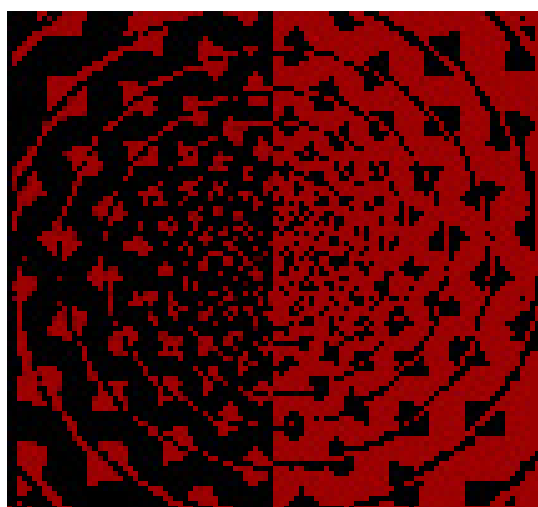# Les Carnets du Centre de Philosophie du Droit

Titre:	**Historicization, Subjectivation, Translation; On the Critique of Historicisms in Benjamin's Theory of Language**
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Historicization, Subjectivation, Translation;
On the Critique of Historicisms
in Benjamin's Theory of Language

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Introduction

Benjamin's text on language is probably one of the most complicated. The difficulties there-in come from the fact he gave the text a very theological form. This form can be understood, if it is read like a metaphysical recess, like an aporia. The language, as soon as it falls into communication, is lost. We can't experience it anymore. The aim of this paper is to show that Benjamin's theory of language is not a pessimistic and ahistorical theory. It is related to his theory of historical knowledge and more deeply, it is based on a specific theory of experience he tries to construct throughout his work.

My paper aims at analyzing Benjamin's theory of language in regard to the theory of the Self he studied in his PhD on the German Romanticism. The target of this proposal is to show that Benjamin's theory of language is a theory

of relationality and that the recourse to the Jewish mysticism and the Christian Genesis are only narrative solutions he took but not a substantial adherence to the structure of history he identifies in those religions.

By way of realizing this goal, we would like to demonstrate that the critique Benjamin makes against communication is first of all a critique against the modern concept of historicism and the implicit theory of experience.

Benjamin's theory of human language as the Fall in communication is, according to us, corrected by his theory of the aesthetic critique that includes the theory of translation. That point of view defends that, in Benjamin's work, pessimism is always completed by the construction of a new way of creating history. This new way, introducing the actors' self-transformation, exceeds the first conception of a loss of experience and a theory of entropy.

1. Metaphysics of Language and Recourse to Theological Structures

In order to demonstrate how Benjamin developed his philosophy of language, two steps are necessary. Firstly, we need to explain how Benjamin understands language as a whole theory of experience of the world. Secondly, we need to show how theological stories of Creation are used by him as particular forms of dramatization of the history of language.

1.1 The Theory of Language

Benjamin's theory of language is not only a description of linguistic facts, it involves a larger reflection on the way the relation between the subject and the object could be comprehended. As such, we think that its function in Benjamin's philosophy is similar to the Science of Knowledge in Fichte's philosophy or to the Aesthetic in the Ienan Romantics' philosophy. Moreover, this paper aims to demonstrate that those reflections on language allow a larger conception of the construction of history (as a paradigmatic place where the relation between the subject and the object is constructed) that determines all his further work. In order to expose this, we first need to explain how the theory of language is developed by Benjamin.

In this text, Benjamin's main thesis is that "there is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake in language" (Walter Benjamin 2000, 62). Language can't thus be understood as the mode of communication between human beings alone. It includes also nature, animal, things, all realms of the objects. As such, language is not simply the expression of content into word. Human language, using words, is the only

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way of using language that could be qualified as most intense. This assertion is the fundament of the role Benjamin will give to language. Language doesn't imply the communication of some content, as we said; it mediates the expression of the subjects and the objects.

In fact, according to Benjamin, everything has a spiritual essence in which is included a linguistic essence that produces language. This spiritual essence is a kind of absolute, it is an intensive totality. We think that this essence works, in Benjamin's theory, as the Absolute subject works in Fichte's Science of Knowledge[1]. This spiritual essence, if it has to communicate itself, needs a linguistic essence, as long as, in the same way that "the absolute subject represents nothing other than [*something formal*]" (Walter Benjamin 2000, 122), spiritual essences have no proper reality neither. They represent a pure reflexivity. This "form without content" needs the action of a position, a limitation, which means a choice in between the compossibility, to come to reality. We can use the same structure to understand Benjamin's theory of language. Language is the medium *in* which the spiritual essence can communicate itself; *in* which and not *through* which says Benjamin, because those spiritual essences need a particular form to come to knowledge. As such, spiritual essence is nothing material. Language is thus the necessary medium that informs the spiritual essences. Moreover, even the divine Creation is matter of a choice; God needs to see the way the Verb (language) has organized the world of possibilities into reality to cognize the world. As Benjamin shows when he comments the Biblical text. " 'And he saw that it was good' – that is, he had cognized it through name" (Walter Benjamin 2000, 68). God himself, if he creates, has to pose a particular object from the infinity of the possibilities[2].

Nonetheless, this explanation of language as a whole theory of Knowledge is, at this point, constructed as a negative background. Benjamin needs to give to this structure a particular form in which it can work as a positive structure. In other words, we can say that this epistemological structure has to be the support of an historical, positive theory of experience, of the relation between the subject and the object. The passage from this negative construction into a topography of experience necessitates an historical form. We think that is the reason why Benjamin resorts to the story of Creation.

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[1] We think that Benjamin will be interested in this text of Fichte for this precise reason: understanding how knowledge and history are related. It is why he chose Fichte and not Kant, who wasn't enough attentive to historical motives. In his doctoral thesis, Benjamin will read Fichte with the background of the researches on metaphysics and theology he did before (Walter Benjamin 1996: 390 *sq* and 403).

[2] This interpretation of the divine creation as a contraction of the absolute into the particular associates the idea of creation with the concept of melancholy. This idea of the nostalgia God would have had in creating the world has a Jewish origin, especially in the Luriac Cabala and appears too – through the mediation of the Souabe mysticism – in Schelling. On the cabalist sources in Schelling, especially in the corporeity of God, see BENZ, 1968: 55-67. On God's nostalgia, see: Schelling, 2006: 28.

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1.2 The Recourse to the Story of Creation

In order to give a form to the relation between these two kinds of essences – linguistic and spiritual-, the text on language uses a theological structure. Benjamin tries to define the problems of language in regards to its origin. This origin, symbolically, can be narrated using the Christian genesis. In our opinion, this recourse to the biblical narrative is rather a dramatization, a shaping of his theory of language rather than a real adherence to the beliefs it involves. Benjamin is thus choosing here a theological form to construct his theory of language:

"If in what follows the nature of language is considered on the basis of the first chapter of Genesis, the object is neither a biblical interpretation nor *subjection* of the Bible to *objective* consideration as revealed truth, but the discovery of what emerges of itself from the biblical text with regard to the nature of language; and the Bible is only *initially* indispensable for this purpose, because the present argument broadly follows it in presupposing language as an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical. The Bible, in regarding itself as a revelation, must necessarily evolve the fundamental linguistic facts" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 67, italics added by me).

This recourse to the Christian story of Genesis is thus a way of analyzing fundamental linguistic facts[3]. According to what Benjamin said concerning the relationship between spiritual essences and linguistic essences, this construction of the text on language is therefore a kind of *mise-en-abîme* of its own theory into a concrete manifestation. (In fact, if we admit that the spiritual essences of things must be updated by the linguistic essences in order to be real, then, the Bible is a way of mediating this informative process.)

This narrative recourse allows him to designate two moments in the origin of language. One of them is ahistorical and the other, historical. The ahistorical step concerns the ideal possibility of an immediate knowledge. It concerns the idea of a whole unity of the subject and the object. The historical one, dramatized in the Christian idea of the Fall, concerns the principle of differentiation between the subject and the object in history.

The idea of an immediate knowledge is also what the Romantics wanted to achieve with the idea of the Self as the beginning and the end of history. The questions Benjamin asks, after the Romantics but also in view of the theological questions, are the following: 'can knowledge exist in history or is it always already lost? How can knowledge be reachable in the context of constant changes?'

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[3] Let's just note here that this Christian structure is completed by a Jewish background of the theory of language in the Cabala. This construction involves a conception of the stages of the transition from the Absolute to the Particular, dramatized in the Christian theology in the story of the Creation and the Fall, and in the Cabala in the story of the broken vessels and the theogony of the Sefiroths.

In order to understand this problem, Benjamin tries to make an analysis of the Fall into differentiation. He first constructs a metaphysical topography of what an absolute knowledge would be. Thus, the story of Creation is a formalization of that kind of absolute knowledge. In the first story of Genesis, God creates the world by the Verb. The particular is based on a process of relationality which involves language. Language is thus the medium that connects the possibilities into a specific form. The second story concerns the language of man. Language appears when Adam has to name the animals. In this case, the Adamite language is the manifestation of an immediate knowledge. The Name he gives to animals is immediately related to the truth. Language, in the theory Benjamin develops, is thus a process of intensification. Things reach knowability by way of the name man gives them. So Benjamin constructs a sequence which comes from the word of God which creates, the nature which communicates itself silently and the Name which gives to Nature a linguistic expression and achieves God's Creation. The Name is thus the expression of the language in its absolute wholeness (Walter Benjamin 2000: 65), where spiritual essences are expressed by linguistic essences. This is why, in Name, "to express oneself and to address everything else amounts to the same thing" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 65). In Name, thus, the spiritual essence and the linguistic essence are united[4]. In the theory of Name, the intensive totality and the extensive totality peak, as Benjamin explains: "So in name culminate both the intensive totality of language, as the absolutely communicable spiritual essence, and the extensive totality of language, as the universally communicating essence" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 65-66, translation modified).

In Benjaminian theory of Name, there is thus a unity between universality and absolute; this is why this can't be a real historical theory. Adam is able to give the animal a Name because he is related to God[5]. Consequently, Benjamin can say that the theory of pure language is based on the "communion of man with the *creative* word of God" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 69). Let's just introduce here that this idea of a community (*Gemeinschaft*), a relational character in the Name that always exceeds immediate meaning, will be 'secularized' by Benjamin.

Nevertheless, we don't think that this text is a theological text. Benjamin, simultaneously, distances himself from the Christian mode of resolution of history contained in the Fall. Indeed, the author does not strive towards the conviction that the language of Name is still possible after the Fall. To the contrary, the theory of Name is reserved to the meta-archeology of language. Benjamin, thus, doesn't adhere to a messianic resolution of the conflicts of

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[4] As such, we find here a process similar to the *Tathandlung* in Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. We could say, as we already have, that the pure reflectibility is a pure intensity and that the positing, at its absolute level, would be a pure extensity.

[5] To pursuit our analogy between Fichte's theory of knowledge and Benjamin's theory of language, we could say that, as Fichte tried to stop the infinity of the reflection using the *Anschauung* (intuition), Benjamin stops the infinity of meaning using God's creative nomination as an instance of absolute intuition.

history which would laud the return to the origin. This Origin is definitively separated from the historical life. Its reconstruction in the dramatization of the story of language is only a necessary step for the understanding of the creative power of language but not an adherence to a religious redemption[6].

Benjamin, thus, doesn't aim at reestablishing the divine realm of immediate knowledge. His theory of language can be understood as a way of responding to two ways of constructing a philosophy of history. The first one can be understood as a process of history which forgets, in its construction, the specific relation of the subject with the reality. This first one is characterized by the overdetermination of the origin of the process, the supremacy of the ideality. It is formalized in the pure language of Name.

The second one can be understood as a process of history which forgets the particular relation of the object to the operation of subjectivation it should imply. This second construction is a millenarian construction of history which is characterized by the overdetermination of the end of the process, the supremacy of reality. It is formalized in the theory of communication.

2.   Language as Critique of Two Historicisms

We now need to analyze what those two structures of history involve. The first one, Benjamin calls the pure language of Name, is out of history. It doesn't involve a principle of differentiation. In this theory, the Name is the revelation of the spiritual essence into a linguistic essence. It works as follows: "the thing in itself has no word, being created from God's word and known in its name by a human word (…) Rather, the name that man gives to language depends on how language is communicated to him" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 69). As such, if it has to be understood in regard to a historical conception, it is a structure that involves the impossible expectation that the world would remain the same and would be expressible in a definitive form. This expectation involves its impossibility. It leads the speaker to silence.

The second one is the language which only means without interrogating its way of meaning and thus masks the moment, in the act of language, of decision of a particular form for a particular object. This second process is thus founded on a black box, the moment of the necessary decision of the subject in the act of language. This kind of language is the form that Benjamin also analyzes as the process of the progress effective in modernity.

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[6]   This is why Andrew Benjamin makes a very strict distinction between theology and religion in Benjamin's work. According to A. Benjamin, W. Benjamin doesn't adhere to a religion but he uses theology as a support of his construction of philosophy. (Andrew Benjamin, 2009: 2).

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2.1 A Structure of Historicism Overdetermined by its Origin: the Adamite Language

As we posited in our introduction, the Adamite language is only comprehensible in view of the space where it is constructed, specifically, here, the Story of Creation. As such, this construction can only be determined as a negative mode of resolution of the problem of the origin of language but not as the specific ontology of its historical manifestation. This consideration involves two consequences: the first one is that this theory is related to the particular form of the story. It can't be the structure of determination of historical language. The second consequence is that this kind of language, if it had to explain the differences between the concrete human languages, wouldn't have another solution than desiring the return of the realm of the origin where the two kinds of essences were related in God. So, without the mediation of an operation of transformation, it produced an aporia: the melancholy of the loss of the paradisiacal state.

First, the unity of absolute and language wouldn't be possible if "were not the name-language of man and the nameless language of things related in God and released from the same creative word" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 70). This is why Benjamin opposes his theory of language to the bourgeois and the mystical conceptions. The Name is neither the communication of something outside the language itself nor the pure spiritual essence. Benjamin's theory of Name is thus a process of accomplishment of the divine Creation, a process similar to the one he developed in his thesis on the German Romanticism. This conception of achievement of the truth in its absolute resolution is based on a metaphysical conception of the Self the Romantics associate to the conception of reflexivity. According to the Romantics, in opposition to the Fichtean theory of *Tathandlung*, reflexivity is already fulfilled by a content, the truth of the Self. This content only needs artworks to come to reality. In the Fichtean theory, the reflection is a form without content, which has to be fulfilled by the positing of a content. The empty form becomes thus the content of the following reflection. This is the way Fichte understands the relation between the Absolute of a Self and the Particular positing of an I. To the contrary, the Romantics consider that the Self already exists and has a content which is external to the subject. It implies that the subject is only here to make the autoprocess of potentiation of the Self come to reality. In the Adamite conception of Name, the language of man is also there to reveal the truth which already exists as a content but which needs a form to be expressed. As such, at this level, the whole world is already determined by spiritual essences which are related in God to linguistic essences.

Moreover, this metaphysical theory of Name is even less historical than the Romantic theory of intensification, because this process doesn't intensify in a continuous process. It only happens once, when Adam names the divine Creation. It only happens out of a historical process of change. This is why this

process implies to stay at the state of the origin and can't be enlarged into an historical process of differentiation. The Name achieves the divine Creation. This is why this process, if it has to determine a historical process, would produce a mythologization of the process where its finality is already given in its origin. It would be the yearning for the world to be how it should be without interrogating the way it transforms itself in history.

2.2 A Structure of Historicism Overdetermined by its End: the Communication

If we try to understand the way this process can be the base for an historical process, thus, we are in front of an aporia. In fact, this process is fixed into a conception of immediate relation between God, his creation and men. This implies that man is only there to achieve the divine creation but he hasn't a creative power. This capability of creation is lost with the fall into history.

This construction leads Benjamin to consider what a historical theory of language would be. He constructs thus a theory of language as communication. In this construction, the divine link to the creative origin is lost. So language of man is no more capable to reach the immediate knowledge of the truth. Language as communication is thus based on a lack, the loss of the capacity for Self expression. In language as communication, language is always late compared to the life it has to determine (Alexander Garcia Düttmann 2000: 62). As such, word is a parody of itself (Walter Benjamin 2000: 71).

This decay of pure language into the human languages appears when language wants to signify something out of its own intensity. In the biblical dramatization, this decay appears with the knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge, according to Benjamin, is nameless; it is from outside (Walter Benjamin 2000: 71). This gap between the knowledge from outside that predominates in communication and the knowledge from inside that predominates in name indicates a separation[7] between the potencies of the subject in the experience of language. Language as communication tries to convey meaning from outside without being first related to the affectivity of the speaker. This process is what Benjamin calls '*Überbennenung*' (overnaming) (Walter Benjamin 2000: 73). In the overnaming, language is overdetermined by its external significance. This process of overnaming leads the nature to melancholy. Melancholy is thus the trace of the memory of the feelings that can't be expressed in communication. It is the manifestation of the banishment of the feelings, of the self-expression from the language as communication.

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[7] This divide between spirit and heart is, according to Schelling, the basis of evil or madness, stupidity and melancholy. In the *Stuttgart Conferences*, Schelling analyzes evil and madness, stupidity and melancholy as an inversion (*Verkehrung*) of the potenties of the subject. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, *SW, VII,* 468. Evil has to be distinguished from the other inversion because it is an inversion done on purpose. It means to put the understanding before the soul (Geist before Seele and Gemüth before Geist). On this topic, see Maesschalck., 1991 : 16.

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In order to analyze the way this construction is related to history, we can say that this construction is encircled in its goal, in the end it has to reach. As such, communication is always more distant from the power of self-expression. It is a medium of alienation[8]. As the artwork was itself the medium-of-the-reflection in the concept of critique in the Ienian Romantics, here, the signifier is the medium of reflection of the communication for the subject. The subject is thus always the passive witness of the process of self-determination of the goal of communication. It isn't a self-expression as it was in the theory of the pure language, where expression and communicability appear in one moment. This process involves an utopization of the process of language which would be able to tell an absolute truth valid at each moment. According to Benjamin, this belief is the fundament of ideologies[9]. This process, considered as a linear progress, is presented as an objective process. It negates the fact that it is always the result of an operation of subjectivation, a decision.

3.   The Third Construction of History: Creativity

The interest of the opposition between the Benjaminian and the bourgeois conceptions of language is the following: in the bourgeois conception of language, the words are always the instruments of a goal external to the relationality the subject has to the object; it becomes the communication of an abstraction. In the Benjaminian conception of language, the word first aims the relationality, the self-communication. As Benjamin explains: "Thus, in name appears the essential law of language, according to which to express oneself and to address everything else amounts to the same thing" (Walter Benjamin 2000, 65). "all language communicates itself" (Walter Benjamin 2000, 63). The question which now has to be asked is 'is this self-expression still possible in history?'

3. 1 Theory of Knowledge as a Theory of Experience

After what we tried to show in the second part of our paper, we think that this negative theory of relationality between the subject and its expression has to be reconstructed into a historical mode, as long as humans can't speak the pure language of name after the Fall. This negative theory has to be translated into

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[8]   This conception is very close to the conception of the 'master signifier' in Lacan. The signifier is always what represents a subject to another signifier. In language as communication, Benjamin describes a very similar process of self referencer of the language in itself.

[9]   We would here refer to our paper Derroitte E., "Construire l'histoire à partir des vaincus, une sortie de la répétition? Une lecture des thèses Sur le concept d'histoire de Walter Benjamin", in Les Carnets du Centre de philosophie du Droit, n°151, January 2010, available at http://www.cpdr.ucl.ac.be/docTravail /151DerroitteE.pdf.

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history. This historical way of understanding language involves that language can't remain always the same. It has to transform itself at every single moment, as Benjamin develops it in his theory of allegory.

In order to proceed to this historicization of language[10], we have to go back to the structure of knowledge induced by the theory of language. The negative structure of knowledge, considered as an absolute, has to be taken again into a positive form. This positive for entails that, if spiritual essences need linguistic essences to take place in reality, the way those forms arise to reality must be related to the particular history where they appear. If, in Benjamin's view, there is no content to language, it is a pure reflexivity. This reflexivity needs a linguistic essence to come to reality. However, those linguistic essences, as historical forms, can now only be envisaged from their becoming[11]. As such, if language has no content except communicability, it means that its very ontology is its transformability. "There is no such thing as content of language; as communication, language communicates a spiritual essence- a communicability *per se*" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 66, translation modified).

According to that, the differences between languages are differences of intensity. A complete language would be the pure equality between two kinds of totalities (Walter Benjamin 2000: 65-66): the first one would be an intensive totality (we called pure reflexivity, the spiritual essence in Benjamin's text[12]) and the second would be an extensive totality (we called an absolute positing, the Name as linguistic essence in Benjamin's text). This unity between the universality and the intensity is impossible in history. This structure of language has to be understood as the unconscious structure of a historical language theory. It has to be constructed at two different levels. In the positive construction, language functions as well as we showed at the beginning of our paper, as the information; let's say the limitation, of spiritual essences. However, this information now needs to take a very particular form in regard to the reality in which it is pronounced. As such, every historical positing of language can be developed as a translation. Indeed, it is a translation of the feeling, the living of the one who speaks into linguistic forms. According to that, language has to be enlarged from its first goal of expression. The theory of language as self expression is only suitable in a negative construction where the world and the subject remain the same in there whole intensity. In history, a theory of language has to consider the mutual influence of the world and the subject. This is why

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[10] We could here refer to Brecht's theory of historicization which immediately involves a principle of subjective interpretation by reframing the reality by way of depotentiation of the beliefs provoked by a certain historicism. In Benjamin also, the historicization of language is related to the way the subject will try to communicate himself in the language by way of translation of the living experience into a communicable experience.

[11] As Schelling theorized in On Human Freedom: 'The concept of becoming is the only one appropriate to the nature of things' (Schelling, 2006: 28).

[12] This spiritual essence is also what Benjamin identifies in the text on Elective Affinities of Goethe, the *Wahrgehalt*.

language, as long as it is considered as an historical process, has to accept his function of experimentation. In order to demonstrate this, we have to go further into our reading of the *Task of the Translator*.

In this text, Benjamin allocates to the translator the task of the afterlife (Walter Benjamin 2000: 254) of a work into history. How can this task be realized? First, it involves that the theory of translation is an embodiment of the negative theory of language. This embodiment means that this limitation of spiritual essences into linguistic essences appears in a specific materiality. According to that, the work is always too late in front of the specific experience of it. More deeply, its manifestation, as part of the historical process, produces its own overcoming. This is why the theory of the translation is merely a theory of historical experience. As Benjamin puts it: "For just as the tenor and significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually perish with its renewal" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 256). This implies that the task of the translator is thus a task of intensification of the work in regard to the specific historical experience in which the translation appears. As such, the translation doesn't only intensify the work; it also intensifies the specific experience that it produces. In fact, to translate, the translator "must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 262). Translation is thus the result of the embodiment of the experience of the work.

How can this embodiment be constructed? According to Benjamin, it is related to the affectivity of the translator. The translator, if he has to intensify the experience of the work, has to "mortify" the work (Walter Benjamin 1992: 182), to depotentiate the aura of the work to reconstruct the form of his own historical experience of it. It has to disclose the unity of the work in order to give to the translation a provisional (Walter Benjamin 2000: 257) form. "For any translation of a work [originates] in a specific stage of linguistic history" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 258, translation modified). Thus, translation is the operation of connection between the method of targeting its language in its historical background and the meaning of the work. This connection is only possible from the experience that the translator makes of his own language. As such, this experience is not an intellectual experience but also an experience of the feeling of the constellation in which the word appears in its language. In fact, one word in one language is always related to an affective constellation of significance, as Benjamin shows: "For this sense, in its poetic significance for the original, is not limited to what is meant but rather wins such significance to the degree that what is meant is bound to the way of meaning of the individual word. People commonly convey this when they say that words have emotional connotations" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 259-260). This constellation, this feeling of the language has to be involved into the translation. Moreover, we could go as far as

saying that two different languages can have nothing like an equivalent way of saying things. So, the task of the translator is found on the very impossibility of a translation. As a specific solution into the (compossibility) of the spiritual essence, language is always a particular solution that always has to be exceeded. This is why we can define this process very closely to the German etymology of *überstezung*. In Benjamin's theory of translation, the task is to pose above, further (*übersetzen*). This definition has of course, according to what we said, a very Fichtean meaning. Translating is the positing (*Setzung*) from the reflexibility involved in the experience of the text. This is why Benjamin says that "a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel" (Walter Benjamin 2000: 260). This potentiation, this intensification of the text is only possible at the condition that the translator experiences the text, doesn't only cognize it. This mode of experience that involves the affectivity of the translator exceeds a theory of language as an expression. Expressing would mean that the translator would have a neutral and fixed relation to the world that he would express. In the theory of the translation, the translator accepts to be transformed himself, to transform his own language by his experience of the world (in this case, his experience of the object that is the original work). He so accepts that his work incurs the risk to fail, that his translation is always an experimentation.

Translation is thus haunted by a double movement: on one hand, it deals with the nostalgia of loss of the perfect and immediate meaning and on the second hand, this yearning (*Sehnsucht*) (Walter Benjamin 2000: 259) calls attention to the way of dealing with this loss. Translation is thus a process of a double effacement, firstly of the fullness of the work, of which limitation has to be exceeded in the language of the translator and secondly of the translator himself as long as his translation will have to be itself exceeded.

Translation isn't only a transposition of a text into another language; it also has to construct the specific way of meaning of this language. This attention necessitates that the translator doesn't only aim at content but also the form that this content takes into the collective structure of ipseity where it appears, the special experience[13] that relates the object and the word (as in the very well-known example of Benjamin on the difference between *Brod* and *pain*, which is not only a linguistic difference but involves a difference within the *Erlebnis* of it). The translation has to accept that the form it gives to a text is always a step in the history of the text, the step of the time of its manifestation[14].

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[13] On this kind of collective experience in language, we would refer to Raphaël Gély, « La vie sociale, le langage et la vulnérabilité originaire du désir, Réflexions à partir de l'œuvre de Michel Henry ».

[14] On the historical character of the translation, we would refer to the very interesting comment of Antoine Bermann, 2008 : 72.

This is why translation works on the relation between fidelity and freedom. Fidelity is the fidelity of the purpose of language as a reflexibility of the subject in relation to another, fidelity to the spiritual essence of language and Freedom is the potentiality of creativity this fidelity opens. As communicability, language has always to be reconstructed at its moment of apparition. This is the reason why there is no muse of translation (Walter Benjamin 2000: 259). As such, translation doesn't aim to reach the complete redemption of the Fall, it rather searches inside its historical manifestation to intensify the conditions of the experience and, in doing so, it transforms itself (it creates a new language) and transforms the relation between the subject and the object.

3.2 Experience, Allegory, Translation: Embodiment of Language

This theory of creativity has a particular form in the task Benjamin allocates to the translator. In this text, Benjamin tries to find a way of linking the particular *Erlebnis* of the translator to a communicable *Erfahrung* of a translation. This text immediately deals with this question of living experience and communication. The translation is thus a creative process. Translation isn't a theory of restoration of the realm of the pure language (*Reine Sprache*). As such, translation deals with a double structure of history: it is 'not yet and even already'. 'Not yet' as the necessary limitation of compossibilities and 'even already' as the overcoming of this form into another. This is why translation is related to the transformability of the experience. Translation is rather related to the concept of allegory. The allegory is a very historical construction in Benjamin's work. In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he opposes allegory to symbol as two different ways of constructing the mode by which symbolic forms are related to history. The symbol, like the Name, is out of history, it has always the same meaning. To the contrary, allegory is the particular manifestation of an idea in its very moment of enunciation. It always has to be deconstructed and reconstructed into a new form, as long as it is attentive to the very particularity of the time in which it emerges.

This kind of attention is no more a passivity to the fullness of the objects as it was in the language of communication. First of all, allegory, as well as translation, is a "displacement". It is a translation of the world in the language of feelings. In fact, to make an allegory, one has to separate the object from its fullness of significance (as in symbol) and link it to oneself as living it.

Thus, we understand the necessity of melancholy as a reconnection to the actors' feelings and its advancement in a creative action in allegory. "This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world" (Walter Benjamin 1992: 166). The baroque's allegory is thus the effort to resubjectivize the language and then to re-open it.

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This conception of the allegory is thus the antagonism of the symbol. "The 'difference between symbolic and allegorical representation' is explained as follows: (…) [t]here (in the symbol) we have momentary totality, here we have progression in a series of moments" (Walter Benjamin 1992: 164-165). As we see, the main differences between those two modes of representation are historical ones: the symbol has an immediate meaning whereas the allegory is developed in the times of its production and reception. We could say that allegory is the symbol in its historical representation: "The mystical instant becomes the 'now' of contemporary actuality" (Walter Benjamin 1992: 183). In other words, allegory is a *qualitative discontinuity; it is a way of escaping from the continuity of historicism.* This is a structure of history that permits the self-transformation of the actors. The act of the allegory is thus an act of relative end that is not *a priori* enclosed in an external criterion of validation which would have engaged the repeatability. As an opened form, the allegory is also an opening within the actors' capabilities in "making-history".

Translation partakes in the same process. It also has to find a particular way of displacing what in the original doesn't suit to the present anymore.

This is why translation is related to the feelings of the translator. All along the text on translation, Benjamin links affectivity with the task of the translator. As such, Benjamin rejoins his very particular theory of messianism which expects that "The Messiah […] will not change the world by force but will merely make a slight adjustment in it" (Walter Benjamin 2001, 811).

Conclusion

This paper was dealing with three related topics: relation, difference and history.

The route we made into Benjamin's theory of language allows now three consequences:

The first one is that Benjamin's theory of language isn't a theology of language. We have tried to show that the theological form this work takes is only a narrative dramatization of the theory of the origin of the relation between the subject and the object.

This first consequence has led us to consider that, if this structure has to be understood as a complete historical theory of language, then, it would imply two kinds of historicisms which Benjamin hadn't theorized for them. The theory of Name would have necessitated going back to the origin of its manifestation and by doing so, would have been unable to reach the world in its transformation. Mirrored in this construction, the theory of communication would imply the necessity of an immediate end, and thus, would lead to the annihilation of the subjective process on which it is based.

This second point had so to be overridden into a third construction of history that Benjamin had theorized in his texts on translation and allegory. This third construction is, according to us, the only one that permits to embody the negative construction of language Benjamin had posited. This construction is based on a double effacement of the overdetermination of subjectivation in the theory of Name and the overdetermination of the objectivation in the theory of communication.

As such, Benjamin's theory of language is rather a theory of the interpretation of an individual living experience into an object of communication, its communicability. The aim of language is more deeply the questioning of the possibility of an objectivation of the subjective experience. If this process of objectivation would say something of the feeling of the subject, it has to deconstruct a preobjectived way of signifying as Benjamin described in the fall into communication.

Thus, we think that the theory of translation exceeds a theory of expression which would not question the way the speaker and the world influence each other. Expression is only possible in the realm of pure language as immediate manifestation of the spiritual essence. Benjamin, by the attention he pays to the suffering which the speaker experiences on account of the world, develops a theory of mutual transformation of the world and the speaker. This process can be understood as a process of creativity where the relation to the world is always reconstructed at each moment.

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