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The Microphysics of Comparison

Towards the Dislocation of the West

Naoki Sakai

At the outset, let me single out the two moments in the act of comparison in what I understand as Comparative Humanities; these two moments – we may characterize one as logical and the other as political – can always be discerned when we are engaged in the procedure of comparing in the Humanities.

The first is the postulation of the class of *genus* among compared items. Comparison is performed between or among unified objects, preliminarily identified as belonging to two *species,* while at the same time comparison is constitutive of the logical dimension of *genus* where *species difference* (*diaphora*) is discovered, measured, or judged. Attributed to the class of *species* are particular cultures, languages, economic systems, political ideologies, and so forth; each of these is postulated as a unified entity and as a particular (*species*) example of the general class (*genus*). Even such items as culture and political ideology are regarded as unified units when we submit these items to comparison. Thus, we compare the English language with the Chinese language, for instance, because these two particular languages belong to the category of language in

general. As long as English is assumed to be a systematicity, it is an individual,[1] a unified indivisible entity, but we are far from certain that the item to be compared – the English or Chinese language in this case – exists at the level of the immediately empirical, as traditional logic has sometimes attributed the property of empirical existence to the concept of the individual. As one of many particular languages, English is a particular *species* of the general *genus* of language. But, furthermore, a particular language should be able to be conceived of as an indivisible unity in order for us to regard it as an individual. The individual is, after all, an *individuum,* an entity that cannot be further divided. Comparison is conducted on the presumption that this basic operation of logical and formal reason is still valid and sustainable, and that the individuality of a particular language is indisputable.

The second moment is the occasion or locale where we are obliged to compare. Comparison takes place because the determination of *species difference* is needed. In the presence of a person who appears to be speaking, I cannot understand either what she wants or what she is meaning to do. In due course I am at a loss. At such a locale, naturally and in due course, some explanation as to why I and we are at a loss is demanded. Reasoning may well provide a schematic explanation: what she speaks is the Chinese language whereas what I speak is English. Both belong to the general class of languages, but we cannot make ourselves understood to one another because the Chinese language is *different* from English.

Let me stop here momentarily since I do not think that difference at stake in this instance can be subsumed under the concept of *species difference*.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the determination of the species difference is offered as a solution to the initial problem of

us being at a loss, in response to the perplexity we come across in such a locale. Language difference is presumably a kind of species difference whose purport is to offer a clue as to why we are at a loss in a locale of incomprehension, perplexity or helplessness.

Thus the language difference is apprehended to cause a situation where we need to know why we are at a loss with one another. Language difference is a serious matter when we do not understand one another, when we cannot be confident in our directives for the immediate future; it is usually assumed that our sociability is built on some primordial communality, on our capacity to be immediately and instantaneously shared in common. Language difference is understood to cause our inability to share, to result in the absence of this communality. Normally — and the normalcy consists of this unwarranted assumption that people do understand one another — we do not express our doubt about either the comprehensibility of our expressive behaviors or our ability to apprehend others' actions and expressions. The need for comparison occurs only on the occasions where we are forced to become aware of different people, different beings with whom we are present.

The term "difference" becomes marked precisely because of this experience of "nonsense," "being at a loss," or "being unable to make sense of the occasion." The determination of *species difference* becomes something urgent and even frantically important precisely because we are in the presence of the others in *discontinuity*. Most often we talk of this encounter with discontinuity in terms of the foreign, but significantly the foreign does not connote the outside or the external in a strictly spatial sense. For, at this stage, discontinuity cannot be represented as a relationship within a smooth continuous space. And most importantly it is imperative to keep in mind that it is not because some person or people are

different – in the sense of *species difference* – from me or us that we are at a loss. On the contrary, it is because we are at a loss or unable to make sense in the first place that we attempt to determine this encounter with *difference* within the logical economy of *species* and *genus*.

What is at stake in this article is whether or not we are allowed to conceptualize *difference* in the sense of "nonsense" or "being at a loss" in terms of *species difference*, of the difference categorized in the economy of *species* and *genus* within classic logic.

Allow me to imagine another situation where we need to know how we are different from one another, why certain people are not subjugated to the imperatives or commands I normally obey or yield to, or why some of us are free from a set of proscriptions while others are not. Thus we compare ourselves to find where we are situated vis-à-vis one another in a practical sense, along the axis of what we must do. Comparison is indispensable precisely because we want to know how we are related to one another, who is to lead among us, who should follow, who should work for whom among us, and so on. It is through the act of comparison that we comprehend the configuration of our subject positions in which we apprehend who we are in terms of the socially-determinate relations: gender, race, social class, nationality, civilization, kinship, religion, culture, professional qualifications and so forth. When we cannot locate ourselves in the configuration of subject positions, we are also at a loss or do not know how to act in accordance with others in the situation. On such occasions, we sense that something is *different*, and that we ought to behave in such a way different from the ways in which we are normally and normatively expected to do things. Yet, it is important to note that this sense of *difference* cannot be simply reduced to difference in the paradigm

of the similar and the different, of the homologous and the heteronomous.

The range of objects of comparison in the Humanities is wide. In this article, therefore, I focus on the types of objects most frequently compared in the Humanities: language, culture, nationality and civilization. What follows is an examination of how the second moment of political maneuver predetermines the scope of deployment for the first moment of logical categorization. Particular attention is paid to identity politics in Comparative Humanities because this aspect is often erased, despite the incontestable fact that the process of identification is premised upon comparative operations. Precisely because the operation of comparison is neither objectified explicitly nor posited as a thematic, is the comparative study of language, culture, nationality and civilization very often ignorant of what precedes, calls for or prepares for comparison.

As I hinted above, I will also examine the ambiguous concept of the individual in relation to the logical economy of the *species* and the *genus*. When it is in conjunction with personality and subjectivity, the term "individual" manifests a conceptual instability; it is at the same time regulated by the economy of specification and absolutely beyond (incommensurate with) the *species*. I would like to introduce this conceptual ambiguity of the individual into my understanding of the locale of comparison, of a topos where we are articulated to one another in ways that elsewhere I called "heterolingual."[2]

Transnationality and Internationality

Following the preliminary guideline, please allow me to state at the outset that nationality has been one of the most predominant

topics to thematically address the process of comparison in knowledge production in the Humanities. Nationality is essentially a figure, schema, design, or image, resultant from the determination of either transnational or international *species difference*. Of course, both transnationality and internationality are unintelligible without reference to the operation of comparison. What is at issue in transnationality as well as internationality is to compare, distinguish, divide and draw a border.

In this context, it is worth noting the increasing significance of the problematic of "bordering" in knowledge production today[3]. This problematic has to be specifically marked as one not of "border" but of "border-ing" because what is at issue is a lot more than the old problem of boundary, discrimination, and classification. At the same time that it recognizes the presence of borders, discriminatory regimes, and the paradigms of classification, this problematic sheds light on the processes of drawing a border, of specifying the element of comparison, of instituting the terms of distinction in discrimination, and of inscribing a *continuous* space[4] of the social against the horizon of which a divide is introduced. Particularly I find it very significant that Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson first introduced this term in what they called "the multiplication of labor."[5] By introducing the concept of the multiplication of labor, Mezzadra and Neilson challenge the conventional categorization of labor and the familiar notion of the international division of labor. They question "the orthodoxy that categorizes the global spectrum of labor according to international divisions or stable configurations such as the three worlds model or those elaborated around binary such as center/periphery or North/South." What has to be taken into consideration is the dynamic and constantly transforming relationship between labor and power. The world is not becoming borderless. On the contrary, borders are

redrawn and multiplied constantly; the boundaries of national territories, ethnic cultures, and civilizations are not the only dominant borders; there are many borders being newly inscribed. Hence, the analytic of bordering requires us to examine simultaneously both the presence of border and its drawing or inscription.

Within the scope of this article, I want to draw attention to the problematic of bordering first of all to elucidate the differentiation of transnationality from nationality. Most importantly I want to reverse the order of apprehension in which transnationality is comprehended on the basis of nationality, on the presumption that nationality is primary and transnationality is somewhat secondary or derivative. The transnational is still apprehended as something that one creates by adding the prefix "trans-" to nationality. Unfortunately the word "transnational" retains a morphology where the "trans+national" obtains only after the "national" is modified, "transnational" is subsumptive to the "national," thereby giving the misleading postulation that the national is more fundamental or foundational than the transnational. Consequently the transnational is assumed somewhat to be derivative of the national. This widely-accepted pattern of reasoning derives from our thought habit, according to which the adjectival "transnational" is attributed to an incident or situation uncontainable within one nationality. For example, an individual or people move across the outer limits of one national territory into another, and such a movement is called "transnational." Or, a company is incorporated in multiple national territories and manages projects mobilizing its employees of different nationalities living in different countries at the same time; such a company is called a "transnational" corporation. What I want to highlight, first of all, is the implicit presumption underlying the concept of

nationality: that nationality cannot make sense unless it is postulated against the horizon of internationality. And we must keep in mind that internationality is utterly incomprehensible unless we take for granted a manner of comparing and categorizing the items of the world to be compared. Essentially, internationality is a historically particular regime of comparison that operates within the economy of *species* and *genus*.

For the very reason of the politics of comparison, *nationality* does not make sense unless in conjunction with *internationality*. Nationality becomes conceivable only when the scene of juxtaposing nations is institutionalized within some scheme of state sovereignty. Just as the sense of difference concerning the experience of "being at a loss" must not be equated to *species difference*, so transnationality must not be confused with internationality.

In due course, distinguishing transnationality from internationality is the central issue in the politics of comparison. In order to assert the priority of transnationality to nationality, therefore, our first move is to delineate the semantics of *transnationality* as distinct from *internationality*.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the modern world can be found in its *internationality*; the modernity of the modern world has manifested itself in the formation of the international world. Today, transnationality is generally understood within the schema of the international world. By "schema," here I mean a certain image or figure against the background of which our sense of nationality is apprehended. The schema of nationality is embedded within the larger schema of internationality, and the very relationship between the national and international schemata is understood to be that of *species* and *genus*. But, it is important to

note that, in some regions such as East Asia, the international world did not prevail until the late nineteenth century. This was also the case in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, (granted that I am using the very problematic geopolitical names for regions on the globe.) I suspect that this was also the case in Northern Europe as well, even though the international world had supposedly been established a long time before.

In East Asia, the international world was entirely new; it took more than a century before East Asian states gave up the old tribute system and yielded to the new inter-state diplomacy dictated by international law. So, in that case – which applies to many other regions of the globe – the international world meant the arrival of colonial modernity. And it is in the very process of introducing the international world that the binary of the West and the Rest began to serve as the framework in which the colonial hierarchy of the world was actualized and institutionalized globally.

Of course, the international world is not a phenomenon exclusive to the twentieth century. Dividing the world into two contrasting areas, the West and the Rest, has been a widely-accepted institutionalized practice in academia for a few centuries. This dichotomy may be traced as far back as the seventeenth century when the system of international laws was inaugurated with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. This peace treaty, subsequent to the Thirty Year War, preliminarily established the division of the two geopolitical areas. The first of these would subsequently be called "the international world" in which four principles were to be observed: 1) the sovereignty of the national state and its self-determination, 2) legal equality among national states, 3) the reign of international laws among the states, and 4) the non-intervention of one state in the domestic affairs of another. The second of these areas was a geopolitical area excluded from the first, in which these

four principles, including the reign of international laws, had no binding force. The first area would later be called the West, while the second area would be excluded from "the international world," and become literally "the Rest of the world," with its states and inhabitants subject to colonial violence.

In East Asia, Japan's colonization of Korea, for instance, was accomplished following the protocols of the international world. Many parts of the globe were also colonized according to the schema of the international world. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of the second area was transformed into colonies belonging to a few super powers. Yet, this pseudo-geographic designation of the West — it is pseudo-geographic because, in the final analysis, the West is not a geographic determinant — gained currency towards the end of the nineteenth century when the international world had to expand to cover the entire surface of the earth as a result of three developments: colonial competition among the imperialist states; the emergence of Japan and the United States as modern imperial powers; and most importantly, the increasingly widespread anti-colonial struggles for national self-determination. In this historical characterization of the West, one can single out two factors that are paramount in its distinction from the Rest of the world: the legacy of colonialisms, on the one hand, and the comparative operation based upon the logical economy of *species* and *genus*, on the other.

For a colony to gain independence, the colonized had to establish their own national sovereignty and gain recognition from other sovereign states. In other words, the process of decolonization for a colonized nation meant entering the ranks of nation-states in the international world. As the number of nations being recognized in the international world increased, the presumptions of nationality

and internationality were accepted as if naturally given. As the schematic nature of the international world was somewhat forgotten, both nationality and internationality were dehistoricized, as though the institutions symbolically marking the border of the national community — national territory, national language, national culture, national history and so forth — had been naturally inherited. Consequently it is no surprise that the vast majority of comparative studies in the Humanities and social sciences — comparative literature, comparative law, comparative sociology, and so-called area studies — fall into the general genre of comparative nationality today.

It is at this juncture that the concept of transnationality must be invigorated. It must be rejuvenated in order both to undermine the apparent naturalness of nationality and internationality and to disclose the very historicity of our presumptions about nationality, national community, national language, national culture and ethnicity which more often than not are associated with "the feeling of nationality." Here, the classical notion of *nationality* in British Liberalism is of decisive importance to historicize the schema of the international world.

According to John Stuart Mill, *nationality* means:

> "a portion of mankind are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others — which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of

> language, and community of religion greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past."[6]

In East Asia, it was arguably Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835 – 1901) who first introduced the British discussion on the nation and nationalism systematically and wholeheartedly. Today he is remembered as one of the leading enlightenment intellectuals who advocated for the creation of the modern nation in Japan, and who translated the English term *nationality* into *kokutai* (national body), a few years after the Meiji Restoration, in the 1870's. Later *kokutai* was used as a fetish to express the sovereignty of the Japanese Emperor. The word *nationality* or *national body* had acquired almost a sacrosanctity and a proscriptiveness in the Japanese Empire in the early twentieth century. In his *Outline of the Theory of Civilization,*[7] however, Fukuzawa included Mill's explications of nationality and the *feeling of nationality* (*kokutai no jô*) almost verbatim in his exposition of *kokutai*. For Fukuzawa, the project of creating the feeling of nationality among the inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago was an absolutely indispensable part of the construction of a nation-state. First of all, what had to be acknowledged was the absence of the feeling of nationality among the masses inhabiting the islands of Japan under the reign of the feudal governments; there was no nation of Japan, no Japanese as a nation. Therefore, the task of creating an unprecedented type of community called "nation" must be found in the manufacture of the feeling of nationality. A wide range of technological knowledge in jurisprudence, medicine, mathematics, natural sciences,

engineering, agriculture, government, economics, weaponry, and so forth was undoubtedly involved in the modernization project of nation-building, but Fukuzawa and many other intellectuals saw that a certain aesthetic knowledge was absolutely more important than any of modern knowledge for Japan's modernization: the core of their task was essentially aesthetic, and they knew that no nation-state could be created without "the feeling of nationality."

Without being recognized as a sovereign state in the international world, however, people living in the Japanese archipelago would never have constituted themselves as a nation or entered the modern international world. Thus, for Fukuzawa, the modernization of Japan meant the creation of the institutional conditions for the feeling of nationality; without this, people would never form a national community; neither as an individual nor as a collectivity would the Japanese be able to become independent, without the feeling of nationality, Fukuzawa argued.

As soon as the term nationality was introduced in East Asia, it served to distinguish those peoples capable of independence from those others doomed to colonization. Fukuzawa firmly believed that, unless the legacies of Confucianism were removed, the society could not be reorganized to transform itself into such a modern community – namely a *national* community – for the feeling of nationality to prevail. And, as we know this was not particular to Japan; this conviction toward modernization was repeated by many nationalist intellectuals such as Lu Xun in China and Yi Kwangsu in Korea. The urge to modernize and turn their countries from colonial subjugation into independent nation-states propelled many nationalist intellectuals in East Asia to engage in struggles against Confucianism and other "feudal remnants" in their own societies. In East Asia just as elsewhere, it is undeniable that the problem of

nationality was closely affiliated with concerns about colonial modernity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nationalist intellectuals believed, almost without exception in East Asia and elsewhere in the Rest, that the introduction of nationality was an absolutely necessary condition, without which peoples in the Rest of the modern international world could not deal with colonial modernity. They understood that, only by turning local masses into a *people* with nationality, could they incite them to reject their predicament of colonial subjugation and humiliation. Of course, it was imperative to institute the systems of industrial capitalism in their own countries and to educate the population so as to make it capable of scientific rationality. The fate of the nation could not be divorced from the project of modernization. Modernization necessitated the introduction of industrial production facilities, national education, a system of national transportation, a national currency regulated by the national bank, a modern military built up with national conscription, and the spirit of scientific rationality guiding modern technology and industrial production into a society. But, any of these institutions necessary for nation-building would be redundant if not accompanied by the feeling of nationality to bind people together as a nation, as a community with shared destiny. Nationalist intellectuals firmly believed that people under colonial domination would never be able to deal with the actuality of colonial modernity unless they formed a political community called "nation," a new political camaraderie shaped after the pattern of a "fraternity" independent of the previous familial, kin, or tribal affiliations. They were convinced that, unless the indigenous population first formed a nation, they would never liberate themselves from the shackles of colonial subjugation.

A disclaimer must be issued here. As a guiding outline or trope, I introduced the modern binary of the West and the Rest of the world, yet it is imperative to keep in mind that it is no more than a trope, a figurative expression. The binary gives us some synoptic vision of the modern world, but this vision can hardly sustain coherence in many concrete historical contexts. The task of modernization that many Asian intellectuals faced from the late nineteenth century was equally present in the geographic areas and peoples that may well be included in Europe or the West. The very boundary between the West and the Rest is so arbitrarily drawn that there are innumerable cases where certain regions of today's European Union may well be located outside the West. Some social strata of the United States, which have enjoyed the reputation of the West's center since the end of the Second World War, for instance, manifest the same characteristic of pre-modernity typically attributed to the Rest. Certain aspects of everyday life in some regions in East Asia, for example, are indisputably more "Western" than in some sectors of the population in the United States. Dependent upon the context of comparison, the very distinction between the West and the Rest shifts and articulates differently. Here, it is important to remind ourselves of the theoretical significance of "the multiplication of labor" introduced by Mezzadra and Neilson. In some instances, the dichotomy of the West and the Rest is solidly instituted. In others, it is arbitrary and contingent. It is almost impossible to find a lucid coherence to connect many different manifestations of this dichotomy. Both the West and the Rest are undoubtedly historical and mythical constructs, although I would never claim that the West is unreal or illusionary. Yet, under every circumstance, I would refrain from talking about it as a kind of transhistorical substance or coherent analytical category.

Translation and Bordering

The problematic guiding my inquiry in this article is quite different from the nationalist concern shared by many Asian intellectuals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rather it is committed to the problem of how to emancipate our imagination from the regime of the nation-state, not through a negation of the regime itself but by problematizing the methodological nationalisms permeating knowledge production in the Humanities, particularly in the academic disciplines of area studies, and thereby to project an alternative image of the transnational community. Suspending the nationalist conviction, I refuse to view nationality as a given; instead I reverse the order of priority while never rejecting our struggle with colonial modernity. Simply put, my starting point is that nationality is a restricted and distorted derivative of transnationality. And my guiding question is how the transnational, the primary modality of sociality, is delimited, regulated and restricted by the rules of the international world. It is in this context that I have to confront the issue of *bordering*.

In order to problematize the priority of nationality and the international world, we must first study the tropics of the border.

It goes without saying that the border cannot exist naturally; physical markers such as a river, a mountain range, a wall and even a line on the ground become a border only when made to represent a certain pattern of social action. In this respect, a border is always man-made and assumes human sociality. Only when people react to one another does a border come into being. Even if a border separates, discriminates or distances one group from another, people must be in some kind of social relation for a border to serve as a marker or representation of separation, discrimination, or distance. A border is a trope serving to paradoxically and

irrevocably represent primordial sociality. Therefore, a border is posterior to social relations, which may well include the acts of exclusion, discrimination, or rejection. First there is an act of "bordering." Only where people agree to "border" can we talk about a border as an institution. Thus, "bordering" always precedes the border. To apprehend the border is to study how it is inscribed, erased, redrawn or reproduced.

Prior to this bordering, it is impossible to conceptualize the national border. Thus, the national territory is indeterminate prior to "bordering." Similarly, it is impossible to determine a national language prior to it. It follows that, without reference to "bordering," we can not comprehend how the individuality of a particular national language, the very indivisible unity of a language presumed in the figure of the national language, came to prevail. And the operation of comparison by means of which species difference between languages is postulated, measured and judged is impossible unless the individuality of one particular language and another to be compared is presumed.

So what corresponds to this "bordering" as far as language is concerned? Of course, it is translation. What I want to put forth here is that, in the context of schematism, translation comes prior to the determination of language unities which translation is understood to bridge more often than not. We must argue therefore, against the commonsensical judgment, that there is translation before the postulation of a national or ethnic language. Just as there is transnationality before nationality. In short, as far as the representation of languages is concerned, translation comes before the determination of *species difference*. Only after translation, are individual languages available for comparison. In other words, only after translation are we able to talk about whether some other

language is similar or dissimilar to, the same as or different from ours.

In this juncture, we can see one of the reasons why it is necessary to touch on the act of bordering prior to comparison. As long as the process of comparison is construed in terms of the determination of *species difference*, there must be an opening of the place, screen or *khora* of comparison where the items to be compared are juxtaposed as mutually commensurate. Unless the items are identified on the same plane or screen against the horizon of which these are compared, it is simply impossible to seek *species difference*. Of course, the process of comparison cannot be initiated unless the items to be compared are postulated as being comparable. In other words, in the occasion of *discontinuity* in which we are at a loss, unable to comprehend what is going on, and face non-sense, we cannot even start comparing. Yet, it is the occasion of discontinuity that demands that we translate. It goes without saying that, in this particular context of our discussion, what opens the place of comparison is nothing but translation. Only after translation comes the schematism of *species* and *genus*, of nationality and internationality.

At this stage, I do not know whether a focus on "bordering" has gathered momentum across different disciplines in the Humanities. But, this much can be asserted: a bordering turn must be accompanied theoretically by a translational turn: bordering and translation are both problematics projected by the same theoretical perspective. Just as bordering is not solely about the demarcation of land, translation is not merely about language.

This article pursues a preliminary investigation into the discussion of translation beyond the conventional domain of the linguistic. Yet the first issue that must be tackled is how to comprehend

language from the viewpoint of translation, or, how to reverse the conventional comprehension of translation that depends on the trope of translation as bridging or communication between two separate languages. However, please let me remind you that mine is a discursive analysis beyond the domain of the linguistic. Accordingly it involves the questions of figuration, schematism, mapping, cartographic representation, and the institution of strategic positions. In the conventional understanding of translation – elsewhere I characterized it as "the schematism of co-figuration"[8] – the separation of two languages or the border between them is already presupposed. This view of translation always presumes the unity of one language and that of another because their separation is taken for granted or already given; it is never understood to be something drawn or inscribed. In other words, the conventional view of translation does not know "bordering."

In this order of reasoning regulated by the tropic of translation I find one of the delimitations imposed by the presumptions of nationality and the international world. Nationality must be postulated prior to the process of the transnational transaction precisely because otherwise it cannot be conceptualized, just as national language must be assumed to exist prior to the process of translation because translation is pre-ordained to be represented as bridging the gap between two separate languages. For this reason, the international world cannot but be pre-determined as the juxtaposition of distinct nationalities external to one another. Thus from the start, the economy of the international world excludes the potentiality of what I have called "heterolingual address."[9]

Translation almost always involves a different language or at least a difference in or of language. But, what difference or differentiation is at issue here? How does it demand that we broaden our

comprehension of translation? From the beginning, we have to guard against the static view of translation in which difference is substantialized; we should not yield to the reification of translation, which denies it its potentiality to deterritorialize and reterritorialize. Therefore, it is important to introduce the difference in and of language so that we can comprehend translation, not in terms of the communication model of equivalence and exchange, but rather as a form of political labor to create continuity at the elusive point of discontinuity in the social. Then, what kind of view of comparison can we acquire?

One may presume that it is possible to distinguish the type of translation according to the type of difference in or of the language to which translation is a response. To follow Roman Jakobson's famous typology of translation, one may refer to a project of overcoming incommensurability as a type of translation – interlingual translation – from one natural language to another. Or one may talk about an act of retelling or interpreting from one style or genre to another in the same language as an instance of translation – intralingual translation. Furthermore, one may cite an act of mapping from one semiotic system to another as a distinctive type of translation – intersemiotic translation. In this typology, however, the unity of a language has to be unproblematically presupposed. Were it not for this supposition, it would be hard to discuss a *different* language, different from the original language, in *inter*-lingual translation that takes place between languages external to one another. Neither would it be possible to designate the inside of a language or to refer to a language as the same in *intra*-lingual translation. Thus, we are forced to return to the question, "what difference?"

At this point my inquiry moves from the question of what is different *in* or *of* language to this question: What is different *from*

the language? This is to say that we must entertain the question of what language is, how the linguistic differs from the extra-linguistic, and how the domain of the linguistic is constituted. In the scope of difference in and of language, however, we are still caught in the mode of questioning where the unity of a language is assumed.
So by difference do we still understand that one term as a *species* is distinguished from another against the backdrop of the same generality or *genus*, just as a white horse is different from a black horse among horses in general? Do we have to understand difference necessarily as a *species difference*? Can the sort of difference at stake in translation be appropriately discussed in terms of the *species* and *genus* of classical logic? In short, according to the conventional view of translation, is translation not pre-supposed in its very discussion?

The world accommodates only one humanity but a plurality of languages. It is generally upheld that, precisely because of this plurality, we are never able to evade translation. Our conception of translation is almost always premised on a specific way of conceiving of the plurality of languages. Not surprisingly, we are often obliged to resort to the story of Babel when we try to think through the issues of the unity of humanity but the necessity of translation. However, can we assume this unity in plurality from the trans-historical perspective? Can we conceive of discourses in which the thought of language is not captured in the formula of many in one? Are we able to conceive of language in an alternative way?

How do we recognize the identity of each language, or, how do we justify presuming that languages can be categorized in terms of one and many? Is language a countable, like an apple or an orange and unlike water? Is it not possible to think of language, for example,

in terms of those grammars in which the distinction of the singular and the plural is irrelevant?

As I have repeatedly draw attention to it, what is at stake here is the unity of language, a certain *positivity of discourse* or historical *a priori* in terms of which we understand a different language or difference in language. To put it slightly differently, it is to understand how we allow ourselves to tell one language from another, to represent language as a unity.

My answer to this question, which I posed some twenty years ago is that the unity of language is like Kant's *regulative idea*.[10] It organizes knowledge but is not empirically verifiable. The regulative idea does not concern itself with the possibility of experience; it is no more than a rule by which a search in the series of empirical data is prescribed. It guarantees not empirically-verifiable truth but, on the contrary, "forbidding [the search for truth] to bring it [self] to a close by treating anything at which it may arrive as absolutely unconditioned."[11] Therefore, the regulative idea gives only an *object in idea*; it only means "a *schema* for which no object, not even a hypothetical one, is directly given."[12] The unity of language cannot be given in experience because it is nothing but a regulative idea that enables us to comprehend related data about languages "in an indirect manner, in their systematic unity, by means of their relation to this idea."[13] It is not possible to know whether a particular language as a unity exists or not. But by subscribing to the idea of the unity of language, we can organize knowledge about languages in a modern, systematic and scientific manner.

To the extent that the unity of national language ultimately serves as a *schema* for *nationality* and offers a sense of national integration, the idea of the unity of language opens up a discourse on not only

the naturalized origin of an ethnic community, but also the entire imaginary associated with national language and culture. A language may be pure, authentic, hybridized, polluted, or corrupt, yet regardless of a particular assessment of it, the very possibility of praising, authenticating, complaining about, or deploring it is offered by the unity of that language as a regulative idea. However, we all know that the institution of the nation-state is a relatively recent invention. Thus we are led to suspect that the idea of the unity of language as the *schema* for ethnic and national communality must also be a recent invention.

How should we understand the formula of many in one, the plurality of languages in one humanity, when the unity of language has to be understood as a regulative idea or *schema* for an object in idea? For Kant, a regulative idea is explicated with regard to the production of scientific knowledge; it ensures that the empirical inquiry of some scientific discipline will never reach any absolute truth and is therefore endless. Every scientific truth changes as more empirical data accumulate. Kant also qualifies the regulative idea as a *schema*, that is, an image, design, outline, or figure not exclusively in the order of idea but also in the order of the sensory.

Practical Application of Schema

From the postulation that the unity of national language is a regulative idea, it follows that this unity of national language enables us to organize various empirical data in a systematic manner, so that we can continue to seek knowledge about the language. At the same time, it does not offer an object in experience but rather an *objective* in praxis, toward which we aspire to regulate our uses of language. The principle is not only epistemic but also strategic and practical. Hence it works in a double register: on the one hand, it determines epistemologically

what is included or excluded in the database of a language, what is linguistic or extralinguistic, and what is proper to a particular language or not; while, on the other hand, it indicates and projects what we must seek as our proper language, what we must avoid as heterogeneous to our language and reject as improper for it. The unity of a national language as a schema guides us about what is just or unjust for our language, what is in accord or discord with the propriety of the language.

Of course, *translation* is a term with much broader connotations than the transferral of meaning from one national or ethnic language into another, but today I am specifically concerned with the delimitation of translation according to the *regime of translation* by which the idea of the national language is put into practice. I suggest that the representation of translation in terms of this regime of translation serves as a *schema of co-figuration*: only when translation is represented by the schematism of co-figuration does the putative unity of a national language as a regulative idea ensue. This schema allows us to *imagine* or *represent* what goes on in translation, to give ourselves an *image* or *representation* of translation. Once imagined, translation is no longer a movement in potentiality. Its image or representation always contains two figures, which are necessarily accompanied by a spatial division in terms of border. Insofar as not the act of representation but rather the representation or image of translation is concerned, we are already implicated in the *tropes* and images of translation. As long as we represent translation to ourselves, it is impossible to evade the *tropics of translation*. Primarily border is a matter of tropics as far as translation is concerned because the unity of a national or ethnic language as a schema is already accompanied by another for the unity of a different language; the unity of a language is possible only in the element of many in one; and for there to be many, one

unity must be distinguishable from another. In the representation of translation, therefore, one language has to be clearly and visibly distinguished from another. The unity of a language requires the postulation of border in the tropics of translation.

Translation takes various processes and forms, to the extent that it is a political labor to overcome points of incommensurability, since it is a testimony to the universality of sociability. It need not be confined to the specific regime of translation; it may well lie outside the modern regime of translation.

The modern is marked by the introduction of the schema of co-figuration, without which it is difficult to *imagine* a nation or ethnicity as a homogeneous sphere. As Antoine Berman taught us about the intellectual history of translation and Romanticism in Germany, the economy of the foreign, that is, how the foreign must be allocated in the production of the domestic language, has played a decisive role in the *poietic* – and poetic – identification of the national language. Without exception, the formation of a modern national language involves institutionalizations of translation according to the *regime of translation*.

As most conspicuously manifest in eighteenth-century movements such as Romanticism in Western Europe and *Kokugaku* (National Studies) in Japan, intellectual and literary maneuvers to invent a national language mythically and poetically were closely associated with a spiritual construction of new identity, in terms of which national sovereignty was later naturalized. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, it makes "the *relation* of sovereignty into a *thing* (often by naturalizing it) and thus weed[s] out every residue of social antagonism. The nation is a kind of ideological shortcut that attempts to free the concepts of sovereignty and modernity from the antagonism and crisis that define them."[14] This

foundation for the legitimation of national and popular sovereignty was proffered as a "natural" language specific to the *people;* ordinary people supposedly spoke it in everyday life. Literary historians generally refer to this historical development as the emergence of the vernacular. The emphasis on ordinary and colloquial languages went in tandem with the re-conception of translation and the schematism of co-figuration.

Returning to the question of the relation between translation and discontinuity, I have outlined how our commonsensical notion of translation is delimited by the schematism of the international world (i.e., our representation of the world according to the logical economy of *species* and *genus* at the levels of nationality and internationality), and conversely how the modern figure of the world as international (i.e., the world consisting of basic units of nations) is prescribed by our representation of translation as a communicative and international transfer of a message between a pair of ethnolinguistic unities.

The measure by which we are able to assess a language as a unity – here again, I am not talking about phonetic systems, morphological units, or syntactic rules of a language, but rather about the whole of a language as *langue* – is given to us only at the locale where the limit of a language is marked, at the border where we come across a nonsense that forces us to do something in order to make sense of it. This occasion of making sense from nonsense, of doing something socially – acting toward foreigners, soliciting their response, seeking their confirmation, and so forth – is generally called translation, provided that we suspend the conventional distinction between translation and interpretation. The unity of a language is always represented in relation to another unity; it is never given in and of itself, but rather in relation to an other.

One can hardly evade dialogic duality when determining the unity of a language; language as a unity almost always conjures up the copresence of another language. Yet, I cannot stress this point too much: the locale of comparison can never be identified cartographically with a national border on the geographic surface of the earth. The representation of translation in terms of the trope of border is nothing but an effect of the tropics of translation, precisely because translation is not only a border-crossing but also and preliminarily an act of drawing a border, of *bordering*. The act of translation occurs in the place prior to the location where a border is drawn. Thus the locale of translation designates a place prior to the place cartographically assigned within the international world; the locale of translation is dislocated, outside the system of location in the international world.

One consequence we cannot evade in the discussion above is the impossibility of locating the locale of translation within the schemata of nationality and internationality. The locale of translation opens up the place of comparison, but it cannot be located within the configuration already prescribed by the schemata of *species* and *genus*. It is not located within the international world. On the contrary, it makes the location possible – in the sense of identifying an object within the already existing coordinate grids - of nationality and internationality; it opens up the place of comparison, while pointing to a place without location.

By transnationality, I want to designate not the systematic of location configured by the logical economy of *species* and *genus,* but instead the locale of translation that opens up the place of comparison. While internationality operates within the logical economy of *species* and *genus*, transnationality undermines and reconfigures the schemata of nationality and internationality. It is in this sense that translation deterritorializes. And this

deterritorializing potential of translation has been reterritorialized by the schematism of co-figuration. Hence, transnationality indicates to us the locus of the foreign, something irreducible to the logical economy of *species* and *genus*. Precisely because translation is prior to the determination of *species difference*, can the conceptual topos of the foreign, where translation is in demand, be found not in internationality but rather in transnationality.

In this article I have tried to rescue the project of Comparative Humanities from the dominant mode of comparative nationality. Yet, my article is far from exhaustive: I can only intimate how we can possibly conceive of the project of Comparative Humanities in a different direction with a different thrust.

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[1] The act of regarding an ethnic/national language as an individual is dubious, to say the least. In our examples, what is designated by “the Chinese language” is far from clear. Does it connote an ensemble of languages that are used in the People’s Republic of China? Does it connote a family of languages that are affiliated with one another through some common phonetic, syntactical, or semantic features? Or does it imply the set of grammatical rules that the state of the People’s Republic of China imposes upon its population as the standard language? It is doubtful that the individuality of this individual constitutes the priority of the empirical with which the individual has traditionally been endowed.

[2] For the term “heterolingual,” please refer to my *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 1–17.

[3] I learned the term "bordering" from Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's "Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor." This is a paper presented at the International Conference "Italian as second language – citizenship, language, and translation" in Rimini on 4 February 2008. It is now available on line: eipcp, *transversal* http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en.

[4] The problem of *discontinuity* must be highlighted precisely because politics is a set of actions by which to create *continuity*. It is important to stress that to divide is not to introduce discontinuity. On the contrary, it is possible to divide only when the space in which a divide is introduced is already continuous. The presence of a border is a sign of continuity rather than discontinuity.

[5] See note 3 above.

[6] Mill, John Stuart (1972): *Utilitarianism*: *Liberty. Considerations on representative government*, London: Dent, p. 391.

[7] Fukuzawa, Yukichi, *Bunmei ron no gairyaku*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1937. [An Outline of a Theory of Civilization, David Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst trans. Tokyo, Sophia University Press, 1973.]

[8] Sakai, N., *Translation and Subjectivity*, op. cit., pp. 1–17, 41–71.

[9] Ibid., pp. 1–17.

[10] Sakai, Naoki (1992): *Voices of the Past – the Status of Language in Eighteenth Century Japanese Discourse*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, p. 326.

[11] Kant, Immanuel (1929): *Critique of Pure Reason*. Transl. Kemp Smith. Norman. New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 450 [A 509; B 537].

[12] Ibid., 550 [A 670; B 698]; emphasis added.

[13] Ibid., 550.

[14] Hardt, Michael/Negri, Antonio (2000): *Empire*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, p. 95.