06 2013

Disrupting Europe

Loredana Polezzi

In their outline for the conference "A commonality that cannot speak: Europe in translation", held in Vienna in June 2012, the organizers asked us to think about Europe's crisis, about what a new commonality could look like, and about how language and translation practices (as well as the politics attached to them) could support that different embodiment of a common presence. My way to approach these questions is to look at how polylingual[1] practices such as translation and self-translation can both disrupt current models of Europe and of European hierarchies and sustain the thinking of different subjectivities and relationalities, as well as the rethinking of place and of *space* – which, according to Michel de Certeau's definition, is "a practiced place" actualized "by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (de Certeau 1984: 117; italics in the original). Following de Certeau's advice, therefore, theoretical models need to be capable of relating to everyday practices, both in terms of recognizing their existence and resilience, and of being capable of producing resistant, disruptive practices where these are called for. In other words, the questions I want to ask – with Europe in mind, but conscious of the insufficiency of that label, both because it contains too much and because it does not contain enough – are similar to those posed by Meaghan Morris in her 'Foreword' to Naoki Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity*: "how is it possible" she wonders "to create a transnational space of debate that crosses linguistic as well as racial,

ethnic, gender, sexual, and religious boundaries?" And, she adds, how can we find a working model which is "able to connect with things that people do, or could conceivably do, in the ordinary course of their lives?" (Morris 1997: xi–xii). These are questions I too want to address, and I'll try to do so by thinking about mobility and translation.

1. Maps

If images speak louder than words, than maps are a good place to start looking at alternative figurations of what the label "Europe" stands for: how it is constituted, what it includes or excludes, what spaces it creates and what borders it insists upon. Two maps of the Mediterranean can serve as eloquent examples of these processes. The first is a *portolano*, a navigational map produced in Venice in the seventeenth century[2]. The second is in fact not one but a series of monumental maps, memorializing subsequent stages in the expansion of the Roman Empire; they were installed along the Via dei Fori Imperiali, in Rome, during the years of the Fascist regime, and were meant to function as a memento of past glory as well as a stimulus for the (supposed) re-establishment of Italian hegemony across the Mare Nostrum.[3]

The two images represent the same space, yet they tell two remarkably different stories and embody two substantially different narratives. One is based on the language of power, conquest, control, and on the policing (as well as the expansionist broadening) of borders. It uses blocks of contrasting color to foreground landmasses, their juxtaposition, and the struggle for their ownership. The other is dominated by the fluid space of the sea, rather than by the land surrounding it, and is inscribed with multiple connections, intricate links, developing relationships,

which blur any borders (though these may well, and in fact do, still exist).

These maps and their respective conceptualizations of space also provide alternative models through which we can read two connected histories of mobility: the history of migration (understood, generically, as the geographical mobility of people) and that of translation (the mobility of texts, in all their forms, and of the heterogeneous cultures[4] they vehicle and construct, produce and re-produce). In this respect too, the two maps correspond to opposite narratives. One is a tale of nations as bearers of distinctive and essential characteristics, to be defended or even imposed (as in the colonial model based on the spreading of European "civilization", or in the more recent neo-capitalist, neo-imperialist construct of globalization and its "exports"), but also to be enriched via selected injections from other, equally distinctive cultures which are "brought" into the boundaries of the nation through carefully policed processes of migration (of people) and of translation (of artifacts). In this model, any other use of translation, or migration, becomes an abuse – or at least what Clem Robyns has called a "potential code violation" (Robyns 1994: 407) The other narrative looks more like the *portolano*: it takes mobility and multiplicity as constitutive elements of history and of experience, recognizes space (including any borders) as permeable, as constituted by and through relationships, and can serve as an icon of the movement of knowledge and people, of individuals and their stories, seen as part of the process which allows the dynamic renewal of cultures and societies, keeping them from ossifying, imploding and dying out. Both maps, however, involve mobility, and both inscribe relationships of power. In spite of my obvious preference for the *portolano* (which can also serve as a reminder of the constitutive connection between aesthetics and politics), I am

perfectly aware that the Venetians, like the ancient Romans, had their ways of controlling the flows of people, goods and riches that crossed and re-crossed the Mediterranean. And, historically, both maps and both models hold true. In fact, their narratives are not mutually exclusive but may well co-exist, at any one time, though one image may become dominant at local, national or international level.

These maps and the distinct models of mobility they embody can also come in useful as we attempt to query the way in which contemporary images of Europe are constructed: images of its centers, its peripheries, its margins, but also of its own centrality and marginality, its internal and external hierarchies. For one thing, the two images I have chosen are not, of course, maps of *Europe*, in any of its historical configurations. They are maps of the Mediterranean and, as such, represent both more and less than Europe. The Mediterranean is both the core of Europe's modern construction – which is after all posited on a narrative of centrality that stretches back to classical antiquity, Humanism, the Renaissance, and rests on myths such as the one of *translatio studii et imperii* – and its most difficult margin – because the South is not normative in contemporary Europe, as amply demonstrated by the current crisis or by the use of labels such as "PIGS"[5], but also because today the Mediterranean represents a dramatic middle passage leading to an increasingly defensive as well as crumbling "fortress Europe". It is in this doubly inscribed context that Mussolini's nationalist *and* imperial vision of the Mediterranean as a bridge to be crossed in the pursuit of renewed conquest and expansion has today turned into an equally dramatic picture of the deadly gap between the human and the de-humanized, a symbol of that indifference to evil that Hannah Arendt portrayed as a shameful yet distinctive trait of contemporary society (Arendt

1973, 1994) and which an Italian political cartoonist, Vauro, recently captured in a dismally eloquent drawing which renames the Mediterranean as “Mar Morto” (the Dead Sea).[6]

Using the Mediterranean and its alternative maps to talk about Europe is also a way of reminding ourselves that while Europe certainly has its own margins and marginalities, it is precisely by those margins that it is defined and it defines itself. In fact, we could go one step further: it is at those margins – and especially the Mediterranean one, with all its inherent ambiguities about where ‘the South’ might actually start – that we also cannot escape the fact of Europe’s own, increasing marginality. This is not a brave-new-world utopia (or dystopia, according to one’s point of view). As Barbara Spinelli noted in an article published by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, “La mutazione è già avvenuta”: We already live in a multi-polar world, even though Europe and especially its political systems continue to behave as if they were deaf and blind to that mutation, unable to acknowledge the change and react to it. Instead of chasing after lost centrality or desperately looking for a new hegemony, accepting Europe’s own margins as well as its marginality might encourage us to follow Walter Mignolo’s advice and acknowledge that the colonial and neo-colonial model of center/periphery politics – where everything stems from the center and, at most, others can just hope to talk back to it – is not the only one available today. Similarly, the world literature model of cultural production, where everything emanates from the center or receives its ultimate value from it, is not the only one currently in operation. We may have failed to notice it, but “peripheries” can talk among themselves too – and that exchange may well turn out to be highly productive.[7]

What happens, then, if we move away from the rigidity of the center/periphery model and also from its essentialist

underpinnings, based on the notion of separate, self-contained national cultures which can be placed firmly on the map, within clear borders and even clearer power hierarchies (at least until a new but similarly hierarchical equilibrium is established, as in Mussolini's successive maps of the expansion of the Roman empire)? What if we abandon, in the specific case of Europe, the still predominant myth of the continent as a cluster of individually homogeneous communities characterized by the overlapping of recognizable (and containable) national identities, languages and cultures? What if we take mobility, multiplicity and heterogeneity as a model, starting, precisely, from the dis-homogeneity and dis-unity of language (which is, after all, another often unacknowledged but self-evident fact)? What if we admit, as Maria Tymoczko has recently done, that monolingualism and linguistic homogeneity may well not be the norm and that, in fact, the majority of people in the world (and most probably the totality of communities) are enmeshed in 'plurilingual' practices (Tymoczko 2006: 16)? What if we acknowledge the permeability of languages as well as of cultures, and the pervasiveness of translation, both linguistic *and* cultural, and both in the form of hetero- and auto-translation, to use Michael Cronin's (2000) definitions?

2. Texts

Texts are forms of linguistic practice, and textual forms are inherently related to the stories we tell about ourselves and about the world. Looking at narratives through a translational paradigm has much to offer – just as looking at translation through the lens of narrative theory can be revealing, as demonstrated by the recent work of Mona Baker (2006).

Thinking in translational terms does, first of all, mean focusing on process rather than just on product or state, on becoming rather

than just on being. Translation can of course be conceptualized in both ways, as product *and* process. Both viewpoints are crucial for any reflection on translation as a social practice. The dynamic nature of translation is a key antidote against essentialism of any kind. Yet thinking about product is also important: if it is true that translation takes place primarily in the realm of texts, those texts are not neutral, they are directly connected to social practices, to the relationships we establish among individuals and groups, to the apportioning of rights, values, and responsibilities. Treating cultures as texts, as noted by Talal Asad (1986) in a famous article on translation and ethnography, can easily lead to the assumption that any "culture" must be perfectly "translatable" in the terms of another – at which point the anthropologist/translator instantly assumes the right to mediate it, in its totality, legitimizing the resulting interpretation. And, we might add, that move also sustains the view that both totalities, the original and the translation, are just that: given, self-contained and possibly interchangeable sets of data, where one can be transposed into the terms of the other, and thereby substituted, without pausing to think either about the processes of transformation which both "texts" (and "cultures") have undergone, or about how much that transformation was always already based on, and enhanced by, the commonality between them. This scenario is already worrying if we think about the implications of such processes for the way in which we treat texts, but once we abandon the textual metaphor (for in this context it is indeed often a metaphor) and reflect on the fact that what we are talking about are cultures as embodied in living practices, in people and the communities they form, in individuals with their own subjectivities, and in the way all these dimensions overlap and intersect (rather than remaining nicely self-contained), then the ethical implications of the culture-as(-translatable)-text fallacy become utterly compelling.

This is also a way of saying that there are risks as well as benefits in adopting a translational model, in theory as well as in practice, and that there are productive as well as not-so-productive models of translation. Seeing the translation process as a binary system which transposes Text A into Text B, Culture A into Culture B, and stops there, having reached its goal and completed its task, is not just incorrect – it is also pernicious. A non-binary model, on the other hand, which takes into account the pervasiveness of translation and includes such practices as self-translation, heterolingualism[8] and polylingualism, will stress the open-ended nature of the process, its tendency to proliferate in multiple directions and to initiate further processes of translation, interpretation and transposition, rather than coming to a stable end.

Translation – and I am including here both linguistic and cultural translation, where the latter, for me, is almost a tautology, as there can be no translation which is not also already cultural – can therefore be described as a process of negotiation, modification, transformation, but not as a neat substitution (Jamarani, 2012: xi). This in turn means that translation does not erase what was there before, just as those people (individuals, groups) who experience self-translation do not become other to themselves, do not replace who they once were with who they now are, *pace* dramatic descriptions of trauma-in-translation, such as the one famously offered by Todorov (1992) about his own linguistic and cultural schizophrenia. (In fact, even schizophrenia could be seen, though in a paradoxical way, as a testimony to enduring markers of identification, in the face of self-translation.)[9]

The two points I have just made – about the impossibility of reducing translation to self-contained textuality and the non-linear, dynamic and proliferating nature of translation processes – are also

clear indications of the relational nature of translation, of its inescapable, constitutive social dimension. Once again, paradox might help: if we take George Steiner's (1992) view that any individual has his or her own idiolect and therefore any act of communication is an act of translation, then only in the absence of all socialization could we do without translation.

This, however, does not mean that translation is always a force for good and translators are the heroes of intercultural communication. There is no *buonismo*, no inevitable "good guys" imperative attached to their role – but there is agency. Translators (including self-translators) can just as easily be complicit with dominant discourses and narratives or ethically aware and committed to translation as a conscious and potentially resistant political practice. So much so that metaphors of translation (and images of translators) can easily shift from positive to negative and back
again. The Italian semiologist Paolo Fabbri has turned the old *traduttore traditore* saying into a badge of honor, stating that translators are prepared to act as double agents or even apostates precisely because they have realized that the self-containment and incommensurability of cultural systems are only necessary myths sustaining an otherwise unstable internal order (Fabbri 2000: 81–98). Mona Baker (2005), on the other hand, has pointed out that the image of the bridge, so often associated with intercultural communication, can sustain narratives of invasion and conquest as much as those of mutual understanding and friendship.
Translation, in fact, may be seen and has been seen as a paradoxical balancing act between these two images of "bridging", between the enforcement of sameness and the embracing of difference. Clifford Geertz has described translation as a conundrum in which "the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less

different; the enormously distant enormously close without becoming less far away" (cited in Pratt 2010: 96). While Paolo Fabbri, in the same piece I referred to above, has compared translators to bumble bees, which, technically, should not be able to fly, yet manage to do it all the time (Fabbri 2000: 86). The balancing act is a difficult one. It requires skill and the defiance of rules. And it is not guaranteed to end up well, for everyone, all of the time.

3. Bodies

Among these acrobats of translation, there are not just professionals, but also self-translators for whom polylingualism and heterolingualism are everyday practices, whether out of necessity or choice (often, in fact, both). Those practices are inherently disruptive of the narratives of homogeneity, incommensurability, and cultural entropy, which have dominated the last few centuries, at least in Europe or, more broadly, in "the West". The agents involved in this form of disruption are not just polylingual speakers and writers, but also their audiences, their readers and listeners. The polylingual text does in fact address a composite public, which includes, crucially, the normative monolingual member of a national audience (or rather: anyone who identifies as such). Polylingual writers and their readers, therefore, can be seen as examples of heterogeneous or "non aggregate"[10] communities involved in (i.e. committed to and/or forced into) processes of ongoing transformation which are capable of disrupting dominant models, discourses and apparatuses. In other words, polylingualism, translation and self-translation, in the sense I have been giving to these terms so far, both constitute and are constitutive of practices of mobility, which can disrupt established forms of power.

In his discussion of modern politics, Michel Foucault identified bio-power as the characteristic mode for the exercise of state control in the contemporary world. He also singled out migration as one of the specific social phenomena, which are the object of and yet continually escape biopolitical technologies (Foucault 1998: 140). Following the analysis I have outlined above, I would argue that language phenomena linked to mobility, such as polylingualism and translation, especially if de-coupled from institutional agents and locations and left to proliferate, instead, into wider practices of heterolingual address, can be equally disruptive and elusive. Understood in the broader sense I have been delineating, translation, as both a linguistic and a cultural activity, involves the disruption of apparently homogeneous communities and the foregrounding of difference. And by giving visibility to the pervasive nature of polylingual practices, translation, while it has certainly been a key instrument in the construction of national cultures, literary canons, and identities, can also become a source of contagion (in the positive sense given to the word by Pierce, for example)[11] and transformation.

Precisely because of their potential for disruption, however, language practices will also attract the attention of state apparatuses. The mingling of words, just like the mingling of bodies, is a key concern of bio-power, an area in need of containment and control. Who translates, where, and for whom; who authorizes or requires translation; how translation is codified, classified and incorporated into official archives, collective memory, local practices; what visibility is granted to translation processes or, conversely, how transparent good translations are deemed to be – these are all key issues for the exercise of biopolitical power. Nowhere is this clearer than at those points where migration (of bodies) and translation (of texts) converge. When translation

encounters migration, its deep entanglement with the formation of new communities and commonalities becomes acutely visible, and this makes the nexus between migration and language practices (and therefore also language policies and politics) a key location for the redefinition of social processes and political action in contemporary society.

That nexus also goes somewhere towards explaining why bodies and languages are so inextricably intertwined in contemporary migrant writing.[12] Figures of interpreters and translators abound in factual as well as fictional texts, which revolve around the experience of migration. And linguistic mobility goes hand in hand with the displacement of bodies, at times taking the form of erasure and substitution, but often also dramatizing the way in which heterolingualism, the choice to self-translate and address multiple audiences, can be a route to new commonalities, new forms of shared understanding which both highlight and rely on the heterogeneous nature of culture, rather than positing homogeneity and demanding assimilation as necessary pre-conditions.

I can illustrate that entanglement and its links with the proliferation of forms of biopolitical power with a specific example taken from the contemporary Italian context. Over the past two decades, the joint markers of migration and polylingualism have characterized an increasing amount of writing produced in Italian. This is not entirely a novelty for a country such as Italy, where linguistic and cultural heterogeneity have been and continue to be the norm rather than the exception, however hard official canons may have tried to deny it. Yet it is noticeable that one of the traits, which distinguish recent migrant writing is precisely the attention paid to forms of biopolitical control. Among the new wave of polylingual writers who are living and working in Italy, many have

profiles which link them to Africa and to those Mediterranean crossings I evoked in the first section of this article. Others come from further afield. All exploit linguistic and narrative strategies to challenge established notions of cultural homogeneity and normative conceptions of national culture. Some (often women, perhaps unsurprisingly) specifically address and openly challenge the link between languages, bodies and the apparatuses of power.

In what is probably her most famous short story, "Io, polpastrello 5423"[13], Christiana de Caldas Brito, an artist of Brazilian origins who has been living in Italy since the 1990s, allows *polpastrello 5423*, a fingertip, to speak in the first person, narrating what happened when, together with thousands of other *polpastrelli*, it turned up at the local police headquarters to leave its fingerprint on an official register, in compliance with the requirements of a new immigration law.[14] The fictional device of personification allows fingertip 5423 as well as all the other fingertips queuing up in the torrid Roman summer to take the place of their owners, who are therefore de-personified, in a mirroring move that reduces them to that little cushion of flesh at the top of a finger which, in today's biopolitical regime, has become the repository of an individual's identity (Agamben 2011).

Around the queuing fingertips, the landscape and the language of the story remain stubbornly realistic: there are numerous *carabinieri* as well as a gate keeper, ink pads and sweat .... Detached from their owners, the immigrant fingertips carry both the stigma of de-humanized identity and the parallel burden of labor: while not identified by gender, religion, culture or place of origin, they all bear the mark of their job.[15] The turning point in the story comes precisely at the point where the immigrant fingertips become collectively aware of the position they occupy in the labor chain, and choose to take action. At a secret meeting, they

denounce the discriminatory nature of the new law and decide to use their only strength, their number, as a form of solidarity and resistance: by flooding the offices of the local police, they will bring the process to a standstill and oblige those charged with enforcing the law to recognize its idiocy as well as its inapplicability. There is no real happy ending though: the *polpastrelli*, now reunited with their owners, simply go back to work, ensuring that Italy and the Italian job market will continue to function as normal.

At the core of Christiana de Caldas Brito's short story we find the denunciation of the double bind of bio-political power: even when not reduced to a fingertip, the migrant is de-humanized, assimilated, on the one hand, to his or her biology and, on the other, to his or her labor. The tale is endowed with additional disruptive force, though, thanks to multiple processes of translation: it is written in the language of the host nation, and addresses both that community and the one formed by migrants as its heterogeneous but nevertheless coherent primary audience; its effectiveness is based on well honed rhetorical devices, transposed into the context of contemporary migration and expressed in the language of bio-political power and bureaucracy; and the talking fingertip is an active self-translator, an agent of change interpreting the surrounding reality and easily adopting the register as well as slipping into the jargon of the system.

4. Conclusion: Common Sense and Good Sense

In the previous three sections, I have taken the discussion on mobility, translation and new commonalities in different directions, but I hope I have at least started to outline how only a map based on complexity, multiplicity, and overlapping margins, rather than on competing centralities, can form the basis of any renewed sense of what is "common".

Here, re-reading Gramsci can be useful. For Gramsci, the renewal of common sense, the superseding of the narrow conformism and traditional beliefs associated with it, can only happen through the critical practice associated with a philosophy of praxis. That renewal can then lead to what he calls "*buon senso*", or good sense. This renewed common sense implies (rather than erasing) multiplicity, since each social formation has its own common sense and its good sense, and also because common sense is not denoted by rigidity, is not static, but is itself continuously transforming as a result of historical processes of change. So any reference to common sense must also be a "*constatazione di carattere storico*", a statement of historical fact, rather than an idealistic appeal to normative behavior.[16]

Any new commonality, any common self must be based on a similar notion of unstable, multiple, and critical common sense. In this scenario, translation is not just pervasive (that is a statement of fact), but it also becomes eminently visible across a range of social practices which have traditionally tended to occlude it. These widespread processes of translation have to be understood not as a neutral tool or perhaps even a conciliatory gesture aiming to facilitate communication and mutual understanding among separate, discrete units, but rather as a conscious, politically and ethically aware practice, as well as a crucial location where issues of bio-political control are played out. If it can function as a model, translation can and must be a disruptive model – where "disruptive", like "critical", acquires a positive charge, at least in its *potential* for change and transformation.

The plural nature of translation and the attention to heterogeneity which its visibility implies can then help us to re-build a sense of commonality, but this can only be based on multiplicity and multistability, on the ability to see multiple aspects of any image

and phenomenon at the same time, rather than on a linear model of translation that always erases and substitutes in the name of synthetic vision.[17] If there is such a common self to be found, it will be based on a renewed and equally unstable notion of common sense which implies not just accepted customs and assumed homogeneity, but rather a *comune sentire*, a commonality of feeling, emotions, and affect that remains radically open to diversity. That commonality would pay attention to bodies and practices, to their mingling and mutual contagion, to their constant mobility and the permeability of boundaries, rather than to abstract notions of internal homogeneity and external incommensurability (of national cultures, language systems, ideal readerships). Any attempt to draw a map of what that space and the practices that inhabit it look like would certainly resemble the Venetian *portolano*, with its emphatic underscoring of relationality, complexity, mobility. As I have already noted, however, even such a map does not erase the persistence of relationships of power. As in Christiana de Caldas Brito's short story, there is no simple happy ending capable of erasing inequality.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio (2011): *Nudities*. Trans. Kishik, David/ Pedatella, Stefan. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Arendt, Hannah. (1973): *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Arendt, Hannah (1994) *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. Jerome Kohn (ed.). New York: Schocken Books.

Asad, Talal (1986): “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology.” In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Clifford, James/Marcus, George E. (eds.). Berkeley, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, pp. 141–164.

Baker, Mona (2005): "Narratives in and of Translation." in *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 4–13.

Baker, Mona (2006): *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. London/New York: Routledge.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich (1981): *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Holquist, Michael (ed.). Trans. Emerson, Caryl/ Holquist, Michael. Austin/London: University of Texas Press.

Casanova, Pascale (2004): *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. DeBevoise, M.B.. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press.

Cronin, Michael (2000): *Across the Lines. Travel, Language, Translation*. Cork: Cork University Press.

Cronin, Michael (2006): *Translation and Identity*. London/New York: Routledge.

de Certeau, Michel (1984): *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Rendall, Steven. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Fabbri, Paolo (2000): *Elogio di Babele*. Rome: Meltemi.

Foucault, Michel (1998): *The Will to Knowledge*. Trans. Hurley, Robert. London: Penguin.

Geertz, Clifford (1983): “Found in Translation. On the Social History of the Moral Imagination.” In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpreting Anthropology*. Geertz, Clifford (ed.). New York: Basic Books, pp. 36–54.

Gragnolati, Manuele (2012): “Analogy and Difference: Multistable Figures in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Appunti per un’Orestiade Africana*.” In *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities, Geographies, Traditions*. Di Blasi, Luca/Gragnolati, Manuele/Holzhey, Christoph. Berlin and Vienna: Turia + Kant, pp. 119–133.

Gramsci, Antonio (2001): *Quaderni dal carcere*. Gerratana, Valentino (ed.), 4 vols. Turin: Einaudi.

Grutman, Rainier (2006): “Refraction and Recognition: Literary Multilingualism in Translation.” *Target*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 17–47.

Jamarani, Maryam (2012): *Identity, Language and Culture in Diaspora: A Study of Iranian Female Migrants to Australia*. Clayton: Monash University Press.

Mignolo, Walter (1996): “Linguistic Maps, Literary Geographies, and Cultural Landscapes: Languages, Languaging and (Trans)nationalism.” In *Modern Languages Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 181–196.

Mignolo, Walter (2002): “Rethinking the Colonial Model.” In *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*. Hutcheon, Linda/Valdés, Mario J.. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 155–193.

Morris, Meaghan (1997): “Foreword.” In Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. ix-xxii.

Pratt, Mary Louise (2010): “Response.” In *Translation Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 94–97.

Robyns, Clem (1994): “Translation and Discursive Identity.” In *Poetics Today*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 405–428.

Sakai, Naoki (1997): *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.

Spinelli, Barbara (2012): “Chi ha paura delle elezioni.” In *La Repubblica*, 9th May 2012.

Steiner, George (1992): *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. 2nd edn. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Todorov, Tzvetan (1992): “Bilingualism, Dialogism and Schizophrenia.” In *New Formations,* no. 17, pp. 16–25.

Tymoczko, Maria (2006): “Reconceptualizing Western Translation Theory: Integrating Non-Western Thought about Translation.” In *Translating Others*. Hermans, Theo (ed.), 2 vols, vol. 1, Manchester: St Jerome, pp. 13–32.

---

[1] I am using the words “polylingual” and “polylingualism” in preference to more common alternatives starting with the prefixes “pluri” or “multi.” My choice is due, on the one hand, to the “taintedness” of labels such as “multiculturalism” and, on the other, to the positive echo I would like to create with Bakhtin’s notion of

polyglossia; see Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson/Michael Holquist. Austin/London: University of Texas Press.

[2] For the Portolano map see: http://www.museomontelupo.it/mostra/intro1b.htm , consulted on March 6th 2013.

[3] See: http://www.colourbox.com/image/brick-wall-with-italian-history-on-via-dei-fori-imperiali-image-1944679, consulted on March 6th 2013.

[4] It should be noted that the plural "cultures" is not used here as synonymous with "national cultures" but rather indicates the much more complex network of heterogeneous forms of production, circulation and reception which characterizes human communities and their exchanges, allowing us to self-identify in ways which are performative, relational and, more often than not, poly-vocal as well as not mutually exclusive. Equally, in speaking of languages I will not have in mind only (or predominantly) national standards, but also social, geographic and other variants, as well as their multiple crossings and overlaps.

[5] The acronym has become popular in connection with the recent European crisis and is usually understood to refer to Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain, though Italy at times takes the place of Ireland and the variant "PIIGS" has also been coined to include both.

[6] The image, Vauro's "Mar Morto" sketch, can be found here: http://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?lang=it&id=6362

or as part of this slideshow: http://www.ilmanifesto.it/multimedia/vignetta-del-giorno/2009/.

[7] See Walter Mignolo (1996): "Linguistic Maps, Literary Geographies, and Cultural Landscapes: Languages, Languaging and (Trans)nationalism." In *Modern Languages Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 181–196 and W. Mignolo (2002): "Rethinking the Colonial Model." In *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*. Linda Hutcheon/Mario J. Valdés (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 155–193. On center-periphery models of world literature see in particular Pascale Casanova (2004): *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press.

[8] I use the term "heterolingualism" primarily in the sense given to it by Rainier Grutman, i.e. a co-presence of idioms which can take multiple forms: "In principle, texts can either give equal prominence to two (or more) languages or add a liberal sprinkling of other languages to a dominant language clearly identified as their central axis. The latter solution is much more commonly encountered, and the actual quantity of foregrounded linguistic material varies wildly." Rainier Grutman (2006): "Refraction and Recognition: Literary Multilingualism in Translation." In *Target*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 19. This form of heterolingualism does, nevertheless, have points of contact with Naoki Sakai's notion of "heterolingual address," in that it not only articulates difference as inscribed in language but, crucially, it interpellates the roles of addresser and addressees and refutes the occlusion of "the mingling and cohabitation of plural language heritage in the audience" typical of what Sakai calls the "regime of homolingual address;" see Naoki Sakai (1997): *Translation and Subjectivity*. Op. cit., p. 6.

[9] This is not, however, the same as saying that self-translation is a guarantee of unity for some form of essentialised "self;" rather, as any form of translation, self-translation is a performative practice and involves forms of refraction and dissemination. Yet these do not necessarily equate with traumatic fracture and (equally essentialising) discontinuity.

[10] N. Sakai (1997): *On Translation and Subjectivity*. Op. cit.

[11] On this subject see P. Fabbri (2000): *Elogio di Babele*. Op. cit.

[12] I am aware of the "slipperiness" of this label, which can be used in a multitude of ways and can also enact a form of ghettoization. Nevertheless, I am using it here as a shorthand to indicate writing which emerges from experiences of migration and is marked by the presence of polylingualism and processes of self-translation.

[13] The full text can be found at: http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/polpastrello.htm.

[14] This is a direct reference to the so called Bossi-Fini law, introduced in Italy in 2002, which required all immigrants to be fingerprinted as part of the procedures for the acquisition of a residence permit.

[15] Even the exception, as we might expect, confirms the rule: in the one case where the sex of a *polpastrello* is identified, this is directly related to its owner's position in the job market: we are told that there are traces of excrements on the fingertip, because it belongs to a *badante*, a young foreign woman employed to look after an elderly Italian lady.

[16] For Gramsci's discussion of common sense see Antonio Gramsci (2001): *Quaderni del carcere*. Valentino Gerratana (ed.), 4 vols. Turin: Einaudi, especially pp. 1063, 1396–401, and 2270–71.

[17] The reference is to multistable images such as Wittengstein's famous duck/rabbit; for a reading of multistability see in particular Manuele Gragnolati (2012): "Analogy and Difference: Multistable Figures in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana*." In: *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini's Multistable Subjectivities, Geographies, Traditions*. Luca Di Blasi/Manuele Gragnolati/Christoph Holzhey (eds.). Berlin/Wien: Turia + Kant, pp. 119–133.