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## Global Romance? Nicole Mones, Teilhard de Chardin, and the Critique of "Planetization"

Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication.  
It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language  
*in situ* (*enonce*, or propositionality). (Bhabha 228)

The answer is: let us wage a war on totality. (Lyotard 82)

### I. The Geopolitics of Desire

Instantly risen to international fame, Marguerite Duras's 1984 "Oriental romance" *L'Amant* (*The Lover*) provides an inescapable framework for coming to grips with Nicole Mones's 1998 less popular "national bestseller" *Last in Translation*. The front cover advertises Mones's book as "A Novel," but the text fits the formal and psychological-cultural model of Duras's romance closely.<sup>1</sup> Both are set in the Far East — *The Lover*, in Indochina, *Last in Translation*, in China — and feature the same kind of erotic plot. Duras's "lover" is Chinese, and so is Mones's, yet in neither case does he take center stage. The two stories' main focus is a young Western woman — French in Duras, American in Mones — who falls so deeply in love with native men that she is on the brink of "going native" herself. In fact, Duras's "Cholon lover"

1 I am indebted to my colleague Kelly Griffith for calling my attention to Nicole Mones's first novel, in particular to some of the subtleties of her intertextual conversation with Teilhard de Chardin.

comes to "discover" a certain "kinship" (*The Lover* 98) between himself and the French woman: "He says," Duras writes, "all the years she's spent here, in this intolerable latitude, have turned her into a girl of Indochina" (98), and then he goes on to describe the metamorphoses of her body, clothes, and overall appearance in terms Mones's readers would undoubtedly find familiar.

I will come back to this alluring body change and to bodies in general because they play a central role in both texts. For now, it is more noteworthy that, on the one hand, in *The Lover* and *Last in Translation* alike the star-crossed lovers must overcome similar obstacles raised by language, culture, and colonial legacies. On the other hand, the two romances bear witness to different historical moments and, in relation to them, illuminate distinct geopolitical contexts. Mones's China is certainly not Duras's Indochina. *The Lover* is an imperial, or colonial — not yet postcolonial — romance; Mones's book has already outgrown John McClure's "late imperial romance"<sup>2</sup> to take on a global problematic by postmodern means,<sup>3</sup> in dialogue with a defining totalist narrative of modernity, and thus foreground, as I argue, the complicated dynamic of globali2ation, modernity, postmodernity, and postmodernism. In other words, "becoming Chinese" in Duras's French-occupied Saigon and in the Beijing of the nineties, respectively, designates different things. As a Chinese character announces at the beginning of *Lost in Translation*, "what counts now and for the future is modernization. Commerce

- 2 In *Late Imperial Romance*, McClure contends that romance "requires the very condition threatened by the successful establishment of the global order. It requires a world at war — starkly divided, partially wild and mysterious, dramatically dangerous . . . Without unordered spaces, or spaces disordered by war, it is impossible to stage the wanderings and disorientation, the quests and conquests and conversions, the ordeals and sacrifices and triumphs that are the stuff of romance." "The ultimate enemies of romance, then," McClure goes on, "are not the foreign foes confronted on the field of battle in the text itself, but the foes held at bay by these essential antagonists: the banal, the quotidian world of calculation and compromise from which the heroes of romance are always in flight, and the globally routinized world that only became imaginable about one hundred years ago, a world utterly devoid of romantic regions" (2-3). As my essay demonstrates, global society and romance are not incompatible.
- 3 I stop short of calling *Lost in Translation* a "postmodern romance," even though the subgenre is abundantly represented in postmodernism (Elam 12). But my reluctance is largely strategic: I want to emphasize, at this juncture in my essay, what Mones's book depicts — a world affected by globalization — rather than how this description takes place, that is, the book's postmodern, polemically intertextual dialogue with modernity. Otherwise the distinction is purely theoretical.

[...] Money" (5). In the throes of fast-forward "modernization," China displays an idiosyncratic mix of communist and corporate politics, with an all-business People's Liberation Army running the show, both tolerant and apprehensive of the new pouring in as capital, Big Macs, fashion and "hip" lifestyles, media and communication technologies, and Madonna blaring in the Inner Mongolia deserts. To be sure, Mones's romance chronicles a later moment in the narrative of modernity. For "modernization," in the Western sense that critics have been busy querying lately, had already begun in a former French colony like Vietnam, and in other, previously colonized and semi-colonized countries such as China. Two World Wars and a series of revolutions — including the "Cultural" one — opened up, roped off, and reopened imperial, Maoist, and, at last, post-Mao China to the world. *Lost in Translation* casts light on this last segment, an episode of global "opening," and we need to remember that in China, former Soviet Union, and its "block," *opening* has been a politically charged term for two decades now. Thus, in Mones the political and the Apolitical are one. Together, they lay out a political space — and lay down a politics — more emphatically than in *The Lover*.

Nor is politics absent in Duras. But it is primarily a politics of desire, mesmerizingly epidermal, unbearably sensuous. Duras's colonial encounter is saturated with, and almost wholly absorbed and transformed into, bodily touch, intimate contact, ineffable sexual chemistry. The French "girl"s and the Cholon lover's bodies take in and burn up, passionately "consume" political energies. Mones, however, recycles and upgrades these energies, renders bodies, more overtly than Duras, arenas of transindividual, indeed, transcultural contact, bartering, and debate. To sum up, and perhaps simplify matters a bit: in *The Lover*, bodies are predominantly aesthetic apparatuses, desire-processing machines the world and its languages seem to lead up to naturally, with minimal resistance and deflection. In this world distinctions, obstacles, conflicts, prejudices, and idiomatic asymmetries do function, no question about it, but communication — and cultural communion — occurs and triumphs eventually. There lies nested, inside the French empire and its metropolitan prerogatives and cultural assumptions, a pre-Babel paradise of sorts where bodies eloquently converse in the supralinguistic language of desire, a tongue they never forget even after history, in violent, "politicized" and postcolonial form, has pulled them apart. "Becoming Chinese" is not an illusion, and bodies are the setting of this Darwinian narrative of sorts. The change happens almost anatomically, under the surreptitious pull of local climate, diet, and fashion. The colony's cycles and rhythms, its entire cultural

metabolism, seep into the French girl's body to become physiology, corporeal metabolism.

In Mones's world now, communication has a different status and mounts a new challenge. Brutally put, culture and politics have displaced nature. The Cultural Revolution no longer holds sway; its traumatic aftershocks, however, are still felt in Mones's China. "Becoming Chinese" is actually a self-acknowledged goal for her protagonist, Alice Mannegan. But it plays out differently because it happens under unprecedented circumstances: the conditions of "late" postmodernity and its globalizing effects. At this stage, the world itself, our bodies, their positionings in it and through language and the communication the latter manages or fails to foster no longer constitute what they do in Duras. *The Lover's* aestheticized bodies are exquisite origins and outlets of desire concurrently. Duras shows them off as absolute, focal and end points, into which considerable translating energies go to make the erotic dialogue possible. In Mones, the characters' bodies are cultural translators themselves, vehicles — rather than *ad quern* signposts — on a global map of yearning. Indeed, what this map charts, what Mones's narrative cartography maps out is global desire, traffickings, and interactions where bodies act as relays, intermediaries, interpreters, placed as they are at the crossroads of races and ethnicities, cultures, political systems, markets, diasporas, human flows generally. Desire is not purely erotic — not any more. Nor is sexuality its almost exclusive, if exquisite, form. Desire displays a thick, economic, cultural, anthropological, and epistemological texture, sets in train a plethora of discourses.

In this light, translation becomes far more important in Mones. *Lost in Translation* employs translation as an overarching trope, a complex cultural operator. And it does it in intertextually conspicuous, or, postmodern terms by engaging with — "translating" — previous texts that formulated, albeit differently, the same private fantasies and collective dramas of desire: contact with others, interaction, "transgressive" longing for what we are not and cannot become until we look deep into ourselves and beyond the boundaries of our selves. "For," David Henry Wang reminds us,

the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women—these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant. This is, to me, the convenient world in which

the French diplomat and the Chinese spy lived. This is why, after twenty years, he had learned nothing at all about his lover, not even the truth of his sex. (100)

This is the last paragraph of Hwang's "Afterword" to his 1988 play *M. Butterfly*, another celebrated text that offers a framework for dealing with Mones's dilemmas of identity in the global epoch. One could argue, after all, that in some regards *Lost in Translation* and *M. Butterfly* are cast in the same mold. Both Mones and Hwang stage a drama of becoming, of trying to "be" the other, to fully dwell in his or her otherness. This drama takes a tragic turn in Hwang. Rene Gallimard, the character Hwang mentions above, kills himself in a prison cell upon completing a delusive "metamorphosis" into the "perfect," "Oriental" woman. For almost twenty years, Gallimard has lived in the fantasy world of this feminine ideal and thought, in point of fact, that his Chinese lover embodies it. But it turns out that "she" is a "he" impersonating a woman. The Frenchman responds to this fraudulent metamorphosis with one of his own. If the "other" could not be, appearances notwithstanding, what Gallimard wanted him to be, Gallimard makes himself into his dream woman by replaying the final episode from *Madama Butterfly*. On the one hand, his death "on stage" and as a result of an intertextual re-staging of Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera takes performance and role playing ad litteram, collapses the distinction between fantasy and reality. On the other hand, this literalizing performance seals up Gallimard's dream world, rendering his ideal immune to any reality check. Death, the ultimate metamorphosis, *sanctions* an illusion in the full ambivalence of the term: it exposes it for what it is — a mirage, an "Orientalist" failure of representation — while making it irrevocable. "From my point of view," Hwang contends, unbelievable as it may seem, "the 'impossible' story of a French duped by a Chinese man masquerading as a woman always seemed perfectly explicable; given the degree of misunderstanding between men and women and also between East and West, it sounded inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place" (98). "Mistake" may be a bit misleading here, but only insofar as Gallimard is manipulated by the tellingly named Song, a gay singer with the Beijing Opera who is rather forced into this scheme by a Chinese government intent upon using him as a spy. A game of multiple, often contradictory, unsuspected, vaguely acknowledged or simply ignored impersonations and manipulations, *M. Butterfly* is set in a time and political context closer to *Lost in Translation* than *The Lover*, that is, during the Cultural Revolution and the Cold War years. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, the identity games involving such a transgressive scenario, i.e., geopolitical, cultural, and gender-

related border-crossing, were part of a broader, fundamentally political performance and thereby controlled by bigger players.

*Lost in Translation* takes this narrative mix of love and suspicion into the global age and, to an extent, past the us-them, self-other fictional disjunctions of the Cold War that underwrite Gallimard's Orientalist, outsider status and thwart his struggle to rewrite, "translate" himself into his obsessing other. As an American expatriate in Beijing, Alice is an outsider and insider simultaneously. A "translator" in more than one way, she develops a sense of "conjunctural" rather than "essential" identity, which holds out the promise of a successful "crosscultural translation" (Clifford 11,4). Daughter of a U.S. Senator, she is suspected of spying, and scientist Lin, who will become her "Chinese lover," and Kong, his colleague, are assigned to keep an eye on her and one Dr. Adam Spencer, an American paleoanthropologist. On his way to the Chinese Northwest, Spencer hires Alice as an "interpreter." Both are tailed everywhere in Beijing, and so are other foreign diplomats and journalists. Yet the Chinese government has special reasons to monitor their moves. True, Spencer is not a spy, not even a journalist seeking out post-Tiananmen dissidents. In hopes to boost his flagging academic career, he sets out to find the famous Peking Man (*Sinanthropus pekinensis*), the remains of which were discovered by the French Jesuit, paleontologist, and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in 1928 but vanished mysteriously in 1941. This project is significant both for the American scholar and the Chinese, who suspect Spencer might try to sneak the Peking Man, if recovered, out of the country. Therefore, Lin and Kong are directed to help him yet also to make sure the precious bones stay in China.

Unlike Duras — but not unlike Hwang — Mones does not quite "concoct" her story. *Lost in Translation's* plot is another "reemplotting" tour de force, in the same vein of overtly intertextual, re-romanced romance of identity performance. David Cowart has actually called *M. Butterfly* a "postmodern symbiont" (4), a text feeding off a previous one. Others have seized it as a postmodern "rewrite" (Moraru 18) of Puccini's opera and with it, of all the intertexts, literary or cultural ("Orientalist"), that went into *Madama Butterfly*: David Belasco's drama *Madame Butterfly*, and the story on which the latter was based, John Luther Long's "Madame Butterfly."<sup>4</sup> In Mones, the major intertext is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, primarily his 1955 essay *Le Phenomene humain* (*The Phenomenon of Man*) and the recently translated

*letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Ladle Swan* (1993). Both are acknowledged in an opening "Author's Note," and then again in the "Historical Note" appended to the novel (*Lost in Translation* 367), while, surprisingly enough, Mones does not mention Eva Hoffman's 1989 memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*.

Could it be that Mones never heard of Hoffman's otherwise well-known work? Or, did she deem her novel's title too obvious an allusion to be referenced? Either way, one thing is certain: Teilhard's biography and bibliography, his scientific-theosophical and epistolary texts alike, tell a story that captivates Mones, and in important ways *Lost in Translation* is a retelling of this story. Teilhard's letters evoke an enduring passion subdued by Catholic restrictions. Lucile and Teilhard's unconsummated relationship was consuming them both in China, right after Teilhard had dug up the Peking Man and gone on to participate in the famed paleontological American Central Asian Expedition. Intriguingly enough, Spencer's own fieldwork trip reiterates this expedition; Alice and Lin's affair parallels Lucile and Teilhard's; diffidence toward foreigners and communist restrictions stand in for Catholic strictures; translation, linguistic, cultural, or sexual, erect an insightful analogy to Teilhard's philosophical "system" of metamorphoses and "continuities" between the organic and the anorganic, spirit and matter, religion and science. "[Teilhard] was," Mones says, "an explorer, a scientist — a real man of the world," a cosmopolitan whom "women found him fascinating" (28). In effect, love — love of a certain sort — is the keystone of Teilhard's world view, as a passage from *Le Phenomene humain*, reread in translation by Alice late at night, teaches us: "Love alone is capable of uniting the living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfil them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves. This is a fact of daily experience." The latter notion gives Alice some pause: "Your daily experience, Pierre... Did you really love [Lucile]? Did you enter her heart and mind? Or did the two of you always remain outside each other?" (*Lost in Translation* 40). Alice does not question directly Teilhard's "total commitment of his heart, his mind, his body"; she realizes, though, that he "could love Lucile, could care about her and be close to her — as long as he never became her lover." In her turn, Alice is aware that she herself "entered the sexual heart of China all the time — but only the sexual heart" (40), yet that will change before long. At this point, it is important to note that her Chinese exploits repeat Teilhard's own explorations with a sexual difference since for him love is a largely theosophical and pantheistic concept, more precisely, a Christian, scientific-

4 See David Cowart's thorough discussion of *M. Butterfly's* intertextual heritage (104).

humanist rather than purely theological one. Teilhard unfolds a vision of de-eroticized love, part and parcel of a philosophy of cosmic unity and global communion, a synthesis of neoplatonism, Thomism, Hegelian *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, and natural sciences-shaped view of genetics and biological evolution. Consequently, the cosmopolitan and the cosmological go hand in hand: Mones's (Teilhard's) paleontology is a generous, if problematic, trope of transhistorical and transcultural connection.

## II. "Planetization": *A grand récit*?

Given the postmodern revision it undergoes in *Lost in Translation*, Teilhard's philosophy is worth a closer look. Widely read in the fifties and sixties, *Le Phénomène humain* can be reread in hindsight as a Christian, indeed, markedly Christie "romance of totality" from which Mones's own global romance draws artfully. At first glance, *Lost in Translation* and *Le Phénomène humain* may appear to have little in common from a "philosophical" standpoint. One might argue, in fact, that Mones's book has hardly any philosophical "depth" to it and that the story and even the overt references to Teilhard and Lucile do not amount to much. To Mones's credit and against any "horizon of expectations" — or lack thereof — built by the presumed simplicity of romance as a genre, things are more complex. Especially in Part IV of his book, *La Survie* ("Superlife" or "Super-Consciousness"<sup>5</sup>), Teilhard sketches out a full-blown philosophy of globalization as a logical corollary of his evolutionary argument; it is in polemical dialogue with this philosophy that Mones imagines translation as a prime modality of global processes. This dialogue is postmodern for *Lost in Translation* sets itself up in intertextual conversation with a major, modern (and modernist) body of work, Teilhard's celebrated treatise and epistles.

Teilhard's texts bespeak a modernist allegiance on several levels. First, his work is a very typical if unstable early-mid-twentieth-century cultural synthesis of philosophical modernity and modernism: on the one side, rationalism, positivism — with Darwin's *Origin of Species* as a prime source — humanism, and anthropocentrism; on the other, challenges to all of these, along lines

running parallel to, and often through, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Marx.<sup>6</sup> Second, a Catholic priest, Teilhard was also, and perhaps primarily, a scientist — a physicist, a geologist, and a paleontologist with interests in evolution theory. These "modernist" preoccupations made the Church quite uneasy, and for good reason. During the first years of the twentieth century, a number of Catholic thinkers attempted to "modernize" the Roman Catholic church. "The Modernists," as Pope Pius X derogatorily called them in 1907, "were involved in an effort to make Church doctrine more compatible with the tenets of modern scientific knowledge (for instance the theory of evolution) or of modern historical criticism" (Calinescu 43). True, Teilhard did not consider himself a theologian proper. Nor did he join directly in this "loose theological movement of 'modernization'" led by theologians such as Alfred Loisy, Friedrich von Hügel, George Tyrell (42) — he is ordained a priest in 1911 and receives his doctorate in geology about a decade thereafter. But the Church would not allow him to publish or even return from Asia, and these interdictions speak to the same dogmatic, "antimodernist" (antiscientific) position. It also bears mentioning that Teilhard's works start to come out only a few years before the Vatican begins to "vindicate" the "modernists" (45).

Third, more notable still is the modernist philosophical form Teilhard adopts, namely, phenomenology. As N.M. Wildiers points out, in Teilhard as much as in Husserl and later on in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phenomenology of Perception* will come out a few years after *Le Phénomène humain* had been completed, "phenomenology may be characterized as an endeavor, through the use of scientific expertise, to give as complete as possible expression to the world in its *totality* and inner orientation" (50) [italics mine]. An "archescience" of sorts, not quite scientific although it lies "within the total spectrum of natural sciences — or at any rate in close association with them" (49), Teilhard's philosophical discourse is neither philosophy nor metaphysics proper (49). It is a vibrant biography of the cosmos, a hybrid "science of totality" attempting a "holistic" description by tapping into an entire range of sciences and working toward a synthesis of religious and scientific spirit. A

5 "Super-consciousness" is how Wildiers renders Teilhard's *la survie* (101), one of the less usual terms Teilhard coins in his phenomenology of the human. Sarah Appleton-Weber, the author of the new translation of *Le Phénomène humain*, prefers to play it safe: "superlife" (*The Human Phenomenon* 165).

6 See Wildiers's discussion of Teilhard's relations to Kierkegaard (166), Nietzsche (101, 107, 166), and Marx and marxism (10-M02, 105-106).

frequently recurring term in Teilhard and its critics,<sup>7</sup> "totality" is a multifaceted phenomenological concept: a method of inquiry stressing the focus on its object as a whole, fundamental insight or meaning concurrently, and by the same token even object insofar as the cosmos *is*, according to Teilhard, a "unity, a *Totum*" (*Le Phenomene humain* 39). As such, the concept reinforces Teilhard's modernism in a fourth sense. "Totality" represents a modernist construct, a projection of the cosmological and biological "grand narrative" *Le Phenomene humain* uncoils chapter by chapter, with ideological serenity and a fair amount of theological obduracy. It is in close connection to "totality" and other components of the "totalist" paradigm articulated in *Le Phenomene humain* that the philosopher theorizes the global.

Teilhard does use the term "global," but in a rather general sense. The spread of life on our planet, we learn, already bears out the hypothesis of a "global unity" (*une globule unite*, 118). But to designate modern, worldwide social and spiritual developments, he speaks, quite revealingly, *oipianetisation* (*Le Phenomene humain* 234*passim*). This is practically a synonym of *mondialisation*, the current French equivalent to "globalization." "Planetization" constitutes the last stage of a universal, coherent, and convergent evolution that has gone through three moments, which Teilhard surveys by "sampling" our planet<sup>8</sup>: a first, anorganic moment (*laprevie*), marked by the creation of matter, or the "geosphere"; succeeding it is an organic or biological phase (*la vie*), when life arrives, and with it the whole "biosphere"; third, but also on the heels of the preceding step, comes an intellectual-rational stage (*la pensee*). As its name suggests, this witnesses the advent, in a particular, "hominized" life form, of

7 In the "Avant-propos" to the 1955 edition of *Le Phenomene humain*, N.M. Wildiers observes that the essay's reader is "struck especially [...] by the profound sense of totality that the author shows constantly" (Teilhard, *Le Phenomene humain* 12).

8 "To obtain our notion of the universe," Wildiers comments on *Le Phenomene humain*, "we have to confine ourselves virtually to a study of this earth. We can in fact take this planet as a typical sample of what the universe is like. About the phenomena belonging to other planets and about what may have happened there down the aeons of time we as yet know very little indeed. In the present state of our knowledge it would seem permissible to generalize — up to a point — certain overall features of our earth and extend them, analogically, to other planets. But we would prefer to leave that question aside here and stick to what we can recognize as actual fact" (64). Wildiers considers Teilhard a scientist at heart, and so did the philosopher himself as a matter of fact. Teilhard made a point to ground his thought in scientific data, much of which gathered during his Asian paleontological expeditions.

thought, which brings about the "noosphere." This coinage is derived from the Ancient Greek word for *nous*, "intelligence," "intellect," and "mind," and means all of them plus their sociocultural manifestations — simply put, human civilization.

Throughout history, Teilhard avers in the opening of the third chapter ("The Modern Earth") of Part III, "Man thought he was facing a 'historical turn'" (*Le Phenomene humain* 237; my trans.<sup>9</sup>). But what we are dealing with in the late thirties, when Teilhard was completing his book, and all the more so at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a deep-running, double crisis. According to the evolutionary logic undergirding Teilhard's cosmo-noological narrative, this is *^planetary* crisis, already set off by what the philosopher calls the "Neolithic metamorphosis," that is, unprecedented social and "socializing" processes (227). In their wake, the "noosphere has already started to close in on itself by embracing the whole Earth" (229). More than just turning nature into culture — or *cultures*, rather, and, we will discover, the plural is relevant here — noological expansion presupposes an exponential increase in "socialization" that will end up "unifying" those cultures into a cultural "megasyntesis" (270). Ominous at it may sound to us, this is, according to Teilhard, "the natural culmination of a process of cosmic organization, which has been following its course invariably since the childhood of our planet" (270). The outcome of this process, Teilhard writes in a chapter titled "Unanime," will be

a harmonious collectivity of consciousnesses, equivalent to a sort of superconsciousness; an Earth covered not just by myriads of isolated grains of thought, but an Earth wrapped in one continuous thinking cover so completely that it makes up a single, vast grain of thought on a cosmic scale; a plurality of individual reflections coming together in one unit and growing stronger in the act of a single, unanimous reflection. (279)

If we have not reached this point, that is because we have not been able to manage the growing "hyperorganicity" or abundance of global connections (*liens sotiaux* 280) yet — because we have mismanaged modernity, that is. Indeed, as Teilhard maintains, the crisis that broke out in the Neolithic reaches its climax during our times.

9 All translations from *Le Phenomene humain* are mine.

This modern crisis — the crisis of modernity — is twofold. First, it stems from a "*Prise en masse de l'Humanité*," from the fact that humankind has been integrated as, or into, a *global mass* (280). Another Teilhardian formula, this *Prise en masse* is, as the philosopher explains, synonymous to "planetization" (280). Following Teilhard's evolutionary dialectic, planetization sums up our present global condition as well as the condition — in the sense, this time, of prerequisite or building block — for future growth as "peoples and civilizations have attained such a degree of peripheral contact or economic interdependence that the only way they can grow any further is by interpenetration" (280). Second, the crisis of globalization is triggered by our inability to use our powers effectively — we are facing, Teilhard discloses, a "formidable, *chaotic outbreak of untapped energies*" as "modern humankind no longer knows how to use the time and powers it has unleashed." This *material* excess befuddles us. Adding insult to injury, we react to this confusing world materially, by adjusting the national frontiers, for example, as we scramble to expand physically, in space. But, unless we readjust ourselves spiritually, we will wind up before long "crushed against one another" on a smaller and smaller planet. What we lack is "a new domain of psychic expansion" rather than new borders and imperial expansion; a "totalization" of an inner kind of the world itself (281), capable of carrying on and "sublating," translating into spiritual terms, material "planetization." This will finally take place in the "point Omega," or, the *Parousia*, the advent of Christ at the end of time, which coincides with the final intensification of noospheric "unanimity" (321) as all centers of thought and spiritual energy coalesce into one "super-personal" and simultaneously super-human center or "*point de convergence*" (303).

Let us not be misled by the Nietzschean-sounding language. Granted, the "super-personal," or, "hyper-personal" (*l'hyper-personnel* 283), obtains beyond the collective (*au delà du collectif*). But it survenes rather mystically, by a quantum leap that takes place as we heighten our "love energy" (*l'amour-énergie* 293). This is universal love in that we have it in us as much as the rest of the universe does because it is this love that has created us all in the first place. The unity of life forms evidences love's universality; it also goes to show that the same kind of creative-spiritual energy stands behind the birth of life, the evolution of species, the development of the human race and thought, and, in fine, the noospheric rise up to, and into, the Omega point. We need to recognize the latter as our inevitable, "ultimate destination" as intelligent creatures. But if we do that — and if we do it, again, as rational beings — the Omega point becomes a "noble enterprise" that we must take upon ourselves

conscientiously. It is our job to "brin[g] the cosmos to its completion" (Wildiers 103), that is, into Christ. This would be "wholly consonant with St. Paul's teaching" (134). Cosmology and Christology name the same "science." Jointly, they provide a rationale for a *cosmopolitan Christianity*, for a global Pauline brotherhood of, in, and under Christ.<sup>10</sup>

It has taken us ages to get here, but in Teilhard's totalist narrative the Alpha is an Omega in the making; earlier chapters foreshadow the denouement. To quote other Teilhardian tides, "the vision of the past" (*La Vision du passé*) projects "the future of man" (*Le Future de l'homme*); paleontology can divulge what awaits us, and it actually does it by lending support to the Christological hypothesis. To be more accurate, "hypothesis" is the wrong word here. Teilhard contends that if we turn to the evolutionary argument to account for anthropogenesis, then we must accept its full consequences, which are "noogenetic" on a planetary scale and ultimately eschatological. To put it otherwise, studying human phylogeny opens a window onto the future. As Teilhard concludes, "the Pithecanthropus and the Sinanthropus are more than just two interesting anthropological types. Through them, we gain an insight into the great panorama of humanity" (*Le Phénomène humain* 215). Accordingly, the rise — but also the crisis — of planetary community comes to light, becomes *legible* for the phenomenologist in the remains of the Peking Man. It is these paleoanthropological intimations of globality that attract Mones to Teilhard's biography, research, and writings.

### III. Totality and Its Discontents

Mones's global romance both builds on, and calls into question, Teilhard's "romance of totality." His *metarecit*, his story of universal modernization and unerring progress on all levels of matter and life, eventually becomes a target for Mones's postmodern critique. What she disputes is, basically, a certain undifferentiated and culturally centered understanding of "globalization" as subcategory and stage of "totality." As Wildiers observes in his discussion of comparative anatomy in Teilhard's "system" (69-71), one can view paleoanthropology as a philosophy of linkages: between humans and other species, between humankind and the cosmos, and among humans themselves.

10 As Wildiers writes, "In the Christian idea of things the whole of history is directed toward the building up and unifying of the entire human race into a supranatural community of which Christ is the head and all of us the members" (135).

Further, the connections are indicative of both discontinuity and continuity, both unity and difference, and, truth be told, Teilhard's integrationist vision does not rule out "diversity." He rejects the "massification" as "bad globalization" insofar it exerts a de-differentiating, "depersonalizing" influence. "Real community," Wildiers comments on *Le Phénomène humain*, "far from making men undifferentiated, creates diversity; and the larger and more complex the community, the more opportunity it affords each individual to develop his peculiar gifts and express his personality" (97). This must be the ultimate goal for the "community of nations" (98). At least theoretically, the "global solidarity" (99) the "planetization of mankind" (100) fosters should not happen at the expense of individual and local values.

Nevertheless, diversity provokes in Teilhard a fair amount of anxiety, a sort of uneasiness about multiple centers and their chaotic, belligerent interaction. This becomes increasingly visible in the account of planetization, which his "new Christian humanism" (Wildiers 150) struggles to keep in check by pulling it together around a single, Christie and Christian, Catholic and Pauline center. As we learned earlier, love leads, naturally and supernaturally at the same time, to the Incarnation. But the "supernatural unification of mankind" into the *Parousia* presupposes a cultural, religious, and generally spiritual unification (136). This "unification" makes Teilhard's *Summa* quite ethnocentric, privileging as it does a certain religious form and cultural space. In the chapter significantly titled "The Neolithic Extensions and the Rise of the West," the philosopher hints at the "centering" of his cosmological narrative not only around a "super-human" axis, in the sense specified above, but also on a geocultural pivot. Planetization and Westernization seem here closely related, if not necessarily interchangeable. Teilhard promises to uncover later on the role "other fragments of humanity" have played in our collective reaching of "planetary plenitude" (*la plénitude de la Tern*). But for the time being, he thinks, we ought to admit that

throughout history, the principal axis of anthropogenesis has passed through the West. It was in this most active zone of universal growth and transformation that all that makes up today's humankind has been discovered, or at least *had to be rediscovered*. It must have been so because even those elements that had been known elsewhere for a long time could take up a definitive human value only by getting integrated into the system of European ideas and actions. It is very telling, along these lines, that we celebrate Columbus's discovery of America ...

Truth be told, a neo-humanity has been flourishing around the Mediterranean for six thousand years, and this neo-humanity completes at this

very moment its absorption of the last traces of the Neolithic mosaic. With it, a new layer is shooting up on the noosphere, and this one is the most substantial of them all.

What proves the preeminence of this human layer is that across the world, to preserve or enhance their humanity, all peoples have inevitably had to formulate the hopes and concerns of the modern world precisely in the terms in which the West has couched them. (235)

As we will see below, *Lost in Translation* begs to differ by pinpointing the cultural ambivalence of Teilhard's anthropogenetic argument. For, on the one hand, a "holistic" kind of science, his "phenomenology" *posits*—as much as it sets out to "reveal"—a totality, or, as Stephen Greenblatt famously describes Renaissance "totalizing society," a world that presupposes "an occult network linking all human, natural, and cosmic powers" (2). On the other hand, Greenblatt and, in her own fashion, Mones stress that this organic whole is a fiction—and debunking its claims to coherence is a most significant project in Greenblatt's New Historicism and Mones's cultural critique of Teilhard's "romance of totality" alike. Greenblatt aptly observes—and his observation can be easily applied to *Le Phénomène humain*—that there is a "privileged place in this network" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 2), or, in Teilhard, a cultural core or "preeminence." Further, we need to consider the possibility that Teilhard's "structural unity" and "centralization" are rhetorical effects, that is, they obtain by "concealing" or glossing over the "cracks, conflict, and disarray" (2) otherwise at play in this grand narrative of unity or "single master discourse" (3). It follows that such effects betoken a power configuration: it is in the interest of a certain "center" to dissimulate, contain, if not altogether suppress conflict or the jostling of multiple, competing cultural-spiritual hubs. The circulation of cosmic and civilizing energy, to paraphrase Greenblatt, is channeled along a single axis in Teilhard's totalist vision. To recall a Flannery O'Connor tide that speaks perhaps to her Catholicism, "everything that rises must converge"—and actually it does, in the Omega point. But this implies a convergence, a unification algorithm that redefines in hindsight all cultural *energies* and *locations* as latently *one* energy and *one* center, Teilhard's discussion of biological diversity notwithstanding. Therefore, the plea he enters in behalf of oneness is a rhetorical *and* a political move. As such, it brings his *totalism* dangerously close to a *totalitarianism* of sorts—of the sort, in fact, that conies under systematic attack from various directions as the century and its various schools of thought's anti-metanarrative "war on totality" wear on.

Greenblatt's brand of historicism is probably the kind of antitotalist reaction we are more familiar with. But before the New Historicism, in Teilhard's own France and reacting to Hegel's philosophy of history, Levinas raised certain doubts in his "attempt to leave the language of phenomenology behind" (Rabate 35). The effort succeeded only in part — his project remains fundamentally phenomenological, albeit originally so, as we will see immediately. A similar argument can be made on another French phenomenological landmark Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*. Subtitled *essay d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Sartre's book was elaborated almost at the same time as *Le Phénomène humain* but was published twelve years earlier. Hegelian as his language may be, Sartre criticizes "Hegel's 'ontological optimism' which made [Hegel] trust Totality too easily" (Rabaté 35). Indeed, as Simone de Beauvoir asserts in a commentary on this Sartrian rejection of Hegel's "totalistic" vision, "It is no more necessary to regard History as a rational totality than to regard the Universe as such. Man, mankind, the universe, and history are, in Sartre's expression, 'detotalized totalities,' that is, separation does not exclude relation, nor vice-versa. Society exists only by means of the existence of particular individuals; likewise, human adventures stand out against the background of time, each finite to each, though they are all open to the infinity of the future and their individual forms thereby imply each other without destroying each other" (122).

Yet "finitude" and the individuality it undergirds are perpetually threatened, for, to go back to Greenblatt, "The concrete individuals exist only in relation to forces that pull against spontaneous singularity and that draw any given life, however peculiarly formed, toward communal norms" (75). Succeeding existentialist phenomenology as a dominant paradigm of inquiry, structural analysis in general and Michel Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge" in particular helped develop an awareness of this kind of "relationality" — a key element in the case against totality, as I will show later. Foucault's "discourse formation" model addresses totality's grand narrative ("great discourse") and "totalitarian" upshots openly (*Archaeology* 148). His target is precisely Teilhard's knowledge domain, the "'sciences of man'" (30), traditional (humanist) historical analysis in general. More often than not, this analysis led, Foucault maintains, to deceptive constructs grounded in "vast unities" and "periods," "great continuities of thought," "homogeneous manifestations," and stubbornly teleological, fissureless developments, while ignoring or discounting ruptures, displacements, and transformations (4). The discontinuous, the philosopher tells us, was "both the given and the

unthinkable ... the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history" (8), whereas now we are facing a Copernican revolution. For Teilhard, totality was, we have noticed, the tool and stuff of inquiry simultaneously; according to Foucault, it is "the notion of discontinuity" that becomes "both an instrument and an object of research" (9) and hence prompts a radical epistemological shift, conspicuously away from Teilhard's phenomenology. "In the history of ideas, of thought, and in the sciences," Foucault writes, new historical — and definitely New Historical — analysis

has broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness, or the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought; it has questioned the themes of convergence and culmination; it has doubted the possibility of creating totalities. It has led to the individualization of different series, which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema. Thus, in place of the continuous chronology of reason, which was invariably traced back to some inaccessible origin, there have appeared scales that are sometimes very brief, distinct from one another, irreducible to a single law, scales that bear a type of history peculiar to each one, and which cannot be reduced to the general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses, and remembers. (*Archaeology* 8)

As a result, "the theme and possibility of a *total history* begin to disappear" (9). A "total description" (10) no longer makes sense insofar as it "draws all phenomena around a single centre — a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape" (10). In general, world history furnishes no proof for the "sovereignty of consciousness" any more, nor guarantees that the "founding" subject will be restored to itself ideologically (16), in a "reconstituted unity" (12) at the end of the Teilhardian "genesis, continuity, totalization" narrative (Foucault, *Archaeology* 138). In particular, "purged" of the anthropological and humanist presuppositions that tend to reduce "all differences" to a single form, set of values, "world-view," "coherent type of civilization," "spirit of the age," the new form of historiography breaks out of "cultural totalities" (13-15) and opens itself up to the other. In Foucault's words, it ceases to be "afraid to conceive of the *Other* in the time of our own thought" (12). It is in this sense that Mones accounts for cultural otherness as it emerges in a global age the rising "totality" of which undercuts the democratic promise of "connections." As Foucault insists in his Introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, this is no paradox. "Is it possible to define a totality, or must one be content with reconstitution connections?," he asks up-

front (3). His answer is clear, I think, and gives hope in a world in whose hyperconnectivity some glimpse anticultural and antidemocratic, conceivably neo-totalitarian specters.

In the Conclusion to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault declares that archaeology sets out to "free history from the grip of phenomenology" (203). But Teilhard's phenomenology differs from other phenomenological approaches such as Levinas's, and I would argue that, despite their differences, both Foucault and Levinas can help us deal with Teilhard's totalist model. Elaborated almost concurrently, Teilhard's *Le Phénomène humain* and Levinas's *Totalité et infini* (*Totality and Infinity*) share, largely speaking, comparable phenomenological methods, all-embracing inquiry scope, and escatological, even mystical concerns (Catholic, in Teilhard, Judaic — Talmudic, more precisely — in Levinas). But the distinctions outweigh the similitudes, especially if one considers Levinas's strong emphasis on the "radical alterity of the other" (*Totality and Infinity* 35) and the related "breach of totality" (35). To go back to my point on the risky proximity of "totalism" and "totalitarianism," I should mention that in his Introduction to the American translation of *Totalité et infini*, John Wild suggests that in his book Levinas seeks a "third way between the horns of [a] recurrent dilemma": the anarchy of antisystemic thought and the hegemonic pressures of systemic visionarism. Wild's commentary seems to me entirely relevant to Mones's critical dialogue with Teilhard's thought. Let me, therefore, reproduce it extensively:

Totalitarian thinking accepts vision rather than language as its model. It aims to gain an all-inclusive, panoramic view of all things, including the other, in a neutral, impersonal light like the Hegelian Geist (Spirit), or the Heidegger Being. It sees the dangers of an uncontrolled, individual freedom, and puts itself forth as the only rational answer to anarchy. To be free is the same as to be rational, and to be rational is to give oneself over to the total system that is developing in world history. Since the essential self is also rational, the development of the system will coincide with the interest of the self. All otherness will be absorbed in this total system of harmony and order.

According to Levinas, however, there is another way, not yet fully explored ... It cannot be identified with subjective anarchism since it takes account of the other and his criticism. But it also differs from the holistic thinking of traditional philosophy in the following ways. Instead of referring to the panoramic sense of vision as its model for understanding, it refers to language where there is always room for the diversity of dialogue, and for further growth through the dynamics of question and answer. This other-regarding way of thought rejects the traditional assumption that reason has no plural, and asks why we should not

recognize what our lived experience shows us, that reason has many centers, and approaches the truth in many different ways. Instead of building great systems in which the singular diversities of things and persons are passed over and diluted, this way of thinking prefers to start with the careful analysis of the peculiar features of each being in its otherness, and only then to clarify its relations with other things in the light of its peculiar and distinctive features. (Wild 15-16)

*Lost in Translation* brings into play a Lévinasian, language-based model. A global understanding of the world informs Mones's book, but not as an otherness-containing, total "system." Hers is not a "vision." Or, if it is one, it gets its force from a certain philosophy, or, better still, from a certain pragmatics of language use in crosscultural, transactional contexts that allows, in Wild's words, for "diversity of dialogue and for further growth through the dynamics of question and answer."

#### IV. Teilhard Revisited: Translating, Being

This is where the translation theme comes in. As suggested earlier, in Mones language in general and translation in particular are an analogy to, but also a critique of, Teilhard's totalist phenomenology. Having "drifted away" from her "expat friends" who "clung so to their Westernness, their imported newspapers, their Sunday touch-football games in the diplomatic compound, weekly trips to McDonald's" (26), Alice earns a living as an interpreter. She is a cultural go-between literally trading upon a question-answer give-and-take in the interstitial space where neither the self nor its other is assimilated into a higher ensemble. Her self may shift into a condition of otherness instead, through a cultural performance in which no single identity monopolizes language nor forces others to adopt a particular idiom and, more generally, to gravitate around a ruling rational "center." "Rational" equals here "cultural," as the second half of Wild's commentary makes plain — it is on the terrain of culture, or cultures, rather, that reason plies, and lays bare, its plural. But Teilhard's "planetization" is — was — modernist and totalist (a tautology?). Its rationality had ontologically "holistic" implications. To be was to be part of — "give oneself over to" — a *totality*, to the world's emerging "total system" — Immanuel Wallerstein's "modern world-system" — while in Mones, not unlike in Levinas, Being is necessarily "relation to the other than self" (*ProperNames* 5). To be "authentic," James Clifford proclaims by turning the tables on the traditional metaphysics of identity, is to be "relational" (12).

Challenging Hegelian *rationality*, this *relationality* comes about by language negotiation and dialogue — quite literally, in translation.

No doubt, Wallerstein's world-system has been spreading out a great deal since *Le Phénomène humain*. This expansion accounts for a major paradox at play in Mones's "global" retooling of Teilhard: although globalization in pre-World War II China was hardly what it is today, Teilhard's "planetization" chimes in with it neatly. His modernist anthroposophy is in tune with the "noospheric," all-embracing — and uncritically embraced — developments of the global age, whereas Mones's romance, set in a country deeply impacted by planetary forces sixty years later, looks to translation as a cultural-existential means for coping with the totalizing "consequences of modernity." In other words, *postmodernity* may be — for sure, is — more global than modernity from a geopolitical, economic, demographic, and, to some extent, cultural standpoint, if we take "global" to equate "integrated" and "unified," "one" or about to become so at the expense of our "multivocal world" (Clifford 23). However, postmodern literary-cultural texts, artifacts, and practices — postmodernity's *postmodernism* — imagine ways of rescuing our plural voices. A case in point, *Last in Translation* bears witness to postmodernity's war with itself, to its fundamental double-bind. On the one hand, postmodernity carries on the globalizing project of modernity by adding a new chapter ("China") to its master narrative of planetary grandeur. On the other hand, inside and against postmodernity itself, the postmodern text jams the works. It resists, thinks up alternatives, wary as it is of grand explanations, exploits, and stories.

By and large, Mones's suspicion of foreboding totalities takes up two forms. More of a "philosophical" kind, the first results in a translation paradigm that takes aim directly at Teilhard's *totalist* philosophy. Rather forthright, conspicuously political, the second shows Alice handle explicitly *totalitarian* or hegemonic ideologies and situations. The two types naturally intertwine since in either case some sort of Teilhardian intertext is involved. For example, Alice rejects Horace, her politician father with a segregationist racist past, who would want only "Anglo-Saxon grandchildren" (156). Nor do the Chinese officials think very different. They simply place the genetic (racial, ethnic) and cultural center, indeed, the *fans et origo* of human civilization on the Asian side of the East/West divide. This explains their approval of Spencer's project, whose "worldwide importance" (18) they sense. Han, Vice Director of a Beijing paleontology institute, is skeptic about Spencer chances, but should the American find the Peking Man, he muses, "The entire world would be reminded that China was not only, of course, the oldest continuous culture

on earth but also — quite possibly — man's point of origin" (18). To boot, the "American hypothesis" has "potential for ruling out the distasteful possibility that the Chinese race might be descended from Africans" (19-20). *Homo erectus* has evolved, Han and Lin contend, "separately in China" (115). In point of fact, Chinese paleontology officially deems Asian *Homo erectus* not only a distinct species, a different race, but also the source of all races. Speaking to science's subordination to politics and hence to the totalitarian side of the regime, this totalist theory is another Stalinist/Maoist anachronisms in "modernized" China. Again, reason has no plural in this controversy, and at first glance this is paradoxical because what Han and Lin argue for is a logic of difference underlying a very loose system of competing anthropological and, by implication, cultural types, with the Chinese one at its core and possible "origin" of later types yet not derived from any. As Alice quotes from *Le Phénomène humain*, Teilhard in his turn believes that, when written "*from within*," "*the true natural history of the world... would appear no longer as an interlocking succession of structural types replacing one another, but as an ascension of inner sap spreading out in a forest of consolidated instincts* (*Lost in Translation* 184). It would seem, then, that the French philosopher's universalism is at odds with "differentialism," Han and Lin's anthropological party line. The conflict is superficial, though. Underwritten by fetishized difference, overt Sinocentrism is the flip side of Teilhard's Eurocentrism, which remains generally latent in his work, with exceptions such as those discussed above. Surely, Teilhard is not unaware of costs — genetic, cultural — of his "vision." Positing a common, original essence ("inner sap") for all beings, his universalist ontology implies a global "synthesis." Yet this comes at a price. As Alice recalls Teilhard again, "*Every final synthesis costs something... Something is finally burned in the course of every synthesis in order to pay for that synthesis*" (156-57).

So where does Mones stand? To answer the question, we need to figure out the position of her protagonist and, apparently, alter-ego. For one thing, Alice is drawn to Teilhard's thought. As a translator, she cannot ignore the promise of crosscultural communication and understanding that his anthroposophy holds out. On a deeper level, she is enthralled by his love for Lucile, which her own relationship with Lin restages. Lucile was the same age as Alice, "just like me," she tells herself (54-55). Nor does she fail to notice Teilhard's limits as a philosopher of humanness and human being himself. Lin's theories do not win her over either, yet she enjoys in his presence the intimacy Teilhard denied Lucile. Her "Chinese lover" crosses over to the "outside woman," breaks the rules where the Frenchman played by them. In

a sense, Teilhard and Lucile reenacted the "calamitous" love story of Abelard and Heloi'se and its romantic poetics of distance, which foiled physical contact while inspiring torturous epistolary discourse. As Thomas M. King reminds us in his "Epilogue" to *The Letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan*, there were other women beside Lucile in Teilhard's life, primarily French and American. With one of them, Leontine Zanta, the philosopher also exchanged affectionate letters.<sup>11</sup> But it is the correspondence between Teilhard and Lucile that limns the French Jesuit's outlook on love and sexuality. According to him, the two are, or should be, different things. As Teilhard wrote in a 1934 essay on "The Evolution of Chastity," sexual manifestations "bur[n] up and deade[n] a portion of the soul" (qtd. in King, *The Letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan* 296). No longer "whole," the soul jeopardizes its integration into a larger aggregate. As Mary Wood Gilbert observes in the "Prologue" to Teilhard's and Lucile's letters, this is the crux of the problem: "For Lucile, physical consummation was fundamental to the love between a man and a woman, a seal of what they felt for each other. Teilhard's consistent and continual response was a rejection of this point of view, offering in its place a redirection of the energy of sexual union towards God. He did not deny the dynamics of love between a man and a woman, and he believed that such love, although unconsummated, could bring them to God" (xvii). Revealingly, in a letter from Beijing dated November 14th, 1933, where he refers to himself in the third person, Teilhard owns that "because your friend, Lucile, belongs to Something Else, he cannot be yours — (and you would find very few [sic] left in him, of what attracts you, if he tried to be yours) — just and merely for being momentarily happy with you" (7). A later epistle from July 18th, 1934 brings unexpected clarity to the dispute. At issue, we gather, is not so much sexuality as gender. "My line of answer," Teilhard states in an otherwise roundabout reply, "does not exclude the 'physical' element, — since it is not some abstract spirit, — but the 'woman', — which I discover in you. All the question is to decide whether, amongst the natural 'effects' which you alluded to, some have not to be avoided (in certain cases) precisely because they have, in themselves, something of an end, or of an achievement, or of an internal completion, which makes them rather a *terminal* stage than a *step* towards the only complete spiritual union" (19).

11 See Teilhard's *Letters to Leontine Zanta*. Most of Teilhard's letters to Leontine were written during his 1923-1934 Chinese travels. In an epistle dated December 14, 1929, the philosopher-paleontologist mentions the discovery of a Peking Man skull (109).

In consequence, Teilhard's spiritual universalism proves one more time less universal than it may seem. It is not, in other words, gender-blind much as he admits that "the problem ... exists for me just as [it does] for you (Lucile)" (19). In his "Epilogue," King concludes that Teilhard sees "the Feminine ... as the force that calls man out of himself and into Life" (295), but then the commentator adds that, idealized as Virgin Mary by Catholic faith, woman rather "inspires the spirit to rise beyond the world and unite with God" (296). This is precisely the role of Teilhard's "Eternal Feminine," as an early essay bearing this title proves (295). Hypostatized as Virgin Mary or Dante's Beatrice, the feminine has essentially a transitional value and thence hardly any ontological prestige. One wonders, thus, into what kind of "Life" the feminine pulls Teilhard. An artist herself, interested in spiritual matters Western and Eastern, Lucile seems to have found by the time of her death the much sought-after peace of mind by returning to her Christian faith, as Mary Wood Gilbert remarks (xvii). But a more pugnacious attitude shines through one of Lucile's 1935 diary entries, pulling the rug as it does out from under Teilhard's spiritualistic totalism. "You admit," she writes,

the necessity of working through and *with* material in order to reach ideas — abstract or God-like — but you deny the use of the material (humans) in order to reach the abstract or God-love — you will say you deny only *one* part of human love — But here I think you are evading the question — for the physical is not only a very important part but an *essential putt* for the race [-]! thoroughly agree that human love should become something much finer [J more spiritual than it is now[J but it must be *through* human love — not denying it — it is like telling someone to stop eating in order to become more spiritual — (which would be true for many) but as a principal — Buddha himself tried and found absurd — no my dearf.] on that point we do not see "eye-to-eye" — and I think that *there you* refuse to cast off your clerical teaching and look at the fact *honestly*. You have faced all sorts of ideas brought to you by your science — But I still feel that you have refused to face that idea because your life has made it possible for you to evade it. And it is by such people as you that it should be faced and *he/pect[.]* not denied — [.] (34)

Lucile turns Teilhard's argument on its head. The repression of sexuality, she submits, ties into a broader denial of physicality, without which one cannot be whole, nor, as I observe above, participate spiritually in a higher wholeness. Despite claims to the contrary, Teilhard fancies a world of restrictions, divisions, and limits. Lucile does not. She strikes me, in fact, as a genuine "translator," assuming as she does the act of existential translation,

etymologically, the "stepping across," over *to* the other side and carrying her world with her.

Lucile's point on human "materiality"<sup>12</sup> pertains chiefly to gender and sex, but, in focusing on Alice and Lin, Mones extends it more generally to culture, or cultures, and shows that *translation is not transcendental*, "evasive," or immaterial. Quite to the contrary, it involves concrete contact, dialogue, and exchange that set off a whole ritual of becoming, where the body, material corporeality play a major role. Granted, in any linguistic expression, mind and body, communication intent and physiological-phonetic means become one. But translation brings this solidarity into sharp relief. Furthermore, having become one, mind and the body set in motion another becoming, a metamorphosis not just linguistic but also ontological as well as cultural. In translation, we can actually become — translate ourselves into, rather, perform like — the other. "Becoming-Chinese" itself becomes possible. This has nothing to do with genetics, with Teilhard's "inner sap" or anthropological "Ur-type" that would allegedly allow Alice to body forth the historically documented subtypes ("Euro-American," "Asian," etc.). But it has a lot to do with a cultural refashioning grounded in language and translation. As post-Foucauldians like Judith Butler have demonstrated, if identity has a "source," performance is its truer name. According to Butler, we perform our gender and even our sexuality. Our culture constructs them for us; then, we respond through a performance aiming at deconstructing and reconstructing them, outside and across inherited rubrics, signifiers, and boundaries. We do, or fail to do, so with gender, sex, class, race, and ethnicity. It is imperative, I propose, that we take another look at language — at language subjected to translation manoeuvres in particular — and ascertain its role in identity performance, in the "chameleonic" protocols of being and becoming. Enabling mimetic reproduction of "local" cultural models, such protocols end up "disembedding" these models, and this "disembedding" is a hallmark of our globalizing world (Giddens 21-29). Echoing an increasingly "acute demand" for linguistic translation in general and "cultural translation" in particular (Butler ix), cultural "chameleonism" challenges the authority of those

"localities" over their own content. It turns out, this content can be more and more "learned," appropriated, reproduced, and circulated worldwide in forms that may "descralizfe] the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy" (Bhabha 228), that is, the myth that an identity, value, or idea is the monopoly of a certain representation. A bodily and linguistic performance, translation thus encroaches upon the political, upon a certain configuration of power and place.

This explains why Alice's skills make the Chinese officials uneasy. Acting as Spencer's interpreter during his first meeting with Vice Director Han, Alice undergoes a transformation beyond her control. Speaking with Han, "Unconsciously she, too, was now rolling and drawing out her r-sounds, unable as always to check this chameleon quality of her Chinese-speaking. She invariably absorbed and replayed the other speaker's accents" (*Lost in Translation* 20). "Chinese-speaking" is, in effect, a form of "Chinese-becoming." "This woman actually wanted to be Chinese!," Han discovers. His flicker of "compassion for her dislocation" (21) is canceled out by the threat she poses to him: it is the dislocated, the "disembedded," who further "disembedding" and foster a "disembedded" culture. Yet the "enemy" does not come from the outside — on this account, there is never a reassuring "inside." Notably, Alice finds in Chinese itself the very matrix for her linguistic-existential "becoming." The mobility of identity, the capacity for self-fashioning and reinvention on the model of the other inhere in, speak to, a profound heterogeneity and intertextuality of being, but these features are themselves first "spelled out," *spoken* in and by language. As her Chinese language teacher told her, in Chinese

"each phrase can be interpreted in different ways — especially in spoken Chinese. Never one meaning, always many. Not like English. And our idioms — the best ones are not literal, no, not at all, instead they are oblique, they make reference to legends, stories, famous dramas, and books. They do not offer specific information, do you understand me or not? They produce a state of mind! Ah, so few of you outside people grasp the pleasure of speaking a truly civilized language — never base, never obvious and therefore clunky and painful, as English is ..."

But Alice had understood. Chinese was a huge maze-world: stable yet evasive. Nothing was permanently what it seemed. *Yes* meant maybe and *no* meant maybe and so did everything in between — other Westerners saw this as Chinese prevarication but to Alice it was simply the natural mutation of things. Natural *and* welcome — because here in China the self could always be

12

"Matter he loved: people, landscape, stones," Annie Dillard, another contemporary American author interested in Teilhard, writes about him in *For the Time Zeing* (43). Judged from her examples, though, it becomes clear that "landscapes" and "stones" fare much better than "people." "Matter" actually designates the "materials" of Teilhard's scientific research.

reinvented. She, too, could become someone else. Eventually. Or so she'd told herself all these years. (247-48)

In this case, being on the "inside" means being on the side of language. This "inside" does not necessarily imply a cultural dualism. Just the other way around, it invalidates all dualisms, not only those of linguistic nature ("yes"/"no"), and thus lays the groundwork for a radical critique of those oppositions blocking the self's "reinvention." Alice does suspect that this Chinese-becoming may never be complete. On the phone with her father, she cannot help feeling the "rush of belonging" (126), and this is a telling moment because in striving to remake herself she *is* to no small extent struggling to get away from what her father is and stands for. "Whatever she was," Alice reflects, "she wasn't American any longer" (317), much though Lin reminds her of her Americanness and whiteness (316). There is some substance to her "acultural" creed — "The truth is, I don't really think of myself as having a culture" (316) — but only insofar as this claim opens up the possibility of multiple *acculturations*, the rites of becoming. Introduced to the "insideness" of language, to the idiomatic space where univocal ideology yields to the dialogic of tongues and voices, Alice gains an insight into the intimate cultural intertextuality of selfhood, into our plural makeup and the imprints of others and their worlds on it. As specified above, translation starts out linguistically but ends culturally and ontologically as it connects intimately language and body, then different bodies, not just their minds and words, and finally the worlds surrounding those bodies. Desire for communication and contact, desire for the other — desire pure and simple — is in Mones at play underneath *equivalence*, linguistic and otherwise. Therefore, language is as eroticized as the body, and sexuality is the body language — the language — par excellence. In this sense, sex with Chinese men is indeed "sex with China," as Alice intimates (155). And only in this sense Mones's book accedes to the status of "global romance," where sex acquires a symbolic, energetic value while maintaining the human materiality lost in Teilhard's spiritualism. "We are fucking now in the center of the anvil," Lin tells Alice in "crude [Chinese] slang" (314), and, symbolically, as they make love, they swap Western and Chinese legends of creation, translate both their bodies and the foundational narratives embedded in their texture into stories that make sense in English and Chinese alike.

Through language and sex, homonymous incarnations of the same translating desire, the translator accedes to a condition of otherness or at least proves capable to reproduce this condition's parameters, to break and "wield"

its cultural codes. What Alice does "eventually" bears upon what she is. "You can never be Chinese" (42), she is told at some point; for certain, she will never fulfill her metamorphosis. But that is because identity in general is never complete onto itself, whole, but provisional, partial in its various embodiments, and Alice's notion of "the true Chinese man" (315) is a fiction, too. Since we are permanently in flux, ever becoming, those trying to be like us cannot but play catchup with our perpetually outdated, always incomplete versions. Indubitably, there is no endgame in the identity games played by Alice, but her ability to learn the rules and play the game itself is a momentous achievement.

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