Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation

In the previous chapter it has been shown that the difficulty of translation that Dewey encountered in Japan is not simply the more or less geographical matter of a cross-cultural encounter but also internally related to the nature of his pragmatism. The problem has been focused by highlighting the question of how American philosophy can open a third way beyond American rootedness and cosmopolitanism: and it has been suggested that practice of translation is a means through which further to explore the viability of the perfectionist antifoundationalism of American philosophy. It was also suggested that it is Cavell who could indicate such a third way of cultural criticism in the mediation of American transcendentalism. In this chapter, I would like to take as a motif the idea that Cavell is American philosophy’s translator. The impetus to this thought derives from the question: How can Cavell enable us to answer the question of the untranslatable, a question left unanswered by Dewey? How does his distinctive mode of antifoundationalism demonstrate a cross-cultural dimension of American philosophy that opens itself to the question of the untranslatable? Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy enables us to translate American philosophy by elucidating its internal tension. Cavell hardly ever talks about translation explicitly, and yet in his pursuit of ordinary language philosophy, the idea of translation appears both as a substantive feature and as itself thematized. As a unique contribution to recent studies on Cavell, this chapter will shed new light on his ordinary language philosophy through the theme of translation (Cavell, forthcoming; Standish and Saito 2017).

I. CAVELL AS A CROSS-CULTURAL FIGURE

As we saw in Chapter 4, both Chantal Mouffe (1996) and Paul Standish (2004), writing from the shores of Europe, and with ambivalent attitudes toward pragmatism, find in the work of
Stanley Cavell an opening in American philosophy, an alternative path of dialogue between America and Europe. Indeed, Cavell’s blend of American and ordinary language philosophy is *cross-cultural* by nature. In multiple respects, his way of philosophizing breaches the boundaries of American philosophy. First, Cavell has described himself as working in the tear in philosophy in the wake of Kant, and hence connecting Anglo-American (Austin and Wittgenstein) and continental philosophy (Nietzsche and Heidegger) (Cavell, forthcoming). In his recent autobiography, Cavell restates his sense that, with the dominance of analytical philosophy in the Anglo-American philosophical world, the philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau has been suppressed, a suppression of the voices he wants to hear (Cavell 2010). He finds commonality between Emerson and Thoreau and the Heidegger of “thinking as thanking” (Cavell 1992, p. 132). Yet in *The Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (2005), in contrast to Heidegger’s proclivity toward home, Cavell finds in Thoreau the distinctive tone of departure (Cavell 2005).

Second, Cavell keeps his sense of distance from and maintains a certain reticence toward the European poststructuralism of Levinas and Derrida. In “Education for Grown-Ups, a Religion for Adults: Skepticism and Alterity in Cavell and Levinas” (2007), Standish discusses Cavell’s strange relation to Levinas—a relation that combines an obvious kinship in thought with a curious distancing, where “philosophical and religious ambitions so apparently different” are found even in the presence of “phenomenological coincidences so precise” (Cavell 2005, pp. 151–52, quoted in Standish 2007). Although both respond to the question of skepticism that originates in Descartes, Cavell’s concern is more with an ‘infinite responsibility for myself, together, let us say, with finite responsibility for the claims of the existence of the other upon me” (Cavell 2005, p. 144 quoted in Standish 2007, p. 81), while in Levinas the focus is rather on “my infinite responsibility for the other” (Standish, 2007, p. 81). In other words, Cavell replaces Levinas’s infinite Other with the nextness and
neighboring found in Thoreau and Emerson (ibid.). Cavell’s appeal is not to an infinite God, but to a responsibility to the other exercised within the limits of human finitude.

Cavell also distances himself from Derrida’s poststructuralism. In Wittgenstein and Austin, as in Emerson and Thoreau, “the mood of philosophy begins in the street, or in doorways, or closets, anywhere but in philosophical schools” (Cavell 1994, p. 63). By contrast, Derrida seems to sustain the grandiose terms of metaphysics, and Levinas invokes the hyperbole of infinity.¹ Here he points toward the American transcendentalists’ replacement of the subject of philosophy—such that philosophy is brought back to the ordinary, so that it becomes “a clinical problem as much as a critical one” (ibid.). This brings Cavell closer to Dewey. Cavell’s sense of distance from Derrida is expressed in terms of a difference in the “sound of philosophy” (p. 77): “I seem to hear the traditions scrape as they pass each other” (p. 74). In his manner of comparison, Cavell neither assimilates Derrida into Emerson and Thoreau, nor thinks in terms of starkly opposing them. Rather, he is interested in how the scraping sound can make us realize who we are. To hear the scraping is to be attuned to why it matters how things are said, why it matters how we account for the way we live—which tells us much about what is at the heart of his ordinary language philosophy.

Third, not only beyond the bounds of America, Cavell’s sense of distance is manifested within American philosophy, insisting as he does on the distance between Emerson’s and Thoreau’s transcendentalism and Dewey’s pragmatism. Resuscitating the voices of Emerson and Thoreau, he expresses resistance to any facile connection between their thought and pragmatism (Cavell 1990, 1998, 2003). He distinguishes Emerson’s “mode of thinking” from Dewey’s “intelligence,” saying that in Emerson, “[t]here is no middle way between, say, self-reliance and self- (other-)conformity” (Cavell 2003, p. 9). He expresses frustration with Dewey’s declaration that language is public and is shared. Thus, with a nod also to Wittgenstein’s rejection of the idea of language as private, he remarks: “[l]anguage is
not, as such, either public or private” (Cavell and Standish 2012, p. 157). Cavell is attuned to Emerson’s “middle” not as a point but as a movement of oscillation, one that never allows us to settle down, which hence puts us into deeper anxiety. The “cross-cultural” already begins here with its intracultural manifestations. These multiple cross-cultural dimensions are interrelated in the mediation of American transcendentalism.

Cavell is an “orienter” (Cavell 1992, p. 141) within America who directs America to open its eyes to these diverse cultural dimensions. Anxieties about what America can become—both carrying the heritage of Europe and freeing itself from that past—are inherent in America, as Cavell conceives it, and this crucially conditions his philosophy. The country’s inevitable, quasi-intrafamilial struggle with this has led to forms of repression that, if he is right, continue to affect America today. His translation between different strands of thought and language extends to and attends to American philosophy’s “dissonant voices.”

It is here that Cavell’s distinctive senses of the East are revealed, perhaps in terms of what I am calling American philosophy’s Eastern strains—its troubled inheritance from Europe and its audible, if still faint, echoes of East Asian thought—“strain” here carrying the double connotation of “tension” and “element.” Emerson and Thoreau both were interested and influenced by Indian and East Asian thought. In “Walden in Tokyo,” Cavell makes it explicit that “from the beginning of writing my book its composition has been associated in my mind with the relation between cultures, and not alone between America and Europe but between America and Asia” (Cavell, forthcoming). His “cross-cultural” approach, however, is nothing like what one expects to find in “East Asian studies,” a comparative philosophy between East and West, and neither has it anything to do with that mystification of Eastern culture that has been and still is prevalent in the West.

What, then, is it to speak of Eastern strains? In the first place, a strain is an element of common stock or breeding—in more muted terms, a characteristic. Such an understanding
might prompt questions regarding possible commonalities between American philosophy and the two “Easts” identified above, where connections with East Asia will probably be the more surprising and interesting ones to consider. But “strain” of course also has this other sense, and here we might think of the tensions between American philosophy (including pragmatism) and these two “Easts.” Cognizant of the diverse implications of America’s Eastern strains, Cavell’s concern is in what happens as these paths of thought intersect: in how each of us is to confront such moments in reorienting our ways of thinking; how each moment may turn us around, so that we relearn how to go on. This is attested to by the fact that his book on Walden was written right as the Vietnam War was reaching its nadir, this American incursion into Asia, and this contrasted so painfully with his humble search for a lost voice of America, for what America itself had suppressed, and for the recovery of what America had to be proud of (Cavell, forthcoming). His philosophizing is indeed an act of cultural criticism from within—and, that is, with this sense of shame (Cavell and Standish 2012). Cavell’s thought, along with Emerson’s and Thoreau’s, is directed toward the East in the oath of this “onward thinking,” within a quasi-religious imaginary of “The Way” (Cavell 1992, p. 136).³ He represents Thoreau as the philosopher of morning in pursuit of a new dawn, which is ever still to be arrived at and, hence, never fully to be achieved (Cavell 2005, pp. 217, 221). The theme of This New Yet Unapproachable America (Cavell 1989), the “finding as founding” of America, is a crucial tenet of Cavell’s American philosophy. In “understanding” other cultures, and riffing on connotations of “home” and “base,” Cavell’s point is not to hit a “homerun,” to reach home base, but to be ready for a continual (sometimes interrupted) movement toward “first base” (Cavell, forthcoming). It is to be ready for a kind of immigrancy of thought. This is the exemplification of Cavell’s philosophy on the way.
Cavell rejects the mindset of finding equivalences, for this will prohibit further thinking of the kind that is needed if the antifoundationalist potential in these writers is to be realized. Bearing in mind the multiple senses of “the East,” seeing things in the light of American transcendentalism, we might be guided to pragmatism’s, and more broadly, American philosophy’s, Eastern strains. Cavell’s cross-cultural approach is indirect, in that different cultures exist adjacent to one another, and yet at a curious distance. The sense of this can perhaps be captured in the oxymoron of “disjunctive bridging,” in a logic of the “between.” Such a logic is very much at the heart of Dewey’s pragmatism, evident in his recurrent reference to “the medium” or to being “in the middle term” (Dewey 1983c, p. 51). This is not to be understood as a kind of compromise or halfway house: it is crucial to Dewey’s pragmatist dynamic worldview that, as Scheffler says referring to Peirce, “we begin in the middle of things” (Scheffler 1974, p. 44). Cavell’s Emersonian way of being in the middle, however, has shown that his mode of thinking and use of language sustains betweenness of a more radical nature—in a way more thoroughly antifoundationalist than Dewey’s pragmatism, always on the way. He is a disturbing mediator on the part of American philosophy, in that the idea of what constitutes “American” philosophy is shifted, in consequence of which any clear categorization of American (and European) philosophy may lose its purchase. Putnam has remarked that “Cavell is the only living American transcendentalist,” which perhaps indicates the way he continues to disturb.

<a>SOME FEATURES OF CAVELL’S ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY</a>

Let us examine then how the positioning of Cavell as a cross-cultural figure can shed new light on his ordinary language philosophy. Cavell’s philosophy of ordinary language, which is associated with J. L. Austin and Wittgenstein, is not merely a matter of linguistic analysis or of sociolinguistic consensus. It is related to those questions of responsibility to the
language we ordinarily use, and to the pervasiveness of language in the human condition. It has social, cultural, and political implications. It would be right to say that in using words we (should) seek community with others, which will prove the best conditions for our autonomy. This is demonstrated in the emphasis, within the language community, on the “we”: “The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community. And the claim to community is always a search for the basis upon which it can or has been established” (Cavell 1979, p. 20). Community depends on our finding ways of expression that strike us as right and apt, not merely submitting to the “authority” of the community, for without individuals’ struggle with their own words and convictions, the community that is achieved will be hollow, and this will be a threat to democracy. In search of community, you cannot know a priori who your neighbor is (p. 22). Engagement with “criteria” is the discovery of whom you can build a relationship of neighborhood with, of whom you can speak for as “we.” Hence, it is a mistake to think of anything that might be called “the social contract” as something that we simply choose to enter into, ideally, so it is imagined, after appropriate deliberation: human beings as linguistic beings are already involved in political life. “What I consent to, in consenting to the contract, is not mere obedience, but membership in a polis. . . [C]itizenship . . . is the same as my autonomy; the polis is the field within which I work out my personal identity and it is the creation of (political) freedom” (p. 23). The political is, thus, reconsidered in such a way as to form an extension of—or, better, to be the condition of—one’s self-examination and discovery of others, in the process of contributing the voice of the “I” to the community. And hence it is through this process that the “I” finds who “my” neighbors are: it is through this process that the “we” is constituted. At the same time, the “I” cannot simply be constituted by whim: it is only from within the linguistic community that the “I” can exercise its deviating force. “Participation in the language community means to ‘offer [one’s] assertion as
exemplary in some way, testing this against the responses of others, and testing her own responses against what those other themselves say’” (Standish and Saito 2005, p. 220). Ordinary language philosophy draws attention, then, to the exercising of a level of judgment, albeit that this is for the most part there in our sensitivity in our use of words.

Furthermore, Cavell’s ordinary language, which returns language to the ordinary, demonstrates something political. His Emersonian moral perfectionism helps to explain the political strain in his ordinary language philosophy and reiterates its American democratic accent on democracy always to be perfected: “That language can become private needs to be acknowledged, and to make language public is a responsibility in each of us” (Cavell, in Cavell and Standish 2012, p. 157). Thus, “language’s wording of the world—in the way our city is a city of words” is the very nature of the political (Standish and Saito 2017, p. 5). The political situation in America (and around the world) has had a sustained presence in Cavell’s philosophy. In his struggling over the identity of philosophy and over his own identity as a philosopher, America has always been on his mind. This political consciousness is internal to his philosophy, not merely a topic that he occasionally takes up or something to which his philosophy is “applied.”

Here what Cavell means by the “political” cannot be accurately understood without close attention to the undercurrent of political emotion in his perfectionism. While the pursuit of happiness as a measure of the good life is its central theme, the negative emotions of shame and guilt are driving forces for perfecting democracy. Moreover, Cavell takes the stance that when you “take the sins of society upon you,” you can never say you are “above reproach” (Cavell, in Cavell and Standish 2012, p. 162). Here also, in the account of political emotions, there is emphasis on the creation of democracy from within—in particular, in response to its undercurrent of cynicism, a form of deep despair and resignation. His political task is to begin with this sense of privacy not as confinement but as “the conditions necessary
for freedom” (Cavell 1988, p. 120). This is what he means by the “criticism of democracy from within” (Cavell 1990, p. 3, italics added).

Cavell says that the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau is underwritten by ordinary language philosophy (and, by implication, that language plays a crucial role in transcendence) (Cavell 1984, p. 32). It calls for the returning of language to the low, to the ordinary—following Wittgenstein’s idea of “leading words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (Cavell 2004, p. 234): this is a “transcendence down” (Standish 2012b, p. 25). This drive toward the ordinary, the common, is another crucial aspect of Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy. Returning language to the ordinary does not mean replacing the language of philosophy with mundane ordinary words, in a kind of willful banality or folksiness. What we mean by “transcendence” and how it takes place in the “ordinary,” in our reengagement with language, are then the central issues to be addressed. Cavell’s redefinition of transcendentalism has multiple implications, and hence, opens American philosophy beyond Dewey’s pragmatism. It evokes a movement onward, not the upward movement symbolized by the attractions of Plato’s sun (Cavell 1990, p. 10; 1992, p. 136). By highlighting the adverbial phrase in Emerson’s remark, “the inmost in due time become the outmost” (Emerson 2000, p. 132), with its implications of provisionality, uncertainty, and unpredictability, Cavell reminds us that the path from the private to the public is always still to be achieved. And this transcendence down also carries implication: of the sense of shame. Cavell perceives Emerson’s idea of self-reliance as a “study of shame” (Cavell 1990, p. 47). Furthermore, language transcends itself: language is attached to the low and the common, and yet a certain spirituality is inherent in language, abundant in excess beyond human grasp. We find ourselves on “some boundary or threshold, as between the impossible and the possible” (Cavell, forthcoming). Translation reveals the impulse to transcendence inherent in
language, producing “a new revelation within an old familiarity” (Cavell, forthcoming). It dispels routines even at the same time as it demystifies transcendence.

From this standpoint, Cavell indicates a chasm between pragmatism and transcendentalism. Victor Kestenbaum objects to Cavell’s criticism of the relation of Dewey’s pragmatism to Emersonian transcendentalism. Against Cavell’s claim that “to repress Emerson’s difference [from Dewey’s pragmatism] is to deny that America is as transcendentalist as it is pragmatist,” Kestenbaum argues that “Dewey was ‘in struggle’ with himself on behalf of an American culture that was and is ‘as transcendentalist as it is pragmatist’” (Kestenbaum 2013, p. 14), and that it is the idea of the “turbulent” (pp. 17, 19) that has its place in his “paideia” (p. 18), suggesting a greater affinity with what Cavell calls “spiritual disorder” (p. 19). The turbulent, Kestenbaum contests, is for Dewey the “human condition,” on the basis of which “criticism and appreciation” are made possible (p. 19). Dewey, like Merleau-Ponty, has “respect for” and “receptivity to” the “absent,” the “indirect,” the “unseen” and the “hidden” as the condition of determining what is visible and what happens (pp. 22–23). Thus, Kestenbaum contends that the experience of transcendence is possible in, or even crucial to, Dewey’s pragmatism (p. 28) and, hence, that it goes further and deeper into human adversity, seeing this in terms other than problems to be solved (p. 26). (This brings us back to the debate on the sense of the tragic discussed in Chapter 3).

Truly, it is unfair to Dewey to say that he is never troubled or anxious in his writings. In order, however, for Dewey and for us to be able to exercise the radical power of critical thinking, so that we can convert the bland dystopia of risk(-management) into the bracing challenge of crisis,⁶ and despair into hope, a more radical turn in the way of thinking and the language of transcendence is called for—beyond the level of being satisfied with what is asserted, and of conceding that Dewey is troubled and that his metaphysics has its own turbulence. It is in the alertness of Emerson and Thoreau to the performative aspect of
language—to the way that to say something is to do something—that Cavell finds their radical difference.

Cavell says that Thoreau’s “philosophy of morning” is a book of crisis and that his *Walden* is “writing about departure” (Cavell 2005, p. 225). “Morning” has, of course, the further connotation of “mourning” (p. 217). As he rereads Thoreau’s text to be “about crisis and transformation, or metamorphosis” (p. 216), the focal point of transcendence is on the critical moment of conversion from negation to affirmation, as if realizing a “philosophy the day after tomorrow”—a phrase designed to evoke the multiple significances of Nietzsche’s “Übermorgen”—the day after tomorrow, the next morning, overcoming mourning and making possible a superawakening (p. 118). The prefix “Uber-,” more than its English equivalent, itself suggests an exceeding of thought, which in turn reminds us of the overlapping of the inheritance of Emerson’s Over-Soul in Nietzsche’s Ubermensch. The exceeding demands placed on us by these thoughts urge us to stand in the between.

Cavell’s approach to language, though apparently similar to Rorty’s contingent creation of new vocabularies, is permeated by the sense of tension, struggle, and even of abyss in one’s relation to language. For Cavell language not only serves as a bridge between the human being and nature, providing “the cherishing mother of all significance,” as Dewey says (Dewey 1981, p, 146), but also constitutes a rift: it demands not only sharing and continuity but also separation. The ordinary permeated by the sense of mourning is what separates Cavell, Emerson, and Thoreau from the ordinary that is more commonly associated with pragmatism. This is most distinctively captured by Thoreau’s and Cavell’s idea of the “father tongue”: “a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 69; Cavell 1992, p. 15). Thoreau and Cavell, while not negating the role of the “mother tongue,” say that the human being needs to gain distance on the mother tongue, in order to “be born again.” If the mother
tongue is characterized by the immediacy typically represented by spoken language, the father tongue is represented by the indirectness of the written word as “the maturity and experience” of the mother tongue (Thoreau 1992a, p. 68; Cavell 1992, p. 15). We are, as humans, fated to this dual relation to language, and hence to inheritance and innovation. Language in this sense is “not only an acquirement but a bequest” (Cavell 1979, p. 189). The father tongue is a way of sustaining the space of what Cavell calls “the daily, insistent split in the self that being human cannot . . . escape” (Cavell 2004, p. 5). And this is the only means through which transcendence can take place.

Let us see then further how this issue of language and transcendence is related to translation.

PHILOSOPHY AS TRANSLATION

These diverse aspects of Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy—its political strain, transcendence, the father tongue—are encapsulated in the idea of translation. And as Cavell says, it is his writings on Thoreau that most closely capture the connection between his ordinary language philosophy and translation. His The Senses of Walden is in a way a microcosm of his ordinary language philosophy (Standish and Saito 2005). As Cavell says, “Thoreau’s book on Walden can be taken as a whole to be precisely about the problem of translation, call it the transfiguration from one form of life to another” (Cavell, forthcoming); it is a “text about crisis and transformation, or metamorphosis” (Cavell 2004, p. 216). Cavell sees Thoreau as a translator who lives on borders, in transience, while at the same time attesting to the transfiguration of life.

Cavell hardly ever talks about translation explicitly, and yet in his pursuit of ordinary language philosophy, the idea of translation appears both as a substantive feature and as itself thematized (Standish and Saito 2017). His language itself performatively enacts this process
of translation, in all its transitivity and volatility (Cavell 1992, p. 27). Thoreau expresses this with the phrasing:

The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly translated; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures. (Thoreau 1992a, p. 217)

What Cavell means by translation is beyond any crude sense of translation as a matter of linguistic exchange as was briefly sketched in Chapter 4. The fantasy of such an idea of conversion brings with it the tacit assumption that languages are pure, stable, and more or less complete in themselves, which settles easily into a correspondence theory of truth, in a representationalist view of the world. In reality, translation involves an attunement to what happens in the encounter between different languages, and this ordinarily involves the experience of a gap—of the incommensurable, of the “untranslatable” (Cassin 2014). Philosophy as translation does not take up the untranslatable as a problem to be solved: it does not seek some definitive answer to the question of whether full translation is possible, and it does not accept the conventional idea of translation as correspondence between different systems of language. Rather, it reinterprets the significance of the untranslatable beyond anything that might be suggested by speaking of, for example, “imperfect interpretation.” The point is rather that in encountering the untranslatable we can gain some intimation of the way that we must find ourselves and, hence, are founded without fixed foundation. If anyone should suspect mystification here, an image Cavell finds in Walden is shown to resist this quite bluntly: when Thoreau heard local tales of the unfathomable depth
of the pond, he sunk a plumb line to measure it and found, not to his surprise, that “there is a solid bottom everywhere” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 220; Cavell 1992, p. 76). The untranslatable brings us back to the fact, therefore, that the criteria for our judgment are generally a work in progress, recreated in our daily expression, tested against one another. And so, from within the abyss, right in the middle of transition, it is still possible to find a foundation.

Language is open to new possibilities all the time, and, hence, it both surprises us and disappoints us. Indeed, Cavell says, any sign opens to new possibilities—which he describes as the “projective” nature of language (Cavell 1979, p. 180)—and this is at the heart of translation. In translation, thought comes off its tracks. Yet this shows something about how language works: it exemplifies the movement of thought that takes place within language; it reflects ways that, as Thoreau puts it, language puts words to work; and it reveals the dynamism that inheres in them. Hence, in Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy, against the conventional understanding, translation is at work not only inter but intra lingually, as we saw in Chapter 4: it is a part of language’s intrinsic nature, permeating our life as a whole. Through it, we regain our surprise at what is beyond our grasp.

Unlike interpretation, which maintains a steady horizon, translation involves “the transfiguration from one form of life to another.”8 Thoreau expresses this moment of conversion as the experience of “stand[ing] on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 11), and he relates this also to “reading, in a high sense” (p. 71). In The Claim of Reason, Cavell occasionally expresses this precarious sense of coming to a “crossroads” (Cavell 1979, p. 19), and this is to be understood as the risk of “onward thinking” (Cavell 1992, p. 135).

Language serves not to solidify the object or meaning, but to confront and acknowledge the gap that lies between the occurrence of words and of objects: word and object do not stand in a relationship of correspondence, with the human being as mediator.
The aforementioned Thoreau’s phrase, “the volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement,” encapsulates this. Thoreau’s antirepresentationalist view of language, which is characterized by transitivity and volatility, is echoed in Cavell’s idea of *philosophy as translation*. With the mediation of language, human beings are implicated in a temporal dislocation and relocation. Thoreau says: “We should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 216). Language is prophetic here. The temporal nextness, going beyond what is, invites the self to transcend itself. Thoreau continues: “I desire to speak somewhere without bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments” (ibid.). Thoreau’s father tongue occasions the undergoing of such disjunctive moments of awakening and rebirth—but only from within its embeddedness in the mother tongue. In this respect, translation is inseparable from such experience of self-transcendence.

Philosophy as translation extends perfectionist impulse in Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy. Refusing to call Emerson a pragmatist (Cavell 1998), he says that Emerson’s idea of circles makes possible an “onward” movement, recasting or resolving the antinomy of subjectivity and objectivity, or of the inner and the outer (Cavell 1992, pp. 128, 137–38). Echoing Emerson’s “finding as founding” (Cavell 1989, p. 112), this is the affirmation that “[f]oundations reach no farther than each issue of finding” (p. 114) and of philosophy as “on the way” (Cavell 1992, p. 137). Dewey does not persevere on this way fully but rather, in spite of himself, falls back, so Cavell seems to allege, into a kind of dualism. Emerson’s response to the antinomy of the inner and the outer (and, for that matter, of the private and the public, of the particular and the universal) is encapsulated in his statement: “The inmost in due time becomes the outmost.” This is an ongoing search for the expression of “something between” (Cavell 1979, p. 341).
Such antifoundationalism underlies Cavell’s Emersonian moral perfectionism (Cavell 1990)—an idea of perfection that does not presume any final state of perfectibility, but that lays emphasis on the ongoing process of perfecting. It is crucially important that the perfectionist is not someone who believes that a perfect society or a perfect life can be realized. On the contrary, the perfectionist takes it that our lives are always open to judgment in the light of a prospect of the better. Cavell’s position here is in clear contrast to Kant. Cavell shows Emerson’s difference as follows:

Kant found an essential place for perfection in his view of it at the end, as it were, of his theory, as an unreachable ideal relation to be striven for to the moral law; in Emerson this place of the ideal occurs at the beginning of moral thinking, as a condition, let us say of moral imagination, as preparation or sign of the moral life.

(Cavell 1990, p. 62)

Cavell himself is opposed to any form of “moralism that fixates on the presence of ideals in one’s culture and promotes them to distract one from the presence of otherwise intolerable injustice” (Cavell 1990, p 13). As Emerson says, in the path of perfection, there is “a residuum unknown, unanalyzable” (Emerson 2000, p. 254. Such a way of thinking strongly resists that trend in analytic moral philosophy that would tidily separate moral problems from others and deal with them by somewhat formal means. In terms of perfectionism, morality becomes more like something that pervades life. Certainly it acknowledges the way that we are responsible in all our words and even in our thoughts: failing to find the right tone, responding too sharply, insensitivity to the nuances of someone’s question or request—these examples suggest the extent of our responsibility in language.
Thus Cavell’s philosophy as translation retains the Emersonian (and hence Nietzschean) perfectionist quest for a better state, while at the same time refusing to settle on fixed ground.

<a> GIFTS FROM A FOREIGN LAND: LOST IN TRANSLATION AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER CULTURES </a>

WHERE DO we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. . . . Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. (Emerson 2000, p. 307)

You sleep one third of your life.


Life and culture are processes of transformation with language and meaning at their heart (Cavell 1979, p. 125). Translation is not simply a substitute or metaphor for human transformation. Let us turn the attention now to actual effects of such experience of translation in our ordinary scenes of education.

The term internationalization has become a catchphrase in higher education. In educational policy statements, the phrase is oftentimes colored by the busy, even aggressive discourse of global markets and the apparently pioneering crossing of borders between different countries and different cultures. Behind this sanguine confidence, however, the actual experience of those who find themselves to be strangers in a foreign land tends to be obliterated. There is no sense of alienation—of getting lost, of losing one’s way (literally, in
the street), of losing one’s bearings in unknown places. By contrast, the criteria of judgment to which one is accustomed and on which one relies are severely tested in a foreign environment, and they can be shattered. One can also be at a loss for words where one’s capacity in a foreign language is challenged. Dewey says that fear is a “function of the environment” (Dewey 1981, p. 43). When we encounter radical difference, however, our sense of identity can be disturbed. Then the evasion of fear is a reasonable reaction. We can easily close our hearts, insulate ourselves from the outside world. This is especially so when we happen to go abroad, without any wish to learn from a different culture. How can we convert a negative sense of fear, anxiety, and closed-mindedness into a more hopeful state? This is a question that underlies education for cross-cultural understanding, foreign language education, and education for the “global citizen”: it is a question that concerns the inner transformation of the self through a cross-cultural encounter; and this is a question that must be remembered for the internationalization of young people.

In destabilizing the typical call for learning from difference, from mutual understanding and sympathetic imagination, I shall thematize in this section the sense of loss we undergo in cross-cultural settings and examine how such experience can unsettle our conventional conception of translation. Here the film Lost in Translation will serve as a means to rethink the intersection between culture, language, and human transformation as involving the experience of translation. A perfectionist reading of the film bestows upon us a gift from a foreign land, opening a door to different cultures as other cultures. Such an opening can reorient education for cross-cultural understanding, reconceptualizing the task of internationalizing higher education.

<bpstyl>Lost in Translation</bp_styl>

Lost in Translation (2003), directed by Sofia Coppola, is a film about two Americans, Bob and Charlotte, whose paths cross in a hotel in Tokyo. Bob is a film star who, with
ostentatious lack of enthusiasm, has come to Japan to make a commercial for Suntory whisky. Charlotte is a young woman who is there with her husband, John, a photographer. She is shyly curious about the city, but also, so it seems, inclined to spend much of her time somewhat withdrawn in her hotel room. They happen to stay in the same hotel in Shinjuku, at the center of Tokyo, and the atmosphere of the area is very much present in the film. With the exception of Charlotte’s short visit to Kyoto, the action takes place in and around this hotel. When John goes away for a few days, she, like Bob, is alone in the hotel, and it is clear that both feel and to some extent seek a kind of isolation there. But one night they meet in the hotel bar and share a drink together. They talk and gradually, and in an oblique and inexplicit way, start to seek out each other’s company. They begin to talk about their isolating, indirectly acknowledging their respective problems in marriage and life as a whole. While Bob’s activities in Japan center on his work with the Japanese people making the commercial, Charlotte’s experience is more obviously solitary. But one night they enjoy a party and late-night karaoke with Charlotte’s unconventional Japanese friends, and this has the effect of opening them to one another. At the karaoke, Bob sings, faltering initially, then finding the note:

<poem>

I could feel at the time

There was no way of knowing

Fallen leaves in the night

...

More than this, you know there is nothing

More than this, tell me one thing

More than this, there is nothing

</poem>
The lyrics from this Roxy Music song speak to the kind of emptiness that both he and Charlotte feel. They go back to the hotel and lie on a bed together. They do not make love, but an overhead camera angle reveals instead their bodies in a pattern—his straight, hers curled—that suggests something to be deciphered. The sign their bodies make looks like a hiragana syllable, even a Chinese character, and this is not one they are going to read. Any chance that their relationship might have developed is forestalled the next day when Bob, sinking in a kind of despair, sleeps with the singer from the hotel bar, which becomes apparent to Charlotte the next day when she calls at his door. On the day when Bob is in the taxi to the airport, ready to go home, however, he happens to see Charlotte on the street. He stops the taxi and runs after her. We see them hug, say a few words, and then leave each other.

There are multiple ways into this film. At the most superficial level, there is a permeating sense of estrangement: this is a culture that is alien to both Bob and Charlotte. As the title suggests, they are lost in translation. Bob says to his wife about his experiences in Japan: “It is not fun. It is very different.”

The most obviously funny scenes are those in which miscommunication takes place between Bob and the Japanese director of the commercial, who, in an impassioned torrent of Japanese, urges Bob to adopt a particular posture as he holds the glass of expensive whiskey (i.e., a brand, “Hibiki,” a high-quality Suntory whisky) while a translator laconically, but surely, inadequately translates the director’s instruction to Bob: “With intensity.” Then again there is the uninvited prostitute who barges into Bob’s room and presses him to “lip my stockings”—that is, to rip her stockings. Charlotte is often seen in her hotel room, looking out across the skyscrapers of Tokyo; otherwise we see her wandering around these foreign places, in Tokyo and Kyoto, the silence showing that Charlotte is at a loss, lost for words, losing her sense of location in this alien place. In the intercut scenes between their respective
hotel rooms, Bob and Charlotte are seen to be channel hopping through the same Japanese TV programs—with the Japanese language reduced to a mere sound, to a soft gabble. Here there is not even the space for misunderstanding.

This is definitely a film about encountering a different culture. One way to look at this is to foreground the enigma of an Asian culture, Japan. The film then, so the story would go, turns out to be just another example of Orientalism—a Western caricature of the Japanese culture and people. Alternatively, it could be said that the film is primarily a love story. An extension of this would be to see the film as dealing with the universal human problems of marriage and relationships—with the alien culture simply providing a backdrop to these domestic disturbances. If so, it could be asked whether Bob and Charlotte need to understand Japan. Bob and Charlotte simply interact with each other, carrying their own native language (i.e., English) and their home culture (American culture) with them. This then becomes a typical case of experience abroad where cross-cultural encounter does not occur and mutual understanding can never succeed. This would be a disappointing conclusion.

Much as such interpretations are not implausible, there are aspects to the film to which none of these frameworks of interpretation can adequately respond. First and foremost, if they do not learn from Japanese culture, what is the point of setting the story in Tokyo? Perhaps this is mildly amusing for the Western viewer, and it does offer the chance for some interesting location shots. But is that all? Second, there is an ambiguity in the relationship between Charlotte and Bob: Is this just a casual friendship or something more like love? Third, there is a puzzle over the ending scene of their separation. The audience is not given a clear indication of where they are going in their lives. It is important that, as they embrace each other to say goodbye, we cannot hear what they are whispering. This ambiguity, however, plays an important part in keeping open the space for interpretation in the film.
As another way into the film, I propose to highlight the sense of loss. Behind the humor in the depiction of Japanese culture, even to the point of caricature, the film is permeated by a sense of loss, even to the point of cynicism and despair. Charlotte has majored in philosophy at Yale. She listens to a tape on the search of the soul. Bob says: “I am stuck”: and “I’m completely lost.” His sense of a void is symbolized by the samples of carpet—which his wife, Lydia, sends to him and which he drops on the floor. This is at one level a satire of the superficiality of the American way of life, which is also illustrated by the American Hollywood actress – Charlotte’s husband have photographed her before and now bumps into her here –and by a Japanese TV industry that imports and redistributes its ethos.

It is in relation to this that Cavell’s reading of Thoreau’s Walden helps us to articulate the sense of loss.

<b>Leaving Walden, Leaving Tokyo: Translating Lost in Translation</b>

<epi>
You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns. (Thoreau 1992a, p. 153)
</epi>

Let us try to read Lost in Translation as an exercise in philosophy as translation. When you sit still in front of the diverse phenomena in the film, paying close attention to the bodily movements of Bob and Charlotte, their subtle changes in facial expressions, and the words they utter, a certain thread of the film is elucidated: this is a story of the “soul’s search,” of “a midlife crisis,” bearing in mind that crisis occurs in the midst of life. They are in a state of “quiet desperation” (p. 5). In order to realize this, the viewer must learn to expose herself patiently to what happens in the film.

In his interpretation of the film, Paul Standish writes: “It is possible to allow the images to work on us, beautiful as they sometimes are, though comic and tinged with
sadness” (Standish 2014). Through Charlotte’s eyes especially—albeit that this is indirect, through the lens of the camera—we come to see things again. In the beginning her whole body is sealed off from the world: she sits in the window of her hotel room, gazing out at the skyscrapers of Tokyo. When she goes out, she visits a temple and is exposed to the sound of the monks’ chanting; she calls her mother in tears only to say, “I did not feel anything.” The nature of her estrangement gradually shifts from despair to a kind of enjoyment. She wanders through the busy nightlife of Shinjuku, with its young people’s hang-outs and brilliant neon signs all around; she drifts into an Ikebana flower-arranging class at the hotel; and most vividly, when she visits the beautiful Nanzenji temple in Kyoto, she chances to see a marriage procession. Charlotte learns how to wander, how to sojourn in foreign places. Their groundless state from which she has been suffering is now transformed into a sense of finding the bottom on which to stand—for now, here in Japan. She hops across the steppingstones of the lily pond in the temple garden. She is at ease with the sensuous surface of signs. This is her remarriage to the world.

The turnings in Bob’s and Charlotte’s selves are being triggered by their conversation as well—casually at the bar, sometimes seriously in a restaurant, and as they lie on the bed together. Theirs is a mode of perfectionist conversation with no final answers. Through their conversation, testing their words to each other, they become answerable to their own selves, learning how to accept their estrangement from the world. Bob makes a cynical remark about the subtitle of the CD Charlotte is listening to, “Finding your true calling.” Charlotte learns to save herself by distancing herself from herself, by becoming what Thoreau calls a neighbor to herself. “[S]piritual breakthrough” occurs in the film not dramatically but silently, step by step and on multiple occasions.

It is through this gradual process of transformation that Bob and Charlotte, and the viewer of the film, arrive at the ending scene—regaining new interest and trust in the world,
learning to entrust themselves to the world, and celebrating the rebirth of their words. A key to transcendence is *leaving* and *abandoning*. “The way of life is wonderful,” Emerson writes, “it is by abandonment” (Emerson 2000, p. 262). For Bob and Charlotte, leaving is epitomized in the climactic scene of their farewell: at the time when they are ready to go back home, separately. When, after embracing and kissing, they turn their backs on each other, the consummatory moment of the “flying Perfect” (p. 252) visits them: their relationship is consummated, but without physical intercourse and without any perfect fit. What makes this film a perfectionist story is not a matter of Bob and Charlotte achieving something solid at the end, nor is it that they have learned some substantial lesson from their encounter with Japanese culture. (Can we not then shift our attention to an aspect of the story, to the fact that neither has come to Japan with the *intention* to learn something?) Rather, what they have learned is the very fact that they still, as grownups, have a capacity to leave, and to leave in “anticipation” (Cavell 1992, p. 110), with the conviction that “we can turn” (p. 97). The metaphor of melting ice at Walden in the early spring expresses this critical turning point as that of “the learning of resolution” (p. 99); here the implicit contrast is with the solution of problems. We might call this their attaining of a “pure” (or purer) state by way of the obscure. Their “renewed innocence” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 209) is not a return to an original, innocent purity. It is rather the attainment of what Cavell calls “eventual ordinary,” the “actual ordinary” transformed (Cavell and Standish 2012, p. 166): where we are remarried with the world and take it as our own, and are ready to come back home again. Yet again, this is not the end state: the self is “knotted” continually to a next, further state (Cavell 1990, p. 12).

The film depicts a labor of rebirth. This may be a frightening experience, and yet fear is the source of happiness and hope, the very precondition of regaining our tongue, the access of the father tongue. In the uplift of these emotions, there is empowerment.
Lost in Translation is a story that tells us something about an alternative route to an encounter with a foreign culture—to suffer its impact in an indirect way. This will necessarily involve one’s reengagement with language—not only with a foreign language, but also and more significantly perhaps with one’s native language. We are fated to be challenged by an endless call for articulating what, so it seems, cannot be said. Translation is filled with paradoxes. Bob’s and Charlotte’s “reunion” at the end is a state of communion that is made possible through leaving: they are “remarried” independently, in separation. In response to what cannot be said in Japan, and with the cinematic effect of the inaudible parting conversation at the end, their voices are recovered as it were in silence. Conversation without the ultimate point of conversion itself inspires further conversation. It is through these multilayered paradoxes that Bob, Charlotte, and the viewer of the film undergo transformation. Such translation already and always operates in the apparently trifling, accidental scenes of the ordinary. Then a miracle happens—a miracle that Bob and Charlotte “look through each other’s eyes.” This is a matter not of the mutual understanding of “different” cultures but rather of the understanding of other cultures—others not only outside but also inside ourselves. This requires the endless endeavor of perfecting one’s own culture.
in encountering the other—to keep moving, at least to find “first base,” not necessarily “hitting a home run.” It implies neither the cosmopolitan fusing of the boundaries of different cultures nor the romanticization of the unknowable other. Our “home base” is continually destabilized and transformed. The process effects an internal transformation.

Philosophy as translation is crucial in language education in that both adults (teachers) and the young (students) are encouraged to be attuned to the volatile truth of their words: and to doubt and criticize what they have so far believed to be the solid ground of their native language. They are encouraged to create something new from within the constraints of their mother tongue and to test it in conversation. Philosophy as translation does not drive them to relativism—to the idea that anything goes. Rather, Cavell’s conception of language reminds them of the constraints of the language community to which they are fated. Only from within—through pressing against—such limits can they acquire the language of “extra-vagance,” a risk-taking language in which bounds can be extended. It demands a rigor on the part of teachers and students in their constant reworking of language’s criteria—“to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me” (Cavell 1979, p. 125).

It is sometimes said that Lost in Translation is a film made for the West and that this is a Western caricature of Japan. But cannot the Japanese experience this through the eyes of the foreigner? Cannot the Japanese find the foreign within themselves? The miracle of looking through each other’s eyes is a gift from the foreign. As the text of the life of those who have lost their ways and as a site of the transitory phenomena of separation and remarriage, the film invites the viewer to the experiment of translation. This can be a powerful medium of education for understanding other cultures—education that invites young people to a radical awakening, a self-transformation, and release from their state of slumber.
The gift of translation enables us to undergo the moment of crisis—the crisis of the loss of and separation from the world, which we thought to be the basis of our culture, our language and our selves—and to celebrate the miracle of rebirth (Saito 2017, p. 20). It is such experience of loss and rebirth in translation that will make internationalization truly bidirectional, casting doubt on the allegedly solid core of cultural identity and yet opening the possibility of cosmopolitan global understanding.

As the film illustrates, translation explores the cross-cultural dimension of Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy in a way that goes beyond comparison between different cultures. Translation involves self-transcendence, but this is not just a matter of personal transformation and rebirth: it is also cultural renewal. Philosophy as translation shows us that the life of human beings is also in translation. In encountering the incommensurable and reexperiencing it as the untranslatable, our judgment is tested. As the film illustrates, our words are tested in the eyes of others, in a process of cultural criticism within which self-criticism and the receptiveness of imagination are crucial components. Hence self-transcendence through translation is an essential condition for understanding our own and other cultures. Translation in our reengagement with language is always already involved in our relation to our cultures, inside and outside.

The discussion in this chapter has shown that philosophy as translation opens up the cross-cultural possibilities of American philosophy. Via Emerson and Thoreau, American philosophy has been released from the constraints of the Anglo-American context, while at the same time the distance between pragmatism and transcendentalism is revealed—and perhaps this can now be seen more clearly than was the case in earlier chapters. The scope of philosophy as translation helps us go beyond the limits of the pragmatist discourse of mutual
understanding, to find an alternative way to address the question of the untranslatable. The Deweyan notion of communication contrasts with and is destabilized by the Emersonian and Thoreauvian notion of translation. Cavell’s standpoint of translation helps us go beyond Dewey’s discourse of community and communication.

Life and culture are processes of transformation with language and meaning at their heart. Hence, a radical reconfiguration of the intricate relationship between language, self, and culture is required. Cavell’s approach is radical in the sense that it disturbs our drive toward the consolidation of our identity in the language of human solidarity and toward inclusion—the assimilation of “they” to the “we,” of the different to the same. It drastically destabilizes the very concepts of “understanding” “other” “cultures.” Sharing with Dewey the cosmopolitan hope for democracy, Cavell shows us an alternative, more thoroughly antifoundationalist way of becoming cosmopolitan.

Cavell’s interpretation of Emerson differs, however, from the quasi-universalist interpretation of Emersonian cosmopolitanism that is presented by Lawrence Buell (2003). Buell claims that Emerson’s cosmopolitanism relies on a “spirit that potentially includes the whole world” and “faith in a common spirituality behind the veils of difference” (Buell 2003, p. 188). In opposition to the way that Emerson’s thought tends to be connected merely with the American context, Buell claims that such a “national ideology of personal or collective particularism suppresses Emerson’s cosmic monism” (p. 195). An approach to Emerson’s transcendentalism simply through the idea of “cosmic monism” overshadows the discontinuous force in Emerson’s perfectionism. Thus through the scope of translation, American philosophy allows us to go beyond the choice between American rootedness and cosmopolitanism.

The identity of American philosophy is not unified or unifying: rather, with its internal gaps, tensions, and divergences, it has been and still is in the process of translation.
The continually destabilized border between American transcendentalism and pragmatism is a part of this process. In the next chapter, this destabilizing sense will be further explained.

<refs>


<notess>
<notes>

1 Cavell says: “Underlying the opposition to the metaphysical voice that I say Austin and Wittgenstein share with Derrida, there is all the difference between the worlds of the Anglo-American and the Continental traditions of philosophy” (Cavell 1994, p. 63).

2 Cavell says: “The Bhagavad Gita is present in Walden—in name, and in moments of doctrine and structure” (Cavell 1992, p. 117).

3 Hence he says: “Emerson and Thoreau may be taken as philosophers of direction, orienters, tirelessly prompting us to be on our way, endlessly asking us where we stand, what it is we face” (Cavell 1992, pp. 141–42).

For more detailed account on the connection between Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy and his idea of translation, see Standish and Saito 2017: 2-4.

Thoreau writes: “If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality” (Thoreau 1992a, p. 66).

For the argument in this section, see Standish and Saito 2017; Saito 2017.

Discussing Gadamer’s hermeneutics in response to the challenge of incommensurability, Richard Bernstein says: “We do not have straightforward commensurable standards for understanding, interpreting and translating what initially strikes us as strange and alien” (Bernstein 2016a, p. 69). He uses the term translating, as comparable to interpreting. In his response paper to my presentation, “American Philosophy in Translation,” Bernstein says: “In my own work, I have found Gadamer and the hermeneutic tradition illuminating in thinking of philosophy as translation. Gadamer emphasizes that all translation involves interpretation. Furthermore, when we seek to understand and translate what is other and different, we are always speaking from our own horizon—but, nevertheless, we must be open to learning from the other horizons” (Bernstein 2016c).

At the start of part IV of The Claim of Reason, Cavell remarks that he sees Wittgenstein as providing, in the Investigations, ways of reappraising the relationship between the inner and the outer. A high point in its disturbance of the Cartesian picture is the remark: “The human body is the best picture of the human soul” (Cavell 1979, p. 356). [AQ: Not listed in references.]

From a Kantian position, Guyer finds common ground between Kant’s and Cavell’s respective commitments to the view that “striving for moral perfection is never ending” (Roth, Gustafsson, and Johansson 2014, p. 2). [AQ: Not listed in references.] Likewise,
Roth shares the view with Guyer of “the perfection of our own use of our freedom’ as an ultimate aim for morality” (ibid.). By contrast, Gustafsson makes a distinction between Kant’s perfectionism and Cavell’s on the ground that in the latter “invention and transformation are processes the ends of which are not clearly understood in advance” (Gustafsson 2014, p. 109). [AQ: Not listed in references.] In his view, Cavell’s Emersonian moral perfectionism, unlike Guyer’s, presupposes a “substantive goal” (ibid.).