Schleswig

Sandy Feinstein
Southwestern College

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open to some kind of partial translation, if one can use that term.

dC: So it sounds like there is no problem of incommensurability.

DI: Here I accept Donald Davidson’s argument. He argues that in order to know that two languages are incommensurable, one would already have to know what was said in them. But knowing this involves translating the two languages into a common language, thereby undermining the whole incommensurability argument. So, I do think that languages can be translated into each other, but I do not mean that they can be translated literally. This is why we need to use language metaphorically in order to capture what is being said in another language. The problem of incommensurability occurs only on the level of formal translatability where one attempts to take a term from one language and translate it into a term in another language.

dC: So is there a contention between Habermas and Lyotard or Habermas and MacIntyre?

DI: Well, I think there is a debate. But the debate concerns how they configure language itself, as a medium of understanding. The problem with Lyotard is that he invokes the concept of incommensurability in ways that suggest that understanding is much more problematic than it really is. He invokes it to suggest that our everyday political discourse is fraught with injustice, incommensurability, or contradictions. In defending a political policy, for instance we appeal to moral, factual, and evaluative claims, often indiscriminately. Lyotard suggests that there is an inherent “agonal” there, because these claims are incommensurable. They’re all logically distinct, and yet, at any given moment, one seems to trump all the others. I don’t think that language is so contradictory. I also don’t treat it as “agonal” as Lyotard says it is. As being so agonal. Of course, we use language as a way of fighting, contesting, negotiating. Power relations, as Foucault points out, inform our everyday discursive practices. But I don’t see communication as primarily a strategic attempt to win, gain the initiative, or silence the other. Rather, it’s equally a play of dialogue, in the Gadamerian sense. Of course, we’re trying to keep up with the conversation, and this means, at appropriate moments, taking the initiative. But this gaming—however strategic it might seem—is simultaneously subordinated to the overall aim of communication, which, after all, is to understand one another mutually and without constraint.
Others entombed in St. Peter’s amongst the three old kings or within crannies of the altar. Perhaps new world Christs saved to bear their own heavy crosses or devils among the tortured, the unforgiven, the sorry damned that have no nationality now.

Each stone, each crafted ornament, from the modest dull chalk frescoes high in the vaulted ceiling to the epitaphs of royal dead gloss time when the living blood tugged south, yanked north to boundaries drawn, redrawn. Faith, too, played politics: More than reformation changes.

The rain stills the ghosts beating, blowing, breathing, scattering dust on history.

Lisa K. Stein

Book Review


In Under the Shadow of Nationalism, Mariko Asano Tamanoi expresses an interest in the way the category “rural women” emerged in the discourse of Japanese nationalism with the onset of the twentieth century and its continuing importance in this discourse. An anthropologist, Tamanoi chose Nagano and its surrounding towns and villages as the site of her investigation, partially because this region was the center of the silk-spinning industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The author chose Nagano not only for its unique role in industrialization but because of the large number of women’s groups that have continued to be formed there since the 1970’s. Tamanoi utilized her membership in these groups as a place to gather unsolicited recollections and memories that the women offered to each other in this forum. Benedict Anderson’s idea, from Language and Power (1990), that changes in consciousness must be