

## ***Using Everything: Translation as a Way of Life***

*Presidential Address intended for International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education Sixteenth Annual Interdisciplinary Conference, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, October 21-23, 2005*

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*Judith E. Vida*

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*"It was odd. As a girl, Sophie would have shriveled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief." (p. 64)*

*"That's magic I admire, using something that exists anyway and turning it round into a curse." (p. 172)*

Diana Wynne Jones, *Howl's Moving Castle*

New York: HarperCollins, 1986/2001

*"[The family's move to Nebraska was] the happiness and the curse of my life."*

*"I didn't care if a performance was good or bad as long as it fired the imagination."*

From the narration of *Willa Cather: The Road is All*,

broadcast on PBS, September 8, 2005

*"No pain is 'somebody else's' I was wrong about that. Pain is as inevitable as love and dying and the somber weather that catches up with itself."*

Judith Harris, *Signifying Pain*

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

## 1. Second Beginning: “As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said.”

This is a presentation with two beginnings. Here is the second one.

Some weeks ago on a Saturday evening, I went to dinner with my husband Stuart Spence and our younger son Jon, who is twenty-seven, a writer and artist who has been living near us for a while, though this is about to change. I had meant to spend the day finding a way in to writing this, but instead I found myself compelled to read *Howl's Moving Castle*. Our boys had instigated a family passion for *anime*, Japanese animation, before they were in kindergarten, especially now for the films of Hayao Miyazaki. Stuart and I had been to see *Howl's Moving Castle*, Miyazaki's latest, when it first opened, in a Japanese version with English subtitles. Knowing of my interest, someone who comes to see me brought me a copy of the book it was based on, by Diana Wynne Jones. Jon had been shown storyboards for the film when, on a trip to Japan, he and his companions made a visit to Miyazaki's studio, but surprisingly he had not yet seen it since its release, and he pounced on the book. “It's a fast read,” he said later, “and it's so clear why Miyazaki was drawn to it. So many themes are connected to his sensibility, especially the way youth and age are intertwined in the predicament of a young girl turned into an old woman by a malicious spell. The ending is convoluted, but if you read it, let me know.” So I did read it, and as I did, a sentence or two leaped out as somehow relevant. I put a post-it on the pages, and copied out the passages, so at dinner I had at least *something* to show for my day's work. “How's it going, Mom?” asked Jon, and I somewhat ruefully confessed that I'd spent most of my day with *Howl*, but that there were some bits that struck a chord for the presentation, and one of them was this:

*“It was odd. As a girl, Sophie would have shriveled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief.”* (p. 64)

I said, "I'm not sure but this might be an epigraph for the paper." Jon said, "I remember that when I read that part, I thought of you."

*A week later, telling this on the phone to Gersh Molad, my writing partner who lives in Tel Aviv, I could feel it more deeply: "Imagine," I said. "I am known by my son." "Well," he said, "That's your presidential paper, your vision for IFPE: knowing and being known in the company of one another."*

## **2. First Beginning: "The small miracle of a communication like this."**

Now, here is where I had I thought I would begin:

I entered the sitting-down part of writing this on September 25 in the voice of a letter on the day after the dinner with Stuart and Jon that I just recounted. The letter this time was a letter to myself rather than inside one of the correspondences that comprise most of my writing:

*I was having a massage yesterday morning, my brow ridges resting comfortably on the padded donut affixed to the end of the table, almost as though my head were being held by a kind hand. I have been having massages with some frequency ever since July, when the twin pressures of hunching over a computer keyboard to work on the IFPE conference and in the same time period to write an essay of great importance to me (I'll tell you more about that) converged with such force that the upper part of my body went into a prolonged muscle spasm as soon as the essay was finished. Well, I knew yesterday that I had to start working on this presentation. The general sense of it has been to use the experience of my visit to México City in March. On the invitation of Arturo Ortíz and his group Agape, I had made a presentation that had the unanticipated effect of bringing my whole life into focus. The work of the artist Allen Ruppertsberg was only one part of it, but in the course of the presentation it became the central element. And then, the experience in México had to be the central element of the essay "of great importance to me" which had been commissioned for the catalog of Allen Ruppertsberg's forthcoming retrospective exhibition in Düsseldorf. This essay would be the culmination*

*and summation of more than thirty years of engagement with his work and his person. As Allen Ruppertsberg turned into the central element for México, and México became the central element for the Ruppertsberg essay, I realized that for you, for IFPE, both México and Allen Ruppertsberg would have to be here.*

*I had thought I'd use the meditative space of the massage to see what else came up, to use the "what else" as another kind of hand to hold that central element. But my mind was blank (as Stuart pointed out later, my head was resting in a "zero"), and there was the early tingling of low-grade panic, the whisper that was almost a hiss: "what if there's nothing?" This was odd because I've developed some real confidence to use whatever shows up, no matter how strange or seemingly disparate from the matter at hand.*

*As I write this, I notice in these words that spilled on the page without reflection, the hand of "the matter at hand" follows the hand of the padded donut and echoes the metaphorical holding of the structure of a piece of writing. Embedded in the words is an image of holding hands to mirror the internal hand that yes, did show up a few moments later in the form of a remembered e-mail:*

Judith--Thank you for your order... It's great to witness another Kafka fan  
(that is, if the book is for yourself)--he's one of my elite favorites--Tolstoy being  
another...and you? Your order will be shipped immediately. Enjoy your book! --  
Yours, Scott ([s.maloley@gmail.com](mailto:s.maloley@gmail.com))

*I had ordered impersonally from one of the Amazon network of "marketplace" booksellers a copy of  
K. by Roberto Calasso, and this e-mail showed up in response.*

*I wrote back:*

It's a small miracle to receive a communication like yours! Yes it's for me; partly  
[because it's about] Kafka and partly [in homage to] Enrique Vila-Matas, in whose  
*Bartleby & Co.* I first learned of Calasso. And both relate to Alberto Manguel who has  
been a relatively recent entry into my literary/reading consciousness.

Thank YOU.

Warm regards,

Judy

*This exchange occurred just before the massage, so perhaps it is not remarkable that it came up. No sooner did it appear than it branched in two. One branch touched some earlier ideas for this presentation, to include my recent electronic correspondences with the poet Judith Harris who is here with us at IFPE, and Barbara Hess who is not and is the translator into German of my Allen Ruppersberg essay, and to include these for a reason parallel to the e-mail that showed up from Scott Maloley, namely “the small miracle of a communication like this.” The miracle is the leaking out of a tiny piece of what could probably be thought of as “identity” and its being scooped up and held by another: electronic eye contact. The second branch led to a sudden awareness that when I am speaking these words to you in Ft. Lauderdale I will be in a room with you, a sizable number of people with nearly all of whom I have been in this very kind of correspondence. Small. (Some larger than others.) And miraculous.*

*And then I understood. I understood why it was that the prospect made me anxious. Gersh Molad referred to this very anxiety years ago in one of the first papers he and I wrote together (and just now published, though without its footnotes). He wrote “At the time of writing this, I became somewhat anxious, as if I instantly emotionally comprehended the vast intensity of dialogue.” In my next instant, I recognized that the anxiety wasn’t about performance. It was uncertainty about being equal to the task of addressing this “vast intensity of dialogue” --- the vastness and the intensity. Uncertainty of finding the words and the means to express what matters to me, and to express it in a way that lets you know something of who is this “me.”*

*Of course this has everything to do with why I am at IFPE. It touches my realization that IFPE is where I need to be; it touches how I happen to be addressing you as IFPE’s President.*

Well, I got this far, and then ground to a halt, two and a half pages into this “first beginning.” On the next page began a section from my Ruppertsberg essay. The white space in between loomed larger and larger. I copied out a few more passages from Gregory Rabassa’s *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents*,<sup>1</sup> and Roberto Calasso’s *K*,<sup>2</sup> gathered my notes around me for company, brewed another cup of tea, and asked myself *Why am I stuck?* There’s a lovely passage in Rabassa, as he is describing the felicity of his translation of Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*: “...there was a kind of natural flow of expression that I only find when I am writing something personal without any restraints from matters like academic purposes ...” (p. 60) *This isn’t “academic purposes,” I reminded myself. So what’s the problem? Taking a deep breath, I heard myself sigh: Don’t you see? It’s all so interconnected, so relentlessly circular and concentric. Everything is connected to everything else. There is no place to begin.*

So perhaps the wisest course is to acknowledge that there is no way to begin, because we have begun already. We’ve walked in at the middle. The conversation is well underway, yours and mine, IFPE’s and mine and yours, the elements of this presentation with one another, so I will take them up in turn, allowing them to mingle and play in our shared consciousness, and then we may see where it is we’ve come to when it’s time to stop. If something doesn’t make much sense at its first appearance, that is, if the bones are too bare, it might show up later with a little more flesh on it. Or, it might not. I’m 62 years old and I’m not shriveling with embarrassment at not “getting it right.” I don’t mind what I say or do as long as it is connected with who I am. This is the only way you can possibly know me, and as you respond to me, however it is that you do, then, I can know something of you, too.

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<sup>1</sup> They will appear in the conclusion. New York: New Directions Books, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> “*The Trial* and *The Castle* share a premise: that election and condemnation are *almost* indistinguishable ... The main difference is this: condemnation is always certain, election always uncertain.” Translated from the Italian by Geoffrey Brock. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, p. 5.

### 3. “I exist in conversation” (“the only reason to be here is love”).

“*I exist in conversation*” is how I began a psychoanalytic presentation for a local conference titled “Who Are We Really? Psychoanalysis as a Human Endeavor,” adding “*I won’t be able to tell you about the conversation that comprises my existence, I can only take you into it.*” In my essay for Allen Ruppersberg I put “*I exist in conversation*” into a footnote, to confirm that the essay itself was written from inside the conversation in the form of a letter to the reader, and titled “*Use Everything: A Letter to You.*”<sup>3</sup> That essay was much easier to write than this. Only later did it hit me with hurricane-force how utterly interconnected everything was, and is, and that I had written in this essay an accounting for my life. From now on, I would look beyond that summation and see what there is, to write from and of that “beyond.” But at this moment, I am beginning to “get it” that the vastness and intensity of that interconnectedness will overwhelm me from time to time, and so it should.

I attended my first IFPE conference in November of 1999, in San Francisco, and I presented “Life Lessons: What One Psychoanalyst Learned From Contemporary Art,” which had recently been rejected by the Program Committee of the American Psychoanalytic Association as being “of no interest to psychoanalysts.” At that time, two and a half decades of my concerted efforts both inside the pale and beyond had finally persuaded me that utopian aspirations were pointless, as institutional psychoanalysis could not but repeat its own reprehensible history. Imagine my astonishment, then, from the first session I attended at IFPE, to find myself inside an alive conversation that didn’t stop when the session was over but swirled and redounded, implicitly audible in all the other sessions, and grew as it went. Eventually, my presentation was received with warm and thoughtful

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<sup>3</sup> “Use Everything” A Letter to You, a contribution to the catalog for the exhibition “Allen Ruppersberg ‘One of Many,’ ” Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 10 December 2005 – 12 February 2006, by Judith E. Vida-Spence. Soon to be available with images at [www.spence.net/collection](http://www.spence.net/collection).

engagement, but it was the conversation that captivated me, conversation with depth and breadth, an openness and humanity that in decades of psychoanalytic conferences I had never before encountered. I went to many presentations some of which, like mine, would never have made the cut in traditional circles. Willa Cather, frustrated as a young girl by the cultural limitations of prairie life, is reported to have said of the local and touring artistic productions passing through Nebraska in the early 1890s, “I didn’t care if a performance was good or bad as long as it fired the imagination.” Well, IFPE fired my imagination. IFPE still fires my imagination. And I’ve never looked back. I say to people, “I think it’s because there are no continuing education credits and no institutional edifice to protect that there’s a different kind of conversation at IFPE. The only reason to be here is love.”

#### **4. “The puritanical fire of self-examination” (“I would do better if I could”).**

This spring, there was a book review in *American Imago* that sang, but both the book’s title and its author fell out of my mind. Later, out of nowhere, arrived an e-mail from someone who had read something of mine and really liked it. The connection came through someone we knew in common, Marilyn Charles. Marilyn subsequently submitted a panel proposal to IFPE with fellow participants Judith Harris and Benjamin Addleson, and asked me to be the moderator. Judith Harris had been the one who e-mailed. By the time I got it that it was also Judith Harris who was the author of the lost book, she and I were already off and running in an electronic correspondence of at times feverish intensity (a characteristic we both share, when permitted, and sometimes when not).

What I want to say from here won’t sound right unless I write it as a letter, and Judith Harris told me she is OK with this.

*Ah, this feels so much better, as though I have taken off my formal gown and my stays and donned a loose wrapper of dark printed silk inside which I can breathe freely. You know what I mean, don't you, Judith?*

*I want to say that some of that feverish intensity inflects your writing to generate a distinctive voice, and this is equally true whether you are being poetic, exegetical, or epistolary. In your first letter to me, you wrote, "The days are hot here and bloodied with pollen." I sat with that for a long time, feeling it, smelling it, luxuriating. I appreciated so much that you read my paper on failures in psychoanalysis and described it to me as burning with "the puritanical fire of self-examination." As soon as I knew it was you, I ordered a copy of your book *Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self Through Writing*, and I started to read it, but I put it down. As we went on writing to each other, you told me some stories about the usual difficulties of writing, especially scholarly writing when complicated by what Gregory Rabassa referred to as "academic purposes." Some weeks later, when I picked up the book again, I knew that voice of yours. There were whole passages and sections where I could inhale deeply and feel parts of myself inflate that I didn't even know had been collapsed, amid such flashes of astonishing illumination. But I also stumbled over the occasional sentence that was heavy and ponderous, clots of more typical literary discourse that didn't sound like you at all. I told you that it delighted me to hear you in what I read, but when you sounded overridden, I wanted to roll the boulder off where it had pinned you. It's you I want to read, not that.*

*This reminds me of something else Rabassa wrote, "As I discovered translating Machado de Assis and García Márquez, the masters will enable you to render their prose into the best possible translation if you only let yourself be led by their expression, following the only possible way to go. If you ponder you will have lost the path." (p. 17) Rabassa is writing about translation as a formal act, the movement between two distinct cultural and linguistic languages. But I think all writing is a kind of translation, between an internal language and one suitable for external consumption. Rabassa's point is that the best possible translation will*

*be the one that flows. If you ponder, he said, with “ponder” encompassing the “ponderous,” you will have lost the path.*

*Your company, Judith, helps me tell IFPE that I lost my own path in the writing of this presentation. I bogged down in the First Beginning. My words became more labored and my thoughts refused to budge. There was no pleasure of movement and I became increasingly anxious. The notion of “the vast intensity of dialogue” became indistinguishable from “academic purposes.” At the bogging-down point, anxiety turned into agitation and it was a little frightening. I stopped writing, taking up a neutral task, the preparation of the conference abstracts, and then I stopped altogether to have dinner again with Jon, another dinner, a week later than the one I’ve already told you about, and it was just the two of us, as Stuart had gone to an opening at a non-profit exhibition space for which he’s a board member. I told Jon that it meant a lot to me, what he had said the previous Saturday. He smiled, and we had a good talk. My agitation was still there, but when I woke up the next morning I knew that there was another way to begin, and this time it did flow; that was the second beginning, the one with which I did begin.*

*But I didn’t make it happen only by myself. Gregory Rabassa, described on the book jacket by Gabriel García Márquez as “the best Latin American writer in the English language,” said “The translator . . . is a writer, too. As a matter of fact, he could be called the ideal writer because all he has to do is write; plot, theme, characters, and all the other essentials have already been provided, so he can just sit down and write his ass off.” (p. 8) I had thought of this presentation as a project of self-translation, and it was the conversation with my son, and with you, Judith, and with some others that allowed the translation to flow. In Michael Eigen’s new book Emotional Storm, there are four short sentences in the acknowledgments in which are concentrated everything that matters in the 256 pages that follow: “I am thankful that my patients work with me. I would do better if I could. We are all we have to work with. If human beings can’t work with each other, what then?” (p. x)*

## 5. Life Lessons: “the world is fine just as it is.”

“The central element ” of this translation project is still the story of what happened in México, and we’re on our way there, but I should say a little more about “Life Lessons,” which is the presentation I made there, as well as having been, as I mentioned, my first presentation at IFPE back in 1999. In the Ruppertsberg essay this is taken from Section 5:

*In 1995 I wrote a 30 minute lecture and titled it “Life Lessons: What One Psychoanalyst Learned from Contemporary Art”, and presented it in December of that year to a meeting of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis in Boston. Since then, the lecture has undergone revision and expansion, and has been given quite a few times, and to art audiences as well as psychoanalytic ones. This is how the lecture begins:*

I have structured this presentation to come to you with my side of a *conversation*, about the contributions of contemporary culture, specifically art, to my professional identity as a psychoanalyst. For more than three decades, pieces of art (and artists) with which and with whom I have become deeply engaged have stretched my comprehension of human experience in unanticipated dimensions. The version of psychoanalysis that I practice, as a consequence, has thus been enlarged to include a recognition of the uses of creativity, conscious and unconscious, that I have witnessed many of my patients to employ in service of their own psychological survival ...

*In 1995 when this was first written, “patient” was the term I used for someone who came to see me. Nowadays, I have moved quite far away from the medical model with which I began. Nowadays I mostly say “someone who comes to see me.”*

*Not quite two-thirds of the way through the lecture, after moving through sections titled “What Psychoanalysis Is,” “History, Personal and Impersonal,” “Perfectionism,” and “Narcissism,” I come to the final one called “What Life Is,” which begins:*

“Allen Ruppersberg is another artist who ... has profoundly altered my everyday experience.”

*I then quote Julia Brown who was the Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1985 on the occasion of Al's exhibition The Secret of Life and Death, with works from 1969 to 1985 as part of the museum's “In Context” series of exhibitions of individual artists:*

Ruppersberg works like a writer, researching his subjects and reinventing them, selecting, rearranging and isolating images so one sees them in a new way. His definition of art as part of everyday experience, of finding the magic and mystery of the ordinary, opens up all our surroundings...Ruppersberg's images are less made than they are chosen, found, and subsequently placed or arranged in such a way as to point out their complexity and layers of meaning. He works in an ambiguous space between image and illustration, retaining a distance from what is seen and the consciousness always of something that is being looked at. The artist is there in the work as (both) the initiator and the observer... (p.7)

*At this point I comment that this method of working closely parallels “the process of listening, reflecting, thinking and feeling that psychoanalysts are trained to use in the formulation of interpretations and other responses in the clinical setting.”*

*Throughout the lecture, I have been showing slides of the works I am talking about, and at this point I begin to cycle through a sequence of some work of Al's, his posters, in hopes of demonstrating*

*something of how he works with the elements that Julia Brown described. The slides make several circuits as I read out the following:*<sup>4</sup>

Ruppersberg likes this quotation from Novalis: “If the most unrelated things share a place, time, or odd similarity there develops wonderful unities and peculiar relationships...and one thing reminds us of everything.” (p. 114)

... About his own work Ruppersberg has said: “The individual search for the secret of life and death. That is the inspiration and the key.”

“The ordinary event leads to the beauty and understanding of the world.”

“The great mystery and the great banality of all things.”

“There is a quotidian sense of loss and tragedy.”

“Art should be familiar and enigmatic, as are human beings.”

“There is a keen interest in appalling behavior.”

“Use everything.” (p.111)

“There is a point in every story that requires a certain scene in order to continue. Each work is one of those scenes.”

“I’m interested in the translation of life to art because it seems to me that the world is fine just as it is.” (p.112)

“Reality only needs a slight adjustment to make it art.”

“Art is indeed everyday.”

“I like things that horrify and amuse at the same time.”

“The extreme in the midst of the bland.”

“I use my art to transform my life, I use my life to make my art.” (p. 113)

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<sup>4</sup> All of these quotations are drawn from *Fifty Helpful Hints for the Art of the Everyday* (1984), in *The Secret of Life and Death* (1985).

*And this section of the lecture concludes, “This is a definition of life that, taken into my consulting room, frames each memory, each dream, each association as ‘a certain scene’ that was required in the past for the story to continue. Each moment of interaction is the next scene for both analyst and analysand ...”*

*When Al Ruppertsberg says, “I’m interested in the translation of life to art because it seems to me that the world is fine just as it is,” he does not mean that the world is sentimentally “fine” or that the world is perfect. He means that the world is what it is, and it is “as it is,” and can’t be otherwise. This connects to Michael Eigen’s words, “We are all we have to work with.”*

## **6. “ ‘Du’ or ‘Sie’ ” (“a steadfast companionable ally”).**

*And now there is my own recent direct encounter with translation, the translation of my essay about Allen Ruppertsberg for the catalog which will be published bilingually, in English and German. On September 3, I received an e-mail from Barbara Hess, who wrote: “For a number of reasons it was an immense pleasure for me to translate your contribution to the catalog ... not only but also because it was ‘a letter to me.’ Due to the differences between the English and the German language,” she went on, “there are some decisions to be made ...” And then she held open the door to a simultaneous alternate universe, and I walked in.*

*One of Al’s large pieces is called ‘The Secret of Life and Death, the interlacing of images with a lengthy text which follows the syllogism, “Some men ... Others do not”, for example, “Some men see violence first. Others do not ... Some men step out of the way of trains. Others do not ... Some men use the words of other men. Others do not ...” “ ‘Some men,’” Barbara Hess wrote, “can be translated into ‘Manche Menschen’ (in the sense of human beings) or “Manche Männer’ (in the sense of men, not including women). After reading ‘The Secret of Life and Death,’” she continued, “I had the impression that Allen Ruppertsberg is actually thinking of male human beings, but I would like to make sure that I understand him correctly.”*

*To which I responded, "Dear Barbara, While I can understand, and even in a sense agree with, your reading of 'some men' as referring specifically to persons of the male gender, at the moment (now) of your calling this to my attention I realize that I have always read it as referring to me even though it is male-men who are being referred to. It is a thoughtless exclusion of women, 'thoughtless' in the sense of careless, not intentional. But it is also honest in the sense of Al's willingness to acknowledge that he cannot speak personally for women, only for male-men, of whom he is one. Yet along with my personal response providing a bridge to the omission/exclusion, at the same time I have considered it also a window into the unique sensibility that is male, and therefore not-me, not me at all." And indeed a further quotation from that text later in my essay, in a footnote, draws closer to the view that Al Ruppberg is indeed talking about men as opposed to women. The issue of translation brought into focus the operation of an ambiguity that adds another layer of complexity to my reading of the work, and offers yet another example of how my reading of art deepens my reading of myself.*

*A second even more crucial question Barbara posed was this: " 'You' can be translated as 'Du' (which is more private and informal) or 'Sie' (which is what in a clinical setting in Germany a psychoanalyst would use in the dialogue with 'someone who comes to see him/her'. So I decided to translate 'you' into 'Sie.'" To this I responded, "Your consideration of 'you' is making me smile. In my clinical setting, which is in many ways not very different from my personal life (a stance that I realize may be highly unusual for the European sensibility to contemplate), I experience the dialogue as 'Du' and I believe that most if not all of the someones who come to see me do so also. So, please use 'Du' instead of 'Sie', but at the first instance of translation, I would like you to add a footnote, as a 'Translator's note' and include the text of your question to me, and perhaps some of my response. That way, some of our dialogue, this dialogue, will find its way into the essay, which is most appropriate." And so, she did, and we did, for both these.*

*Then my German-speaking colleague Maxxa Ott, upon reading these footnotes that had been added to the German translation, said, “Well, of course, now you must translate them back so the English reader won’t be left out of this part of the story.” And so we did that, too.*

## **7. “Use everything” (México City, 2005).**

OK. Here we are at last. This is adapted from Section 8 in the Ruppertsberg essay.

*On March 12, 2005, I wrote to Michael Larivière,<sup>5</sup> one of my principal correspondents, a psychoanalyst in Strasbourg, France:*

México City

2342 [11:42 PM]

... A day that confounds description. If I were to say I had devoted my life to preparing for this day, I wouldn’t be far off. I can’t render it in words: 30 or 40 people and I made magic together and touched one another in ways none of us suspected. It was, to borrow some very good words, both shamanism and romance.<sup>6</sup> (... ) I must let this all settle and see where I am. I’m suddenly anxious and I don’t know why. I want to cry, though I won’t ... I think, oddly enough, that this was a big enough experience to allow me to feel how small and insignificant I really am. A relief.

*After finding these words,<sup>7</sup> and before falling asleep, I called Stuart to tell him. In the morning, it made more sense to me:*

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<sup>5</sup>The following are excerpts from my letters of March 12 and 13, 2005

<sup>6</sup> “As if belonging to an institution was the only way [analysts had] of convincing themselves that what they had committed themselves to was not merely shamanism or romance.” Michael Larivière, “The Invention of Oneself (Self-Portrait of an Other)” (2005), p. 16. I, on the other hand, am not interested in a psychoanalysis that is neither shamanism nor romance.

<sup>7</sup> Alberto Manguel (1996, p. 7) says “Reading — I discovered — comes before writing.” And, for myself, I discovered that writing often comes before speaking.

México City

0741 [7:41 AM]

I awoke with more understanding of “small and insignificant.” (...) When everyone in the room attains his or her proper size, I am one among many; we are all truly present, and each of us is one among many. An astonishing experience to have this glimpse, this taste of one’s place. It is a “place,” it is the volume that I occupy while standing in my own shoes.<sup>8</sup>

*I had been invited to speak by Dr. Arturo Ortíz and Agape<sup>9</sup> who wanted me to present “Life Lessons” [yes, which had been my first offering to IFPE in 1999]. I cannot make my way in Spanish, except for what I have absorbed from watching televised Spanish-language football (soccer) matches, so there would have to be informal translation during the whole day. I paused every few sentences in the reading of the paper [for the translation], and then there was what Arturo called “the whispering translation.” This was my first visit to México. The day before, I had been taken to Querétaro, a colonial city near México City, that we hoped would be the site for a future meeting jointly sponsored by Agape and IFPE, where I ate chapulinas and escamoles and fell utterly in love with this place; on the day after, Arturo, Dra. Laura Elena Martínez and Dra. Rebeca Resnik (two of those who presented cases to me), and Marcela Gutiérrez, a talented graphic designer, met for long and serious talk over more wonderful food about the hoped-for continuity of collaboration on both personal and organizational levels. After three very full days, I flew home. And found it difficult at first to find sufficient language for what had taken place.*

*Ten days later, I was ready to write something about it to David Tresan, a Jungian analyst in San Francisco, another of my principal correspondents {who had introduced me to the Jungian concept of*

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<sup>8</sup> Enrique Vila-Matas (2000/2004) quotes Kafka, “Happiness is the understanding that the ground on which he has stopped cannot be bigger than the area covered by his feet.” (p. 64).

<sup>9</sup> In their own words, “Agape is a group of specialists devoted to promote and spread psychoanalysis as a vision of the world and as a tool to promote mental health. For this purpose, Agape members since 1996 organize diverse activities oriented towards professionals, students, as well as to the general public.” “Consciencia y diálogo” is part of their logo (“awareness and dialogue”).

*“individuation” which I find compelling as a description of where I seem to be in my life, namely letting go the trajectory of youth’s heroic quest in exchange for the deepening concentricity of middle and later age in which I become more and more myself}. This is my letter to David. In several places, I will interrupt myself to add some further details:*

Dear David,

... the days have been getting away from me. I've needed more time to re-surface from México.

I've got some pictures that demonstrate what a lovely time it was. OK, here are a few things I do want to tell you ... [I gave them "Life Lessons," the art lecture that's coming to be a kind of calling card, and pretty much everything that could have gone wrong] did — too much undimmable light, and the projector just didn't seem to work, so I "translated" the slides into words, and talked my way through 2/3 of the lecture. [I was] informally translated every few sentences; the audience jumped right in with comments and questions, and it was very alive.

*It hadn't occurred to me until afterwards that the “translation” of images into words was such a really important part of the whole experience. “2/3 of the lecture” meant that I stopped right after the part about Al Ruppberg. Because of the difficulty with the equipment, we were more than an hour late in starting, which everyone, both organizers and audience, was incredibly nice about. As I went along through the lecture, pausing to be translated gave me time to absorb and work with what was in the written text, so I began to incorporate into informal asides some remarks that wedded our shared difficulties to the text as virtual illustrations. Members of the audience began to enter also, right away, unselfconsciously, with questions and comments that I found it suddenly easy to work with as further illuminations of “the material.” We had been going for an hour and a half when I made the decision to stop “early” — there was something embedded in the experience of reading, of using Al's words that allowed me to feel that getting this far had been enough. Particularly his phrase “Use everything.” “Use everything” reverberated in the setting of this*

*sunlit garden room, and I would find myself repeating it out loud as almost a musical refrain throughout the rest of the day, as a generously proportioned basket into which all the bits of ourselves being offered could be held.*

An artist [Paul Birbil], and then a Jungian analyst (Jacqueline Gerson, who studied with Tom Kirsch and John Beebe [Jungian analysts known to both David and myself]) made some very nice formal comments. Afterwards, I told them that this was one of those moments when everything that had happened to me up to this point in my life was worth it to get to here. Then [after a really good lunch] I did three "supervisions", though I [had told] them I don't do "supervision" but "conversation." This was supposed to take six hours, but I could only do four, since we were running very late. But [in the afternoon] some twenty or twenty-five of us sat in a circle and it was a real conversation. There was a lot of resonance of the first case with the morning lecture, but what to do about the time? I had an inspiration and asked the two presenters (both of whom I know, good people) if they could imagine presenting at the same time; namely, one would say something about her patient, and the other, listening, would then say something about her own patient evoked by what had been said about the first one. Well, we did it. It was like dancing. Everyone who was bilingual (practically everyone but me) went back and forth between languages, and so on; it was slow and languorous, yet every once in a while punctuated with deep throaty laughter and occasionally tears. Magic. We ended up with some deep symmetrical understanding of [these two] cases, and each made a certain contrast with the first one that had been [presented]. What transpired in the group among everyone was wonderful; so many voices, each distinct and having something unique to add.

*We used everything.*

Afterwards, one of the presenters asked what it had been like for me. I [had to admit I couldn't say yet]. Before I went to sleep that night, I had a clear sense of being small and insignificant, and it was a good feeling. In the morning, I understood what that

was [and told Becky, who had asked] ... all day I had been one among many; each person there was one among many. There was no gradient of value. I knew my place in the world, that is, I could recognize myself in my place in the world: it was and is right here, standing in my shoes, on my feet, upright, of a given size and shape, right here, no more, and no less.<sup>10</sup>

Love,

Judy<sup>11</sup>

*What “use everything” meant in the clinical conversation of the afternoon was that I listened carefully, not only to “the case” but to each presenter as a person, in the parenthetical comments she made about herself, as the translations went back and forth; and I listened to the other participants who were very eager to ask questions and add their observations, from the very beginning — and I mean from the very beginning: the absence of formality, and everyone’s seeming comfort with it, was so refreshing. I listened, and I waited. The presenters, as a courtesy to me, spoke in English; but I know well that in using another language, receptive comprehension tends to come long before confidence in the expressive, so not surprisingly there was a continuous movement between Spanish and English in all possible directions among the participants. Having to wait for the translation was my steadfast companionable ally, allowing me time to reflect, to think, to observe, and to muse, and to bear the music of the Spanish language.*

*When I was ready to say something, I could go slowly. My own language simplified. I used my hands, my eyes, my body language as well as words. I was taking all the ribbons, all the threads, that were*

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<sup>10</sup> “Expressed in physical or geometric terms, one could claim ... that the narcissism that is indispensable as the basis of the personality — that is to say the recognition and assertion of one’s own self as a genuinely existing, a valuable entity of a given size, shape, and significance — is attainable only when the positive interest of the environment, let us say its libido, guarantees the stability of that form of personality by means of external pressure, so to speak. Without such a counterpressure, let us say counterlove [*Gegenliebe*], the individual tends to explode, to dissolve itself in the universe, perhaps to die.” *The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi*, ed. Judith Dupont, trans. Michael Balint and Nicola Zarday Jackson, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988 (1933), pp. 128-9. Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933), a contemporary and intimate of Sigmund Freud, has long been of compelling interest to me; meeting Gersh Molad, Michael Larivière, and David Tresan occurred initially in the context of conferences devoted to consideration of Ferenczi’s life and work.

<sup>11</sup> From my letter to David Tresan, March 21, 2005.

*being offered and weaving with them, and what a tapestry we made together! In the cases themselves, the first one presented "alone" followed by the two presented "together," Al Ruppertsberg's phrase "use everything" came to reverberate as the basic clinical principle: each of the cases, each of the persons in distress, had at the core a kind of imperative, whether sociological, psychological, cultural, or familial, to "get rid" of something, to let go of something, to fit into some other way of being. What we did in our "clinical" conversation as a group, was an alive version of what was called for in the continued work with each of the cases. One of the presenters said, as we were concluding, with a kind of amazement, "Well, there's a lot to think about, and to re-think." Part of the difficulty of "supervision" as a concept and a practice is that when handled traditionally, the "supervisee" is quite vulnerable to being shamed by the allegedly superior knowledge of the "supervisor." But the impression here was of a generative re-think rather than a shameful one. It was a long day; everyone was tired when we finally finished, but no one was drained, and no one was in a hurry to leave.*

*Even now, this description of that day pales in comparison both to my recollection and to my sense of what it meant to me. What I said to Jacqueline Gerson after the morning session, that everything in my life that had either happened or befallen me had been worth it to get to this day, could not include the later awareness that everything in my life seemed to have actually prepared me for this day.*

At this point in the Ruppertsberg essay, I found myself wondering if this made any sense at all to the reader. *It is another kind of translation .... Al Ruppertsberg's work offers a translation of life, the life around me and in me, into art, and the "art" of it is something that indeed has seemed to allow me to "live another day," another in what has become a very long succession of days. I can't say any more about that now, but I also can't be certain if what I have written translates my experience of this into something that you can read, or will even want to.* But I thought this must be in a way how it is for an artist all the time: will anyone get it? Is anyone there? (And perhaps it is how all of us feel all the time when we meet one another: will you get me? are you listening? am I?)

## 8. “Breaking down open doors” (“we would have to be certain birds”).

Two of the epigraphs, one each from *Howl* and from a PBS program on Willa Cather, suggest the joining of seemingly antithetical elements: magic, or happiness, and the curse:

*“That’s magic I admire, using something that exists anyway and turning it round into a curse.”*

*“[The family’s move to Nebraska was] the happiness and the curse of my life.”*

In *No Exit*, one of Sartre’s characters finds out that “Hell is other people.” What suits me may enrage you, and to what you love I may be indifferent. In psychoanalysis as in life, this can move so quickly to who’s right and who’s wrong that the space for discourse and further development collapses. But we did not choose the lives we were born into. Michael Eigen says, “We are all we have.” Judith Harris writes: “We should probably approach theory with the same sanguine humility Arctic explorers approach uncharted territories, realizing that our ownership claims are vast but largely symbolic. For most patients suffering symptoms, theory is simply beside the point.” (p. 246). Can we talk, engage, in a way that is caring and receptive, though we differ? IFPE exists to ask that question and to hold it open for consideration and elaboration.

*So, this, so far, is my self-translation; this is some of the flavor of who I am and why I am at IFPE. Some may like this, and me; others will not. That I like myself, now, at last, after very many years of becoming, makes it much easier to bear when others do not. It seems to be part of who I am, however, that I do not shrug off difficult or negative experiences or responses but continue to work with them. For long years it would be to try to make myself different, less criticize-able; but that never seemed to work; I could never be good enough at it; there was always something of a more real me leaking out to cause me to shrivel with embarrassment. Over the years, I have received some withering and astringent assessments of my separate and collaborative writing, of the thinking manifest in that writing, of some of the actions I have undertaken during*

*various psychoanalytic incarcerations, and even of aspects of being with contemporary art. It has been hard to take. Such assaults can threaten relational bonds, even long and deep ones. Occasionally some of these bonds have ruptured, though usually not at my instigation; sometimes attenuation of contact is what is required, for a while, or sometimes ever. While I cry out in protest on one level, and on another recognize always that different “languages” of discourse are being used for which no translation was or is possible, I am also unable not to take in and consider what is being said. Over the years, I have received such comments as: “simplistic,” “embarrassingly obvious,” “anti-intellectual,” “needlessly arcane,” “unintelligible,” “arguing against privacy while revealing nothing,” “self-serving,” and “undermining the intellectual premise of psychoanalysis,” and I reflect about the truths lodged therein. One that’s gotten to me lately is “you keep, as they say, ‘breaking down open doors.’” In part this is a view of what I write as “what ‘everyone’ already knows,” as well as referring to my penchant for saying “I don’t really care if someone has said it or written it before.” What I mean is that I haven’t said it or written it before, and I want to. What this means is that I don’t care that I am not original, or paradigm-busting, or luminous. I don’t need to be read that way. Those who find value in what I write know I am not writing for them but to them. I write for myself to them. I see that this is self-serving. I need to write this in order to live my life. My life. Not someone else’s.*

*I want to come back to what I said about “insignificance.” “Insignificance” is my response to the immensity of inter-connectedness. “Insignificance” affords relief from the criticism that crushes. Nick Hornby said in an interview in June of this year, “What I’m interested in now is the idea that anyone who persists and tries to become some kind of artist is emotionally immature. It seems to me that the passage to adulthood is accepting that you’re not special. As a kid, you think you are. And I’m not sure that people who want to see their name in print or on a movie screen or in a gallery have accepted that they’re not special. That’s not to say that we don’t need artists, or that what they do isn’t valuable, because it is. But I think maybe at the heart of it, there’s a lack of acceptance. It’s sort of weird that these are the people we end up looking at to explain our world.” This statement may sound simplistic, but it was made in the context of Nick Hornby’s*

*book tour for A Long Way Down, in which five people meet by chance on New Year's Eve on the roof of London's most notorious suicide spot. One of the characters is a young man, a musician, despondent at not breaking into stardom, whose anguished struggle leads him toward the possibility that the pleasure of making music could be enough.*

*So, yes, it is true that I break down open doors. I must, because although they may be broken down by and for other people, they are not yet for me. I have my own inner story of imprisonment, and the only way to reach some freedom is to start with my own experience --- my perceptions, my thinking --- and to work from there, to translate from my way of being towards that of others, towards yours. I was made more aware of the "imprisonment" part of my inner story to realize that on one of the days of frustration when I could not write this presentation, I had unwittingly picked up from my bookshelf Kalakuta Republic by the expatriate Nigerian Chris Abani {who lives now in Los Angeles} and spent several hours in its pages. These are poems written out of his horrific actual imprisonment. Unadorned, unflinching language bears witness to what improbably gives sustenance under extreme conditions, from which Chris Abani has emerged as "a survivor who has no good answer for why he has survived."<sup>12</sup> (p. 16) Judith Harris has written, "No pain is 'somebody else's'. I was wrong about that. Pain is as inevitable as love and dying and the somber weather that catches up with itself." (p. 257) And here again is Gregory Rabassa: "Like the colors of the spectrum, languages are unique and distinctive; they can approach each other but never reproduce one another ... What makes translation seem so possible is that we live in a world of similarities and it is too much with us. Languages, like the colors mentioned above, are similar and we can at least imagine how they would look in another hue. But what about those invisible colors that lurk at the ends of the spectrum? The limits of our ability to perceive show up in the fact that we are unable even to imagine what these colors might be like. We would have to be certain birds. Translation may be impossible, but it can at least be essayed." (p. 20-1)*

*Essayed. Breaking down open doors. Over and over and over again. Using everything.*

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<sup>12</sup> Kwame Dawes, "Introduction," to *Kalakuta Republic* by Chris Abani, London: Saqi Books, 2000, p. 17.

*Thank you.*

301 S. Fair Oaks Ave. #406A

Pasadena, CA 91105

626.796.7572

[jvida@spence.net](mailto:jvida@spence.net)