movement, complexity

and texture of urban language interactions. Multilingualism points to pure diversity, the number of languages spoken with no account taken of the relations of tension, interaction, rivalry or convergence, indifference or interference among them, or of the particular spaces they occupy in the city. In the translational city, by contrast, languages connect as they move across space, are dominant in certain zones, less so in others. Border zones are scenes of specially intense interaction. Translation tracks language flows and interactions among variously entitled communities—those which have historic claims to the territory of the city, as well as those which seek to establish claims as migrants, exiles or sojourners.

The interplay of languages within the city contributes to its distinctive feel, its particular sensibility, to the ways in which knowledge in and of the city is shaped. This may seem like a truism, but in the abundant literature devoted to the city over the last decades, the many works of urban and cultural studies, beginning with Walter Benjamin and extending through Richard Sennett, Edward Soja, Alan Blum, and many others, this linguistic and aural aspect has been largely neglected in favour of the visual. The city has been seen, but not heard. Yet languages are not only part of the experiential feel of the city, they in turn become modes of representation of the city—poems and novels, essays and letters, paintings, engravings, photos, films, the biographies of people connected to the city. These "texts" contribute to the aura and mythology of the city, shaping and preserving it in the cultural memory.

To read a city in one language is to know one version of the city text, one ensemble of materials. For most cities, there will be multiple and competing city texts, written either in the submerged languages of the past or in the rival languages of the present. And so citizens living side by side may be experiencing separate, even contradictory, versions of the urban imaginary. How is it different to read New York in English or in Spanish? New Orleans in French or English? Johannesburg in English, Afrikaans or Xhosa? Manila in Spanish or Tagalog? Barcelona in Castilian or in Catalan? Montreal in French or in English? Czernowitz in German, Yiddish or Romanian? Thessaloniki in Greek or Turkish? Each of these questions brings into being a different constellation of linguistic forces, shaped by moments of violence and conquest, patterns of immigration, diasporic networks, political jurisdictions, emergent or declining cultural loyalties. These configurations put into play translational responses, bringing these texts into dialogue, allowing them to enter into new conversations and frames of interpretation. In cities where the major, tutelary

language of the city is disputed, where more than one community lays claim to the territory of the city, these language relationships will occupy center stage. The city becomes a crossroads of codes, a place of double entendres, where collective language insecurities nourish a culture of doubt, where memories meet at odd angles. This makes the space of the linguistically contested city a particularly modern space, where there is a heightened awareness of the plurality of meaning systems, of the testing of the limits of expression, where dissonance is understood as a productive force. Translation and translators play an especially important role as they move through the spaces of the city, carrying messages, marking urban spaces and reinterpreting symbols.

HERE WE MIGHT TURN to the example of colonial Calcutta, a rigorously divided space from which issued separate linguistic representations of the city. Two separate structures of power and knowledge underlay ideas of Calcutta, rendering the city "uncanny" in the uneven fit between the two.[4] Such representational schisms are a characteristic feature of colonial cities, where knowledge about the city was nourished by dissimilar sources, uneven in their political influence. Yet the meeting of British and Bengali culture across the spatial separations of Calcutta was the occasion for what Amit Chaudhuri calls "one of the most profound and creative cross-fertilizations between two different cultures in the modern age."[5] The separate and hierarchical spaces of colonial Calcutta were a crucible which produced a rich array of new cultural forms—which together have been called the Bengali Renaissance, lasting very broadly from 1850 to 1915. These forms of scholarly and artistic creation took place across separate meaning systems, leading not to processes of transparent substitution but rather to the constructed forms of equivalence resulting from the encounter between the modern forms and techniques of governance instituted by colonial authority and the ambitions cultivated by the Bengali community. Perfect equivalence is made impossible by the entanglement of concepts in different meaning networks.

The values associated with this extraordinary flourishing of thought have been the subject of entire libraries of scholarship on this constitutive period of Indian history. The innovations in Bengali literary and scientific culture were significantly translational, and they included the transfer not only of texts or ideas but of forms and genres—like Bankimchandra Chatterjee's appropriation of the novel form into Bengali. These transformations were enacted in large part across the civic space of Cal-

cutta. Translation is understood as a sign of colonial subjugation and as a privileged instrument of Orientalism when it is shown, for instance, that the work of Sir William Jones imposed categories of Western thought on an ancient culture, elevating ancient texts of religion and law above the unruly present and using them as a standard against which their unworthy contemporaries would be judged. But translation also activated the levers of cultural nationalism, by manipulating and reworking the texts of authority. Rather than a technique whose results are predictable and univocal, translation encompasses a broad range of interventions and mediations, contributing to a weave of linkages.

Now I will introduce a final and more detailed example, the mythically polyglot and creative city of Trieste, exploring its translational life in the period following World War I and, in particular, in the intellectual commerce between Italy and Mitteleuropa. Trieste is legendary for its introduction of psychoanalysis to Italy in the period immediately following the city's "redemption" from Austria and "return" to Italy. In this enterprise of cultural transfer, we can fully appreciate the wide definition of what a translator is: a mediator writing at the intersection of languages, opening new spaces of cultural expression. Into this category will fall two dissimilar characters, both originators in their different ways of the Italian "unconscious": the psychoanalyst Edoardo Weiss and the novelist Italo Svevo.

Situated at the confluence of three language cultures—Italian, German, Slovenian, Trieste was for four hundred years a historical anomaly. Geographically part of the Venetian sphere of influence that extended along the Adriatic coast and emphatically Italian in culture, the city was politically and economically Austrian, the port city of the Habsburg empire. Perhaps because they were unsuccessful in making German the language of daily life, the Austrians were all the more vigorous in filling the city with Habsburg architecture. And this imposing built legacy, as the backdrop to today's Italian city, continues to make for a particularly rich sensory dissonance. Trieste's massive downtown buildings exude the stolid self-confidence of Habsburg structures across Central and Eastern Europe. This solidarity reinforced the linkages created through the imperial bureaucracy as well as networks of industry and finance. Trieste's visual aspect reinforced the paradoxes of its cultural identity—its outward allegiance to the empire, its inner nationalist aspirations.

Language and language politics were crucial to the history of Trieste,

as they were in all Habsburg cities in the late nineteenth century. Until 1918, German was the expression of political and commercial authority, the language that every cultivated or ambitious Triestino would have to master. Slovene and Croatian, by contrast, were relegated to the marginal spaces of domestic and menial labour, and, under Fascism, literally forced underground as proscribed languages. Tuscan was the language of a nation and a culture regained in 1918 as the lost motherland of the Triestines. By contrast, Triestino was the true language of everyday citizenship, the universally spoken vernacular, uniting and welcoming the many immigrant populations of the nineteenth century. Legendary for the rich literary culture it nurtured (including writers James Joyce, Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba), for the exuberant mixture of peoples who gathered there, and later for its position as an outpost during the Cold War, Trieste has become something of a cult city, a landscape of the mind where each streetcorner is bathed in myth.

As a city with a large, cultivated middle class educated in German, Trieste served as a gateway for the entry of German ideas and cultural forms into Italy. Perhaps the most spectacular contribution of the city was to serve as the entry point for psychoanalysis into Italian culture—through several different axes of translation. Psychoanalysis and the influence of Freud were pervasive in Trieste in the 1920s and 1930s, much before it had penetrated other regions of Italy. Giorgio Voghera's engaging memoirs of those years are called *The Years of Psychoanalysis*, and they evoke the literary circles where the likes of Roberto Bazlen, Umberto Saba, and Italo Svevo would debate Freudian concepts. The discussions were not only intellectual, they involved a deep and passionate relationship to psychoanalysis as both a system of knowledge and a mode of therapy. Umberto Saba underwent a significant and transformative period of psychoanalytic treatment with Edoardo Weiss, Svevo's brother-in-law Bruno Veneziani was treated by Freud himself in Vienna, and significant projects were undertaken to translate Freud into Italian—finding fruition, on the one hand, in Edoardo Weiss's Italian renderings of two volumes by Freud (Freud's *Introductory Lectures* as *Introduzione allo studio della psicoanalisi* and then *Totem e Tabu*) and, on the other, in the more devious but perhaps more influential "translation" of the Freudian talking cure into the structure and framing device for Italo Svevo's *La Coscienza di Zeno*. It is these two latter translation projects that I will discuss here, showing them to be a product of the tensions that shaped the crossroads sensibility of Trieste.

Edoardo Weiss was born in Habsburg Trieste in 1889, and because

there was no university in Trieste, he went, like most of his schoolmates, to Vienna for his studies. He studied medicine and then turned to psychoanalysis. Weiss was analyzed by Freud and maintained his close relationship with Freud through visits and letters, even when he had returned to Trieste after serving in World War I on the Austrian side. In 1919, he offered to translate Freud's writings and Freud enthusiastically agreed. As the first translator of Freud into Italian, and as a faithful and loyal lieutenant in the struggle to establish psychoanalysis across Europe, Weiss took his task seriously and was aware of the importance of establishing an adequate and durable terminology.

Translation was from the start a key to propagating the doctrines of psychoanalysis but also of ensuring their integration into new language communities and determining the nature of the institutions which would oversee the continued life of psychoanalytic interpretation and practice. The orientations of later translations, in particular those by James Strachey into English, are notoriously controversial, in their desire to validate psychoanalysis by the massive use of pseudo-scientific language, in particular medical and Latinate terms. In 1919 the enterprise was still new and Weiss didn't have any models to follow—and simply soldiered along on his own. Actually, before he began, he did suggest to Freud that he could use some help, and suggested a certain Doctor A—a very intelligent man, familiar with psychoanalysis and fully competent in both Italian and German. But Freud dismissed this Dr. A. in very derogatory terms—and Weiss accepted the Master's judgement. It turns out that Dr. A. was in fact Bruno Veneziani, Svevo's brother-in-law, a patient Weiss himself treated in Trieste. Veneziani was a brilliant chemist and musician; he was a homosexual, and he had drug problems. Why was Freud so suspicious and disrespectful of him—to the point that he felt his collaboration in the translation would be harmful? There is no doubt material for analysis of Freud himself here, in his paranoid testing of the loyalty of his followers.

According to Voghera, everyone in Weiss's circle was anxious to get in on the action of translating. Voghera claimed that there was no one who didn't offer suggestions —although whether Weiss accepted them or not is not known. Saba was surely called upon for his opinions, as he was in analysis during this time. *Introduzione allo studio della psicoanalisi* was published in 1922.[6] One of the few difficulties of translation that Weiss actually discusses is the question of finding an equivalent for the German "*Es*" in the triple structure of the Freudian topography of the mind: *Ich*,

Über-Ich, and *Es* (to be bizarrely translated into English as ego, super-ego and id). The "*Es*" seems to correspond, for Weiss, to a power similar to that of the author of a dream. How to name, asks Weiss, the author of a dream? Who dreams? To say "I have dreamt" does not correspond to reality: the formulation should rather be something like "*Mi venne fatto a sognare*" ("A dream has come to me, I have been made to dream"). While these formulations are passive in English, as in Italian, the passive meaning is retained in German through the use of a grammatical subject and an active formulation: "*Es träumt mir.*" This active formulation which gives full agency to "*das Es*" is therefore the most appropriate term, in preference to the English "id" or the French "soi" which Weiss dismisses as totally erroneous. Weiss's terminology seems to have remained current in Italian psychoanalysis.

One wonders if Weiss would have made this choice had he not been a Triestine. This "*Es*" would remind his readers of the German origin of psychoanalysis, as well as the syntactic structure which is lacking in Italian. Weiss clearly oriented the reception of psychoanalysis in Italy through his translations, as well as through his institutional positions as founder of the *Società psicoanalitica italiana* and the professional journal *Rivista italiana di psicoanalisi*, through his translation of *Totem and Taboo*, and through the publication of his own *Elementi di psicoanalisi* (1931), whose significance has been recognized as a foundational for the Italian tradition of psychoanalysis.[7] Weiss was forced to leave Italy in 1938 with the adoption of Mussolini's Racial Laws, and access to his work was prohibited during the Fascist period. The Lectures were republished after the war in 1948 –in a revised translation, accompanied by a glossary of psychoanalytic terms—and here he comments on the term, explaining, in part: ES (*Es*): "With this German word (the substantive of the third-person neutral pronoun) is indicated the impersonal psychic primal source of instinctive manifestations" (my translation). This is the only term in the extensive vocabulary which is taken as such from the German.

The story of Bruno Veneziani, the Dr. A. whom Freud adamantly refuses as a co-translator of the *Lessons*, provides a link from Weiss to Svevo. Svevo was very distressed at the failure of Veneziani's early treatment with Freud, and his anger might account for the combination of fascination and contempt with which his character Zeno Cosini treats psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts.

In accord with Giorgio Voghera's assertion that "everyone" in Trieste was somehow involved in translating Freud, it is interesting to learn that,

around 1918, Svevo and his nephew, the doctor Aurelio Finzi, had the idea of translating Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* into Italian. [8] No trace of the manuscript exists, but several sources make reference to the project and to the fact that it was carried out at least in part. But Svevo's more influential translation of Freud was the novel in which he used the talking cure as a structuring device. In fact, Svevo half-seriously and half-playfully adopted the form of the psychoanalytic confession as the framing device of his *La coscienza di Zeno*, turning it to his own ends. But Zeno, Svevo's character, is not a good patient and in fact turns the process on its head, by introducing questions of language.

This is how it happens. Towards the end of the novel, Svevo's character Zeno confesses to his psychoanalyst (who has requested the account that makes up the novel itself) that everything he, the narrator, has written is "a lie" because it was written in a "foreign" language—Tuscan. Triestino is Zeno's real language; Tuscan is a formal and alien language for which he must have recourse to the dictionary. And as one naturally avoids using the dictionary, Zeno explains, he has used only the words that came to him spontaneously—thus limiting the range of ideas and emotions he could discuss. This declaration has two effects. On the one hand, Zeno is undermining his testimony, questioning the truth of everything that he has written up until that point. On the other hand, Zeno is also attempting to take control of the psychoanalytic process and prevent the doctor from producing an interpretation which would be authoritative. By undercutting his own testimony, Zeno is effectively trying to take over:

> "The doctor puts too much faith in those damned confessions of mine, which he won't return to me so I can revise them. Good heavens! He studied only medicine and therefore doesn't know what it means to write in Italian for those of us who speak the dialect and can't write it. A confession in writing is always a lie. With our every Tuscan word, we lie![9]

Is this a true declaration of linguistic incompetence or a typically perverse flourish on the part of an unreliable narrator and a recalcitrant patient? Svevo indeed had troubles with Tuscan, not only because of Triestino but because he had received his education only in German and had taught himself literary Italian. Svevo's defiance of the doctor is in some ways a confession in itself: in order to produce literature, Svevo was obliged to translate himself and indeed to be a Triestine means that one is necessarily between languages. The linguistic inadequacies of the

Triestines inevitably lead to such a result, because "by predilection, we recount all the things for which we have the words at hand… This is exactly how we choose, from our life, the episodes to underline. Obviously our life would have an entirely different aspect if it were told in our dialect" (404). Linguistic discomfort, the sense of being between languages, retroactively suffuses the novel. Strata of language take the form of a palimpsest reminiscent of Freud's own topography of the mind: the underground id (Triestino), the surface ego (Tuscan), and the superego (German). The linguistic ground of Trieste reveals itself to be a space of translation. The modern hero is not only decadent, anxious, and incapable of acting—he is also linguistically fractured.

Though Italo Svevo is known as a novelist, I argue for Svevo as a translator, a mediator between the Italian and German cultural zones. Svevo's fiction becomes a zone of mediation between the Italian language and *Mitteleuropean* concepts of subjectivity, challenging the Italian narrative tradition while allying itself with the powerful new forms of thought that would define European modernity.

Zeno shows his resistance to analysis by defining himself as a subject in translation, caught in the impossibilities of adequate equivalence. In this respect, he echoes Edoardo Weiss's decision to leave '*Es*' as an untranslated concept in Freud's topology. And so both Weiss and Zeno show themselves as situated in an ambivalent relationship to authority—fully consonant with a psychoanalytic understanding of resistance. Both welcome psychoanalytic concepts into a new framework, but perform their own challenges and critiques. Both "translations" are the product of the liminality and the cultural tensions of their city, its geographical eccentricity emblematic of the anxious individual who will become increasingly prominent in the modern consciousness.

CITIES FLOURISH ON SITES that are places of encounter—where rivers converge, where mountains slope towards the sea, where populations meet to trade. But the original tensions of such sites never dissolve entirely. *Incontri* can easily turn into *scontri*, as Italian neatly suggests. From Czernowitz and Thessaloniki to Calcutta and Trieste, cities show themselves to be traversed by fracture lines and translational forces. While these language transfers can work towards repression and silencing, the sponging out and replacement of one urban reality by another, as in the case of the violent suppression of national regimes or of the forced transposition of ideas, translational axes are more often the routes along

which cities express their plural identities. Indeed translational dynamics are at the core of all urban citizenship. And so in the era of diasporas and globalization, it is translation that tells which languages count, which can generate the relationships at the base of a common urban citizenship. It is not the simple presence of languages that matter, but the ways in which languages converge within public space to create a common place of conversation and debate—and the ways in which an enhanced role for the translator will contribute to this end. This means that the city requires forms of connection which will multiply points of contact among languages, enrich languages with previously alien dreams and myths, put memories into circulation. Translation is then more than the recognition of difference; it is a process that contributes to the definition of civic space.

NOTES

[1]Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home. The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

[2]Cited by Jess Olson in Czernowitz at 100.

[3]Mark Mazower., *Salonica: City of Ghosts*. New York, Harper Collins, 2004. 'Making the City Geek'.

[4]Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta. Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, London: Routledge, 2005.

[5]A. Chaudhuri, *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, London: Picador, 2001.

[6]E. Weiss, *Elementi di psicoanalisi*, Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1985.

[7]P. Roazen and Edoardo Weiss. *The House That Freud Built,* New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, 2005.

[8]I. Svevo, I and B. Stasi (ed.) *La coscienza di Zeno*, Roma: Edizioni di storia et letteratura, xv.

[9]Italo Svevo, *Zeno's Conscience*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, trans. William Weaver, 2001, p. 404.