06 2008

A Tangent that Betrayed the Circle

On the Limits of Fidelity in Translation

Boris Buden

> "If we were to translate into English the traditional formula *Traduttore, traditore* as 'the translator is a betrayer,' we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence, a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement and to answer the questions: translator of what messages? betrayer of what values?"[1]
> Roman Jacobson

The problem of fidelity is a commonplace in the theory of translation. It usually occurs in a mutually exclusive relation to the so-called licence (or freedom) of translation. According to this bipolar constellation, a translation is either faithful to the source text, following its every word as closely as possible, or free in its relation to the original, striving rather for its own goals. However, there are no objective criteria to measure the degree of fidelity of translation or the range of its licence. Both are normative claims

whose reasons transcend the logic of the purely linguistic practice of translation.

Faithful or free? A decision in this dilemma, familiar to anyone who has ever been confronted with the practical task of translating, is always made out of what is in translation more than translation. We usually call it "context", saying that a text cannot be properly translated without considering – or rather co-translating – its context. But what in fact is this context? What is it that is more than the simple linguistic context of the original words? Is it society, or history, or politics, or culture, or a peculiar mixture of all of these? Is it the context of the source text or the context of translation, or rather something that goes beyond both?

Clearly, the context of translation is as contingent as human life itself: its meaning is existentially, socially, historically, politically, culturally, etc. an ambiguous category[2]. In other words, fidelity and licence of translation have a meaning only in the context of what fidelity and freedom specifically mean to a particular human being, in a particular society, historical period, ideological and political situation or culture. A translator can never be simply faithful to a "true" meaning of an original text but rather to some values of its context as well as of the context of his or her translation. The same is true of the licence of translation.

Here, one should remember Walter Benjamin's claim that both the original and its translation are equally exposed to transformation in time.[3] First, the original is not an entity whose meaning is fixed once and for all at the moment of its birth. It undergoes change in what Benjamin calls its "afterlife" (*Überleben/Fortleben*). "What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound archaic," he writes.[4] A translation, for its part, can never be made at the same time as the original.

This posteriority is an essential element of its relation to the original. It makes translation a part of its "continued life"[5], a moment in the "maturing process" of the original. But translation too undergoes change in time. "The mother tongue of translator is transformed as well."[6]. Even the greatest translation can be overtaken by the development of its language and eventually perish in its history.

I

However, the question now is: what happens to the broader context of both the original and its translation? Does it also undergo change in time? What if the current context of the original at the time of its creation, which essentially informed its meaning, later becomes archaic, barely comprehensible or even meaningless? The same applies to the context of translation. It too can be historically overtaken by its own development. Does it mean in the end that historical time is in fact the ultimate context of the transformation of both, of the original and its translation, as well as of their particular contexts? Is history a sort of context of all contexts?[7] At the time of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of Translator", in the 1920s, such an assumption would hardly have given rise to disagreement.

But today things seem to be different. Let's imagine an example – the translation of a pamphlet written by some rebellious students caught up in the riots in Paris in May 1968. Let's say it is written in French. But what is the context of this text, or rather, what was perceived as its context at the moment of its birth? The answer shouldn't be difficult. With quite a high degree of probability, we might retroactively say that its context was French society at a particular moment in its historical development. In addition, we

may point to a broader context by mentioning worldwide protests – from California and Mexico to Berlin, Prague and Belgrade, etc – by the youth of the sixties. What is crucial here is the fact that we can define this context almost entirely in socio-political categories. The pamphlet is then understood primarily as the expression of some kind of social antagonism; its intention is seen as the demand for social change at its most radical, in the form of a universal revolution – the demand to change the world. It is supposed to have a performative quality, which means the power to actively participate in the event as well as socially and politically subjectifying its author(s): even if the author is an individual, the text appears as the product of a "we" as well as the very act of production of this "we". In short, it is clearly not inaccurate to name this context "society", which is understood as a historical and political category in an entirely universal sense.

What then would it mean today to translate this pamphlet into whatever language considering, or rather co-translating, its context? A translator would face not only the foreignness of the original French language, but the specific foreignness of its context too. First of all, the conceptual – one might also say ideological – framework of today's translational practice, i.e. the hegemonic notion of translation, perceives the context of translation almost exclusively in cultural terms. Translating a text today automatically means translating a culture. This is the reason why today few would disagree with the statement that every linguistic translation is always a cultural translation. It is a truism not only of the contemporary theory of translation but also of cultural theory, which has introduced the notion of translation as one of its most important conceptual tools.

But what then is the "true" context of the pamphlet in our example? Is it "society" or rather "culture"? What exactly is the

context of the sentence – to use one of the most famous phrases from that period – "*Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible*" with regard to its English translation "Be realistic, demand the impossible"? Again, we are talking about a context that obviously determines the very meaning of the notions of "reality" and "possibility/impossibility". If this context is no longer "society" but "culture", as we suggested above, which culture is it? A culture of popular upheaval or even a "revolutionary culture", typical of what we perceive as French national identity and for which we can easily find enough historical evidence? Or is it a culture of youth rebellion as opposed to the conservative and authoritarian culture of French society at that time? Or rather a culture of "countercultural" subversion as it has been conceptualized and practised in the sixties, not only in France but also far beyond its borders? If it is not only French or European, is it then a Western or simply a modernist culture?

The question is therefore whether the words of this pamphlet denoting such an important issue as our relation to reality – being or not being "realistic" – have to be understood in terms of radical social change or in terms of cultural difference, in terms of their universality or in terms of their cultural particularity (of any sort)?

This is not an abstract question. How can you be faithful to the original in this particular case – bearing in mind that fidelity of translation is always a fidelity to some sort of context – if you believe that the idea of radically changing the world is necessarily unrealistic, or could only be realistic in a culture which is not yours (which amounts to the same thing)? It wouldn't help here to take a neutral position and say that the text is a document from the past, a text from a context that is historically dead, so we can ignore the question. This is wrong, not only because of the discursive content of such a pamphlet, which has never been a neutral comment on

its context, i.e., on the event of rebellion, but rather its active participant or, more precisely, the event itself. To separate retroactively this text from the event of which it was an intrinsic part would raise a more fundamental question: why translate it at all? Why translate dead texts from dead contexts? If translation is reduced to a mere funeral of words and their meanings, however grandiose and well-attended it might be, it will still lose its *raison d'être*. Translation cannot be "the sterile equation of two dead languages," wrote Benjamin.[8] He saw the task of translator as struggling to ensure the survival of the original and securing its afterlife, not as paying his or her last respects to it.

This obviously applies to the context too. In a good translation, the context of the original must be also given an afterlife "which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living"[9]. But what does it mean in the case of our pamphlet from 1968 specifically? As stated above, its context was at that time perceived as social category, or more precisely, as a particular historical form of social antagonism, of which this pamphlet was both an expression and an articulation. But now, at the period of its translation, this same context appears culturally structured in terms of post-historical cultural difference. Are we to think of the relation between these two contexts as a form of translation? Does this then imply that culture is an afterlife of society, a form of its survival?[10]

Of course, it is not that simple. Benjamin has warned us that the essence of the constant changes of the language of the original, as well as of its meaning, cannot be found in the subjectivity of posteriority.[11] In other words, the fact that the cultural paradigm has replaced the social in our perception of what the context of that pamphlet is, doesn't necessarily imply that this change is that of a successful translation, in which, as Benjamin would put it, "the

life of the original attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding".[12] If it is culture today that subjectifies translators beyond the narrow notion of their profession, that is to say, if the task of today's translator is always a cultural task, it doesn't automatically mean that culture is now the "latest and most complete unfolding" of what used to be the social contextualization of both the text and its translation, in other words, the social task of translator. Instead, we might also allow for another possibility, for culture to be a failed translation of society.

II

As suggested above, we take it that not only the original and its translation but their context too undergo change in time. But this change is by no means a linear development in an abstract historical time. One doesn't have to be a Hegelian dialectician to imagine it as a process that might not only have a regressive tendency but that also reflects – or is even generated by – conflicting interests and power relations, a hegemony or an open domination. Moreover, this change might be nothing but a sort of running to stay still in the sense of the well-known phrase about changing everything so that nothing is changed: in short, a compulsive restoration of the status quo. Instead of bringing a renewal, historical time, or more precisely, the forces that articulate and inform it, could actively work against a text that has dared to challenge their hegemony, transforming its context into an obstacle to understanding and translating it. Suddenly reawoken at the moment of its translation, such a text can find itself in a thoroughly hostile context. Again, according to Benjamin, a good translation must be a renewal of something living. But what if the context – or the current hegemonic perception of that context – is designed precisely to prevent the emergence of something new?

Left to itself in its abstract objectivity, history could take on the role of a bad translator who always follows his or her selfish interests and doesn't give a straw about the afterlife of written words. Thus, it can always develop a new context that could kill the text. This is how history can render translation impossible, at least unless the translator dares to oppose it. It is for this reason that no context should be taken for granted. For it can turn out to be itself a failed translation, the translation that doesn't support what Benjamin called the "maturing process of written words" but rather obstructs it. A context too can undergo a change without renewal. Instead of attaining through the historical transformation "its continually renewed, latest and most complete unfolding" or – in another English translation – "its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering"[13], it can, on the contrary, grow old and eventually perish.

Let us now suppose, for analytical purposes, that this is the case with the transformation of the context of society into the context of culture, and that this transformation is such a failed translation. Culture, which, to stress it again, is today almost unanimously perceived as the "natural" context of every translation, wouldn't be the moment of a new flowering of society, a sort of spring, as it were. Rather, it could easily prove to be the form of its deterioration or, to pursue the metaphor, the winter of society, in other words, the state of its hibernation.

Like those individuals who after death have their bodies cryogenically frozen, hoping to be reawoken once the future has finally found the cure for their fatal illness, this society, in a state of hibernation as culture, is a society that expects the future to retroactively remove the cause of its death and to awaken it into new life. Far from being its "continued life" or its "afterlife", culture in this case seems, rather, to be a "bad posteriority" of

society, to paraphrase Hegel – that is, a posteriority that has mistaken itself for the subject-essence of historical change. For Benjamin, once again,[14] the essence of the change to which both the original and its translation are exposed, cannot be found in what he calls "the subjectivity of posterity". The quality of "being after" doesn't imply the change that determines the life of written words, for it ignores the fact of their mortality. Translatability is, according to Benjamin, not a quality of all works of art but only of some of them, specifically of those capable of surviving. Others perish, never having found an afterlife in translation, or they hibernate in mistranslations. A mistranslation is not an afterlife of the original but rather its "after" without life, its bad posteriority.

This same condition also determines the context of translation that renders some texts untranslatable. How can one faithfully translate a call for radical change – as in the case of our example, a pamphlet by rebellious students from 1968 – in a context that has totally separated the very event of change from its performative textuality, from a typically modernist mode of textual expression, objectified in the literary form of pamphlet or manifesto that always implies the power of text to act and to subjectify? Moreover, why translate this call if it cannot be (re)contextualized as the act of some "we"? It would now sound like a frozen echo of the original; it would read as a pile of hibernating – i.e., not quite dead – words.

At this point, we should recall Benjamin's dictum that translations "that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame."[15] But what if in the meantime the context has jeopardized that fame, or even turned it into its opposite? Unfortunately, Benjamin didn't tell us what it means to translate a text not in the age of its fame but rather in the age of its shame: a question that we cannot avoid here since this is precisely the case

with our example, the pamphlet from 1968. It is today's context that has transformed – or translated – its former fame into the current shame. Indeed, shame is probably the best description of how our era now relates to the youth rebellion of the sixties. We are deeply convinced that one should be truly ashamed of its icons like Lenin and Mao, ashamed of its intellectuals supporting Pol Pot and the murderous regime of the Khmer Rouge, ashamed of its ideal – and practice – of free love, of its excessive attacks on all sorts of authority, of its belief in radical change, of its concepts of reality and possibility as well as of the peculiar relationship between the two that still symbolizes that historical event: "Be realistic, demand the impossible". One can only ask: is there anything the "protest generation" of 1960s shouldn't be ashamed of today?[16] What in fact is this shame, which now informs the context of this text? Is it an afterlife – a translation – of the context of fame? Or is it rather the dubious advantage of those who have simply come later and are now mistaking this trivial – bad – posteriority for a deeper insight or, as Benjamin would say, for subjectivity? Again, what if it is not an afterlife of the former context, but rather its "after" without life, a context without its translation? To what context then should the translator ultimately be faithful?

A brief historical review of the issue of fidelity of translation may help to answer this question.

III

It is thanks to the German Romantics, first of all, that the theory of translation has not only embraced the problem of fidelity, but that it has also found the meaning of fidelity in "what is more in translation than translation", i.e., in the context of translation.

However, translation theory today is quite ambivalent when it comes to their concept of translation. On the one hand, it praises the German Romantics for advocating literalism in translations, for their openness to what Wilhelm von Humboldt called *das Fremde* ("what is foreign") in the source text and language. Nowadays we would say, rather, that it praises their respect for the linguistic and cultural – i.e. the contextual – differences of foreign texts.

In fact, their preference for *das Fremde* seems at first to be a decision born of the very practical dilemma of linguistic translation. It is best expressed in Schleiermacher's famous formula: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the author toward him."[17] Put simply, either we translate more faithfully, meaning more literally, "word-for-word", foreignizing the language of translation, or, quite the contrary, we translate more freely, "sense-for-sense", domesticating or naturalizing the translation as much as possible. Schleiermacher and the other German Romantic translation theorists preferred the first method, the one that respects *das Fremde* in the source text. In short, they preferred fidelity to licence.

On the other hand, this foreignness was understood in terms of its positive effects on German language and culture. In short, its role was to improve – to enrich and expand – both. And since language and culture are the very essence of nation for the German Romantics, its ultimate purpose was to build a German nation.

However, it is due to this context-based teleology of translation that transcends the purpose of communication and the horizon of an allegedly pure linguistic practice that German translation theory

is also seen as nationalistic.[18] Indeed, it reduces translation to an auxiliary practice of nation-building.

This is even more clearly implied by Wilhelm von Humboldt's theory of translation. Here, the fidelity of translation is defined as its necessary precondition. According to his theory of language, translation is in fact impossible. Since every word of a particular language expresses its unique spirit, there is no likelihood of finding an adequate match in another language. However, translations are made in spite of their impossibility. For this reason, Humboldt introduces a moral category, a special virtue, which he calls *die Treue* (fidelity, faithfulness) and which is necessary for the translator to achieve a good translation. It doesn't apply to some authentic meaning of the original text, but rather to the translator's mother tongue or to his or her nation, which for him or her amounts to the same thing. For Humboldt too, the task of the translator is not to transport meanings across linguistic differences and thus enable or facilitate communication between different languages, nations or cultures, but rather to build his or her language, and consequently his or her nation.

This, again, is the reason why the translator should be faithful to *das Fremde*. It is a new quality, which the translator adds to his or her language, thereby building its spirit, the spirit of the nation. Fidelity is ultimately a patriotic virtue, but not simply in terms of an abstract love for the nation. This love makes sense only if it takes the shape of a commitment to the task of nation-building or, in German, to the task of *Bildung*, which we might understand as a sort of cultivation both in the individual and the social sense. In other words, translation that, according to Humboldt, is impossible becomes possible nevertheless, but only if the translator has devoted himself or herself to the task of *Bildung*.

Herder saw the task of translation in a similar way. He too understood the foreign *(das Fremde)* which, according to Humboldt and the other German Romantics, must be clearly perceptible in translation, as a sort of added value that refines the language of the translator and his or her nation. For Herder, the German language in itself has no classical character. However, it can acquire this through translations from the classical languages, Greek and Latin.[19] It is therefore only translation that can endow German language and culture with a classical quality. Otherwise, it would remain imperfect since it is in its original form, something we might imagine as a kind of linguistic state of nature, a condition of language before its first encounter with other languages; in short, a state of language prior to its first translation. It clearly resembles the concept of an individual existing before his or her first encounter with other individuals, before his or her social relations; in short, before the emergence of society.

In fact, one can hardly overlook the obvious parallel here with the concept of the social contract, the well-known theoretical fairytale about the emergence of society and social order. Translated into the language of the social contract, the concept of translation as developed by the German Romantics – as well as the reason for their welcoming the foreign in translations and consequently preferring fidelity to licence – would probably sound like this: a nation, expressed through its language as its very essence, gives up a part of its natural purity, uniqueness or originality and accepts contamination by the foreign in order to achieve the state of culture. Translation, based on the normative idea of fidelity, is simply a means of cultivation, a cultivation tool. Like the conceptual dummy of the social-contract theory, the ideal translator of German Romantic translation theory must sacrifice a

part of his or her freedom in order to accomplish a cultural mission seen as an intrinsic part of translational practice.

But, again, the cultural task of the translator is always a social – indeed a political – one, the task of nation-building. This is what the translator must identify with. The fidelity of his or her translation is not a matter of its quality, meaning something contingent, a degree of faithfulness to the original that allows us to speak of more or less faithful translations. Rather it is a matter of loyalty to the nation understood as a cultural category. Thus, not to be faithful in translation doesn't mean betraying the original text but betraying the translator's own nation and with it a historically particular form of cultural and social belonging. In the end, this means betraying a very specific and a very specifically binding political commitment. The consequences of such a betrayal of course run far deeper than the consequences of an inaccurate or bad translation.

IV

We see now that it is not entirely wrong to accuse the German Romantics of nationalism in spite of their explicit openness to *das Fremde*, which is certainly not a typical feature of nationalism. Precisely in its insistence on literalism, on the idea of foreignizing the language of translation, their theory of translation was aiming not only to build the German language and the German nation but also to erect a boundary with the "French concept" of translation, which was known for preferring the domestication, or as its German critics would say, the assimilation of foreign texts. This boundary was of course a political boundary.[20]

However, there is another boundary that this method of translation was "co-erecting", the one between the subject of cultivation, the *Bildungsbürgertum*[21] or the cultural elite, as the true builder of the nation, and its object, the masses, that must be cultivated or, to put it another way, translated from the state of nature into the state of culture.[22] This too should be understood as a form of cultural translation.

In 1784, Moses Mendelsohn wrote: "The words enlightenment, culture, *Bildung* are still new arrivals to our language. They belong directly to the language of books[23]. The hoi polloi[24] hardly understand them."[25]

Thus, the most effective agency of nation-building and the most precious element of a nation's modern identity – the ideas of enlightenment, culture and *Bildung* – is literally an arrival, something foreign (*das Fremde*), imported from abroad, translated from another culture: it is a translation.

This means that we shouldn't think of translation as being only an auxiliary in the nation-building process, a means of cultivation, but more radically, we should think of it in terms of the nation-building process itself. It is the very idea of *Bildung*, of cultivation that is a translation. In other words, what is essential to a culture is precisely the fact that it cannot claim the status of an original, for it is always a translation.

Although it is translated from abroad, it nevertheless has its agency within the nation, a class of *Bildungsbürger* that is supposed to introduce and to represent it. This implies that, besides the so-called "proper translators" who, by making linguistic translations from foreign languages, accomplish the task of cultivation[26] and are part of the class of *Bildungsbürger*, we should also think of this

class as the class of cultural translators. Cultural translation here does not primarily mean a translation of some foreign cultural content, ideas, literature, etc, into a domestic national culture, or a translation from a source culture into the host culture; rather, translation as cultivation, i.e., a "domestic" cultural work (*Kulturarbeit*) in the sense of a translation of the state of nature into the state of culture is the ultimate task of *Bildung und Kultur*, of education and culture. And this is, again, what the fidelity of translation is about for the German Romantics: the fidelity to the very task of *Bildung*, to the task of nation-building as a process of cultivation.

For Humboldt, as we have already seen, the translator must be faithful to *das Fremde* (what is foreign). But he differentiates it from what he calls *die Fremdheit* (foreignness). The difference is that the first, *das Fremde* – which is unavoidable since, for Humboldt, the spirit appears in its objective form only in the plurality of different national languages – can be deployed, invested, integrated, appropriated, as an added value, in the process of nation-building. *Das Fremde* builds the nation, creates it and cultivates it. *Die Fremdheit*, on the contrary, is of no use in cultivation. What is more, it violates the nation-building process; it jeopardizes its very purpose, abolishes its most precious achievements. In short, it exposes the nation to assimilation.

Of course, the question is: where is the difference between them, between *das Fremde* and *die Fremdheit*? The answer cannot but be cynical: the difference is where *der Bildungsbürger,* the cultivator of the nation as a faithful cultural translator, says it is. In other words, it is arbitrary, and depends only on his or her sense of fidelity. Ultimately, translational fidelity is, to quote Hans-Yost Fray's comment on Humboldt's concept of fidelity of translation, "A

properly measured grade of the foreign (*das Fremde*) that can be experienced or better felt in one's own language."[27]

This also means that we can define the *Bildungsbürgertum* as the social agency of culture in terms of having an exclusive and arbitrary control over *das Fremde*. It is a social elite vitally identified with the task of building the nation, of building society as a nation, precisely by exercising this exclusive and arbitrary control. They are the ones to decide where the limit of a productive use of the foreign lies, where the foreign ceases to build society and starts to destroy it. They are the builders of the society because they are its gatekeepers, and conversely, they must guard the boundaries of society – of which they are the social embodiment – because they have to build it. What is crucial is to put these two tasks – which coincide in the virtue of fidelity – together. For only in its relation to the task of *Bildung* can we understand the true purpose of national boundaries: to select rather than to protect.

This also helps us to explain why there is no contradiction in the politics, which, proud of its democratic tolerance, embraces (some carefully chosen forms of) the foreign, and at the same time passes repressive laws against migrants that legalize detention and deportation. It is precisely in so doing that this politics exercises a form of faithful cultural translation. It actually separates the foreign from foreignness and incorporates, or more precisely, builds the former into society. Of course, the question then is: what happens to the latter, to foreignness?

V

One possible answer would be the following: foreignness stays out in terms of an excluded outside and is now struggling for

recognition and (re)admission. This is precisely how Judith Butler understands cultural translation, namely as the process that generates the hegemonic concept of universality. [28] Stated briefly, what is repudiated within universality and informs its excluded outside puts pressure on it – "the claim to universality" – until it is finally readmitted into the term, the consequence of which is a rearticulation of the existing concept of universality. Its meaning is extended to include what was previously excluded.

To place it within the context of our present analysis, Butler's concept of cultural translation is in fact a translation of foreignness into the foreign. What was previously seen as destructive or at least of no use for a nation, a society, a culture, the First World or whichever form of universality actually in existence, is now recognized as the building material that "cultivates" it in the sense of a progressive development. Seen from this perspective, cultural translation as cultivation – that is how we may refer to it here – has an intrinsically progressive quality. It helps the world to become better and better or, as Judith Butler specifically puts it, to expand "the democratic possibilities for the key terms of liberalism, rendering them more inclusive, more dynamic, more concrete."[29] From the point of view of this liberal optimism that conceives of progress as the result of a play of exclusions and inclusions in which, of course, the inclusions always prevail in the end, foreignness is *per definitionem* a disappearing quality, or rather, a "quality to disappear", somewhat like the remaining snows in springtime that slowly vanish in an ever stronger sun of cultural translation.

However, it is of crucial importance to cast light on another, dystopic side of cultural translation. For it may not only be a means of an ever-broadening inclusion and therefore a vehicle of progressive development. It may also be a means of exclusion itself

that can – and often really does – broaden the range of the "excluded outside", not only narrowing the hegemonic meaning of universality but also deepening its intrinsic antagonisms and finally turning its promise of liberation into violent oppression.

Foreignness, in contrast to the foreign, obviously implies its untranslatability. But this untranslatability shouldn't only be perceived as a negative leftover of cultural translation, something that is "so far too foreign to be translated" and that will eventually be translated in one of the next waves of translations/inclusions; it could also be its positive product, i.e., the product of negative selection exercised by this same cultural translation in every act of translation, which is always an act of differentiation between the foreign and foreignness, between what is translatable and what is not, or not yet translatable. So we can think of foreignness as being an effect of cultural translation, which is understood here as a socially formative translation into culture, i.e., cultivation. It is untranslatable because it cannot, at least not yet, be interwoven into the symbolic fabric of the social – what culture as a texture of the social, as a translation of society actually is.

Again, there is a social agency that is responsible for this "primal cultural translation", i.e., the translation of the social into its cultural textuality. This agency is to decide what is translatable and what is not translatable, separating socially useful foreignizing (the foreign) from socially destructive foreignizing (foreignness). However, we shouldn't think of such an agency as being some sort of representative elite of society, nation, culture, or, of the existing concept of universality. What legitimizes its elitist status is not primarily its place within society, nation, etc.; it is rather its intermediary position between the foreign that must be built into the society and something we may call the natural substratum of society, a sort of raw material of society yet to be finalized or, to

put it another way, to be cultivated. This is precisely the position of the *Bildungsbürgertum*: between the classical culture of Greeks and Romans that must be translated and built into German culture and the barbaric German masses (the hoi polloi) that must be cultivated by means of this translation.[30] So every elite is an elite of cultural translators. By the same token, we may say that every elite is a compradorial one. Not only does it treat a part of its own society as a colony that must be translated from its original barbarity into culture. It acts too as an agent – a translator – of foreign values that alone are capable of cultivating this society.[31] This is why its fidelity is intrinsically ambivalent. It is always a double loyalty, one to the society and the other to foreign values. But it is one and the same fidelity nevertheless, since both loyalties coincide in the commitment to the task of building the society, to the idea of society as a form of life that must be constantly rebuilt, renewed, developed, in short, reborn again and again out of some sort of natural substratum, which is of course culturally produced and ideologically presupposed.

In a similar way, we may understand Butler's notion of a cultural translation that rearticulates and improves the existing concept of universality. It also implies a compradorial elite of cultural translators that is faithful to the task of rendering universality more inclusive, of course, in terms of liberal democracy. This elite is both loyal to the foreign values that should be included and loyal to its very idea of inclusive universality. But it actually treats the existing form of universality as an object of cultivation and acts, simultaneously, as an agent of the excluded outside, which alone is capable of generating this cultivation. It is the elite of "proper foreignizers" – faithful cultural translators – able to select between the useful foreign and the destructive foreignness. It knows very well how to separate, for instance, some "universal" values of Islam

from its patriarchal or "fundamentalist" traits, which instead of expanding "the democratic possibilities for the key terms of liberalism" would rather annihilate them and therefore must remain excluded, at least unless they accommodate to the universal norms of tolerance.

Ironically, Butler's notion of cultural translation is labelled as "a counter-imperialist conception of translation"[32]. However, seen from another perspective, it gives a diametrically opposite impression. Thus Rastko Močnik writes that Butler's concept of cultural translation presupposes the idea of cultural system that "is modelled upon the juridical ideology, and participates in the juridico-political universalism that presently legitimizes various imperial enterprises (bringing democracy and law to Ukraine, Georgia, Kirghistan, Iraq ...).[33]

VI

Is this perspective on cultural translation a perspective of the excluded, of the untranslatable foreignness that, precisely by being excluded and rendered untranslatable, helps the existing concept of universality to survive, to find its continually renewed afterlife in the ever-oncoming waves of cultural translation? Is there anyone – an elite, an agency – who could be faithful to this foreignness?

Curiously, it is again the concept of cultural translation that provides an answer to this question – but this time in the version conceptualized by Homi Bhabha. Here, cultural translation is another name for the cultural hybridity that emerges beyond the multiculturalist vision of the world as a cluster of original cultural identities. Foreignness now means a positive articulation of cultural difference as such. The forms of its articulation that follow the

logic of cultural translation –subversion, transgression, blasphemy, heresy, etc. – generate the politics of new internationalism capable of bringing about emancipatory change. About this foreignness too we may say that it is untranslatable for it is itself nothing but a never-ending process of cultural translation.

But the question now is: is this concept of cultural translation what positively defines the social, political and existential condition of those migrants who, being subjected to different forms of repressive exclusion – from deportations and detentions to the so-called clandestinization, appear today as the human embodiment of untranslatable foreignness? Or to put it more radically: is their fidelity to the task of cultural translation what makes them subjects of emancipatory change, as Bhabha believes?

Alexander Vaindorf's video installation, "Detour. One Particular Sunday" (2006), seems at first to answer this question positively. It presents us with a picture of the life of migrant workers, mostly middle-aged women from the former Soviet Union, in modern-day Rome. Vaindorf meets them in the *Parco di Resistenza* where they gather every Sunday, on their only day off, because the rest of the week they spend mostly locked up in the houses of Italian families, where they work as housekeepers or carers of the elderly. They tell the artist their personal stories and their reflections on life, work and migration.

So it seems at first sight as though Vaindorf's film depicts precisely the creation of what Bhabha calls the space of cultural translation – the space of cultural hybridity that belongs neither to the culture those migrants have left behind, nor to the one they have come into – a space that obviously can no longer be perceived in terms of homogenous national cultures. The articulation of cultural difference that takes place among them in the *Parco di Resistenza*

could be easily understood as the emergence of a new type of transnational subjectivity that Bhabha has envisioned as a result of the process of cultural translation. In short, it seems that precisely these migrant workers, as "part of the massive economic and political diaspora or modern world" living under the "conditions of cultural displacement and social discrimination"[34], embody the new transnational "elite" of cultural translators, faithful to the task of hybridity proliferation and therefore to the mission of emancipatory change. [35]

But there is an element in Vaindorf's work that challenges this assumption – a reference to Ettore Scola's famous film "A special day" (1977). This is the story of two people, a housewife (Sophia Loren) and a man who has lost his job and is about to be deported because of his homosexuality and his animosity towards Fascism (Marcello Mastroianni). While everyone goes into the streets to follow Hitler's visit to Mussolini in Rome, they meet in the empty building and end up having a love affair.[36]

Obviously, this is not a story about fidelity. Rather it is a story of betrayal, more specifically, of a threefold betrayal. First, there is the betrayal of the social context, i.e., the betrayal of the "historical" event, Hitler's visit to Rome, which informs that context politically. Secondly, Loren betrays her marriage and her family, her most precious values, which inform the ethical context of her lifeworld, at least up to the moment when she meets Mastroianni. And finally, they both betray what each perceived hitherto as his or her authentic sexual identity – a homosexual man falls in love with a heterosexual woman and a heterosexual woman falls in love with a homosexual man.

Again, one might say – Homi Bhabha especially – that their love happens as an articulation of difference that opens a new space of

hybridity, which belongs neither to the dominant culture of marriage, family and heterosexuality, perceived as the realm of universal values, nor to its excluded cultural counterpart, the gay subculture with its own values and ethical norms. Moreover, one might conceive of their betrayal, their love, as this act of subversion and transgression that informs the politics of anti-Fascist resistance and thereby initiates an emancipatory change. One might even think of this love as an effect of fidelity to the task of cultural translation, the task of generating a renewal, a new flowering of a culture of life as opposed to the Fascist culture of death.

And yet, we see clearly that this love is anything but an articulation of difference. Rather, it seems to be completely blind to it. Moreover, what really makes the love between Loren and Mastroianni happen is a total disrespect for all the differences that separate them socially, morally, politically, including the very difference in their sexual orientation. Heterosexual or homosexual? A true love doesn't care. For it is, to recall Alain Badiou's famous dictum about the truth, "indifferent to differences"[37].

The love story which Scola's film recounts doesn't articulate a third (cultural) quality between heterosexuality and homosexuality, a sort of qualitatively new mixture of both. If it really articulates something new, then this newness is the result of its break with the very logic of differences that has established the existing – specifically Fascist – order. This is where the new originates – from the disruption of the given context, regardless of how we define it. As such, it no longer belongs to this context and cannot be judged by its normativity. It is radically foreign to it, i.e., foreign in terms of an untranslatable foreignness.

By the same token, the love between Loren and Mastroianni escapes the logic of exclusion and inclusion. It doesn't really inform

an excluded outside of the existing Fascist order and cannot be perceived in terms of its not-yet-included foreignness. It is rather an act of radical self-exclusion with no way back. This is why it would be nonsense to say that Loren and Mastroianni, by falling in love with each other, actually challenge the existing (Fascist) concept of universality, urging its rearticulation so that they might be finally recognized and readmitted. They are not interested in rendering Fascism more inclusive. For they make love, not a claim to universality, and they neither regret it nor beg for understanding. They are not victims of exclusion but perpetrators of a forbidden love, of which they are themselves guilty and for which there would be no forgiveness, "for they know what they do". "A Special Day" is not a story with a happy ending.

The love between Loren and Mastroianni takes place as an event that is radically external to its context. It is a step off the edge into the abyss, consisting of nothing but an ungrounded decision. In other words, it does take place in a context but is not "of that context". This again doesn't mean that it is simply empty of it. What makes the event of this love possible is precisely another event, Hitler's visit to Rome, which has hegemonized the context and so, paradoxically, cleared the stage for their love. No hegemony can completely totalize the context. There is always something that is left over, unabsorbed by its otherwise so compelling power. There is Mastroianni who openly hates Fascists; there is Loren who finds doing her laundry more important than welcoming Hitler, which by the way she regrets. But it is not until they fall in love that the hegemony is disrupted and opposed. Their love, therefore, doesn't simply happen in the absence of the hegemonic event. Rather it articulates its absence positively, as an event on its own, as a counter-event. But again, their going against the grain of the world takes the form of a betrayal. Their love is not an act of

purity and innocence. She betrays Hitler indeed, but she betrays her husband and her children too. As a gay man, he betrays society's conservative morality, but he then betrays the very sexual difference for which he has been excluded. In other words, instead of insisting on the right to difference – and what is a right to difference if not a legal phrase for one's fidelity to it, a fidelity that generates identities – he betrays it precisely in the name of the dominant sexual norm, the heterosexual love that has hitherto excluded him. For both, then, it is too late for innocence. This is why we call it betrayal since their encounter is at the same time an encounter with something stronger than fidelity. Is it a "true love" or the truth of love (as Badiou would have it), or rather an encounter with the Real (Lacan)? Let's leave it aside for now. The crucial thing is not to confuse the event with some sort of mythical exodus. We can never simply turn our back on the bad reality and desert it in an act of primal innocence. There is nothing of a divine or an ontological purity in what we call the event. For it is too human to be innocent: it always makes us guilty, guilty of a betrayal of some sort.

Let us come back now to Vaindorf's migrants from the *Parco di Resistenza*. Like Ettore Scola's lovers, we can think of them too as being betrayers of a sort. These mostly middle-aged women have also betrayed their families and children whom they have left alone, for which they openly express a painful feeling of guilt. But they have also betrayed a historical event, the so-called democratic revolution of 1989, showing no fidelity whatsoever to its task of building a new democratic and prosperous society. The new nomad horde from the East hasn't simply deserted the collapsing societies of

bureaucratic socialism, as, for instance, Hardt and Negri argue in *Empire*, even taking "the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of

the entire Soviet bloc" as the strongest example of "the power of desertion and exodus".[38] The post-Soviet migrants in Rome, whose story Alexander Vaindorf's video work recounts, haven't merely abandoned an old world already in a state of collapse, but have betrayed the promise of a new and better one that was constitutive of the democratic revolution of 1989. Moreover, it is precisely their betrayal that has disclosed a hidden restorative character of this allegedly revolutionary event. In Vaindorf's video, we are told that during Soviet times most of these women had had regular jobs, which they later lost. The socialist industrial modernization had thus made them working women. But the neoliberal privatization and its ideological supplement, the neoconservative turn – both essential elements of the democratic revolution of 1989 – made them housewives again. Their migration is an escape from this fate too. Instead of returning to the woman's traditional role within the family, they went abroad, finding in Italy a "historical compromise", mostly becoming working housewives in the grey area of illegal labour. Thus, their migration is not, as Hardt and Negri want us to believe, an essential moment of the revolutionary break with the past, but rather a desperate attempt to re-establish, in a typically neoliberal, hybrid form, some continuity with it. This is what their migrant condition is about – an articulation of sameness, rather than of difference. And this is what makes them the betrayers of 1989.

Finally they betray love too. Without any hesitation, they assert their willingness to marry any Italian man as long as the marriage guarantees them Italian citizenship. Love, for them, is nothing but a means to escape illegality. However, it is the legal system itself, which has mutually conditioned love and legal status, in concrete terms, citizenship. On the other hand, true love can still happen to them, but only as an event that breaks with the given socio-legal

context, an event that, like the love story in Scola's film, can hardly have a happy ending. In any case, a betrayal of some sort is for them the only way to encounter love. In other words, love is for them that untranslatable foreignness they can only encounter through a betrayal.

VII

Every translation is an encounter with the untranslatable. From the perspective of the translator, it is experienced as the point where translation reaches its immanent limits, the point where its light ceases to illuminate the darkness of the foreign. From the opposite perspective, at this same point begins the realm of untranslatability. Be it divine or transcendental, intralingual or extralingual, this realm, which has no stable boundaries, announces its presence in every single act of translation threatening to render it impossible. This is why Wilhelm von Humboldt introduced the notion of fidelity, a virtue whose task is to constantly determine and guard the boundary between translatable and untranslatable, or in his own terminology, between the foreign (*das Fremde*) that can and should be translated, and foreignness (*die Fremdheit*) that must be rejected. Yet he related this fidelity to what we call the context of translation, specifically, to the translator's nation i.e., to the task of its cultivation. Context of translation is in fact a particular regime of fidelity. This doesn't only mean that every translation is always faithful to some value of its context. It also means that fidelity itself, which in translation is subjectively experienced as fidelity to the source text, always articulates a commitment to something in translation that is more than translation itself and thus performatively coproduces its context. In other words, context of translation is never given in advance as an entity that exists prior to translation. Rather, every translation is potentially a self-

contextualization, able to generate its own context or, put another way, able to betray what has hitherto been hegemonically imposed as its "natural" context, be it national, social, cultural or any other. This is what we should understand as freedom of translation – the freedom of self-contextualization. Every translation is free to de-contextualize or counter-contextualize itself. It is free to betray the given context and its normative values.

As stated above, if we allow for both the original and its translation to undergo a change in time, to grow old and eventually perish, we must allow it for the context of translation too. This then implies a further consequence: what was before the virtue of fidelity to some distinguished value of a given context that rendered translation possible might undergo a change in time and become its opposite, the vice of dependence, blind obedience, bondage or servitude that now renders translation impossible. Or it might be possible nevertheless, but this time by virtue of betrayal. This too is true of the task of translation: to accomplish it, the translator must also dare to betray.

For Walter Benjamin, to reiterate the point, translation is a moment in the maturing process of written words. However, Benjamin didn't want us to understand this process as taking place objectively, regardless of how these written words are translated. In order to become a moment in their maturing process, translation must actively participate in it. To meet this challenge, it must itself become an act of maturity. But what does it mean for translation to be mature? Obviously not a quality of the empty flow of time. It is not maturity that makes a person independent and responsible. Rather it is the other way round. One becomes mature in breaking with relations of dependence and in accepting responsibility for one's own fate. As is well known, Kant made maturity (*Mündigkeit*) a *conditio sine qua non* of the Enlightenment, which he defined as

the emergence from self-imposed immaturity and dependence. One is oneself responsible for this immaturity if its cause lies, not in a lack of intelligence, but a lack of determination and courage to use one's own intellect freely and independently, without the direction of another. Kant summed up this idea in the famous Enlightenment slogan: *Sapere aude*! "Dare to know! Dare to think independently!"

We must think of the maturity of translation (*Nachreife*, in Benjamin's German phrase) in a similar way. It has nothing to do with reaching a certain point in time, like attaining the age of adulthood. Rather, it presupposes the independence of translation from the given context, i.e., its liberation from a self-imposed regime of fidelity – in short, its betrayal. Autonomy is, thus, what, in a strong Kantian sense, essentially belongs to the task of translation. However, to accomplish it, determination and courage are needed. Therefore, the slogan of translation would read: *Prodere Aude*![39] "Dare to betray!" This alone is the way for translation to become a moment in the maturing process of written words (*Nachreife*), namely to become itself an act of maturity (*Mündigkeit*). This would also give an additional meaning to Benjamin's famous metaphor for the freedom of translation, in which he compares it with a tangent that touches a circle, i.e., that touches the original "lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course".[40] The freedom of translation includes its autonomy in relation to its context, however this is currently – hegemonically – defined.

Of course, it also includes a full responsibility that implies the risk of making itself guilty. Indeed, if it wants to be free, translation must break with the illusion of innocence, which is so dear today to the elite of "cultural translators", who see themselves occupying a cultural space of neutral in-betweenness, completely detached

from the old world of essentialist binarisms, of exclusive "either-ors", which, as is almost commonly believed today, of necessity cause conflicts, violence, terror ...

Translation can escape binarism just as love can, but only in a narcissistic delusion. It can escape conflict no more easily. For it is nothing but a special conflict, precisely in the sense in which it is the love story in Scola's *A Special day*. The conflict in this story doesn't break out because of the difference between a true love and a socio-political context that is hostile to it. It is rather this true love that breaks out amidst the conflict of the lovers with political, moral or sexual differences that tear them apart, the conflict over which they prevail precisely by becoming indifferent to these differences. This is what has made this love an event on its own and this day a special one – an encounter with something stronger than fidelity to particular differences – in short, a betrayal of the current regime of fidelity.

Like love, translation doesn't happen amidst the conflict of differences but rather in the conflict with differences, be they linguistic or cultural, moral or political. It has achieved its goal when it has rendered them meaningless or, just like love, when it has become indifferent to them, "thereupon pursuing its own course". Yet translation cannot do that without coming up against the untranslatable. The relation between the translatable and the untranslatable is the irreducible binary relation that no translation can escape. It takes the form of an encounter and is fully contingent, for the very site of this encounter, the boundary between translatable and untranslatable, is contingent too. This is the moment of freedom and risk. First, every translation is free to make of this encounter an event and become a "special translation", a translation that, in "pursuing its own course", creates something new that cannot be referred back to a pre-existing objectivity either

of the original text or of the context. In its ultimate essence, as Benjamin wrote, “no translation would be possible if … it strove for likeness to the original.”[41] It wouldn’t be possible either if it strove for adaptation to the context. This is why risk saturates the freedom of translation. For its encounter with the foreign can make translation itself foreign, not only to the source text, but also to its own language and its own political, cultural, moral, etc., context. So it can antagonize a translation too. The fact that the boundaries of the untranslatable, where this encounter takes place, are all but stable doesn’t mean that they are simply negotiable. An encounter is never a smooth negotiation. Neither is translation. We should never mistake it for a cultural practice free of conflict, whose handling of differences relies on respect and tolerance. A true translation, just like true love, doesn’t respect differences; it ignores them, risking rather than avoiding conflicts. For it is due to its agonistic potentiality that translation is able to create something new. This is especially true of its encounter with the untranslatable.

Paradoxically, translation always approaches this from its apparently translatable side. For the realm of untranslatability is not internally consistent in itself. It is actually broken into two parts, one of which is totally ambiguous. This is its borderline space, where the dividing line between translatable and untranslatable must be drawn anew for every translation – according to a normative claim made by what is in translation more than translation, according to the fidelity to some value of its context. In fact, it is wrong to think of it as a space since it is, rather, a site – and accordingly an effect – of an arbitrary decision. This is the site where, for instance, a Humboldtian translator makes the distinction between a translatable “foreign” and an untranslatable “foreignness”. However, what today is seen as a new linguistic or cultural quality

that would enrich the nation and therefore should be "imported" by translation, can tomorrow become its opposite, a quality that destroys its very essence and should remain untranslatable. What one translator perceives as a constructive foreign, another can declare to be a destructive foreignness. Yet where there is ambiguity and arbitrariness, there must also be hegemony and political power to decide ultimately what is and what is not translatable.

This is why we can say that translation never encounters the untranslatable as such – for it only ever encounters the untranslatable that has been made untranslatable. "Made" means here contextually foreclosed, i.e., foreclosed under the particular regime of fidelity. Thus, what from the perspective of translation appears as untranslatable is in fact its foreclosed context. It doesn't consist of the words of a foreign language that can still be learned and translated; it is neither an excluded value waiting to be readmitted nor a suppressed truth that, by deploying a special technique, we can disclose and make conscious ... but it can be encountered nevertheless. What fidelity has foreclosed, only a betrayal can encounter. What has been made untranslatable, only a translation as an event of betrayal and emancipation can (re)create. This is how translation helps "newness" to enter the world.

Once again, however, in order to become a creation, translation must dare to betray and risk guilt. Coming back to our example of the translation of a pamphlet from 1968, this would specifically mean encountering the very performativity of the idea of a "great refusal", which is essential to the most profound meaning of both, this notion and the event – the revolt of 1968. The question is simply: are we able today to translate the world "refusal" without any refusal, that is to say, without being challenged by its performative meaning, which compels us to act against the grain of

the given context, to disrupt it, to betray it, to make ourselves guilty of violating some of its most precious values. For no refusal is innocent. This is exactly what Herbert Marcuse had in mind when quoting/translating the words of Maurice Blanchot at the end of his "One Dimensional Man": "What we refuse is not without value or importance. Precisely because of that, the refusal is necessary."[42] This is also true of translation. If it is to become an event and bring something new, it must be a refusal too.

There is, of course, much to be refused in today's world, probably too much for such an "innocent" practice as translation. But we know that this innocence is self-delusion. So why not betray it?

---

[1] Roman Jacobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", in: Lawrence Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2000, p. 138-143, p. 143.

[2] "Only, the context, even more than a text or a translation, is a conjecture informed by so many things, personal, cultural, historic. A sentence, or a word, can refer to innumerable contexts and meanings or "regimes of sentences" as J-F. Lyotard would have it. *The* regime itself is indefinable, indefinite, although *a* regime is inevitable. There is always a concatenation, but we can't tell in advance which." Rada Iveković, Interview with Boris Buden, see http://eipcp.net/transversal.

[3] See Walter Benjamin, "The Task of Translator", in M. Bullock, M.W. Jennings (Ed.), Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* Volume 1, Cambridge, Ma., London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 253-263.

[4] Ibid., p. 256.

[5] This is how Benjamins *Fortleben* is also translated, ibid. p. 254.

[6] Ibid. p. 256.

[7] Although Benjamin's idea of "life" and "afterlife" in works of art, which determines the relation between the original and translation, makes sense only from the standpoint of history (conceived of *contra naturam*), what, for him, makes translation possible in the end is a "suprahistorical" category – the kinship between languages, in short, what Benjamin calls "pure language". Ibid., p. 257.

[8] Ibid., p. 256.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Cultural theory already works with the concept of culture as a translation of society. Lutz Musner writes about "culture as 'the texture of society'". He advocates the concept of culture which is informed by political economy and which "describes 'culture' itself as a process of transfer, a process that 'translates' the social into the symbolic and in that way impresses a texture on it, i.e., impresses the meanings of the life world on the fabric of the social." Lutz Musner, *Kultur als Textur des Sozialen: Essays zum Stand der Kulturwissenschaften*, Wien: Löcker, 2004, p. 82.

[11] "To seek the essence of such changes, as well as the equally constant changes in meaning, in the subjectivity of posteriority rather than in the very life of language and its works would mean – even allowing for the crudest psychologism – confusing the root cause of a thing with its essence. More precisely, it would mean

denying, by an impotence of thought, one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes." Ibid., p. 256.

[12] Ibid., p. 255.

[13] In Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Fontana: London, 1973, p. 72. The German original is "stets erneute späteste und umfassendste Entfaltung." W. Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, Walter Benjamin *Gesammelte Schriften*, *IV.1*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 9-21, p. 11.

[14] See footnote 11.

[15] Ibid. p. 255.

[16] To be "ashamed of" shouldn't be mistaken for to be "guilty of". One might be "ashamed of" having a poster of Mao in his or her student room, but to say that one should be "ashamed of" committing a crime is nonsense.

[17] Friedrich Schleiermacher, "On the different Methods of Translating", in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, ibid., p. 43-64, here, p. 49.

[18] "Like Humboldt, he [Schleiermacher, BB] imagines foreignizing translation as a nationalist practice that can build a German language and literature and overcome the cultural and political domination that France exercises over German-speaking lands.", "Foundational Statements", in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, ibid. p.19.

[19] See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur*, Werke in zehn Bänden, Bd. I, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1990, p. 199.

[20] Schleiermacher's lecture "On the Different Methods of Translating", as mentioned above, was delivered to the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin in June 1813 in the historical and political context of a Napoleonic invasion, which Schleiermacher opposed. His method of translation, in this context, also has a political purpose – it was designed to secure the supremacy of German culture over French culture. And in this sense – as well as the German concept of culture as a spiritual unity of language, literature and art – it was a compensation for the unrealized dream of a sovereign nation-state. See Anthony Pym, "Schleiermacher and the Problem of Blendlinge", *Translation and Literature* 4/1, 1995, pp. 5-30. See also www.tinet.org/~apym/on-line/intercultures/blendlinge.pdf

[21] The educated middle class or simply the intelligentsia.

[22] In the sense of the German verbs *emporheben*, *emporentwickeln* – "to raise up", "to develop upwards", "to elevate to a higher position by means of culture".

[23] "The language of books", *die Büchersprache* – a standardized national language, artificially composed of many local dialects.

[24] "Hoi polloi", *Der gemeine Haufe*. We can also translate it as "multitude" – *Haufe* = much, many in terms of Gk. *polys*, *polloi* (pl.).

[25] In Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur: Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters*, Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel, 1994, p. 31.

[26] In the sense of what Freud understood as *Kulturarbeit* – something similar to draining a swamp, "Trockenlegung der Zuydersee".

[27] Hans-Yost Frey, "Übersetzung und Sprachtheorie bei Humboldt", in: Alfred Hirsch (Ed.) *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997, pp. 37-64, p. 59.

[28] See Judith Butler, "Universality in Culture", in: Martha C. Nussbaum with Respondents, ed. By Joshua Cohen, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Boston: Beacon Press 1996, pp. 45-53. Also, Judith Butler/Ernesto Laclau/Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, London/New York: Verso, 2000.

[29] *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, ibid. p.13.

[30] We should also remember that, in the period of German Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel called Germans *die Griechen der Neuzeit* ("the Greeks of modern times").

[31] It is not by chance that *Culture* and *Colonialism* have the same etymological root in the Latin word *colere*, "which can mean anything from cultivating and inhabiting to worshipping and protecting. Its meaning as 'inhabit' has evolved from the Latin *colonus* to the contemporary 'colonialism'". Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford UK/Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000., p. 2.

[32] *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, ibid. p. 4.

[33] Rastko Močnik, „Translation in the Field of Ideological Struggle", http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0606/mocnik/en

[34] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London/New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 8.

[35] This is how cultural theory works wonders – it can make even the lowest social stratum appear as a (cultural) elite.

[36] The *Parco di Resistenza* where the migrants from the former Soviet Union meet is in fact near the train station *Ostience,* which was built by Mussolini specifically for Hitler's arrival.

[37] See Alain Badiou, *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London and New York: Verso, 2002, p. 27.

[38] See Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 213-214.

[39] Literally in terms of *fidem prodere* – a break with fidelity.

[40] *The Task of Translator*, ibid., p. 261.

[41] Ibid., p. 256.

[42] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964, p. 256.