The Regime of Translation and the Figure of Politics

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Abstract: What is a "politics" of translation? How does translation—a general theoretical term that indicates a social process of articulation or disarticulation through which some phenomena in a given social field appear as a "two"—relate to politics *as such*, that is the *practice* of politics? Frequently, a phrase such as "the politics of translation" presupposes that "translation" is a complex and multivalent term to be unpacked, but "politics" is, in this style of composition, often treated as if it were self-evident, as if it were possible to simply affix the term "politics" to various concepts in order to *politicize* them. But I want to disrupt this easy notion of politics and politicization by suggesting that we must seek another means of entry into the relationship of politics and translation than simply a facile imbrication of two presuppositions. What I will be primarily concerned with here is the clarification of the question of *the two*—duality, two "sides," complementarity, comparison, division, scission, antagonism, perhaps even the figure of the "dialectic." The question of translation, and particularly the status of the two in translation, has important consequences for the thinking of politics, even the politics of politics, a metapolitics or archipolitics. I will attempt to elaborate these consequences at length in order to disrupt two complementary misunderstandings: the notion of politics as ubiquitous or constant, and the notion of translation as a simple transposition or transference between two already established positions or fields.

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In recent years, the question of translation has been deepened and extended by numerous important interventions in theory. This concept—and I want to insist on the full plenitude of translation as a concept—is not, however, merely a theoretical question. Translation is also a means of naming or marking a real arrangement of forces that organizes real social relations. In this sense, Naoki Sakai has alerted us to an important conceptual distinction within the work of this concept: the distinction between translation itself and what he calls "the regime of translation." I want to try to develop this distinction, so crucial to Sakai's work, in a specific di-

rection: the direction of politics proper. What is a "politics" of translation? How does translation—a general theoretical term that indicates a social process of articulation or disarticulation through which some phenomena in a given social field appear as a "two"—relate to politics *as such*, that is the *practice* of politics? Frequently, a phrase such as "the politics of translation" presupposes that "translation" is a complex and multivalent term to be unpacked, but "politics" is, in this style of composition, often treated as if it were self-evident, as if it were possible to simply affix the term "politics" to various concepts in order to *politicize* them. But I want to disrupt this easy notion of politics and politicization by suggesting that we must seek another means of entry into the relationship of politics and translation than simply a facile imbrication of two presuppositions. We should be equally careful here to avoid a disciplinary separation of registers that would simply equate "politics" with presumed political acts—practical/concrete acts—and "translation" with "culture" in a metonymic style of substitution. Instead, I want to enter into this relation by treating these two terms, these two concepts, in a divergent manner: what is at stake in the concept of politics? What is at stake in the concept of translation? And above all, what is at stake for an act of theoretical articulation between them? What I will be primarily concerned with here is the clarification of the question of *the two*—duality, two "sides," complementarity, comparison, division, scission, antagonism, perhaps even the figure of the "dialectic." The question of translation, and particularly the status of the two in translation, has important consequences for the thinking of politics, even the politics of politics, a metapolitics or archipolitics. We will attempt here to elaborate these consequences at length in order to disrupt two complementary misunderstandings: the notion of politics as ubiquitous or constant, and the notion of translation as a simple transposition or transference between two already established positions or fields.

There are essentially two dominant registers of inherited knowledge in which the figure of the two has been extensively developed: politics and psychoanalysis. We can think of figures of politics such as the distinction between friend and enemy (Schmitt), the primacy of partisanship (Gramsci), the choice of one line or another (Lenin), the geopolitics of the right wing (one putative "civilization" or another), the geopolitics of the left (the revolutionary

camp or the capitalist camp), questions of historiography (the transition from one mode of production to another and the articulation between them), and, of course, questions of psychoanalysis. In the case of psychoanalysis, the figure of the two is perhaps most widely developed: we can immediately recall such instances as the two of analyst and analysand in the clinical scenario, the field of love ("the scene of the Two" in Badiou's terms), but also the two of the split—the splitting of the drive between its self-negating effects and its compulsive repetition, the splitting of the subject between the enunciation and the enunciated, the splitting of the law between its pretension to eternality and its unstable institution in every scenario of domination. But what is the two on the most abstract or conceptual level? (Perhaps this is in fact the most truly "practical" level, in the sense that the concept is precisely what allows for the fullest development of what is constrained in the "real" social field). Here, we must return to the broad question of how to explain three terms or fields: translation, politics, and the politics or politicality *of* translation. Let us then begin with translation.

Translation: The Regime of the Two

The typical presentation of the concept of translation is not, in fact, referential to "translation" at all but rather to the *representation* of translation, what Naoki Sakai has called the "regime of translation." In order to set the scene for an articulation between the concept of politics and the concept of translation, we must first expand and delineate what is actually referred to by this term "translation" and the ways in which a clear understanding of this term is covered over, hidden, or obscured by its confusion with its own representation. In the commonsensical usage of this word, we often assume a simple and formal transposition of content from one signifying system to another. The individual terms, linguistic structure, and field of meanings are meant to pass through and detach from one system of signification and reattach themselves, transferred into another system, to a new *home*. More broadly, we are no longer simply accustomed to translation as a concept linked solely to national language, yet national language nevertheless remains the general historical concept *implied* in the term translation: one putatively unitary language system's set of codings are disarticulated and reassembled in the terms of another putatively unitary

system. English is "translated" into Japanese, French is "translated" into Russian, and so forth. Beyond this basic sense, however, we are now used to another use of this term—the whole field of discussions of "cultural translation," for example.

These discussions, however, often reproduce the worst tropes related to the representation of translation—the image of translation as communication, translation as simple transfer, translation as a "bridge" between two self-identical elements, translation as a "filter" or screen (see Sakai 2009). All of these concepts of translation essentially imagine that translation is nothing more than an act of articulation between two *already existing* entities. Hence, "Western" products are "culturally translated" in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and so forth, or vice versa, essentially leaving the concept of "cultural translation" as a mere substitution for something like the local inflection of ostensibly "foreign" elements. Here, therefore, there is no reflection on the *process* of the formation of the local and the foreign as modes of classification; instead, they are simply treated as the presupposed boundaries or edges of terms that are posited as "two sides" of a relation, a relation that could be connected in multiple ways, to be sure, but always a relation of one thing and another.

It is exactly this representation of translation that suppresses or conceals the more basic question of translation as such:

> Strictly speaking, it is not because two different language unities are given that we have to translate (or interpret) one text into another; it is because translation articulates languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated languages as if they were autonomous and closed entities through a certain representation of translation. (Sakai 1997, 2)

In other words, translation is an open and inconclusive *act* of articulation in the space of radical incommensurability, in the space of indeterminacy prior to coalescence into the form of relation. Translation is *represented* as if this zone of indecidability was not the primary scene of engagement, but rather the *outcome* of its own processual motion. But the basic problem is that translation describes what Gramsci called a "historical act," an act with political and historical *contents*. However, the representation of translation represses this aspect of history, and therefore, the aspect of politics, which is always involved in the necessity of reducing cir-

cumstances to *one line and another*. We will return to this aspect when we take up the question of politics proper. If we reduce translation to its representation, we undertake an act of *dehistoricization*, by which the originary differential, the *acting* and *poietic* dimension of translation, is repressed and reduced to an ahistorical constant, a relation already established between two elements that are themselves not called into question.

The paradox presented by this gap or rupture between the work of translation and its representation is that it is only *through* translation that we can enter into this gap itself, exposing us to a theoretical dynamics in which translation appears as a *structure that works on itself*. But how does this operate? And what kind of problem does this disclose, not only for *translation* but also for *translatability*?

What makes it possible to represent the initial difference as an already determined difference between one language unity and another is the work of translation itself. This is why we always have to remind ourselves that the untranslatable, or what can never be appropriated by the economy of translational communication, cannot exist prior to the enunciation of translation. It is translation that gives birth to the untranslatable. Thus the untranslatable is as much a testimony to the sociality of the translator, whose figure exposes the presence of a nonaggregate community between the addresser and the addressee, as to the translatable itself. However, the essential sociality of the untranslatable is ignored in the homolingual address, and with the repression of this insight, the homolingual address ends up equating translation to communication. (Sakai 1997, 14)

Here Sakai introduces the concept of "homolingual address," a term that plays a crucial role in explicating the specifically theoretical physics of this question. The homolingual address presupposes that not only the language community (or let us say more broadly *social* community) of the addresser but also that of the addressee is *unitary*, or perhaps, more specifically, *univocal*, and that it can be expressed in a relation of integrity or totality. In this schema, the unity of the community of the addresser and that of the addressee do not have to be the same. In fact, they can be radically divergent from each other. But they must each be *presupposed* as *two unities*. That is, the surrounding economies of address and receipt must be understood or imagined as two islands, two self-contained and self-identical spaces without excess or escape. These two spaces would each constitute an interior and an exterior, a hard kernel of solidity inside and a fluid, indeterminate space outside. But

this structure of presupposition is itself based on another intervening set of determinations, a *schema*—and here we should emphasize the centrality of the Kantian thinking of the concept of schema for Sakai's work, in which important and original theoretical results are generated around this figure of thought—through which social circumstances are represented *as if* they corresponded to this prior image of isolated, unitary, and identical communities.

But what happens in such a schematic? What is elevated and what is repressed from view? In turn, what is accidentally or fortuitously disclosed to us by means of another dynamics that would inhere in such relations? First and foremost, a complex temporality is installed here. Translation, as we have been arguing, is above all *a historical act*, in the Gramscian sense. What Gramsci suggests by this formulation is that the concept of the act—the practice—that is crucial to us never occurs merely at the level of a conceptual dynamics or an empty, contentless purity. The act for Gramsci is *always* historical, always immersed in a context, a genre, a category of statements, movements, alliances, spontaneous and emergent political allegiances, forms of intelligibility, and so forth. In this sense, translation—the act of articulation in a social space of incommensurability—is always historical insofar as it never merely occurs as an interval, but rather *creates the conditions for an interval or gap to assert itself*. But where this gap should be located, how it should be formed, and what conditions inform its emergence, are all questions linked to the specific historical and political dynamics of the particular circumstantial conjuncture within which the act of translation is undertaken. In this sense, translation is an instance of the *historical present*, a historicity suffused with an openness and sense of intervention, while translation's representation is saturated by a conception of the past as closure, the past as fixity, in which two sides are structurally presumed.

What plays the essential role here is the *prefix*, in the strict sense: the always-already determined nature of supposition:

> By erasing the temporality of translation with which the *oscillation* or *indeterminacy of personality in translation* is closely associated and which can be thought in an analogy to the aporetic temporality of "I think", we displace translation with the representation of translation. […] The representation of translation transforms *difference in repetition* into *species difference* (diaphora) between two specific identities. (Sakai 1997, 15)

Here, a new and crucial point is presented: we see how translation as a historical act is conflated with or covered over by the representation of translation, or the regime of translation, but we also see how this conflation creates a specific modality of the presentation of difference as such. As Sakai points out, here difference in repetition—translation as a historical act, an act of articulation that is incessantly repeated but always in divergent conjunctures with divergent compositional elements and outcomes—is instead transformed into a sort of *specific difference*, in the schematic sense of genus, species, and individual. It is in this sense that the representation of translation, in which the open historicity of articulation is foreclosed as a mere encounter between two presupposed "sides," comes to be not an expression of a difference that must be bridged, but rather a difference that takes place always-already *within* the economy of commensurability. Two sides are presupposed, two unities are preposited. These two unities come to be capable of an encounter, of being represented as two fields between which translation *passes*, because they already are presumed as unities within a field of commensurability, in which an encounter is possible at all. But this, as Sakai demonstrates throughout his body of work, is precisely the theoretical mode by which translation as an act of articulation in the space of *incommensurability*, is repressed or hidden. In this sense, the regime of translation is the repression of the historical, despite its appeal to history – the supposed "natural" basis of national linguistic community and so forth – an appeal that might be linked here also to the psychoanalytic concept of "drive," a force of *pulsion* towards an object of desire that nevertheless must undermine its own satisfaction or fulfillment.

This entire theoretical structure is what Sakai calls "the schema of cofiguration," "the discursive apparatus that makes it possible to represent translation" (Sakai 1997, 15). This apparatus or mechanism is immersed in discourse, that is to say, in *history*. The schema of cofiguration is a mechanism that is itself profoundly historical, a product of the historical process, but one that allows through a certain evasion of the implications of this historicity. This schema in essence names or marks the gap between the historicity of translation and the historicity of its own representation, a representation that acts *as if* translation could from the outset be a pre-

supposition rather than a rupture or contingent act in the incommensurable and irreconcilable field of historical flux. This is again why the historicity of translation that is repressed by the regime of translation finds its resolution in *practice*, in the historical act: "the *practice* of translation remains radically heterogeneous to the representation of translation" (Sakai 1997, 15). As an act of social articulation, in which a previously existing set of terms and relations emerges and develops, translation is always first and foremost practical. It involves an intervention, or what we might call a *forcing* (following Alain Badiou), the production of an economy of elements and relations between them that the prior conjuncture could not theoretically anticipate in its own logical structure. This openness of practice and historical contingency must always be "radically heterogeneous" to the regime of translation, the schema of cofiguration in which two sides are posited from the outset as if their own conditions of production were mere teleological outcomes of necessity, and not themselves subject to the same historical flux that enabled even the discursive apparatus through which they could be apprehended at all.

This is why, in the question of translation, we must pay extremely close attention to the position of the translator, the site in which the entire process remains open to a certain flux, even within the representation of translation, which desperately attempts to repress the historicity of the image of "two sides":

> At best she can be *a subject in transit*, first because the translator cannot be an "individual" in the sense of *individuum* in order to perform translation, and second because she is a *singular* that marks an elusive point of discontinuity in the social, whereas translation is the practice of creating continuity at that singular point of discontinuity. Translation is an instance of *continuity in discontinuity* and a poietic social practice that institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability. (Sakai 1997, 13)

Here the concept of the singular needs to be unpacked at length, and in reference to a series of theoretical problems linked to the question of the subject. Sakai locates the concept of singularity in the figure of the translator, what he calls the *subject in transit*, that is, the "point of discontinuity" in the representation of translation as a smooth transposition of meaning between one signifying system and another. The singular here is thus a marker of interruption, an emblem of a split, a break, or a rupture. Equally, however, the

singular is also that mechanism through which continuity attempts to renew or renovate itself, needing to always be articulated through concrete instances and thereby attain a social solidity. As a consequence, singularity is that form in which both continuity and discontinuity find a foothold or grounding, a paradox or dynamic tension that furnishes the point of rupture in the regime of translation. It is in this sense that singularity is the site of connection between the historical practice of translation and the representation of translation that hides or shields it from view. Equally, however, singularity is also the point around which our investigation of *politics* must circulate.

Politics: The Torsion of the Two

Just as the concept of translation is in fact a divided concept, suspended between the regime of translation (the work of its representation) and translation *as such*, so too is the concept of politics divided between at least two dominant instances. Translation itself is a marker of instability, a point or site within the social motion at which there is an active process of *institution*, the formation of a relation out of the field of radical incommensurability. But the regime of translation is a repression of this radical singularity, one that instead relies on an ahistorical insistence on the *ubiquity* of the two. Here is where a theoretical relation can be drawn between translation and politics. But let us first investigate the concept of politics as such, before we enter into the relational concept of a politics *of* translation.

The two dominant instances through which the concept of politics is broadly understood can be conceived in terms of *ubiquity* and *rarity*. What do these two relations signify? Our global moment is one in which politics appears to be everywhere: in our personal lives, in our increasing capacities to participate in supposedly political processes (polls, questionnaires, the interactive space of online news, the massification of opinion via social media, and so forth). Our tendency today, therefore, is to imagine that politics is something ubiquitous: always available, easily accessible, a question of simply "choosing" or "thinking" within a field of immediacy, a direct plane of outcomes that lies within our proximate horizon. But is this thesis not in fact the death of politics as such? What specificity could we even accord to politics if every social—

historical instance were considered "political"? The concept of ubiquity presupposes that everything is political, that politics suffuses our situation. In a sense, this concept of politics is one that conceives of it as a continuity, as a constantly present field of instances that emerge in and through everything. But what if instead we were to say that politics is *rare*? In other words, what if we were to state that politics is not what is included throughout the social–historical world, but rather what is excluded? The argument for the rarity of politics is one that suggests something quite different from the thesis of ubiquity. Here, instead, politics would be conceived as a specific, concrete, historical, and practical *figure*, something with specific moments of institution, something that emerges in and through a specific conjuncture, rather than a presupposed immanent and universally accessible field.

Such a concept of politics could be said to have a certain genealogy of recent and contemporary thinkers associated to it: Foucault, who rejected the ubiquity of politics, and instead spoke of the possibility of *politicization*, the "making-political" of social instances through practical interventions; Badiou, who insists on the event, which punctures the seemingly smooth and closed situation by introducing new and inventive contradictions, grounding a political sequence and thus retroactively convoking a political subject through a fidelity; Rancière, in whose work we find an emphasis on the strong intervention of an egalitarian proposal that suspends the representations possible in the dominant order, an opposition that he names the antagonism between "politics" and "police." In essence, all these thinkers oppose the basic thesis that "everything is political," insisting instead that, strictly speaking, if everything is political, then in truth nothing is political, because politics here would be indistinguishable from the situation of its emergence, eliminating entirely any element of contestation or novelty. If everything were political, the very act of politicization would be meaningless. There would be no need for political analyses or political interventions that above all introduce an element of *exteriority* into the situation, exposing it to new limits, boundaries, and combinations rather than simply accepting the status quo as a set of rigid givens. In this sense, contestation itself would merely be enclosed within an economy of inclusion, such that any force of the outside would itself already be presupposed as internal to the all-

encompassing, entirely immanent situation. Here, of course, there would be no need to speak of politics as such, because if politics is anything, it is precisely the rare moment when the existing social and historical arrangement is called into question by means of novel and inventive acts of contestation, the creation of new antagonisms that previously could not be represented in the conjuncture.

In thinking this concept of politics, let us take an example from Rancière, who offers an apt formulation: "Politics exists when the figure of a specific subject is constituted, a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions in a society" (Rancière 2004, 51). Here a series of terms emerge that are crucial for our analysis. First, as Rancière points out, the question of politics is always linked to the question of the subject. But there is an important proviso, in that the subject – that is, the subject of a political process – is not considered here to be a *given*, something that would be presupposed. Rather, the typical or commonsensical order of the process is inverted: the subject is understood as an effect of politics rather than its guarantor, justification, or legitimating force. It must also be said that here the subject is *specific*, that is, the product of specific circumstances, trends, and forces. But what Rancière also emphasizes here that is most crucial for our analysis is his emphasis that this subject is always *supernumerary*. What does he indicate with this concept? There is here a thought of *countability* or *calculability*: as we know, a given social formation is composed of groups, interests, communities, forms of relation, and types of social linkages. For this given society, the social body itself apprehends these elements; certain groups are recognized, acknowledged, and counted, or accounted for in the body of society as a whole, by means of statistical interventions, censuses, and surveys. In other words, these groups and communities constitute a specific number rather than an infinite series. This must be the case because for a group to *count as one* it must be acknowledged as such.

But what Rancière points us toward here is a concept of politics that exceeds or that cannot be encompassed by this calculability, this preestablished count through which society constitutes itself in a given situation. Instead, he claims, politics proceeds when a supernumerary—some element, statement, concept, action, invention, creation—that is not calculable within the given hierar-

chies, taxonomies, and arrangements presents itself within a social formation. This figure of politics would be precisely an excess element escaping calculation that, by presenting itself within an order of the count, suspends that order by its very existence, calling into question the very foundations of the forms of ordering making up the social status quo. Elsewhere, Rancière provides us with a suggestive historical episode that might clarify the process by which this rare conception of politics erupts, inserting into the conjuncture an entirely new mode of contestation that, strictly speaking, was *absent* prior to its enunciation, prior to the historical act of politics:

> The difference that political disorder inscribes in the police order can thus, at first glance, be expressed as the difference between subjectification and identification. It inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community. This point may be illustrated by a historic episode, a speech scene that is one of the first political occurrences of the modern proletarian subject. It concerns an exemplary dialogue occasioned by the trial of the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui in 1832. Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: "Proletarian." The magistrate immediately objects to this: "That is not a profession," thereby setting himself up for the accused's immediate response: "It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labour and who are deprived of political rights." (Rancière 1999, 37)

In essence, the crucial point of this historical moment is expressed in terms of a "subject name" that is "different from any identified part of the community." What is already included or counted within the existing situation is a compositional part of that situation, something "identified" (sighted or cited) within the set of available relations produced by the status quo, the arrangement of forces at work. Thus, when Blanqui refers to himself before the magistrate as a "proletarian," he presents the subject-name of something paradoxically foundational to the existing order, but in a negative or absent sense. The figure of the proletariat appears as the negative ground of the status quo, the element that must be included insofar as it is a core element of the situation ("the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labour and who are deprived of political rights"), but that must be excluded as calculable within the existing social and political arrangements, because to do so would expose the instability, the contingency and accidental nature of the dominant discursive apparatuses for the ordering of society (the figure of the citizen, legal personhood, state recognition).

All of these elements are themselves historical products, but products whose contingent and historical origins must be erased or covered over in order to function as putatively "natural" givens in the maintenance of the social order. It is here that Rancière points out that politics is exactly what emerges at the point when this erasure of historicity is exercised, when the element that is *excluded in representation presents itself*.

Here, we might profitably take up another complimentary discussion, this time in the work of Alain Badiou, who has extensively developed the generic conceptual schema behind such an understanding of politics by drawing a clear distinction between representation and presentation, and the position of an evental rupture in the supposedly "normal" course of the situation, a circumstance linked in his thought to the figure of the State.

The ultimate effect of an evental caesura, and of an intervention from which the introduction into circulation of a supernumerary name proceeds, would thus be that the truth of a situation, with this caesura as its principle, *forces the situation to accommodate it:* to extend itself to the point at which this truth – primitively no more than a part, a representation – attains belonging, thereby becoming a presentation. The trajectory of the faithful generic procedure and its passage to infinity transform the ontological status of a truth: they do so by changing the situation "by force"; anonymous excrescence in the beginning, the truth will end up being normalized. However, it would remain subtracted from knowledge if the language of the situation was not radically transformed. (Badiou 2005, 342)

Here Badiou, in a dense and concentrated formulation, points out something crucial for this discussion of the supernumerary "subject-name" in the question of politics: the role of *force*. In essence, when Rancière relates the story of Blanqui's trial, what he points out is that something derived from the situation but not co-extensive with it erupts into being and "forces the situation to accommodate it." More specifically than merely its supernumerary character, it is this *forcing* that expresses the nature of politics. A political process does not merely *present* something absent from the situation that nevertheless must play a role within it; rather, it forcibly *punctures* the situation by means of an insistence. What is "counted" in the situation is given a place within it. But what is supernumerary, what exceeds calculability in the optic of a putatively constant and stable scenario, never attains a clear "place" within the logic of the situation into which it intervenes. This is because,

as a forcing, such a supernumerary intervention always compels the situation to modify its equilibrium in order to persist.

What we might then say is that, if politics is the rare and evental forcing of a modification of the situation by means of the intervention of a supernumerary element, then the *representation* of politics as a calculable, easily accessible, and immediate field obscures and represses politics as such. This we could call "the regime of the political," the mode of inquiry that reduces the instance of politics proper—a forceful and hazardous intervention that institutes a novel modality of the situation—to a mere set of choices *already presented* within the field of commensurability. Let us expand more on this point.

What is commensurable is capable of a relation, capable of being included in a preestablished or presupposed set of potential relations. What is incommensurable is a radical difference, a difference that cannot be "explained" or resolved, even into a relational concept of "difference" itself. Concepts of difference that we frequently encounter in theoretical analysis—cultural difference, linguistic difference, sexual difference, national difference, etc.— are not, strictly speaking, incommensurable. One putative cultural space is contrasted with another, instituting a relation of "difference"; one presupposed linguistic community is placed into relation with another, establishing a system of ordering "differences" between the two zones; physical elements, social behaviors, cultural practices, and so forth are formed into categories of belonging, thereafter establishing modalities of detecting supposed "abnormalities" and forming a regime of differences with types of relations, modes of contrast, means of comparison, and so on. But all these "differences" are forms of *specific difference*, differences that are gradations of contrast *within a conceptual species*. In other words, rather than being markers of difference as such, these are all relations *included* within a regime of homogeneity, one in which the heterogeneous is ordered on the interior of a bordered space of univocality.

When politics is thought as the simple oscillation between already-established positions within the field of commensurability, what is desperately repressed is the historicity of politics as such, politics as an historical act. Paradoxically, however, it is always history that is appealed to in the service of this erasure: the situation

is treated as a necessary outcome of a circumscribed history, a language is retrospectively made a unity through appeals to national history, a social circumstance is made "natural" by means of retrojecting a historical development onto a contingent process. But in this way, the historical possibility of politics, the fact that politics has no guarantee or legitimating force, is covered over and re-presented as a set of necessities. The radical historicity of politics is contained precisely in its *excess* over the historical narrative, the inability of appeals to history to exhaustively account for the historical materiality of the institution of a new mode of social existence, or to account (or "count") for the historicity of *singularity* (see Haver 1986). If politics then, is a fidelity to a concept of historicity as incompletion, it is never an incompletion that would lead to abstention or withdrawal. Such a concept of politics, by emphasizing the incompletion of the historical process and the radical incommensurability of interventions supernumerary to the conjuncture, is instead a theory of *partisanship*. And this concept of the partisan is always a thought of the two. From the outset, politics has its own concept of "two"—the situation and the intervention, the field of the countable and the supernumerary, for instance. It might be argued that such a conception of politics can never be reducible to the two precisely because it is supernumerary and therefore exceeds all forms of the count. But this would be to misunderstand the status of the two, a decisive concept that we now must clarify in knitting together the questions of politics and translation.

The Politics *of* Translation: The Distribution of Force

Having considered two separate concepts—the relation between translation and its representation (the "regime" of translation) and the relation between two conceptions of politics (ubiquity and rarity)—I want to consider the possibilities for thinking the politics of translation through an articulation of these two fields of inquiry. First and foremost, let us revisit the basic problem: the representation of translation is a regime in which two sides are made to appear. It is not the case that these two sides are "already there"— translation is an act in which this division or separation is enacted. This division or separation occurs for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it expresses the forms of political subjectivation that are

given by means of social relations and that express social forms of power and subordination. On the other hand, the intervention into this regime—which cannot be simply or easily overcome, as it essentially expresses the social-historical forms through which significations such as language itself are inherited—cannot consist in refusing the act of division or separation either. To do so would simply mean valorizing a flattened concept of immanence, in which the copresence of all phenomena was treated as one indistinguishable plane. The political consequences of this are stark: the status quo is thus treated as the immanent expression of the existing field of elements, which only have to be differentially arranged to enact a political intervention. Everything is *interior* to this schema, it ends in proposing a certain univocality of politics and of thought, in which an actual *break* remains impossible.

In other words, if our reaction to the concept of translation as a schema, as a modality of analysis, remains at the level of simply refuting the parceling out of phenomena into "two," we will be unable to sustain a genuine *politics* of translation. A politics of translation must not take the immanentist route, which presumes that the response to the simplistic binaries of modernity is to propose instead one unitary field in which everything is arrayed for experience. This would be to deny the politicality of politics proper, which consists precisely in following through the consequences of what *cannot be included* within a unitary field of experience. In other words, if we are to create a politics of translation that is not merely an acting correlate to the *regime* of translation, in which we are consistently given "two sides" of a false choice, we must attempt to inhabit this relation of the Two in a divergent manner, to see how this separation might function differently. If we were to say that politics is rare, while the regime of politics is ubiquitous, we might also say that, although the discursive apparatus of the regime of translation makes us think otherwise, in fact *translation is rare*.

Let us now take up this question of the two, the question of how to think this problem without simply valorizing the false binary structure of the schema of cofiguration. In the case of translation, the representation of this concept always relies on the image of the structure of communication—one successful and unitary sequence is "translated" (here transposed, recoded, reframed) into an-

other. In this representation, therefore, a figure of the two is always being generated: two sides, two languages, two systems of enunciation. This sense of equivalence—the insistence that translation is a smooth transfer of meaning from one "side" to the other—is given by means of the regime of translation itself, in which the structure of presupposition is always relied on as a primary driving force. Language itself is presupposed as coextensive with national community or with an instituted and given community of belonging, thus rendering all instances of translation into modes of communication or transfer between these already-presupposed entities. In this sense, to insist on the historical act or practice of translation is also an insistence on the instability of this two, an emphasis on the point that this two is in no way a coherent or natural arrangement but rather itself a historical product of the encounter of translation, which is then retrospectively attributed to its origins, and then once again conjured up in order to derive itself from its own presuppositions. This peculiar and circular logic of origin is a general phenomenon of capitalist society, one that we must insist is in no way limited to the questions here under consideration (see Walker 2011, and 2012). But for our purposes, what is distinctive and crucial here is to try to think of how we can understand this figure of the two—of division, scission, torsion, and so forth—without reproducing the other two, the binary structure of cofiguration presented to us in the regime of translation.

If the two of the regime of translation is a two that is located, as we have discussed, within the presupposed terrain of commensurability, we might profitably ask: is this cofigurative pairing really a Two at all? Is it not the case that the secret of the regime of translation is in fact its flattening of the uneven and hazardous *practice* of translation, in which neither "side" preexists the process, itself never a simple teleological instance? If this is all true, should we not refer to the regime of translation not as a Two but as a One? In fact, what the regime of translation and the regime of the political share, in flattening their respective practices into simplistic forms of commensurability, is a refusal of contestation, of the truth of the two, the truth of division and rupture, that another direction is possible, and *one must choose*. One must choose because politics, while contained in the supernumerary eruption that suspends the dominant order by introducing or presenting a structuring principle

that is nevertheless absent, consists also in upholding the *consequences* of this eruption (see Walker 2013). In the guise of the two, what is really presented to us in the regime of translation and in the regime of the political is a concept of the one, of a field without real scission, a space of preordained "difference" within which everything has already been decided, placed into a regime of relation that excludes critical contestation.

In considering this duality of the two, suspended between the historical practice of translation and its representation, we might proceed here by entering into the thinking of the concept of the dialectic, this embattled and even "scandalous" term, a term over which fierce contestations in the theoretical field have been fought. The question of the relation between the analysis of translation and the thought-form of the dialectic is fraught and complex. How can we think these two instances of relation or non-relation together? What is at stake in doing so? First and foremost, before we enter fully into the elaboration of this question, I want to state from the outset my basic thesis: the *politics* of translation remain fundamentally linked to the dialectic precisely because the dialectic is the essential form through which the critical force of antagonism and contestation is preserved. But what is it, in the form of dialectical thought, that remains linked to this split of translation and its representation? Marx reminds us:

> The dialectic in its rational form is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, of its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary. (Marx 1996, 20)

The dialectical torsion between elements is an expression, not of simple commensurability, but of the historically *practical* character of relations, in which the very terms of the relation itself are subject to a fluid motion, a flux of radical singularity, in which the terms—and the putative division between them—torsionally invert into each other, each in turn containing the seeds of the prior results and cyclically passing between forms of solidity. The dialectic is in essence a refusal of the simplistic commensurable stratum of specific difference, a refusal that posits a new and restless

Two, ceaselessly changing in history and practice, against a mere binary treated as two sides of a given field. This "rational form" here is of course the Hegelian "rational," the figure of *intelligibility*, not the concept of rationality linked to the questions of "rational choice," *homo economicus*, and so forth. What is this "rational" figure in the field of translation? It is precisely *politics*. Politics is the form through which the potentiality of translation—the historical act of making, creation, relation in the space of incommensurability—realizes itself in the social life world. In this sense, the politics of translation is an entirely literal phrase: translation, rather than its representation, realizes itself in and through politics, understood here as the field of contestation, raised to a principle: the principle of the supernumerary historical intervention that cannot be merely reduced to an outcome of the existing situation.

The politicality of the split between the historical practice of translation, the pure articulation in the space of the incommensurable, and the representation of translation as communication or exchange between two given sides is a conflict between two images of duality: the regime of translation or schema of cofiguration essentially produces a false image of the two in order to neutralize the real of the Two, the radicality of intervention that the Two expresses. This latter duality is not the simple exchange between one "side" and another, but a two that expresses the split between the state of the situation, in which difference is flattened into commensurability, and the eruptive intervention of *singularity* that presents the void core of the situation, that exposes its regime of cofiguration.

To apprehend the singular is frequently nothing but a reduction to a genealogical or taxonomical structure, a process through which the singular is itself erased *as singular*, precisely in an act of attempting to "locate" it, to "site" (or *cite*) it. The structure of the citation, the historicization, whereby the singular comes to be a stabilized meaning, a stable signification, places the singular into an economy of signification, one that then saturates the original instance with a full density of meaning. When we cite a quotation we do more than simply "locate" a text: we refer a series of words, concepts, and statements to a group of significations—places, names, publishing houses, networks of knowledge, linkages of power, patronage, intellectual heritage and genealogy, modes of analysis, partisan groupings within the production of knowledge, etc.—thereby

overwriting the cited text with a deeply sedimented, ingrained history. This interjection of the historical into the text constitutes one of the key elements through which the singular tends to always *vanish*, emergent but interrupted, in the process of its own elaboration. In turn, just as a statement once cited transforms from an irruptive interjection into a genealogical referent, so too a politics that presents itself as a natural outgrowth of a set of givens or field of historical necessities erases the element of politics proper — antagonism, contestation, the singular exposure of the void of the situation.[1]

One of the peculiar aspects of the question of translation, one crucially pointed out by Sakai, is that translation names both the negative system of capture in which social phenomena are bracketed into simple dualisms (the schema of cofiguration or regime of translation), but also names the affirmative politics through which this gap itself is negotiated or intervened into, in practice, in strategy. Translation always implies strategy. We know that there is a politicality of translation — but the real question is, if this politicality is merely the expression in the political field of the double bind of the regime of translation, how can we develop a specifically *affirmative politics* of translation? Here part of the essential question is the distance, separation or split between the one shore of translation and the other. Can we learn something essential here from the question of politics more broadly? In the political sphere the problem is exactly that you must take a distance from a relationship of antagonism in order to develop your forces on your own terrain. What does this tactical consideration mean for the politics of translation?

The representation of translation makes the social space of incommensurable and radical heterogeneity into a simple relation of two already-determined sides. But this two, as we have noted, in fact functions in a univocal manner, suspending the radical difference of the two under the homogenizing force of the one, the field in which specific difference is already included in its count of the situation. In contrast to this false pairing, politics consists in the *active* and *forceful* production of a two where previously there was

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[1] On the thought of singularity, see Lazarus, especially 1996 and 2013. I intend to extensively discuss the unique and original work of Lazarus on another occasion.

only one: the act of division here is of a decisively different character than that of the regime of translation, in which division is only a simulacrum of difference. Politics, in this sense, precisely consists in the radical act of making two sides appear—two antagonistic classes, two lines, two positions—and in refusing the two (the schema of cofiguration) produced by the situation itself and in which we find nothing but a field of mutually reinforcing complicities. Let us take the example of class—the quintessential social category of capitalist society—in thinking the possibility of a politics of translation:

The simple class contradiction is a permanent structural fact, economically locatable (weak correlation), while the class struggle is a process of particular conditions, entirely political in essence, which is not deducible from the simple weak correlation. To confuse the class contradiction with the class struggle, to practice the correlative indistinction of the contradiction, is the philosophical tendency of economism, workerism, the Marxism of drowsiness and the classroom. (Badiou 2009, 24)

In the same way that the "simple class contradiction" is a structural fact of the situation under which it exists (world capitalism), so too the "regime of translation" which establishes the civilizational-colonial division of labor is a structural fact of the "international world," the world constructed from the unit of the nation–state. What this means in practice is that a *politics* of translation cannot begin from the mere "structural fact" of translation—the fact that significations and social relations are parceled out and distributed according to the schema of separation and classification as discrete and holistic entities—but must begin instead from the *active negation* of this fact. Such a politics would not refuse the concept "translation," but would attempt to enter into it from another direction, another mode of possibility, a way to "apprehend singularity without making it disappear" (Badiou 2005, 30), without making it disappear under the weight of its own name.

Just as politics can never confuse the class contradiction—the mere fact of the situation—with the class struggle, the active and inventive intervention that cannot be accounted for in the terms of the situation, so too a politics of translation must never conflate the representation of translation with the rare and singular encounter of translation. A politics of translation would consist in the *apprehension* of singularity, an apprehension that would hold it in

tension, refuse to subsume it under the weight of its own surrounding economy, but that would sustain its visibility in the midst of a regime of representation dedicated to rendering it invisible. In a time when the mutually reinforcing civilizational narcissisms of area studies and the representations of the international world are being constantly presented in the schema of cofiguration, the political and historical work of translation remains a decisive task. Elaborating new political modes of relation, actively creating new linkages and solidarities beyond the simplistic communicative model that we are given by the regime of translation in which we are immersed is a task that reminds us of the center of a politics of translation: a new and open search for the possibilities of the common, but an uncanny common, a common that disturbs our sense of inherited belonging and that suspends our fantasies of natural affiliations. Only through a careful consideration of the politics of translation can we hope to produce this hazardous and contingent possibility of the common, a new mode of life desperately needed in the global present.

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