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More Thoughts on Cultural Translation

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I start by thanking the translators. This is a benign situation of simultaneous translation. It will not matter if Spivak's deathless prose is not correctly translated. The situation is, however, a reminder of what I think in contemporary globality, although not a result of globalization as such, is the model of translation for us.

Historically one thinks of the Arabs. They were great translators, imperial translators; they had a completely different philosophy of translation from Schleiermacher, the thinker most abundantly quoted in this conference. One thinks for example of the extraordinary fact that both Ibn Rushd and Aquinas read translations of Aristotle, in Arabic and Latin, but Aquinas also read Ibn Rushd in Latin.[1]

Rada Ivekovic will appreciate that one of the Indic classical languages is called Sanskrit, meaning, more or less, "refined," and the word prakrt, naming the so called Creole, means, more or less "natural." Since nature pre-dates refinement, philosophically the Creole precedes the original. We need to think about the implications of such an intuition. One of the boldest acts of Gautama Buddha was to decide to compose his doctrines in a Creole. It was an unbelievable act of daring; as a Prince, he certainly had the right to go to the refined language, but it was

part of his critique of institutionalized religion not to do so. However we invoke Buddhism, we have to remember that within a century that initial radical gesture had been destroyed through translation into the refined language and naming the translation the greater vehicle. These interesting events happened before the Germans stumbled upon the fact of translation. We need to think about this at a translation conference.

But, what I was invoking in terms of the simultaneous translators here in this room was that today, the model for translation is the simultaneous translation at Truth Commissions. Such translation emphasized the inevitability of betrayal, which gnaws at the heart of the difference between the speaker and the translator. When one reads the accounts of these translators –in the Balkans, in Latin America, in South Africa– it is precisely the trauma of having fictively to represent something that is coming in the future, in other words the testimony of the speaker, as the translator's lived past, that looms as the task of the translator. This particular temporal betrayal, this responsibility, which is much more than being faithful to what is being said; this particular thing is what makes it almost impossible for these translators to last. What we are told by people who work in such situations is that the turn-over is very fast. So I would like to suggest that we think not only about models such as the great translators of the past, but learn this lesson of our contemporaneity.

I have to confess that I have been unable to get my head around the subject of this conference. I will share with you my failure. This is how the conference describes itself: "'home is where I understand and where I am understood,' wrote Karl Jaspers once" You begin. That is also interesting: Is citation necessary, when we talk about something that is as unmediated as our dwelling? Is it always a story of mediation, however successful? Is it necessary to

depend upon citation to be told what our home is? Or what is our mother tongue?

Let us continue with the self-description of the conference: "If this home today is our globalized world, then its mother tongue cannot be but a translation, both linguistically and culturally." I cannot really get my head around these words: "our globalized world" and "it must be a translation." What is a "globalized world," I ask. Only a part of us lives as a subject in the globalized world, but how are we calling it "a home?" Where do we pay our taxes? How is it, that anybody's home today is "our globalized world?" Because things move fast? Because there are specific groups of migrants who have crowded old Europe? As walls have gone up between the US and Mexico, between Israel and Palestine, and neither India nor China will let the Tibetans cross a border, we are wishfully thinking of a world without borders, because European states can cross into each other? This is colonial behaviour.

Westphalia belongs to European history. In the 18th century it was thought that it opened a world for Europe, but we are now in the 21st century. It's just an incident in European history. It has nothing, no purchase in the way nation states are thought of today. I would like to speak a little bit about Africa here.

I hope some of you will read a conversation that my student Ben Baer and I have recorded for the 20th anniversary issue of Rethinking Marxism.[2] We are critical of *Le Monde diplomatique* and its invocation of alliances with feudality in the global and then we turn toward Africa.

Why do we turn toward Africa? Because the colonial adventure in Africa did not last more than one hundred years. It's not a story like the one that we are forever talking about. When the

colonialists left Africa, they left impossible borders that masqueraded as partitions of nation states. Africa is going to give us something, which will be quite different from our old ideas of the ineluctable connection between nations and states. We have not spoken about Africa for these last two days. Yet it is not the Balkans or South Asia which is readiest to offer something other than the nation-state.

The partition of Africa by the imperial colonial powers lead ultimately to the establishment of some forty-eight new states, most of them with clearly defined boundaries, okay. The creation of the states has proofed to be more of a liability. Had the boundaries of these states been laid down in accordance with any well defined rational criteria and in full cognition of the ethno-cultural, geographical and ecological realities of Africa, the outcome would have been different. But here now, each independent African state is made up of a whole host of different ethno-cultural groups and nations, having different historical traditions and therefore interstate boundary disputes. Not only did these artificial boundaries create multi-ethnic states, they run across pre-existing groups, ethnicities, states, kingdoms and empires. The Bakongo are divided by the boundaries of the Congo, Angola and Gabon; some of the Ewe live in Ghana, some in Togo, others in Benin. The Akan are found in the Ivory Coast and Ghana; the Somalia are shared among Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The Senufo live in Mali, the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso etc. Third problem, this is even more interesting, the uneven sizes and unequal natural resources and economic potentialities of these states. Some of the states that emerge from the partition were giants, like the Sudan, area of approximately 967.000 square miles, Congo 906.000 square miles, Algeria 920.000 square miles, Nigeria 357.000 square miles, others like the Gambia 4.000 square

miles, Lesotho and Burundi 11.000 each. Some states have miles and miles of coast line, while others are landlocked with no access to the sea, the latter Mali, Burkina Faso (Upper Volta), Niger, Chad, Central African Republic and finally the Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana – no borders; and then some states like the Gambia and Somalia have only a border or two to police, others have four or more and Congo has seven. How can such handicapped states solve the problem of developement. How can a state without access to the Sea or without fertile land really develop? Can one imagine the problems of security and of smuggling confronting these states with so many borders to patrol? [3]

So, when we are talking about nation states, let's think about this kind of adjudication. Let us not linger with old ideas about linguistic nation states as a given. Hannah Arendt was prescient when she talked about the fact that nation states, the connection of nation and state is just a blip in history.[4] Another blip is the welfare state and communism. Someone has to write an 18th Brumaire of the Bolshevik revolution.[5] In that essay Marx suggested that the French Revolution had only succeeded in consolidating the power of the executive in France. It sometimes seems that what the Bolshevik revolution finally brought about is a kind of restoration of a feudality without feudalism. This feudality reclaims the European story of language and nation tied together into nation states at the transition from historical feudalism culminating in Westphalia, declares its break up and talks about a globalized home. Once you look at Africa that narrative does not have much purchase. Africa is not only emerging markets, offset by the United Nation's Millennium Goals. It can also be seen as a laboratory for thinking and doing non nation-centred states. There is no connection between the language boundaries of Africa and so

called national boundaries. This is not merely the case of the existence of tribal languages, although that too is important, as in the case of Latin America. In the Indic context, by contrast, what is interesting is early bilingualism between aboriginal and Indo-European languages, since it is not a European encounter. So again, what is our model of translation? Let us think about these histories, hardly peripheral, before we begin to wind up our conference.

I do not think you can know cultures. When we move from a linguistic translation into cultural translation we are providing ourselves with an alibi. We are, here and now, standing in the Eastern kingdom, -- das öster Reich -- and the next parish is the Balkans. We are at the crossroads of the Habsburgs, the Ottomans, and the Russian Empires. When in this context the European radical wants to be kind to migrant populations and transfers from language into cultural translation, it is an alibi.

Anthropologists must of course attempt to describe cultures as a doctor must medicalize bodies. But in a context where radical Europeans are attempting to be responsible and benevolent toward their former subjects, culture is the last thing that can be known or translated. What people call transculture is culture as it happens. Culture alive is its own counter-example. Transculturation is not something special and different. It is a moment in a taxonomy of the normality of what is called culture. To assign oneself the special task of cultural translation or plotting cultural translation has therefore to be put within a political context. Cultures cannot be known, languages can be known. Languages lead you to a certain lingual memory, which then begins to make you participants in a cultural production, where this irreducible counter-example by which culture moves begins to become your responsibility. That's a rather different situation.

You were comfortable about the word culture in this audience. I appreciated Jon Solomon's distinction between "viral" and "bacterial" cultures. But I cannot make a move into such big defining situations, because I believe that every definition or description of culture comes from the cultural assumptions of the speaker.

This is so easily said. It is so easy to agree with this. But what are cultural assumptions? Are they broad clusters of arguments? Are they simply a version of the "we are better" that every group feels even when it is being implied by reversal? Or, that uneasy bond, that one expat feels for another when they are out of the country? In their denial they are cultural assumptions. Sometimes the call for culture is in response to the presence of the "global" in our everyday lives, as in your conference description. The lower you go in class, the more the claim for "culture" becomes indistinguishable from the claim for an equal share in the world' s goods: political, military, religious ... Please notice that I am calling religion a worldly good. This is where gender comes in. Whatever your theology, you have to admit that if culture is a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions loosely held by loosely outlined groups of people, it maps negotiations between the sacred and the profane by way of the relationship between the sexes. We have to access sexual difference in terms of how cultures negotiate, not simply by placing national-cultural adjectives. However much you may want to, you simply cannot do it through wild anthropology and a desire to transculturate. As I have repeated many times in classroom teaching and published prose: history is larger than personal goodwill.

As agents we try to restore rights and provide means for institutional validation.

Subject formation is a different area of the instrumentalization of sexual difference in culturing. In that context one must think of culture as process. One could do worse than Raymond Williams, who taught us to think of culture as the synchronic dance of diachronic and political moves: archaic, residual, dominant, emergent, alternative, oppositional, pre-emergent. If you want to play with that one, you really have to put in, as Williams doesn't, sexual difference. It is the only material plus/minus with which cultures build an entire semiotic system. It didn't happen yesterday. Gendering is not something outside that you factor into your cultural descriptions. We have not heard a great deal about gendering during this conference.

If for the moment we accept that religion as culture, or culture as religion, like any sign system, operates by way of differences, and the only tangible one is sexual difference, then we will see why in popular geopolitics, the claim to recognition and sovereignty is expressed, sometimes by urban guerrilla tactics, but unavoidably mixed up with gender management. And there, I think, as many of you know, the problem of cultural translation becomes an extremely complicated thing; the relationship between fidelity, betrayal, original, translation, becomes incredibly different from the theoretical stuff that we have so far discussed. It's all very well as long as you are discussing language. But as soon as you want to deal with culture and you feel that you ought to undertake cultural translation, this particular project becomes almost impossible.

On the level of culture as loosely held assumptions and presuppositions change is incessant. With the generations the first language changes, and the relationship to whatever is called "the culture of origin" also changes. You cannot therefore speak about the first generation of migrants as giving you a lasting example of anything. This is to be distinguished from the normative conduct

of culture as its own irreducible counterexample. Immigrant groups are not static people, come to find justice in the metropole. It's the development of the allochthonic European. To repeat, then, the idea of the first language is changeful –think first language, not mother tongue. Every infant learns a language, that we will call a first language. Sometimes in a very multi-lingual situation the infant doesn't know which language was first. That's fine, doesn't have to be pinpointed for what I am going to now say. Here is the learning of the first language by an impressionistic description, which you can take or leave. The infant invents a language. The parents begin to recognize it. Somehow, without knowing quite how it happens, this gets inserted into a language with a history, a past, a future, which will last after the child dies, but nonetheless the child will then invent himself or herself in that language. It will become his or her own language. This learning process and this alone sets going the meta-psychological circuits and produces lingual memory. Only one language is learnt like that. If you're in a multi-lingual situation it is possible that what I am calling one language is actually, two or more named languages; nothing is at stake there.

Here a slight digression: both Etienne Balibar and Sandro Mezzadra think equivalence is not such a good idea. Think about the fact that labour as power can only be computed by way of equivalence. This is where Marx was completely counter-intuitive, too counter-intuitive for most of the theorists of alienation, alienated labour and reification. Marx's idea was to recognize that quantification – I am using the modern word for the abstract average –was the power of labor, labor power, and, in the hands of the working class a tool to turn capitalism around and use capital in the service of the social. The idea that there is an equivalence among all languages, because each language as language can activate

the circuits of the meta-psychological in terms of access into linguistic memory is also a useful and usable idea, a "socialized" idea of language. Balibar says that equivalence blurs difference, and so equality is a better word. "Equality" is perhaps a better word for a legal philosopher. What we theorists of cultural politics need is also a little blurring. And I am not arguing cultural equivalence, no. It is only if you felt, and I believe that would be a mistake, that languages are isomorphic with cultures that you would argue that. You then would neglect historical differences between languages, and be in the lala-Land of cultural relativism. When you acknowledge that this equivalence – simply in terms of the fact, that each language (and occasionally a cluster) can actually activate these circuits as first language, nothing more – then, – because this respect is not given to all languages –you can constatively work at the historical difference between the production of cultural power and performatively resist to correct that. This is much more important, it seems to me, than cultural translation. And I do not believe that a mother tongue can be a translation. If it could be, we would not have the translators in that little box in the corner of the room.

I want to make a quick shift here and think about globalization and remember that every self declared rupture is an actively forgotten repetition. And every confident declaration of repetition, must, conversely, make us ask: “But in what ways could it be a rupture as well?” Here is globalization repeated as a rupture: It repeats what Marx predicted as a rupture: that capital wants to move *mit Gedankenschnelle*. It can happen as a rupture with the Silicon chip and now, the biochip. It becomes possible, as rupture, to repeat what was in fact the goal even before: to establish the same system of exchange all over the world. You remove the barriers between the fragile national economies and international capital. The state

becomes the managerial state, redistributive functions disappear. And therefore the possibility of constitutional redress, even if the state were wanting to abide by the constitution, disappears. This is the situation within the globalized state system. It's a divided world.

In this globalization, which is not only world trade, but finance capital turning over many times more now in a day than world trade, there is something like the empiricization of the virtual, so that the distinction between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime, the idea that the sublime can only be in nature, has to be revised. According to Kant what happens in the sublime is that by subreption, in place of declaring the subject's moral will as sublime we say the mountain is sublime, the falls are sublime and so on. That is no longer possible, because in fact in this incredible network, which is the possibility of globalized capital, finance capital moving in this way, the general equivalent no longer money but data, the subject's position is both controlling (because of programming and market decisions) but also controlled by a network infinitely larger than the subject. -- that entire notion of the sublime and the subject's relationship to the sublime has been revised in ways where one doesn't know if we as part are bigger than the whole or subsumed in it. The hardware is in some ways like the psychic apparatus and the software is the network within which the subject is contingent in the way in which a stopped clock gives correct time twice a day, – by chance. If we move into globalization in this way, then we need to begin theorizing somewhat differently and not just by way of antic notions of language, culture, and translation.

We will have to be able to think that for each one of us and groups of us, globalization is an island of languaging in a field of traces. Just descriptively, upstream from politics, globalization is an island

of languaging in a field of traces. What, then, is a trace? Always remember that it is not an "-isness". A sign system promises meaning. A trace does not promise anything. It is something that seems to suggest, that there was something before. Think of the world's richness of languages. And then think of what happens with the visual. I really began to think of this much more carefully, when I was with Anish Kapoor three or four weeks ago. He is making a colossal sculpture for the Guggenheim and I was asked to write an essay, so I spent three days with Anish. As I'm trying to figure out what it is that this very smart guy wants ,– I am beginning to realize that he is trying to represent traces -- Zwischenräume der Zeit.[6] That's not a sign system, it's like a Spur. It's like elephant shit on the forest floor. It can be either, that there were elephants here. Or it could be, that you are hallucinating. Or yet it could be, that someone put it there in order to be a decoy for you. Or it could be that you are mistaken, elephant shit does not look like that at all, or – . . . indefinite "inventory of traces."[7] A trace is not . . . a sign. In this connection one inevitably thinks of the established patriarchal convention, still honoured by most legal systems, that I, especially if I am recognizable as a man, am my father's sign and my mother's trace.[8] What is important for us within my argument is that, rather than theorize globalization as a general field of translation which, in spite of all the empiricization of apparently impersonal mechanical translation, in fact privileges host or target, ceaselessly and indefinitely, we should learn to think that the human subject in globalization is an island of languaging – unevenly understanding some languages and idioms with the "first" language as monitor, within an entire field of traces., where "understanding" follows no guarantee. A new call for a different "conceptual" art, a different "simultaneous translation."

I will give you a conclusion without transition and as a question: what should we do, if anything? Remember that earlier conjecture about the mental theatre theorized by way of the concept-metaphor of the relationship between hardware and software. In this situation, in this new situation – which is also a repetition, what is the repeating? The repeating is the coming back of feudality to match the ill-theorized convenience of the apparent convenience of a level playing field – in our case of a generalized translation. That's the repeating: top-down dogooding; even in the name of no top-down, because without deep language learning it is top-down, because translation in fact is a matter of power. Because there is bad conscience in this area, one is obliged to watch countless videos testifying that the people at the bottom are really "doing it themselves." How many NGOs (and sometimes state-run programs) have names signifying self-help? We need sophisticated evaluative techniques here. Emoting is feudality at work. I wish I had more time to explain this. I am myself an activist. I have some experience of how some of the big declarations in the name of the subaltern are in fact produced. On occasion I have been myself active in the production of some of those declarations, because my handwriting is good in Bengali, for example, and I write fast without mistakes. I will not name names, because it is auto-critiques that should be launched in this field. On the other side are racists. But this much I will say and insist upon: there is in fact no equality. Within this field of languages, there is no deep language learning. There is a pressing need to imagine equivalence, as potential first language, among languages.

I would agree with Michaela Wolf, that translation itself then becomes not a prosthetic but an active work, which is not a convenience. The convenience idea, which cannot be given up, should be treated carefully, as a problem, not a solution. If you

look at the many, many translations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you will know what bad faith is contained within the idea of translation. Or if you look at the Afghan constitution, where at the bottom of each page is: "Please consult the original in Dari" and you sit down and look at the Dari and at the English, you begin to think that perhaps it was the English that was translated, that had authority.[9] Translation is a field of power. In the arena of agency, work, then, at upward class mobility rather than cultural translation. Upward class mobility works if the politics of local economies are tended to. It cannot be just contained on metropolitan soil. If the politics of local economies are somewhat shored up then the terrain of migrant acculturation in Europe would at least be altered. I am not alone in saying this.

What happens with upward class mobility? Cultural rights claims generally do not affect well placed persons. These are underclass problems. If I were working in a 7-11, I would not be wearing a sari. As you come up in class, the cultural performative becomes the possibility of performance. So you work with curricula, you work with exhibitions, but the main thing is upward class mobility – not just exhibitions and not just curricula. If this labor is sustained, the Samuel Huntingtons of the world can perhaps be defeated. In Who Are We? "class" is the one word Huntington needs but does not know how to say, let alone articulate with what might resemble an argument.[10] He says that the US underclass does not want Hispanic bilingualism and brings statistics. He says, the deconstructivists – by which he simply means those who think the U.S. is heterogeneous, not those who have read Derrida -- are destroying the American Creed, because the underclass doesn't want bilingualism and the deconstructivists do. He does not realize that what is really required is mechanisms of upward class mobility, sadly lacking in late capitalism. Then the erstwhile underclass

would be able to cherish bilingualism, transforming a hampering cultural performative to an enriching cultural performance. That particular thing Huntington cannot think. And that is why I say that, upon the terrain of agency, we should be rethinking capitalism through upward class mobility and the idea of equivalence among all languages. Not cultural equivalence, but equivalence among all languages – leading to deep language learning. We have to establish the grounding conditions, the Grundbedingungen, in order to undo the harm, that we do to women through the quick gendering that the international civil society brings to "the rest of the world." It is also noticeable that the queer does not really exist within international civil society gender work. There the idea of sex work itself generally suffers from middle class politics, middle class pieties. If we do indeed keep trying to establish those grounding conditions, so that we can undo the harm being done on the gender level through the international civil society and treating gendering with the respect it deserves, because it is the first semiosis of culture itself, then I believe, we will have revised our tasks and not thought too soon, that we share a globalized world, which is our home, where a mother tongue is a translation. Thank you.

Moderation (Hito Steyerl):
Thank you very much Professor Spivak for this rich and multi-faceted talk. I am sure, there will be lots of questions. Just a quick check, are there any immediate reactions already?

Question (Sandro Mezzadra):
Just a question, you were talking about the coming back of the feudality, and I would like to hear you expand a bit more on the concept of feudality, on the way you conceive feudality.

G. Ch. Spivak:
I speak of "feudality without feudalism" on the model of Derrida's “messianicity without messianism”. “Feudality” signifies a mode of production where the value-forum is taken by loyalty. In the international civil society you have self-selected moral entrepreneurs who work on emotions like loyalty. This is particularly true among the activist leaders of the global South who can establish connections with the alter-globalizers in the global North. In a book published by Pluto Press Harriet Fraad makes an interesting argument: that the institution of marriage within advanced capitalism still moves by the kind of feudal values, that Marx describes in the patriarchal family, where affect and loyalty are the terms of exchange by which things are produced etc. If you look in general at the global social movements with generally female leaders, and if you have enough sense of language, if you hang out with them, if you become an intern and go into the movement, you will see, that in fact what is happening, is a benevolent doing good, and not necessarily making the people ready for an intuition of the public sphere. All the arguments with the transnational agencies at the World Social Forum, with the European alter-globalists etc. –take place on the level of feudality without feudalism. In the usual way, there are always exceptions among the subalterns who align themselves with the leaders and become major items of evidence. In those occasional contacts with interpreters, the subaltern is full of smiles, full of support, able to say good things, especially through an interpreter. On the other hand if you analyze in detail and with linguistic and cultural knowledge the way it's actually working, it’s the remnants of the old feudality. In West Bengal, where I have experience in the most backward districts, although zamindari was abolished in 1952, that Latifundia system is well at work, and what the rare but good landowners do (and they are loved by the UNDP con for example,

who, in the absence of linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge, take them to be subalterns, because they do not speak English)– is to constantly litigate against the Party. Well, of course the Party functionaries are not very good on that level, so that is fine; but when these landowners die of course the revenge will be taken on the subaltern. So rather than make it possible through the instrumentalization of the intellectual for the subaltern to be inserted into the circuit of hegemony, an intuition of the public sphere, you have this kind of protective behaviour, where the subaltern must be kept in a condition of subalternity, so that the latifundist can go on litigating on their behalf, fighting with the Party through a subaltern spy system. It's heartbreaking. That's what I mean by the return of a feudality without feudalism.

Question (Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez):
Just a brief question about what you mention as lingual memory, if you could say more about it.

G. Ch. Spivak:
It's not actually my own notion. It comes from an anthropologist called Becker. He has a book called *Beyond Translation* where he writes about learning a language in such a way, that you begin to enter the lingual memory, into, let's say, the sense of humour archived in the language perhaps, into sexual assumptions, which underlie the language perhaps, small things, smaller things than that. It is almost as if – and this is a concept-metaphor – it is almost as if the language has within it not just the rules, that you learn, but an articulated space of differences from any translatable "present" that can produce something like a non-psychologized "memory." Voloshinov's insistence, that the mode of existence of a language is exactly not the dictionary also fits into this. When you access lingual memory you are surprised by it, or other people begin to notice it.

And it's not necessarily academic. It is not coincident with learning the language extremely well institutionally, although institutional learning may be helpful, we are speaking here of a different order of intimacy. We are also not speaking of cultural memory. Cultural memory is a privatization of history and it happens with an insistent collective rememoration "this really happened, this really happened"; one can be deeply suspicious of cultural memory, but lingual memory is an acquired access.

Question from the audience:
In the beginning you mentioned quite briefly, that concerning culture it is crucial to think of gender differences. Could you point out a bit more on its influence on language, on translation, on these keywords; how the gender differences influence language and translation in your view?

G. Ch. Spivak:
There are two things at work here. It's not really language I was talking about. I was talking about cultures. Culture seems to me to be a negotiation between the transcendent and the profane, the worldly. Because without some intuition of transcendence you can neither execute nor mourn, all cultures are cultures of death. Culture in my view must have an intuition of the transcendental. That is the negotiation between the sacred and the profane. How is it worked out? If you are going to work out a system, you need a plus and a minus, you need a difference. Otherwise it won't work. And the primary difference that is accessible to human beings, is sexual difference. I wasn't really talking about gender. I was talking about sexual difference. Sex and gender are not the same thing, of course. Melanie Klein's idea, that birth is a kind of death, an exit from the world of uterine comfort, a life-death in which the child begins to build an ethical system with, at first, need, desire, want leads us also to her thought that all the child has in terms of the

ingredients for that semiotic system is part objects. We feminists we were so nervous about biology in the early days, that when we rediscovered Klein we began to see how sexual difference slowly moved into gendering – we began to conclude that gendering was our first instrument of abstraction – we saw this as the possibility of, the articulation of sexual difference into "culture."

Question (Jon Solomon):
There's an economy of knowledge, that you set up. I think there's a Kantian reading of that, in terms of you can't know the totality ...

G. Ch. Spivak:
... I agree with you, that was too quick ...

Jon Solomon:
... and then – I'm just listing these here – culture is not knowable; and then at various different times you addressed us as an audience with references to something we all know; and of course the whole question of why must I know something, is the fundamental project of critical philosophy, right. So, I don't know it very well, but I just learned about it recently from a paper by Dennis Galvin, there's a practice of joking in Africa, where they by – precisely the kind of populations, who don't ... they are doing translations and they have no sense of nation state whatsoever, and not a nationalized sense of language either; and so I'm really intrigued by this, the original kind of first language, which is an activation – I was reading it in terms of neurobiology, it's an activation of neurocircuits, right – and that that doesn't concern either education or knowledge?

G. Ch. Spivak:
That's a beautiful question. What I should have said, is that languaging is acquirable, not language is knowable. I was talking

about the acquisition of the first languages as the moves that prime the psychic apparatus as it were. As infants we are encountered by the possibility of ourselves through this languaging. It is in fact already tele-communicative, we are indeed already separated from it, we are helpless before it. What we need to be thinking about, and this relates also, Encarna, to your question, is to reproduce a simulacrum of that as we learn. That description of revolutionary practice in the 18th Brumaire, that we all know by heart, that to know a foreign language so well, that when we produce in it, we forget the language stemmed or rooted in us, is a description of deep language learning. Neural networking teaches us that there is hardware, the psychic apparatus, and software, the place where the languaging is beginning to get away from us. In that network the "we" is contingent like the two moments in a stopped clock when it gives correct time. People tell us that some day, with the biochip in full force, stuff will be uploaded into our heads, so that we will become altogether more computerlike. ; But the differential between first and other language learning will not disappear. Your question also brings in the theory of change, that the event escapes the conventions of the performative. It is a pointing toward the future, because our way of thinking will not be able to contain it; it's not mystical, but it's a genuine theory of change. That's why I talked about building the Grundbedingungen, you can call it building the infrastructures. The event is going to escape the conventions within which we will so carefully build. Yet we have to have plans, we can't just say: "Oh the event is escaping."

Question (Tom Waibel):
It was very important that you mentioned the situation in Africa, which in fact wasn't mentioned at all during the conference, but I am not able to understand what the special particularity of Africa in this context is. Because if we see, for example, the American

continent, where we have more than 65 languages in Mexico, for example, extending the borders to Central America; where we have nearly same situations of non-access to the sea in Bolivia with more than 30 languages that are distributed all over Amazonia. So I cannot cope what is the particularity and why your emphasis that in Africa will start to rise something, that cannot start and not develop not in India, not in South America or anywhere else.

Moderation (Hito Steyerl):
Can I add a question? I would like to add a question. Today we have been speaking about fidelity towards different political events, like fidelity towards the events of 1989 for example; other events have been mentioned. In your talk you have been bringing up at least two other political events, for example in talking about Africa, I think maybe the founding political event of these impossible borders is the Congo Conference, which took place 1884/85 in Berlin; or if you mentioned the Arab tradition of translation, it is inextricably tied with the historical event, of course, of 1492 when the first school of translators, which was an Arab school situated in Granada was destroyed. So I think, we have had a lot of references towards different historical events and different, let's say, examples of faithfulness towards these events. Now, I ask myself – and I think your question is a very good example of that, one could go on adding to the list, endlessly – and it seems to me, that this potentially infinite addition creates another example of let's say competing paradigms which try to claim universal value. And it seemed to me as if you offered two, let's say, ways out from this endless addition of different political events; and I would like you to elaborate on these: First of all the field of traces; I was very intrigued by that, although I must confess, I'm not sure whether I understood that correctly, but let's say addressing the field of traces as a potentially common ground, which belongs to a different order

than this endless succession of localities. Does it offer the possibility of translation between people who are loyal to different political events, and enable common articulation beyond different political horizons?
Would that relieve us from the task of endlessly adding on missing places, situations or events? Is that a solution? And the other one is of course, you were mentioning upward class mobility, how can we talk about that, and how can we address that as a possibility of articulating different political events to each other without having to remain faithful or to betray those events? Is this a way of addressing the vertical dimension of globalisation, the class dimension instead of the horizontal, speak geographical one? And what sort of translation do we need with respect to that?

G. Ch. Spivak:
This is a huge barrage of questions, it feels like an oral exam. First of all, Tom, you are absolutely correct. But why need we refuse Africa? Of course it can be Latin America, it can be India etc., but I put it in as a kind of scandalous gesture, because God knows, that Hegel on down, people have been unable to wrap their heads around Africa. Groups writing on nothing but mnemonic substances, had to be defined as without writing. There is never a possibility of people wanting to begin there, wanting to find something there – unless they are Africans or African-Americans. We must also remember that African languages are not considered aboriginal languages, they are simply African languages. The "lettered city" type approach is not necessarily available there. Pan-Africanism deals with it in very interesting ways. So I was offering Africa not as a kind of winning the competition of victimology turned around as source of enlightenment. I can think that it can begin anywhere, it can begin in New York City. I do want still to offer this incredible act of border making –this heterogeneous

bordering, the inequality of size, the incommensurability of frontiers etc. What I am offering is a principle that would change, would be normed case by case. It is just that the international plan of socialism must also relate to the shoring up of the politics of local economies. No, you can't say it without the local, it seems to me.

Question from the audience:
Thank you. I just want to say that it was not a mistake for Prof. Spivak to mention Africa in this conference, because Prof. Spivak has pleaded for an equivalence among languages. But we are living in a world of a terrible ambivalence, where we have on the one side the languages of the powerful and on the other side the languages of powerless. Are you proposing to solve that terrible ambivalence?

G. Ch. Spivak:
It's a comment, yes? You are not asking me, how I'm proposing to solve it. You are saying that I am trying to solve the problem of ambivalence by asking people to think equivalence.

... Yes I want you perhaps to come again ... to tackle again that ambivalence.

G. Ch. Spivak:
Thank you first of all for your supportive remarks. My solution is an academic solution, my friend. You cannot imagine how hard it is. I have for the last 17 years been trying to change the structure of what is called the acquisition of the orphan languages – I think that's a disgracefully ambivalent word – within language learning in the United States. And I'm a person, you may not know anything about me, I'm a person with some institutional power, this is my 44th year of fulltime teaching; so I have really thrown my entire energies behind it, and there is extreme resistance. It's a structural

change, curricular change, not just conferences and seminars and think tanks. Universities and in fact the entire national scene resists this mightily. That's how one knows that something is at stake.

Moderation (Hito Steyerl):
Questions? Okay than it is not a question but rather a remark: I wondered, can certain secrets only be expressed in forms of quotation or citation? Because I was thinking about the example you gave in the beginning of your talk, the example of the translators in truth commissions. So I ask myself, can certain testimonies only be represented in form of their translation or their quotation? Because given the state of a capitalist attention economy, media economy, I think that any sort of concrete experience or authentic statements about traumata, which people had to live through, would be put under extreme stress; they would be dismissed as, let's say, a concrete experience. So I asked myself, in this case can those statements, maybe like or unlike those secrets, can they only be expressed in form of translation or of quotation?

G. Ch. Spivak:
I would invite you to look at the work of Ritu Birla, who has proposed historiography itself as a secret encounter. This is a very bold interdisciplinary move. She is a historian, she teaches at the University of Toronto, she just received tenure, her first book is about to come out from Duke University Press. She proposes, you know with all of the barrage of quantified history that's coming along, historiography itself as, in your sense, the secret encounter. So thank you for that.

Moderation (Hito Steyerl):
Any other questions?

Question from the audience:
You uttered distrust with the concept of cultural memory. Is that so, because of the structuralist background of the concept of cultural memory? Or, if not so, why do you distrust this concept and what do you think about the translatability of historical frames of reference as a narratively constructed language system in a way, historical concept; let's not call it a concept or a frame of cultural memory, but a historical interpretation of certain cultural realm.

G. Ch. Spivak:
A certain prevalent political use of the idea of cultural memory is to me a little suspect. As I said it seems to me to be a kind of privatization of history, using the idea of interiority implicit in the notion of memory as a justification of politics. I'm thinking Israel, of course. The human characteristic of wanting to explain still deploys itself in not immediately recognizable rites of initiation, such as education as preparation for war. I'm thinking the situation of Islam, of course. I belong to an 86 percent violent majority in a country of a billion people and my passport is Indian; so I see constantly this kind of rememoration: "don't you remember how ..." and then some crap against the Muslims. Cultural memory is in the process of being constructed and Aryanism is being constructed. What, then, is history? I don't know; I talked about historiography – as something that takes its share of culturality – I think in the case of Bulgaria, for example, this is a fantastically interesting thing, the 500 years of Ottoman control over against 70 years of the Soviets, the relative importance of these two occupations, that's a cultural fact. Our British colonialism and the extraordinary Mogul imperial period and Ranajit Guha's denial that Persian was an Indian language – these are the culturalities of the historical which should be investigated.

Moderation (Hito Steyerl):
Doesn't seem to be any more questions. Thank you very much Gayatri Spivak for patiently answering all these questions and for being with us tonight. Thank you.

G. Ch. Spivak:
Thank you for inviting me.

[1] For a sense of how different a philosophy of translation would emerge from a consideration of the Arabic history of translation, one begins with Dmitri Gutas, *Arabic culture: the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‚Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)*, New York: Routledge, 1998, keeping in mind that the Greeks were not the only folks whose texts the Arabs translated. I know of no good comprehensive text that dockets the Arabs' movement Eastwards. For a spirited partisan discussion of the Aquinas affair, it is instructive to read Majid Fakry, *Averroes, Aquinas and the Rediscovery of Aristotle in Western Europe*, Washington: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1997.

[2] Benjamin Conisbee Baer and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, „Redoing Marxism in Gigi Cafe," *Rethinking Marxism* (forthcoming).

[3] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, Johns Hopkins symposia in comparative history, 15th, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989 (1991 printing), p. 95-6.

[4] Judith Butler and I have discussed this in Butler and Spivak, Who Sings the Nation-State?, London: Seagull Books, 2007.

[5] Karl Marx, „The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,“ in *Surveys from Exile*, tr. David Fernbach, New York : Penguin Books in asociation with New Left Review, 1992, c1973.

[6] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*, Leipzig: Insel, 1931.

[7] Antonio Gramsci, “The History of the Subaltern Classes,” in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, tr. *Prison Notebooks*, New York : International Publishers, 1971, p. 52-55.

[8] This has been discussed in Spivak, “Notes Toward A Tribute to Jacques Derrida,” *differences* 16.3 (2005), p. 102-113,. For Derrida’s own early definition of a trace, see Derrida, “Differance,” in Allan Bass, tr. *Margins: Of Philosophy*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 23.

[9] See G. Ch. Spivak, “Close Reading,” *PMLA* 121.5 (October 2006), p. 1608-1617; and G. Ch. Spivak, *Other Asias*, Boston: Blackwell, 2007, p. 14-57, for more expanded discussions.

[10] Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: the Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York : Simon & Schuster, 2004.