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***SIMILARITY AND TRANSLATION CONFERENCE
OPENING REMARKS***

I would like to start with a heartfelt 'thank you' to you all. Bob Hodgson and I spent two years conceptualising and organising this conference; now our work finds its crowning glory in the international interest it raised and in your participation today and tomorrow.

Let me note at the outset the diversity of contributions—all of outstanding level—we will hear for the next two days. The many disciplines and areas they cover far exceed what we had in mind originally. We are elated, because we planned this meeting exactly with the intent to bring scholars from all walks of life together over a topic we regard as crucial for translation theory. So, already at the start, this conference goes well beyond our rosiest expectations. You will raise questions, issues, and projects we could never think of in the first place. In fact, I hope this meeting will be just the first in a series. For the time being, I would like to highlight three aspects that have grown increasingly clear in the run up to this day.

The first aspect has to do with history and epistemology. A programme like ours clearly marks the end of disciplines meant as enclosed fields of study; as a result, it also marks the end of inter-disciplinarity. I am convinced of the need to do away with traditionally defined disciplines, and I am not alone. This results especially from looking into the crisis of disciplines understood as a myth of the Social Sciences in the Seventies and—more recently—of Translation Studies. What we now call Social and Human Sciences were born and became independent at the turn of the 20th century. For the past hundred years they have split into so many autonomous branches. The discipline devoted to translation arrived late on the scene; first as translation science and theory, then as Translation Studies.

I can think of scientific, academic, and sociological reasons for this proliferation. I will not deny that the ramification was mainly due to a growing specialisation of research interests; however, it is equally clear that certain labels (think of Textlinguistics, for instance) appeared in the Sixties and Seventies thanks to a certain institutional set-up; namely, the restructuring of Germany's higher education. Also, translation research grew in Europe in parallel with a global reorganisation of training centres, whereas in the U.S. its focus is in high-brow academia and the localisation industry. At any rate, the division of intellectual labour into so many disciplines is a legacy of a positivist view of knowledge as a tree whose fruits are discipline-labels, each covering a special field with its own special protocol. It is ultimately an anti-humanist idea which dissects and scatters the body of human knowledge; each research area must be enclosed in a separate discipline

and what is not regarded as relevant ends up being marginalised. This is how Linguistics came to be at the turn of the 20th century. Saussure isolated Linguistics from the neighbouring sciences by selecting certain areas of relevance and cutting off the rest as not-the-object of linguistics. In this respect, the two main meanings of 'discipline' draw close together.

To come to our own, drawing a circle around the field of translation involves sticking a discipline-label to it and cutting off the rest. However, if it is true that what we call translation today has shifted greatly in the course of time—ranging from the most reckless rewriting to the painstaking crib—it follows that many disciplines would have something to say on translation. The move attempted by Translation Studies to create a discipline that would embrace several neighbours clearly would not do. This is why I think the idea of interdisciplinarity depends on the tree and its label-bearing branches. Interdisciplinarity is conceivable only where disciplines rule; it results from matching artifacts grown on different parts of the tree.

In the past few years, this image of knowledge has progressively lost ground. The image of the tree has been replaced by that of the rhizome, which I borrow from Deleuze. The rhizome stands for the network of knowledge. In it, each node gives access to all others. In this network of knowledge—epitomised by the Internet—disciplinary boundaries and inter-disciplinary relations make no sense at all. In it, the content coincides with the nodes; it is the point where the mesh crosses another path.

The second aspect of this conference I would like to highlight is the grand return to theory. Of course, I'm not referring to theory as it was meant in the past decades, but to a growing confidence in the ability to ask some fundamental questions without hiding behind mere descriptivism. What I mean to say here, is that we do theory every time the premisses of 'scientific' discourse cease to be universally shared. This is when knowledge must be rethought and restructured. Doing theory is thus a declaration of conflict; it is a subversive move which academic institutions may later turn into method. Theory therefore always precedes the institution. To tell you the whole story, I believe institutions often tend to marginalise and neutralise theory to render it harmless. In this sense, theory intimately corresponds to critique, a term I use as a militant battlecry.

Theory is in opposition to ideology. The former sets the conditions for the possibility of practice, the latter legitimises practice by posing as theory. Theory strives for criticism and casts doubt on practice; ideology can only defend established views. In this sense—with reference to translation—theory is a critique of translation ideology. Better still, it is a critique of translation ideologies. These and other positions are borrowed from Antoine Compagnon, who showed that, in a literary setting, these ideas were already clear in Baudelaire and Mallarmé. The best human and social scientists in the past century have shared precisely this idea of theory. Theory has always been an assault on dominant ideologies; as such, it has shaken shared beliefs from their very foundations, and sometimes it questioned Western culture as a whole. I believe a reflection from the subversive viewpoint of theory is

all the more needed today, starting from translation and looking out onto a world well on its way towards globalisation. The grand return to theory therefore means the possibility of a critique of institutions, often polemically, as Eikhenbaum already wrote in 1927 in his book titled *Theory, Criticism, Polemic*.

The third aspect has to do with the specific topic we will work on these days. In the closing session we will discuss the results and the usefulness of the notion of similarity for translation. However, one thing can be said already. It is necessary to identify new transdisciplinary topics, ideas, I'd almost say 'words' to push research onwards. We need topics that are not linked to the traditional dictionary, nor to translation studies as we know it, nor to any other discipline in particular. We need ideas that can hover above these lines of demarcation and focus our thinking.

The theme we agreed upon for this meeting is an attempt at doing just that. The topic is important for translation, including Bible translation. It is important because it implies a serious and network-oriented reflection on the space between texts and the relationship these texts set up across different cultures. Bible translators are, of course, accustomed to using such concepts as "faithfulness," "fidelity" and "equivalence" to characterize the quality of this space and this relationship, and to measure how well they do their job. However, the topic of similarity goes well beyond translation, including Bible translation. It bears upon perception, representation, imitation, the relationship among things, the modelisation of culture,

and the relation between past and present. It is about the very way we represent our existence to ourselves and to the others. It is about diversity. What kind of tool can similarity be? What is the nexus between similarity, diversity and mediation in the globalised world? How can we use the notion of similarity vis à vis all intertextual relations and translations? We think these questions, these new possibilities of networking must be of vital interest to all translation researchers, producers, trainers, and critics.

Some notions recently surfaced in translation theory look in the same direction. I'm thinking of Lawrence Venuti's *remainder*, which has to do with translation as well as much else and which originated in a totally different field of research. In the same way, I can think of the *location of culture*, on which Homi Bhabha has recently worked. Such terms help us locate translation itself in a broader and more fruitful framework.

We can safely claim this conference is an attempt to cut across the issue of translation by placing it under the lens of similarity, perhaps its most central issue. In doing so, this meeting points towards a new way of doing meetings, one where disciplinary issues are secondary or altogether negligible and where the focus is on some crucial issues of what we call modernity. Similarity is an entry in our rhizome-like encyclopedia in which each node is both center and periphery.

As is usual in these cases, let me close with a big 'thank you' to all the people whose work made this conference possible. First, I would like to call a round of applause for the local and remote staff of the American Bible Society, their ability, goodwill, and expertise are without parallel, thank you.

I will not try to mention anyone in particular, because it's their teamwork that made things happen. However, special gratitude and admiration goes to Bob Hodgson, whom I would like to publicly commend for his intellectual, professional, and personal qualities.

My thanks also go to the scientific committee, that contributed with their time and intelligence to making this event a scholarly success. To the plenary speakers and rapporteurs I send my thanks in the form of a voucher: you can put it in your pocket now and cash it when your work is done.

Thanks to all, have a fun and fruitful meeting, and God bless you.