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Another European Crisis?!

Myth, translation, and the apparatus of area

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Superimposition

In Naoki Sakai's theorization of the heterolingual address (Sakai 1997), one finds a crucial distinction between address (the existence of a social relation through linguistic encounter) and communication (the repetition or iterability of content). This distinction enables Sakai to show how certain presuppositions of linguistic community are retroactively projected onto the translational encounter, forming what he calls "the homolingual address". While the common-sense notion of translation sees it as a form of transfer and exchange between separate linguistico-cultural spheres, the homogeneity that makes this view possible is abstracted only after the fact from the actual practice of translation. The moment of address contains an irreducible indeterminacy that is ontological as much as semantic, yet we continually appeal to the notion of communicational transfer in order to hide it from view. That which is commonly thought to be a "bridge" between communities and languages is actually the inaugural gesture that enables and legitimizes the discrimination among linguistic

communities and national languages. *Reduced to an epistemological representation of iterability*, translation becomes a speculative moment – well beyond German idealism – that posteriorly imposes elements of its "vision" onto the phenomenon it describes, claiming anteriority for them. I would like to approach this movement through the theme of *superimposition*, an English word whose components evoke position, imposition, doubling and elevation. My aim is to provide elements for a critique of *the apparatus of area*.

Key to this critical project is the question of what to do with the circularity of modern societies that institute their own presuppositions? The problem of circularity essentially boils down to a conundrum between history and knowledge harbored by capitalist societies. The perennial problem of thought in the wake of the modern Revolutions has been not just to explain the revolutionary events, but rather to discern their social conditions and, armed with that knowledge, to reproduce them and perfect them. Capital on the one hand needs to erode social hierarchies enough to unleash the dynamic forces of production, yet on the other hand needs to capture this volatility in disciplinary structures long enough to permit the accumulation of surplus value. Methodologically, this conflictual need calls into question models of causality behind deep social change. How did/do peasants become labor power while the fruits of production became/become capital? As soon as one claims, as is so often the case in political discourse today, a determining role for the economy vis-à-vis social and cultural practices, one is left unable to explain historical transitions such as that from agricultural societies to industrial ones.

For this reason, Étienne Balibar has suggested that in addition to the mode of production (the classic category of political economy),

there is also a parallel category that he dubs the "mode of subjection". The mode of subjection cannot be simply "derived" from the mode of production, as in Plekhanovian determinism, but must rather be thought of in terms of what paradoxically joins the struggle for autonomy (to become a subject) to the inevitable problem of social difference (relations of domination and subjugation). Whereas the mode of production is the index of exploitation, the mode of subjection is a social index of relations of power. In speaking of the two modes as "incompatible" yet "indissociable" (Balibar 1995: 160), Balibar's idea of the relation between the two modes recalls his earlier theorization of the relation between freedom and equality, joined together in the revolutionary situation as the "proposition of equaliberty."

In analyzing the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, Balibar draws attention to the radical novelty of associating liberty and equality without appeal to the transcendental ground of either human nature or divine truth. Eschewing such ground (which would inevitably recognize servitude), the revolutionary Declaration aims instead to instantiate its own presuppositions, which take the form of a strict equivalency between equality and freedom. Yet there is an historical contradiction at work here: while the revolutionary situation has effectively created the conditions under which those presuppositions can become active, it cannot yet assure their identity. In actual social practice, liberty and equality remain locked in irresolvable contradiction. Taken together as the "proposition of equaliberty", the combination of the two unleashes radical indeterminacy into the social. The core of this indeterminacy lies, according to Balibar, in the irresolvable tension between the universality of the Declaration and the particularity of the concrete social conditions in which the Revolution is caught. From this unique analysis, Balibar draws fascinating conclusions

about the way in which modern societies, based on an equivalency between equality and freedom the conditions of which they are nonetheless unable institutionally to secure, are forced to seek "supplements" in the direction of property (for liberty) and community (for equality). That to which I would like to draw attention, in order to save time, is what Balibar terms "the inscription of 'anthropological differences' in the topography of equaliberty." (Balibar 1994: 57) These are, in summary order, gender difference (which corresponds to the contradictions of community) and intellectual difference (or class difference, which corresponds to the contradictions of property).

Balibar provides no explanation for his terminology. In his usage, "anthropological differences" extend to both class and gender differences, yet little additional effort would be needed to show that ethno-linguistic difference – more traditionally associated with the term anthropological difference – could be included as well. What is important to retain, I think, is that the category of anthropological difference straddles the opposition between nature and culture in a way that is entirely consistent with Balibar's admonition against a "Platonizing reading" of the revolutionary Declaration that would treat ideas as essences and look for their common nature (Balibar 1994: 47). Rather, one has to face up to the *indeterminacy* of these categories, which constantly calls forth a need to reinsert them into new oppositions of nature and culture, necessity and contingency, universalism and particularism, through which they can then assist in assuring the constant transformation of living labor, i.e., humans, into the commodity of labor power.

Indetereminacy does not mean the absence of determination, but rather signals the challenge of avoiding retroactive superimposition. The problem is how to face the modern conundrum of societies that posit their own presuppositions? What is at stake is the issue

of causality. Balibar's work since the 1980s is distinguished by the attempt to revitalize the problematic at which Louis Althusser's concept of "immanent causality" aimed: the attempt, that is, to think social relations beyond the opposition of cause and effect inherited from classical mechanics.

This call has been answered nowhere more exhaustively in theoretical form than in Jason Read's writings from the first decade of the new millenium. Read distills Marx's writings on "primitive accumulation", juxtaposing them with philosophical insights about the nature of events and capitalist relations from Deleuze and Guattari, alongside Foucaultian contributions to the understanding of subjectivity. Eschewing the line of Marxist orthodoxy that has dogmatically clung to an understanding of social relations through the deterministic model of linear causality, Read seeks to base our understanding of the social firmly upon the indeterminate. The *indeterminate*, which Read calls forth under the name of "contingency", is not a license for random fabrication, but a way to seize the singularity of the meeting between modes of production and modes of subjection. Read summarizes the singularity of their encounter thus:

"In [Marx's 1857-58 notes gathered in the essay] 'Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations'" the contingency of the encounter, the fact that every mode of production must begin from presuppositions which are not produced by it but are presupposed by it, is immediately intertwined with a second problem – the manner in which every mode of production conceals its own contingency, its historicity, and, ultimately, its vulnerability." (Read 2003b)

What I would like to do here is to tease out the implications foqr "the inscription of 'anthropological differences'" of Read's (and, of course, Balibar's) discovery of a contradiction between the pure-

origin and the total-end-of-history that lies at the heart of the modern mode of subjection. Throughout the modern era, in which capitalist development coincides with colonial encounter and imperialist expansion, origin and historicity are joined nowhere more strongly than in *the apparatus of area*. It is virtually a truism of the contemporary conjuncture that differences of origin and historical development are taken to be at the heart of the inability, so much in evidence today among intellectuals from different regions of the world and from different disciplines of humanistic knowledge, to agree on a common narrative about the colonial encounter. Area remains today the place where continuity and authenticity in the relation between history and origin remains stubbornly entrenched.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that a critique of 'concealment' or the strategies of 'superimposition' alone would be sufficient to dissolve the apparatus of area. Even as Foucault's anti-historicist project in his archaeological phase remains an important milestone in the critique of area for its refusal of the tropes of origin, influence and continuity as means to understand the past, the Foucaultian text remains mired in and unwittingly reinforces the apparatus of area (Solomon 2011). The crux of the problem is that the modern subject arising out of the undecidability between cause and effect cannot be said simply to be an effect of the device of concealment any more than it could be the result of a false continuity presumed to exist between origin and history. The subject of the apparatus of area must be one that actively produces concealment as much as it is produced by that concealment. It must be, in other words, something like the subject of myth in the sense given to this term by the philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.

Biopolitics as a 'History of Fictionings'

In their analysis of Nazi ideology as an historically-situated metaphysical operation carried out as a political project, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe call our attention not to the content of myth, i.e., not to its iconographic and allegorical richness, but rather to the "productive or formative power of myth." (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe 1990: 307) Myth, in this modern sense, wants to be not just a story about history and origins, but also the realization of that story, in the sense of both self-awareness and the bringing to term of a process of constitution. In the two philosophers' eyes, "myth" is the name for the experience that arises when modern societies that posit their own presuppositions try to anchor those presuppositions in the element of the transcendental. The historical experience of Germany is highly illustrative (but certainly not exemplary or unique, as we shall see).

Modern 'Germany' was caught, they assert, in an historical "double bind", related to the problem of historical imitation. Vis-à-vis both the present (represented by 'France', which developed a modern and militarily aggressive nation-state based on the principle of homogeneity across multiple domains of language, territory and market much earlier than 'Germany') and the past (represented by Latinity and the neoclassical appropriation of 'Greece'), modern 'Germany' is faced with the problem of imitation. This dual lack, subsequently repeated throughout the history of colonialism, throws into question not just identity, but the process of subjectivation. "Germany, in other words, was not only missing an identity but also lacked the ownership of its means of identification." (Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy 1990: 299). It may be difficult living in the wake of the re-writing of history undertaken after the end of the Second World War, when 'Germany' was accorded an unproblematic inclusion in the 'West' in order to secure its participation in an anti-communist front, to remember

the anxiety over the question of 'Germany's membership in the 'West' that marked 'German' thought and culture throughout the difficult modern period. Beginning with the fact that in the 18th century "a German language could barely be said to exist" (*ibid*., 299), 'Germany"s modern search for the "means of identification" began by appropriating the representational image of translational transfer. Although beginning with the "identification of the German language with the Greek language" (*ibid.,* 301), it moves quickly away from linguistic identification to a representational level of the unitary image. It is not that 'Germany' is going to find in 'Greece' a mythological source of expression, but rather that it will find in Greek mythology a power to make "fictions" become real. The subject of these fictions are anthropological images, or types. The mythological power discovered by 'Germany' is nothing other than the will to possess an anthropological type, within a taxonomy of anthropological difference. This is a properly speculative power, which imposes itself upon reality and seeks to 'model' it. Yet the 'model' is also, in the context of the historical "double-bind", also given as a source or origin. The power of myth (or fictioning) is the power to conceive of species-being as an ideal anthropological type that would be at once the originary model and the destination, or historical destiny, of a specific people. This circularity is the power of *superimposition*. Much more than an identity, 'Germany' aimed for "*an appropriation of the means of identification*" (Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy 1990: 299; emphasis in original). Yet, with each successive attempt to consolidate 'German' identity, 'Germany' fell ever more deeply into a trap that had been *imposed* upon it through the form of the historical "double-bind".

In a global context, this 'German' experience describes the quintessential problem of national self-determination that will be repeated throughout the history of colonialism. The attempt to

find a national identity in opposition to the 'West' is a form of co-figuration in which the image of the 'West' continues to play a central role. For this reason it is absolutely crucial to see that the 'double bind' of historical imitation is not just a problem for the colonized 'Rest', but is also constitutive of the colonizing 'West', as well. The "double bind" of historical imitation cannot be contained within the boundaries of a single area, but is rather essential to its nature as a modern apparatus in general. It corresponds precisely to the modern conundrum of societies that posit their own presuppositions.

Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe ask us to confer upon this problem "the status of a political concept" (Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy 1990: 299) that bears on an "extremely precise stratum of history" (*ibid.,* 298). The political problem of historical imitation in the modern context is not only a problem of what shall be imitated, i.e., identity, nor just a problem of who is to do the imitating, but it is also, and primarily, a problem of who or what is being generated or produced by the action of imitation? It is in other words a problem of the subject for whom the processes of production and reproduction of life are at stake in a political way. The locus of that "precise stratum" identified by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe turns out finally to be coterminous with what Foucault called biopolitics. There is undoubtedly a complex itinerary[i], to trace between the subject of imitation and the subject created by imitation that constitutes the "paradoxical" nature of "aesthetic exemplarity", (Button: 2009, 276) in the formation of the modern taxonomy of "anthropological difference", yet what is important to retain here is that the circular nature of the relation between the two is captured by the mythological power of *the type* as a living species. The "history of fictionings" proposed by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe (Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy 1990: 299) is thus a history of

biopolitical taxonomy – the history that occurs after the "entry of life into history" that Foucault famously identified as the birth of biopolitics. These types are not representations of things given, but projections of a formative power, a desire, upon the rift between origin and historical development.

The posterior superimposition is undoubtedly essential for the creation of subjects in the apparatus of area, yet it is not, as is commonly thought, because of the conflictual multiplicity of origins and histories represented by each of the individual areas. Instead what we have is a double-bind, 'squared'. The *capitalist* double bind of imitation between origin and history that marks the history of primitive accumulation is multiplied by the *colonial* double bind found in the unavoidable problem of imitation between hierarchically-organized and divided areas each with their own concrete and incommensurable origin/history pairs. It is because history in the modern era is always the point of this 'double-bind squared' that it holds such importance for our analysis as the site that calls forth the mythical production of a subject invested in anthropological difference. History is the domain in which the subjective technology of superimposition is exercised – precisely as myth, the myth of Man's collective ability to collectively fashion individuals and individualized collectivities. Both Foucault's archaeology and his later genealogy alike amount to strategic interventions into this technology. In light of Foucault's efforts to call our attention to the generative, rather than repressive, side of power, it is vitally important to insist on the idea that what we have been calling superimposition is not simply the imposition of external constraints upon social actors, but also the process of *doubling* that opens up subjective positions as well as the element of elevation that permits the taxonomy of anthropological difference to be mapped onto a *topography of areas*.

The recognition of this productive doubling between colonial difference and capitalist accumulation forces us to confront, in our critique of the apparatus of area, a problem of communicability. In order to elucidate this problem, it would be helpful to examine a bit further how the critique of "apparatus" has been envisaged in the work of Giorgio Agamben.

Agamben's Apparatus

In this section I would like to return to Agamben's short essay "What is an apparatus?" not just for clues about how the apparatus works and how we may escape from it, but also in order to examine a number of problems in Agamben's text that illustrate the problem of communication and translation with regard to the stubborn persistence of the area-apparatus.

Agamben begins his essay with a brief summary of the definition of apparatus. The core points are: 1) it is composed of heterogeneous elements that include the linguistic and non-linguistic; 2) it has a concrete function that responds to a certain urgency in social relations; 3) it lies at the nexus between knowledge and power. Having established this basic definition, Agamben traces a genealogy of the concept through an historical itinerary.

Skipping over the Hegelian part of this itinerary, I will move quickly to what Agamben chooses to call a "theological genealogy of economy" (Agamben 2009: 8). This covers an historical period of roughly five centuries from the 2nd to the 6th century C.E. during which time the Greek word *oikonomia* takes on a "decisive theological function", known in theology as "divine economy," that is crucial to understand, Agamben argues, the peculiar philosophical position of the apparatus in modern societies. Early Church fathers resorted to the term in order to quell the potential

for polytheism, still an urgent problem in the societies of that age, to infiltrate its way back into the Church through the dogma of the Trinity. The philosophical implications of this expedient move are profound. Being, or essence, is torn away from praxis, or historical action. This leads to "nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured." (Agamben 2009: 13) On account of the fact of this division, apparatuses must produce a subject, who will fill the void left by the absence of being. Subjects are, insists Agamben, the third "class" that mediates the "relentless fight" (*ibid.*: 14) between the other two.

The equivalence between living beings and substance is a classical one, yet Agamben is hardly constrained to use it. In matters of ontology, Agamben is assuredly no Aristetolian-Thomist. I suspect the reason Agamben adopts this approach is the expression not of a philosophical choice but of an historical decision.

In historical terms, the Trinitarian dogma is nothing more than the injunction, upheld by sovereign fiat, to abide by the template of hylomorphism. The Church fathers could have simply avoided the problem of polytheism by removing the dogma altogether (as was the case in Islam), but this would have denied Christianity the singularly appropriative force that resides in the assignation of numerical unity, "three persons, one being".[ii] This gesture, a paradigmatic form of *speculative superimposition*, lays the ground for an expansionary – dare we say colonizing – universalism.

Yet what does it mean to say that philosophical thought 'lays the ground'? Undoubtedly, it makes for dramatic reading to follow the path whereby the "theological genealogy of economy" ends up

tracing the "legacy," as Agamben calls it, this template has left to "Western culture" (Agamben 2009: 10). The sense of narrative drama is derived, of course, not from the particularity of the West, but its supposed universalism, evident in the remainder of Agamben's historical narrative, which surreptitiously substitutes "capitalism" and "modernity" for a term, the West, that harbors too much residual particularity. In that very precise sense, the "theological genealogy of economy" is another apparatus, inasmuch as it is, again in Agamben's words, a "body of knowledge" that "*orient[s]* – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings." (Agamben 2009: 12; emphasis added).

At issue here is not a critique of crude philosophical occidentalism. It is rather a case of "praxis and being", to stay within the classical terms used by Agamben, "conceived and lived as inseparable." (Zartaloudis 2008: 133) The proposition of "inseparability" is hardly as simple as it may sound, yet it may serve temporarily as a clue, or as a place-holder waiting for a more appropriate concept. In Agamben's apparatus essay, this inseparability runs astray exactly around the point of linguistic communicability. Agamben's choice of the mobile phone as a privileged illustration of the contemporary apparatus is symptomatic. The humorous admission of the "implacable hatred" Agamben has developed "for this apparatus [the mobile phone]" that has led him "more than once wondering how to destroy or deactivate [it]" (Agamben 2009: 16) symptomatically reveals the level of subjective investment this point attracts.

So what is the role of language in this essay about the apparatus? Among the three roles I discern in the essay, I would like to draw attention to the one that is nearest our theme, translation. The role played by translation in the construction of the "theological

genealogy of economy" is predominantly etymological and articulatory. The Greek term *oikonomia* is mapped onto the Latin word *Dispositio*, enabling the latter to "take on the complex semantic sphere" of the former (Agamben 2009: 11). Translation in the guise of etymology is an operation that enables a spatialized representation of cultural spheres and a process of transfer between the two. Agamben's narrative thus constitutes an example of the classic modern representation of translation as a form of *translatio* (transfer) between discrete linguistico-cultural spheres. That which I would dispute is not the etymological filiation brilliantly traced by Agamben per se, but rather with the way in which it is mapped onto a representational image of cultural continuity. Michael Herzfeld, an anthropologist of Greece and Thailand, summarizes: "Etymology not only legitimizes a connection that does not necessarily subsist, but also deflects attention away from the ephemerality of that connection – indeed, materializes it – by the device of proclaiming the cognate signifiers as though they were a single signified, collapsing all temporal shifts in meaning into a single, indivisible, timeless truth." (Herzfeld 2002: 910) In a postcolonial context, the significance of cultural translation via etymology could not be more pronounced. Historical contact among populations prior to colonial encounter is invariably encoded in etymology, forming a kind of "deep historical memory" of prior historical contact. The specificity of the colonial encounter, however, lies precisely in the fact that populations without the sort of "deep historical memory" encoded in etymology come into mutual contact. Hence, to rely on etymology to explain the historicity of modern philosophemes is to exclude from view colonialism as a form of both cause and effect for those very same philosophemes. Seen from this perspective, the etymological gesture is yet another attempt to manage retrospectively the problematic circularity of modern societies.

Greece: the Myth of the West

One of the qualities that distinguishes the West as a paradigm of the modern apparatus of area is the institutionalization of translation-as-cultural transference through the disciplinary control of bodies of knowledge. Elements for an archaeology of this institutional configuration can be found in Herzfeld's description of a disavowed colonial problematic at the heart of the discipline of anthropology. It is not simply that anthropology finds its roots in the Enlightenment project, intrinsically tied to colonialism, of a scientifically-exhaustive taxonomy of human being (against which Herzfeld proposes to use taxonomy against taxonomy). It is rather the idea that anthropology presides, within the field of knowledge, over the instantiation of a myth. In the case of modern anthropology, this myth is divided into two parts. On the one hand, it is the essentially Cartesian myth of *logos* divided from *muthos*; on the other hand, it is also the place where the West as myth is initially constructed. The history of a discipline, recounted at length by Herzfeld, that invokes Greek origins only to repress its own historicity reveals a distributive mechanism that captures and divides 'Greece' among disciplines, translations, and an economy of indebtedness – both figural and literal. Is 'Greece' indebted to 'Europe', or is 'Europe' indebted to 'Greece'? What kind of change in perspective is required to deal with the accumulation of debt in the mode of subjectivation rather than the mode of production? To speak of an 'exchange rate' between the two would be to admit the primacy of the economic subject, especially in an age when debt is the mechanism through which collective responsibility is refused.

In the context of the current European debt crisis and the "deficit of democracy" (Balibar 2004), it is vitally important to follow Herzfeld as he makes a connection between the regime of accumulation and the apparatus of area:

I shall call [this phenomenon] crypto-colonialism and define it as the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. (Herzfeld 2002: 900–901)

I can only surmise, after reading Herzfeld, that the reasons the contemporary European crisis has been localized along a Greco-German axis are neither incidental nor purely limited to the strategies of neoliberalism, but concern as well the fundamental inability of the European construction to divest itself of the myth of West. It seems as if every major European crisis of the past century has been connected to the fundamental question of whether or not (or in what way) "colonialism" – which was supposed to be reserved for areas outside 'Europe' – will be introduced as a legitimate option for population management in the 'European' space.

Profanation

At the end of his essay on apparatuses, Giorgio Agamben returns to 'profanation', one of the recurring themes in his work[iii], proposing it as a template for liberation from them. His argument is based on the juridico-religious status the term enjoyed in ancient Rome. Whereas the sacred takes things out of the common world shared by all, instituting a form of separation that is at the heart of all relations of power, profanation restores things to common usage. Profanation is not the destruction or elimination of apparatuses, but rather a practice of *transferring* them to common usage. I do not see how, in the postcolonial context, it would be possible to use in a common way a term such as *profanation* that is

so intrinsically tied to a specific civilizational and religious history. If "an absolutely profane life" is, as Agamben writes, one "that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability" (Agamben 2000: 113–114), it impossible to see how the term *profanation* could possibly achieve that communicability in the face of appropriation by the 'clash of civilizations' discourse. The mobile phone that exemplifies for Agamben the detestable aspects of the apparatus is also one of those elements that reminds us most immediately of the intimately global, interconnected age in which we live. One can never be sure where the person on the other end of the line (or app) is calling from. Were Giorgio Agamben to make it his project to become "response-able" to the communicability of profanation in the social, political and institutional situations in which Arabic language, for instance, is standard, that process, to my mind, would qualify at least as a gesture towards the act of liberation from the apparatus of area, if not constituting an act outright. By contrast, Naoki Sakai's critique of the regime of translation built upon the assumptions of homolingual address would be an excellent instance of the kind of action envisaged by Agamben's concept of profanation, without its translational baggage. Yet we must be very careful, lest the heterolingual address become a new sort of articulatory mechanism between praxis and theory.

As theory, the heterolingual address cannot assure its own communicability. In the context of the actual divisions of the humanities according to the principles of anthropological difference, it is necessary to remember that the processes of subjectivation through the economic are not evenly distributed across the globe, but are, like capitalist economic activity in general, subject to the modalities of 'exchange' on the basis of social institutions overcoded by all manner of inequality and

difference. The example of "China Studies" is relevant: As China Studies is a field of knowledge that supposedly corresponds to a specific area and a specific population, it matters little how ill-defined 'China' and 'Chinese-ness' actually may be. What is key rather is the complicity between the process of subjectivation-through-the-economic in the institutional field and the process of subjectivation-through-the-economic in the actual social relations that are offered as objects of study. Within that social reality, i.e., within Chinese social, political and cultural institutions, the process of subjectivation-through-the-economic occurs in relation to the dual histories of both colonialism and capitalism, the combination of which presents major obstacles to the political communication of liberation from the apparatus of area. Such obstacles have been essentially summarized by Jacques Rancière's notion of "disagreement" or Jean-François Lyotard's idea of "the differend". Without collapsing the differences between the two, the point to which I would like to draw attention is this: the divergence in viewpoints renders common access to the common world impossible to communicate in a common way. For this reason, those intellectuals who work in disciplines outside of Chinese Studies, whose belief in their own exteriority is often the expression of a genuine modesty and respect-for-the-other, cannot be considered exempt from the apparatus of area in which those 'Chinese' subjects are formed. Quite the contrary, the apparatus of area permeates the university through and through, and no amount of pious respect for "otherness" can change that. This is especially true in today's "University of Finance", where disciplinary subjects coincide more perfectly than ever with the subject of economy. To accept "cultural translation" means to accept, ultimately, this subject of economy.

The asymmetry and incommensurability that motivates the theories of "disagreement" and the "differend" only hold insofar as one assumes continuity between the registers of thought and action, theory and praxis. Such continuity is precisely that which opens up superimposition as a general figure of the transcendental moment in modern thought. If, however, we were to distinguish, as Bernard Aspe suggests, between act and thought in terms of non-relation, our task would become that of finding the skillful means to "jump" between the two, without speculative articulation or superimposition.

As practice, what the heterolingual address does is to open up the temporality in which such an act of "jumping" becomes possible. Remember that the effectivity of the homolingual address is to be found not in the communicative content of the address, but in the temporality of the social relation in which the address occurs. We must be very careful not to demand of the heterolingual address political tasks that it cannot achieve. The opposition between the heterolingual address and the homolingual one only occurs on the side of communication, the object of representation and iterability. Here, heterolingual address is a *theory* that reminds us of what its being superimposed upon the *act* of translational encounter. The moment of heterolingual address in the encounter *as act* cannot, however, be positively identified and does not "mean" anything per se.

Mindful of this distinction between the heterolingual address as *act* and as *theory*, we will remain open to the indeterminacy of the social relation and the temporality of praxis. This is what Aspe calls "the instant". It is precisely in this "instant" that the continuity between thought and action deemed essential to the "differend" or the "disagreement" dissolves.

What is needed, in other words, is not a prose (or poetics) of translation, but *a politics of transfer* (*translatio*) or *transposition,* for which Aspe uses the figure of the jump (*le saut*). If, as Balibar writes, "*the emancipation of the oppressed can only be their own work,* which emphasizes its immediately ethical signification" (Balibar 1994: 49), then the emancipation from the apparatus of area, which oppresses all or else oppresses none, can only be undertaken by jumping outside of the area-apparatus – outside, that is, of its hylomorphic ontology and modes of subjection. This is not a proverbial "leap of faith", but rather a refusal of the transcendental gestures (such as the appeal to a metalanguage) that are inevitably required to articulate theory and praxis.

Exodus

In what will certainly come to be read as a major contribution to the critique of the apparatus of area, Gavin Walker proposes that we must consider the subjective investment in the apparatus of area as a form of ethics. This is an ethics, however, that in its present form has abandoned emancipatory action in favor of the economy, a pure means virally appropriated by an infinitely senseless end. Against this puerile ethics, Walker suggests a strategy of exodus and an appropriation of what I call the technology of superimposition:

"In this sense, area studies cannot be overcome, but must be bisected by a
subtractive strategy of exodus, a removal of its basic element, which is ourselves. Such an exodus must be produced, not discovered, by creating new forms of encounter and theoretical practice, new lines of proximity, distance, and relation, the superimposition of outlines, boundaries, and operations in sites other than their expected location. (Walker: forthcoming)

Quite vexing to me, this passage confirms my suspicion that the only ethical action open to those who are truly committed to returning the apparatus of area to a common usage is to leave altogether the University of Finance. Within the University of Finance, a 'profane' appropriation of the subjective technology of superimposition seems impossible. Regardless of the critical force of one's publications and research, the fact remains that virtually all of what we – perhaps it is just I? – actually *do* in the university is consecrated to the practice of a mythological superimposition that hides our subjectivation through the economy. What results are the normalized assemblages of bodies, tongues and minds that ceaselessly reproduce, in their actions, the mythology of "expected locations." In the end, the most fundamental 'location' to which one is being assigned in the university is Aspe's "monopolization of choice" by the economic domain.

This can only change, suggests Aspe, through a commitment to act, politically. For intellectuals in 'Europe', political action begins by refusing their "expected location" in the colonial/capitalist divisions of intellectual labor, reflected in linguistic competence, disciplinary divisions, spatial arrangements, and institutional evaluations. Evidently, we are talking about institutional change that can only be qualified as radical or revolutionary, as both the disciplines of knowledge and the organization of populations will have to be reorganized *at the same time*. Neither can provide the presuppositions or grounding for the other. It means an Aspean jump outside, in which thought and act cannot mutually substitute for the other.

If it is true that the first step to liberation from the apparatus begins with refusal, what happens after? Agamben's answer is that nothing substantially changes. Everything remains as it had been before, with the fundamental, radical difference that there would

no longer be any separation. Profanation achieves the end of separation. This would seem to be an eminently *speculative* posture. For this reason, I appreciate Aspe's philosophical reflections on a life "without reserve", which take him in direction distinctly different from that of Agamben's "life without separation". The latter theorizes "non-separation" in a Heideggerian mode, one that reinstalls thought in the speculative – even if it is a speculative cut off from all speculation, at least in the sense of German idealism. The former concentrates instead on the non-relation *imposed* upon us, and on the challenge of unreservedly "jumping" outside and/or between the two.

Central to the rejection of a "life of without separation" in favor of "jumping without reserve" is the distinction drawn by Aspe between act and work. An act is associated with something new; a work with completion and ending. With regard to the political, their difference is to be found in the moment of *imposition*. The political act imposes a beginning – a beginning that looks impossible when seen from the chains of linear causality.

Yet what kind of imposition is this? *A beginning is precisely that which, according to Aspe, presents the paradox of being its own presupposition*. (Aspe 2011: 106) This is the problem with which this essay began, calling it the essential conundrum of modern societies. The novelty of Aspe's work lies in a call to break with all the various forms of speculative superimposition that attempt to figure out – through adequation between history and knowledge – the rational equivalence between the inaugural moment and its presuppositions. Finally, we have in Aspe's work an alternative to the mournfulness expressed by deconstructive authors such as Lacoue-Labarthe. In a 1992 conference in Strasbourg, "Thinking Europe at Its Borders", Lacoue-Labarthe centers his intervention on the question of "afterwardsness" (*l'après-coup*[iv]): "In its most

abrupt, and hence most paradoxical, definition, afterwardness designates the belated – but recognized – manifestation of something that did not happen or did not have even the slightest chance of happening. Of something that took place, thus, without taking place." (*Géophilosophie de l'Europe* 1992: 74) Lacoue-Labarthe identifies this "retroactive" quality as the philosophically-essential movement of European modernity, and concludes, "afterwardsness can also, quite simply, take the form of regret or repentance" (*Géophilosophie de l'Europe* 1992: 76). By contrast, Aspe's careful formulation of the "jump" as a refusal of the religious leap-of-faith has no need for mournful repentance, offering an alternative to the political oscillation between a dictatorship of the proletariat and a dictatorship of the economy. We are being asked, in other words, to look squarely at that which *imposes* itself upon us – to face imposition without resorting to superimposition. In the case of the inaugural beginning, this means minimally to "jump outside of the chain of these [speculative] deductions." (Aspe 2011: 105). *A transposition in the face of imposition that refuses superimposition.*

The Politics of Transposition and the Arab Spring

In order to illustrate the potential politics of transposition, I would like to offer a few remarks on the 'Arab Spring'. Of the many aspects of the Arab Spring that call for attention and analysis, five of the ones succinctly identified by Balibar and Brossat are salient: 1) the legacy of colonial encounter (of which migrations are just one part) that constitutes an essential element of historical irreversibility; 2) the "system of collusion" between elites in Western and non-Western states; 3) the beginning of the end of certain historically-determined socio-political forms summarized under the name of sovereignty; 4) the concomitant ushering in of a period of unprecedented historical transformation; and, finally, 5)

the ambiguity of a situation that comes from our collective inability to use familiar, old concepts and oppositions to clearly define the political stakes in play. (Balibar and Brossat 2011)

These five elements, taken together, spell out the ineluctable destabilization of a system that goes much deeper than the weighty edifice of sovereignty around which modern political power has been contingently constructed in the wake of the colonial encounter. Without denying the importance and relevance of the conflict between sovereignty and democracy, can we not also venture to say that what is also at stake is a transformation in the underlying biopolitical structure of the global system at the level of "anthropological difference" that emerged out of colonial/imperial modernity?

In order to clarify the meaning of this question, it may be necessary to sketch out a working hypothesis that will allow us a ground for common terms.

Through the historical contingency of colonial encounter, a social formation that we now habitually call "the West" initiated a global project of human liberation that operates simultaneously on two levels: At the first level, there is the essentially epistemological side of the project, which aims for exhaustive scientific knowledge about all species of life on the planet earth, including, of course, the human species. At the second level, there is a project of political ontology, which has as its goal the rational development of a form, or forms, of social organization best suited to the particularities of the human species in all its manifest forms. To follow Michel Foucault, what is really unique or striking about modern Man is not the advent of either 'objective' scientific knowledge or 'democratic' political organization, but rather the link between the two. This link is to be found precisely in the fact that

among all species of life on earth, Man is the species that participates in its own speciation through the practices of language, labor, and life (reproduction). Knowledge about anthropological difference is thus intrinsically linked to the political management of human multiplicities. As Foucault noted very early on his career, this leads to an incessant oscillation between the transcendental and the empirical that is a hallmark of modernity.

Armed with this hypothesis, we may venture an alternative narrative about the historical transition from multiple, isolated empires and tribes to the single world of nation-states that constitutes the social transition to modernity. From this perspective, and to proceed very hastily, we may say that the social formation that we have come to know as "the West" is precisely that form of community that reserves for itself, among all other forms of human community, the key position in the speciation of the human, the place where the epistemological project is articulated to the politico-ontological one. Seen in this light, the West aspires to be the sole community that is self-aware, through scientific knowledge, of humanity's active participation in its own speciation. Yet it is not simply by virtue of a proprietary claim over knowledge that the West has been able to form itself as the pole or center or model of human population management in general. In order to occupy this position, it has been necessary to construct out of the contingency of historical encounter (colonialism) a political system for effective population management (effective from the point of view of capitalist accumulation). Through a long period of colonialism and the formation of independent nation-states, an asymmetrical "system of collusion" developed between the West and the Rest, including of course the Arab world. There are many ways in which we could describe this 'system of collusion', but the one that is most apposite here concerns

complicity in the speciation of the human. The formal means of channeling this complicity lie in the universalization of sovereignty and its application to the control of language, labor, and reproduction (life). The 'historical irreversibility' of colonialism finds its strongest resonance precisely with regard to the formation of a postcolonial/postimperial world system of sovereign nation-states. On the face of it, independence from colonial rule and dependency has been depicted as a reversal of the terms of *translatio imperii* (the fictive transfer of native sovereignty to European colonial rule). The actual situation, however, is better described in terms of *irreversibility* and *asymmetry*, and it is in this context that advent of the common that we see in the figure of the migrant takes on its greatest significance. At the heart of the matter, the figure of the migrant constitutes what is probably the most visible challenge today to the system of human speciation that emerged out of colonial encounter and that defines the modern era.

In the discussions about the validity of concepts such as 'civil war' and 'uprising vs. revolution' to describe the Arab Spring, what is perhaps most striking is the nagging inadequacy, felt by all of us, of such categories to measure the importance of the event. I wonder if we cannot venture to say that what this event signals in multiple and complex ways is the beginning of the collapse of this historically determined system of institutional complicity built around the speciation of the human?

Festival

For 'Europe', the task at hand is to say goodbye to the Myth of the West, with all its species of difference, and allow something else to be born in its place. *Neither a "Grexit" nor a "Gerxit"*[v], *but a cooperative exit from Europe*. This implies the impossible act of

choosing to assume that which has been imposed: "To choose to be born, which is in other words to choose to renounce the project of avenging oneself of the injustice contained in the fact of being born" (Aspe 2011: 103) – to renounce the 'fact' of history (which is always the history of victimization and retribution) and the commemoration of the 'given' (which is always the mythic power of instantiating one's own presuppositions). This is perhaps not so far removed from Walter Benjamin's vision of the profane world (minus his speculative desire for non-separation). It is a world in which:

history is not written: it is celebrated as a festival. As a purified festival, however, it does not have the character of a ceremony and does not know any hymns. Its language is free prose, a prose that has broken the chains of writing. (Walter Benjamin. *Gesammelte Schriften* 1:1235, cited in de la Durantaye 2008: 34).

I would hate to disrespect Saint Benjamin, but the festival we're putting on is anything but purified! Purity belongs to the register of thought, not bodies. Not that we need to celebrate the impurities of the impermanent, but we do need to resolutely face up to the impermanence and indeterminacy that the split between act and thought imposes upon us. Needless to say, it wouldn't really be a festival unless writing were accompanied by acts, in ways that mutually impose upon each other, without the chains of transcendental superimposition, without the apparatus of area. Truly, a cause to celebrate.

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[i] Peter Button charts out this itinerary through the complex circuit between *Bild* (image), *Einbildungskraft* (imagination), *Bildung* (formation), *Vorbild* (modèle), and *Nachbild* (reproduction). (Button 2009: 78 *passim*).

[ii] The philosophical decision to reject hylomorphism and to distinguish the singular/Common from the individual/universal (cf. Virno 2009) lies behind the arguments in this paper yet could not be included for considerations of space. Ultimately, our understanding of translation is a ontological as it is political (and ontology is political). As Ray Brassier comments, “what the indeterminacy of translation really boils down to is an indeterminacy of individuation.” (Brassier 2001: 65)

[iii] For a discussion of this theme in Agamben’s work, see Leland de la Durantaye (2008): “‘Homo Profanus’: Giorgio Agamben’s Profane Philosophy.” In *Boundary 2*, vol. 35, nr. 3, pp. 27–62.

[iv] Lacoue-Labarthe explicitly takes up the Freudian-Lacanian theme of *Nachträglichkeit*. English translations of this term are either “deferral” or “afterwardsness”, neither of which is fully satisfactory.

[v] A former chief economist of the IMF, Simon Johnson, asserts that the collapse of the Euro is inevitable, and raises the specter of a German exit from the single currency – after that of Greece. Simon Johnson/Peter Boone, "The End of the Euro: A Survivor's Guide". *Huffington Post*, 27th May 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/simon-johnson/euro-collapse_b_1549444.html, consulted in June 2012.