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Simultaneous – From Wage Form to Space Form?

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I.

Interpreting is an extreme form of translating that condenses in a different form and intensity all the tasks arising with other types of translating. It requires the interpreter to make decisions in a fraction of a second, for which the translator of written texts, for instance, has at least a certain period of time. A translator can consult dictionaries, glossaries or the Internet, ask colleagues for advice or sometimes ask the author. This results in a *spatialization* of one's own work, which is organized on the one hand through new forms of communication, such as email or participation in Internet forums, as well as through collaboration with specialized agencies or institutes, but on the other hand through the use of libraries, archives, etc. Of course, *interpreting* is rarely an activity that is practiced without preparation, special skills or a certain background knowledge. In this sense, *simultaneous translation*, as I understand it here, involves a principle, a concept, which is in reality confronted with phenomena in the most diverse nuances.

The “integration” of translators into existing structures in recent years, however, has undergone a crucial change. Integration into offices, agencies or cooperatives has probably decreased in numbers, which has to do, among other things, with the increased opportunities that translators now have to offer their services more or less globally. In this case, however, “globalization” does not mean that the competence of translating, similar to certain consumer articles, is actually equally in demand in every region of the world, but rather that it is now possible, without greater organizational effort, to carry out jobs from Berlin, Vienna, Budapest or Bratislava, which are required, for instance, in Brussels. Translators working as the new self-employed are moving closer, to a certain degree, to the extreme situation that exists for interpreting: they are increasingly compelled to supply an entire infrastructure along with their specific service, and it depends on their respective integration in certain forums, communities and networks, whether they are capable of achieving a sustainable position within a chain of value creation that has been dynamized in this way.

What makes the work of translating *meaningful*, in other words productive, is in danger of being marginalized here in the face of the constraints, such as time pressure or the necessity of maintaining an infrastructure that is a lean as possible: the deliberating and comparing, checking different sources, consulting with colleagues, discussing and evaluating new variations, etc. All of these activities are hard to reconcile with the logic of an immediate, almost simultaneous adaptation of the offer to the demand. A translator, whose task within the value creation chain consists of covering the peaks of the volume of commissions for a certain agency, will probably have great difficulty in achieving a life-sustaining income.

II.

More generally formulated, we are dealing with translation work within the value creation chain that has gone astray: what appears to the contractor as a possibility for expanding value creation, presents itself from the perspective of the self-employed translator as insufficient income. *Translated* into the terms of Keynesian theory, this means that we are witnessing here a phantom pain of political economy, an expansion of the "marginal efficiency of capital"[1], which faces neither a concomitant wage increase nor lasting employment growth or the assertion of social, ecological or cultural interests. What plays out at the margins of value creation is to be understood as a lab experiment seeking to organize the simultaneity of the most diverse interests by outsourcing essential risks and problem situations. It does so by providing a symbolic justification for the divestment of responsibility, namely cost reduction. The new forms of work are worn thin by this justification. In order to employ their creativity, they must participate in the game of the market.

"In reality consumers lack information, time and means to assert their interests; IBM, Microsoft and the other giants can buy up small innovative businesses, instead of laboriously developing the innovations themselves; there are resources that actually belong to the community, but whose productivity can be easily and cheaply grabbed up to be exploited at the cost of future generations."[2]

The *simultaneous*, represented by the task of achieving a diversification of income sources against the background of increased time pressure and reduced infrastructure, is expressed at the level of the acts, posited by the solo-self-employed, through a manifold internalization of space. The more the perspective of

direct conflict vanishes from work relationships – and who should a translator enter into a direct conflict with, in light of her situation? – the more the accomplished work does not lead to resistance against poor payment and inadequate social security, but rather to mimetic behavior in terms of expanding marginal efficiency: the pressure of innovation rises, creativity becomes a compulsion and the boundaries of psycho-physical pressure are increasingly shifted. Self-employed translators will attempt to work for several agencies at the same time, sign up in the registers of online services, establish contacts to companies or institutions, or take over other jobs such as editing, correcting, etc. In this way, translators are essentially no different from most others in the field of flexible forms of work. Christian Marazzi summarizes this fact succinctly by characterizing postfordism as such that in it

"*the dimension of time organizes the social working day*. A multitude of activities by individual workers are coordinated within this same dimension of time 'from a distance'. What still remains essential for the social working day is cooperation – not within the same space, however, but within the same time. The space of cooperation is now developing, in a sense, 'within' the activities of the individual workers, on the one hand because new technologies convey the information that previously had to be transported across spatial distances, and on the other hand because the socialization of the worker is no longer so dependent on the 'social contact' that was ensured in the type of cooperation described by Marx by the fact that all were moving in the same space."[3]

For this reason, Marazzi proposes the hypothesis that in terms of redefining the social relationship between capital and labor, space will take the place of the wage form.[4] Naturally, the fordist organization of labor has always had to do with the structuring, permeation and subjugation of space to the principles of

management. Yet whereas the form of wage labor developed a certain mode for compensating, organizing and managing work time, which was based on implementing an increase of productivity through a homogenization of the processes, in other words through *the spatialization of time*,[5] the parallelizing and serializing of physical and communicative acts, postfordist space creates an original heterogeneity of demands, obligations and tasks, between which the subject – negotiating or choosing – shifts. In other words, we are dealing more with a *temporalization of space*, which seeks to conjoin many heterogeneous points through a sequence of acts of choosing and deciding and arranges the relationless one-after-another *qualitatively* along the decision of before/after.[6]

Because of the central moment of deciding or choosing, time assumes a different significance than in the regime of wage labor, within which it was a matter of excluding chance and uncertainty as far as possible by organizing accordingly. The consequence of the altered significance of chance, which is elevated to a principle of organization, is that the dispositive necessary for the socialization of the worker is largely learned, in the narrower sense, cultivated and developed outside the world of work.[7] Philippe Zarifian defines the new form of work both succinctly and correctly when he writes that it is a matter of "steering events".[8] It is a matter of reacting to what is *coming* and of finding the communicative means, with which a new fact, a new situation or a new problem can accordingly be assessed, represented, changed or solved.

III.

I would like to conclude with a mental image that can claim no immediate practical relevance. At best, it could serve to suggest narratives and processes of exchange within the new regime of

labor, or to support processes of reflection in existing organizational experiments. In keeping with this mental image, if we wanted to attempt to make what is conflictual about the relationship of labor and capital visible within concrete contexts, we would have to distinguish between two forms of the spatialization of tasks, which are the basis, so to speak, of the difference between interpreting and translating.

1. If the spatialization appears as capital, it takes the form of deciding, of scarcity, of externally determined cooperation or isolation. There is no time left even to decide between variations; the pressure to objectify one's own knowledge and put it to use before the others, if at all possible, is very strong. On the other hand, the work of deciding must be performed, because this makes up the essence of the worker in postfordism. This work only exists as innovative, difference-producing work, even if the differences produced and to be produced are often enough only pure rhetorics, pure marketing and purely superficial effects. Accordingly, the space in which the work must assert itself functions as *strategic memory*, as the mobilization of a capacity that is to be made immediately accessible. The point is to steer the respective event, to decide which track to follow, and to pursue the various possibilities that may be derived from the task with as little deliberation as possible. The simultaneity that becomes objectified in another language in simultaneous translation as rendering emerging content consists, from the general perspective of the worker, of a surplus of stimuli that must be ordered meaningfully in keeping with the logic of the event.

Husserl describes the difference between potency and act in a reflection on the phenomenon of simultaneity:

"The many primal sensations flow away and from the beginning have at their disposal the same running-off modes, except that the series of primal sensations constitutive of the enduring immanent objects are variously prolonged, corresponding to the various durations of the immanent objects. They do not all make use of the formal possibilities in the same way."[9]

In order to maintain the unity of time-founding consciousness, Husserl has to retreat to an extremely formal level. *Simultaneously* occurring sensations, such as that of a color or a sound, endanger the identity of time-consciousness, because the *series* that thus develop from one and the same primal sensation and constitute a duration each take a different course. According to Husserl, however, identity is guaranteed by the *now*, from which the various sensations originate, and which can be unequivocally determined as such in the flow of time-consciousness. The difference between the sensations relates to the content (color, sound), but not to the form, the now of simultaneity. To this extent, there is – to phrase it more pointedly – only *one* language of sensation. Translation, which could be defined as generating an equally primal, but different sensation, has to be ascribed to the sameness of the form of the now. It is a matter of translating as *literally* as possible.

2. The matter presents itself differently if we presume that the possibilities resulting from the primal sensations do not arise from a uniform form, but rather from a *horizon of meaning*, which is intersubjectively constituted by it and must be conveyed in the same way. In the words of Wittgenstein, it is not so much a matter of determining the original truth value of a sensation of sound, color or anything else, but rather of understanding its language, which is engendered through accord.[10] In this respect, the fact that the running-off phenomena "do not make use of the formal possibilities in the same way" is not *contingent*, but rather is

explained by the fact that the linguistic-communicative treatment of the sensual material, the materiality of sensation, is what first creates its form. What this involves is specifically the type of symbolization as spatialization, of which Christian Marazzi says that it is accomplished "within" the activities of the workers. Although they appear to be left to themselves, in fact this interiority means that they are constantly newly surveying the space of communication. The unity that time-consciousness is still capable of as working subjectivity is, in fact, translation work, the production of signs that contribute to building the infrastructure that tends to be lacking due to the reduction of the regime of wage labor. It is translation work that is very productive and also assumes an important function within the productive cycle, but in which there is no framework for organized conflictual action.

This leads us to the second type of spatialization, which understands this as the self-reliant organization of the worker. I presume that it is impossible to return to the regime of wage labor. This does not mean that I believe it could ever be completely abandoned, but in my view, the tremendous significance that accrues to communication and therefore to free, deregulated, self-reliant work in the productive cycle demands completely new forms of organizing the labor force in terms of protection and conflictuality. As workers, we are prisoners of events, so to speak, of that which is to come, which we must steer translating or interpreting. So the question remains of where we are capable of steering it to. A somewhat schematic answer to the problem could be suggested by starting from the question of which possibilities arise for pursuing one's own interests, i.e. ensuring autonomous access to the "formal possibilities" of the running-off of a primal sensation. In the sense of what has been said, the answer is to tend to transform interpreting into translating, to create possibilities of

exchange and deliberation, to enrich and extend choosing and deciding with criteria and considerations. The point is to make the symbolic infrastructure, which we are already forced to constantly produce, usable for ourselves and others in the form of sustainable cooperatives, production networks, forms of solidarity, etc.

Easier said than done.

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[1] J. M. Keynes, *Allgemeine Theorie der Beschäftigung, des Zinses und des Geldes*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1936, p. 114-123. [*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Palgrave McMillan, 1936]

[2] M. Albert, *Parecon. Leben nach dem Kapitalismus*, Grafenau / Frankfurt a. M.: Trotzdem Verlagsgenossenschaft 2006, p. 75f.

[3] C. Marazzzi, "Il lavoro autonomo nella cooperazione comunicativa", in: S. Bologna / A. Fumagalli (Ed.), *Il lavoro autonomo di seconda generazione. Scenari del postfordismo in Italia*, Milano: Feltrinelli 1997, p. 42-80 (S. 70).

[4] Ibid., p. 71.

[5] P. Zarifian, *A quoi sert le travail?*, Paris: La Dispute 2003.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Cf. P. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Life*, Semiotext(e), 2004, p. 86.

[8] P. Zarifian, *A quoi sert le travail?*, op.cit.

[9] E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*, *Husserliana Band X*, Den Haag: Nijhoff 1966, p. 373f.

[Engl. translation: E. Husserl, D. Welton (Ed.), *The Essential Husserl*, Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 214]

[10] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, in: *Werkausgabe Band 1*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1984, p. 225-580 (§ 355).