

Marxism, Communism, and Translation: An Introduction

Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin

The political Right in the United States and elsewhere has always found it convenient to imagine Marxism and communism as movements in translation, rooted in the foreign bodies of texts with inauthentic external origins. But left movements have not always been fully comfortable with the facts and the tasks of translation, either. In his 2004 memoir, *Bir Ömrün Kıyılarında: Anılar (On the Shores of a Life: Memories)*, Orhan Suda (1929–2014), the Turkish translator of Karl Marx’s *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökono-*

We thank our contributors for the rich, rigorous, and thought-provoking exchanges that accompanied the preparation of this special issue. Halil Nalçaoğlu of Istanbul Bilgi University very kindly put us in contact with Levent Yılmaz. Yüksel Arslan, Seli Arslan, and Levent Yılmaz generously granted us permission to reproduce the images of Arslan’s paintings from the collection *A Retrospective of Yüksel Arslan, Catalogue/Yüksel Arslan Retrospektifi, Katalog*, edited by Levent Yılmaz (2009). Color printing of these images was supported by funding provided by the Pennsylvania State University.

Throughout this special issue, we use a simplified form of the Library of Congress system for transliteration of Russian names and phrases, except where proper names may be better known to readers in other variants (for example, Maksim Gorky, Georgy Plekhanov, etc.). All translations from the Turkish are our own unless indicated otherwise.

mie and other works, including Georgy Plekhanov's *Osnovnye voprosy marksizma* and Edward Carr's *The Bolshevik Revolution*, remarked: "No one considers this: all the revolutionary songs that have been sung in Turkey since the 1930s fail to correspond with the reality of Turkey. These songs are truly beautiful, and their words have deep meaning, but they are all translated from either Russian or Bulgarian. . . . Everything is translation. Ours is a MOVEMENT IN TRANSLATION. Nothing but an imitation [öykünmekten]."¹ Suda correctly understands translation as a constitutive characteristic and dynamic of Marxism and communism, but he regards it as inauthentic imitation, producing a particular, translated Marxism and communism that is hierarchically subordinated to an untranslated, potentially universal Marxism and communism.

Such views certainly do not stand alone in the long history of Marxist and communist translation dating back, in the Turkish case, to the early twentieth century and carrying the weight of a belated modernity as well as violent state exorcisms of the Left. From the start, with the preface to the first complete 1923 Turkish translation of *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (titled *Komünist Beyannamesi* [*Communist Declaration*]) composed by the secretary of the Turkish Communist Party, Şefik Hüsnü, Turkish translators remarked their own belatedness and inadequacy to a laborious task.² Hüsnü's translation from a French-language edition followed the first incomplete translation by Mustafa Suphi, a founder of the Turkish Communist Party who was murdered along with fourteen comrades in 1921 on the Black Sea by local boatmen.³ Reflecting on the range of languages into

1. Orhan Suda, *Bir Ömrün Kıyılarındaki Anılar* (Istanbul: Literatür, 2011), 73–74. Capitalization in Suda's text is reproduced as it appears in the work.

2. Karl Marks and Fridrik Engels, *Komünist Beyannamesi*, trans. Şefik Hüsnü (Istanbul: Evkaf Matbaası, 1923), transliterated by Şeyda Oğuz, in *Komünist Manifesto ve Hakkında Yazılar* (Istanbul: Yordam, 2013), 80–110. For a survey of Turkish translation of foundational works of Marxism and communism, see Erkan Ünal, "Sol Düşüncenin Ortasında ve Kıyısında: Çeviri Kitapları," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol*, vol. 8, ed. Murat Gültekinçil (Istanbul: İletişim, 2008), 418–31.

3. Harassed by a mob in Trebizond, Suphi and his comrades presumably boarded a boat to travel back to Soviet Russia, but they were attacked on the open sea by local boatmen. The specifics of the case—especially whether other political agents (such as Mustafa Kemal or Kazım Karabekir) were involved in planning the murders and recruiting the assassins—are still unresolved. On Mustafa Suphi, see Paul Dumont, "Bolchevisme et Orient: Le parti communiste turc de Mustafa Suphi, 1918–1921," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 18, no. 4 (1977): 377–409. For Mustafa Suphi's incomplete translation, see Mete Tunçay, *Eski Sol Üzerine Yeni Bilgiler* (Istanbul: Belge, 1982), 27–46.

which the *Manifesto* had been translated, Hüsnü observed that “this valuable work marking a crucial stage in the development of human thought was translated into our language and presented to Turkish intellectuals and the working class only now—seventy-five years after its composition—and is as such a great example of the calamitous circumstances under which we have lived until now.”⁴ When Mehmet Selik’s translation from the German of the first volume of *Das Kapital* was published in 1966, a review essay by the prominent critic and translator Selahattin Hilâv dwelled similarly on its belatedness.⁵ Selik’s translation had followed Hikmet Kıvılcımlı’s unfinished effort to translate the first volume in serial form in the late 1930s, relying on the popular German edition of 1932 issued by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute. Kıvılcımlı’s translation appeared in seven serial installments, with the seventh installment ending in the middle of a sentence upon Kıvılcımlı’s arrest and imprisonment in 1937.⁶

It is understandable that the interruptions and deferrals produced by censorship and by the persecution of translators would encourage those who suffered them to imagine Marxist and communist translation as specially cursed by belatedness and inauthenticity, in Turkey and elsewhere. But we think it is time to examine this discourse more carefully, and one of our goals in this special issue has been to imagine translation as an event of iteration that is requested and anticipated by the “original” works of the Marxist-Leninist corpus itself. To imagine translation as mere derivation is to leave it confined by what Walter Benjamin called “the bourgeois conception of language,” which regarded language principally or only as a means of communication and regarded translation in similar terms, as the reproduction at a distance of an abstract content of communication that was always identical to itself.⁷ Resisting or simply turning away from the singularity of each translation, the bourgeois conception of translation abstracts from the source text a universalized or universalizable conceptual content and understands any given product of translation as an instance of such

4. Şefik Hüsnü, “Birkaç Söz,” in *Komünist Manifesto ve Hakkında Yazılar*, 82.

5. Selahattin Hilâv, “Kitap Tanıtım,” *Ant* 4 (January 24, 1967): 15.

6. Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Bütün Eserleri*, vol. 7, *Kapital Formaları 1–7* (Istanbul: Sosyal İnsan, 2007).

7. Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 65; Benjamin, “Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2.1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 144.

abstraction. As such, it recapitulates the governing logic of the commodity form, which establishes the relation between the universal and the particular as a relationship of essential identity.

Against the chrono-logic of belatedness and the onto-logic of sameness, in these senses, we posed as our organizing question the following: How does the Marxist-Leninist oeuvre lend itself to and “call” for translation, and how do the languages of translation respond to, rather than merely exemplify or serve (a universal) Marxism and communism? In challenging attributions of derivativeness to translation, we take our cue from Benjamin, who imagined translation as a form and translatability as a characteristic of the original text itself. “If translation is a form [*Form*],” he wrote in his 1921 essay “The Task of the Translator” (“Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”), “translatability [*Übersetzbarkeit*] must be an essential feature of certain works . . . [which] means that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability.”⁸ In an essay explicating this formal or formalist image of translation, Samuel Weber argues that in Benjamin’s usage, the suffix form *-ability (-barkeit)* in the word *translatability (Übersetzbarkeit)* marks translation as a structural possibility and indeed a necessity inherent in the original itself, in just this sense.⁹ If, according to the bourgeois conception of translation, what “moves across” in translation is a self-identical conceptual content, Benjamin contrastingly understands the event of translation as a structurally necessary event—and *that* is what is communicated.

In like manner, Marxist-communist translation in particular marks a necessary “relationship of the original to itself,” in its iterations: each event of translation is, then, a self-realization of the original text in its taking leave (of itself) and becoming an other. Not a closed, self-identical totality, the original is imagined as a whole comprised of its (realized and possible) translations—a whole that resembles the assembled fragments of a broken vessel, whose broken pieces “must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another.”¹⁰ Here we might consider the remarks of Kivılcımlı, in a 1978 essay titled “Geç Gelme” (“Arriving Late”), on the belatedness of the Turkish communist movement,

8. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, 254; “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 10.

9. Samuel Weber, “Translatability I: Following (*Nachfolge*)” and “Translatability II: Afterlife,” in *Benjamin’s -abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 53–78 and 79–94; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *BA*.

10. Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 260; “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” 18.

which formulate a principle of affirmation of the belatedness of all Marxist-communist translation: “*Not to benefit from the virtues of arriving late is to be oppressed by the vices of being late. . . . Yes, we arrived at the movement late. But if we’re resolved not to be late, and if we know how to represent all the lessons of the past, . . . [we can recognize that] we are not facing objective obstacles that are impossible to surmount.*”¹¹ Translation as latecomer inherits the past of the original (as well as its existing translations), promising the meeting of the belated original with itself in a new form.

In thus insisting on translation, one might say that we are resisting a recent tendency in comparative literary studies to valorize untranslatability. Revisiting the oft-cited account by Marx and Friedrich Engels in the *Manifesto* of the emergence of *Weltliteratur* from an intensified intercourse (*Verkehr*), Emily Apter has observed the dependence of the revival of world literary studies during the 2000s “on a translatability assumption.” Against this “expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors,” Apter proposes a comparative method that “recognizes the importance of non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability, and untranslatability.”¹² Apter’s most recent work must be read alongside the English translation of Barbara Cassin’s *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, coedited by Apter with Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood, which borrows and modifies Cassin’s concept of an “Untranslatable.”¹³ For Cassin, “to speak of *untranslatables* in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the syntactical or grammatical turns are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on

11. Hikmet Kivılcımlı, “Geç Gelme,” *Yol 1: Genel Düşünceler* (Köxüz Dijital Yayınlar), 56, 63, <https://docs.google.com/folderview?id=0B4WCAkflVlkyY2gzcnQtWFkzZ3c>.

12. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 3, 4.

13. Barbara Cassin, ed., *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); Cassin, ed., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, trans. Steven Rendall et al., translation edited by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). One cannot help but wonder what kind of “untranslatable” the word *européen* presents when omitted from the English title of the book. One might, for example, imagine the subject position of the Turkish subaltern, for whom the category of *européen* is (un)translatable. In her memoirs, the Turkish nationalist-feminist Halide Edib Adıvar wrote thus of an exchange with a peasant woman and survivor of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22: “I asked the Greeks for pity. . . . They told us they were sent by Avrope [Europe]. My daughter, please tell that man Avrope to leave us alone, we didn’t do anything bad to him, tell him not to disturb us.” See Halide Edib Adıvar, *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı* (Istanbul: Atlas, 1994), 201.

(not) translating.”¹⁴ But we find that Apter’s version of the Untranslatable, despite her clarifications, too often appears to stand for a pure difference, and thus risks a double marginalization in its otherwise noble opposition to the “always translatable.”¹⁵ One cannot end with the Untranslatable as illegible: rather, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has suggested, one must continue from that waypoint, to reclaim the singularity of the untranslatable as a universalizable, without actually universalizing it.¹⁶ In the case of Marx, whose writings may all too conveniently be construed as prophecies that lost their historical force in mistranslation (among other misfortunes), we might say that our obligation today is to translate Marx more extensively and more vigorously—not despite but precisely because of Marx’s inexhaustible translatability. Insofar as an ostensibly original Marx, or Marxism, has always exceeded its historical realization, we ought to affirm its difference as a universalizable, in Spivak’s sense, and to imagine another politics of translation for the so-called postcommunist historical present.

We affirm Cassin’s foregrounding of the “interminable” character of translation in general, and we suggest its application to Marxist-communist translation in particular. The essays that follow represent work across European and Asian languages including German, French, English, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Azeri, and Turkish; in such work “from one language to another,” as Cassin put it, “neither the words nor the conceptual networks can simply be superimposed” (*DU*, xvii). It is a given, not a revelation, in such a context, that translation “into one language or another,” as Cassin also put it, “creates a problem, to the extent of sometimes generating a neologism or imposing a new meaning on an old word” (*DU*, xvii). Tracing the English (mis)translation of Marx’s phrase *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* as “primitive accumulation,” Rosalind C. Morris suggests that mistranslation of this concept has supported evolutionary or developmentalist accounts of national and epochal history. Morris suggests “originary accumulation” as a rendering that conveys the recursive dimension of *ursprüngliche Akkumulation*, as a process that is reenacted in the life-history of not only every economic system but also every subject. Reminding us that “ursprüngliche Akkumulation” was Marx’s own German

14. Barbara Cassin, introduction to *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, xvii; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *DU*.

15. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 20.

16. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Comparative Literature/World Literature: A Discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 48, no. 4 (2011): 478.

rendering of Adam Smith's "previous accumulation," Morris intimates that translation is not an afterlife of Marxist-communist texts but a constitutive force that impels them from the start.

In their respective essays on the Chinese and Turkish communist translators Qu Qiubai (1899–1935) and Hikmet Kivılcımlı (1902–71), Tani Barlow and Özge Serin shift focus to historical contexts, in which the project of Marxist-communist translation was doubly complicated by the radicalization of the instability in language under the influence of early twentieth-century Chinese and Turkish lexical, orthographic, and writing reforms. Barlow suggests that for Qu, who played a key role in the institutionalization of sociology in China as a Marxist discipline, the *hanzi*, or old written Chinese language, resembled "an undead zombie or a filthy ghost" that posed a major obstacle to Marxist translation.¹⁷ Against this inaccessible language that offered fake, petit bourgeois representations of reality, Qu proposed cultivating a "common" written language—common in the sense of "common as dirt" (QQ, 284)—based on the aphorisms, localisms, and idioms of all varieties of spoken Chinese.¹⁸

According to Serin, it was to achieve a similar end that Kivılcımlı insisted on the idiomatic use of Marx's concepts in his Turkish translations. What mattered for Kivılcımlı was not only the actual use of idioms but also the reconceptualization of Marxist-communist translation itself according to the logic of the idiom: the inseparability of language and thought, of form and content, that alone makes possible the singular use of idioms in their commonality. Through a close reading of Kivılcımlı's preface to his translation of Marx's *Wage Labor and Capital*, Serin suggests that Kivılcımlı's idiosyncratic, literalist method of translation not only traced Marxian concept-metaphors back to their sensuous origins, exposing the use-value of abstractions for the immediate grasping of historical materiality, but also called for the singular use of Marxian concept-metaphors by anyone and everyone as if they were idioms, putting into practice a new kind of literary communism.

In "Lenin of the Camps: Radical Translation in Colonial Digoel and Nazi Terezín," Rudolf Mrázek offers a contrapuntal reading of the Nazi con-

17. See Tani Barlow, "'History's Coffin Can Never Be Closed': Qu Qiubai Translates Social Science," this issue of *boundary 2*, 264; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as QQ.

18. On language as force, see Jacques Derrida, "Signature événement contexte," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 365–93; "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 307–30.

centration camp at Terezín (Theresienstadt), established in Bohemia for European Jews, and the Dutch colonial camp Boven Digoel, established in New Guinea for the imprisonment of Indonesian communists. Tracing the translation and “massive borrowing” of Marxist-communist texts in both camps, Mrázek emphasizes not only the translational gaps between languages—for example, in the Dutch translation of *soviet* as *raad* (“council”)—but also the translation and translatability of what seems most untranslatable: the proper names *Lenin*, *Sovieta*, and so on given to children born in the camps. Collecting what he calls, quoting Walter Benjamin, the “rags of speech and verbal scraps” of these archives, Mrázek suggests that the translating activities of the imprisoned gave to the “original” texts a new kind of revolutionary code or “concentrated” language. If what emerges in the interstices of idioms, code, and other fragmentary utterances in Mrázek’s essay as well as across the whole collection is a kind of a Benjaminian pure language, this plurilingual relationality ought to be affirmed, as Mrázek suggests (via Jacques Derrida), as the mark of an undeconstructible communist promise that one cannot stop (not) translating.

Marx as Translator

If our first goal in this special issue is to displace the derivative conceptualization of Marxist-communist translation, a second is to foreground translation as both a concept-metaphor and a practice in Marx’s own work. Even a quick glance at the published volumes of Marx and Engels’s reading excerpts and notes in the fourth division of *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) suggests a constitutive role for translation. While Marx’s earliest notebooks, which include extracts in ancient Greek and Latin on Epicurean philosophy and the work of Gottfried Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza, among others, reveal his solid knowledge of classical languages, the reading notes Marx kept in 1844 on Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and David Ricardo, among others, suggest that translation was a methodological condition of the Marxian critique of classical political economy.¹⁹ The 1844 notebooks that provided the foundation for *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Capital* reveal that Marx was reading and abstracting English texts in French translation prior to gaining facility in English during

19. See *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), vol. 4.1, *Exzerpte und Notizen bis 1842* (Berlin: Dietz, 1976); and MEGA, vol. 4.2, *Exzerpte und Notizen 1843 bis Januar 1845* (Berlin: Dietz, 1981).

the 1850s, and that Marx translated some passages into a kind of Germanized French.²⁰

It is well known that Marx composed *Misère de la philosophie* in French in 1847 and that he revised and rewrote Joseph Roy's French translation of *Capital*, published in installments from 1872 to 1875, making corrections as well as simplifying the text for a readership of French workers. In January 1853, Marx began composing his articles for the *New York Daily Tribune* in English, no longer requesting that Engels either translate them from German or write them on his behalf.²¹ In addition to studying Spanish and Italian, Marx in his fifties acquired reading knowledge of Russian, writing to Sigfrid Meyer in a letter composed in English and dated January 21, 1871,

I don't know whether I told you that since the beginning of 1870 I have been having to teach myself Russian, which I now read fairly fluently. . . . The result was worth the effort that a man of my age must make to master a language differing so greatly from the classical, Germanic and Romance languages. The intellectual movement now taking place in Russia testifies to the fact that things are seething deep below the surface. Minds are always connected by invisible threads with the body of the people.²²

Such rigorous plurilingualism, with its commitment to ongoing language acquisition, was also characteristic of Engels and, later, Vladimir Lenin: in addition to classical and modern European languages, Engels studied Persian, Russian, and Serbo-Croat, while Lenin learned German, French, and English in addition to classical European languages.²³

We have already mentioned Morris's essay, in which we encounter the figure of Marx as translator, working across English, German, and French. It might be productively read alongside Dermot Ryan's "Marx's

20. See the *Apparat* of *MEGA*, 4.2:746, 759–60. The editors note that in contrast with the extracts on Smith and Ricardo, the Mill extracts comprise mainly German translations of French passages, with few citations in French.

21. See the preface to *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 39, *Letters, 1852–1855*, trans. Peter and Betty Ross (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), xxix.

22. Karl Marx, "Letter to Sigfrid Meyer," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 44, *Letters, 1870–1873*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 105.

23. On Engels's study of Slavic languages, see his letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, April 12, 1853, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 39, 305; on Persian, see his letter to Marx dated June 6, 1853, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 39, 341. On Lenin's education, see Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2000), 37–41, 77.

‘Universal Passport’; or, Critique as a Practice of Translation.” Tracing Marx and Engels’s exchange on Wilhelm Pieper’s unpublished English translation of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and Roy’s French translation of the first volume of *Capital*, Ryan suggests that where Engels imagined translation as “a potential diminishment or falling away from the original moment of theory,” Marx often took it as an opportunity to renew his engagement with the original.²⁴ Ryan suggests that translation does not take place only after Marx’s writings and in their afterlife. Emphasizing that translation was a key method of Marx’s critical epistemology, he observes that as early as *The Economic and Philosophic Notebooks of 1844*, Marx grounded his critiques of foundational works of British and French political economy on his own translations of extracts. Ryan argues that it is essential to grasp the *longue durée* of Marx’s critical-translational method: understood properly, it displaces the break on which Louis Althusser insisted in *Reading “Capital,”* separating the reading methodologies of the 1844 Paris manuscripts from *Capital*.²⁵

It is useful to recall that Althusser distinguished two modes of reading in Marx. In the first mode, Marx emphasized classical political economy’s oversight or omission of essential matters: its blindness; while in the second, Marx foregrounded what classical political economy had seen but failed to name: its silent vision. For Althusser, the “religious,” logocentric mode of reading employed in the Paris manuscripts, interpreting concrete existence as the “immediate transparency” of an abstract (human) essence, was devoted to the detection of blindness (*RC*, 17; *LC*, 13). The detection of silent vision, meanwhile, is a goal of the second mode of reading, the “structural” mode employed in *Capital*, which “measures a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real, inscribed in its *structure*, a distance and a dislocation such as to make their own effects themselves illegible, and the illusion of an immediate reading of them the ultimate apex of their effects: *fetishism*” (*RC*, 17; *LC*, 14). Following Ryan, we might challenge the Althusserian insistence on a characteristic break in Marx’s work, instead reading symptomatically Althusser’s own reading of Marx and suggesting that translation is the missing problematic in Althusser’s explication of Marx’s reading “protocol.”

24. See Dermot Ryan, “Marx’s ‘Universal Passport’; or, Critique as a Practice of Translation,” this issue of *boundary 2*, 108.

25. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading “Capital,”* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *RC*. *Lire* “*Le capital*,” vol. 1 (Paris: Maspero, 1973); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *LC*.

One might examine the extract quoted by Althusser from the nineteenth chapter of the French edition of *Capital*, translated by Roy and edited by Marx (*RC*, 21; *LC*, 19), on the transformation of the value (and respectively the price) of labor-power into wages. Tracing classical political economy's determination of the real value of labor by the accidental market prices of labor, Marx notes that classical political economy "then determined this value by the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the labourer." Marx observes and Althusser emphasizes that classical political economy thus pointed toward the concept of labor-power but that in its exclusive preoccupation "with the difference between the current prices of labour and its value, with the relation of this value to the values of commodities, to the rate of profit, etc." (quoted in *RC*, 21; *LC*, 19), classical political economy failed to name and develop what it saw.²⁶ Marx was able to name the missing concept, calling it *Arbeitskraft*, and we follow Ryan in suggesting that the act of translation is a condition of possibility for the critical epistemology that appears here.

Although Althusser does not comment on it, the work of translation animates every turn in Marx's parsing of the logic of classical political economy in the passage in question. Marx refers to "le 'prix nécessaire' des Physiocrates, — le 'prix naturel' d'Adam Smith" (quoted in *LC*, 18), then translates a sentence from Smith: "'La marchandise,' dit Smith, 'est alors vendue précisément *ce qu'elle vaut*'" ("The commodity,' says Smith, 'is then sold for precisely *what it is worth*'") (quoted in *LC*, 19; *RC*, 21). In the 1867 German original, Marx's role as a translator is also marked by the appearance of the English phrase "value of labour" in a crucial sentence: "Was sie also *Werth der Arbeit* (value of labour) nennt, ist in der That der *Werth der Arbeitskraft*, die in der Persönlichkeit des Arbeiters existirt, und von ihrer Funktion, der Arbeit, ebenso verschieden ist, wie eine Maschine von ihren Operationen."²⁷ ("Therefore what they called 'the value of labour' is in fact the value of labour-power, as it exists in the personality of the worker, and it is as different from its function, labour, as a machine is from

26. The English translation by Ben Brewster provided here follows Roy's French text, which differs slightly from the German original. For the English translation of this passage, based primarily on the fourth 1890 German edition of *Das Kapital* edited by Engels, see Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 677–79; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *C*.

27. For the German original quoted here, see *MEGA*, vol. 2.5, *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 1 (Hamburg, 1867), 436, MEGADigital, <http://telota.bbaw.de/mega/>.

the operations it performs" [C, 678]). Roy's translation modifies this sentence slightly, and it omits the English phrase. Still, translation is present as a kind of reading protocol in the quoted French.

Such repetition by translation estranges the original encountered in French and/or English, exposing a gap between the name of the concept and the place it occupies, or the role it serves, in the signifying chain of classical political economy and requesting its supplementation in a translating language, German. Via Weber and Benjamin, we remember that translation can never "be equated with the sum of the meanings of individual words and phrases" (BA, 73); it also concerns "the way in which the individual elements are syntactically related or positioned with respect to the other elements of the phrase" (BA, 77). Here we might borrow Althusser's analogy, noting that there is indeed "*the action of a real drama*" in the texts of classical political economy, "in which old concepts desperately play the part of something absent *which is nameless*, in order to call it onto the stage in person—whereas they only 'produce' its presence in their failures, in the dislocation between the characters and their roles" (RC, 31; LC, 31). It is precisely the repetition of this epistemological production (as a kind of relational drama) in another language that exposes the gap between the name of the concept and its role in the original language, allowing for its supplementation in a translating language. Irreducible to mere mechanical repetition, Marx's translations register in this way the limits of the discourse on derivative translation that we mentioned earlier.

But in Marx's work translation is not only an actual practice. It also serves as an important concept-metaphor in the first chapter of *Capital*, describing a process inherent in and at the origin of the capitalist constitution of reality. Appearing in a world of commodities, each commodity "betrays [*verrät*] its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar, the commodity-language [*der Warensprache*]" (C, 143; translation slightly modified).²⁸ Eavesdropping on a conversation between one commodity, linen, and another commodity, a coat, that have "entered into association with one another," Marx translates their exchange thus:

In order to tell us that labor creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labor, [the linen] says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e. is value, consists of the same labor as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as a value

28. For the German original of this passage, see *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1973), 66; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *K*.

differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that the value has the appearance of a coat, and therefore that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value [*Wertding*], it and the coat are as like as two peas. (C, 143–44; K, 66–67)

More than merely a reference to a figurative act of speech, the term *commodity-language* denotes a kind of language that predicates and is predicated on the world of commodities. Analyzing the grammar, syntax, and semantics of this commodity-language, in the exchange between the linen and the coat, Werner Hamacher observes that it is restricted to propositions of equality.²⁹ Hamacher further notes that its “statements are not propositions of existence but arithmetical propositions of relation which can claim validity even if the existence of one of their members is not assured” (GD, 170). Insofar as the statements of the commodity-language posit an equivalence where there is none, they are performative: it is in fact this equivalence that brings the commodity into the world, making it *appear* in the world of commodities. Finally, Hamacher suggests, because the commodity-language “disregards all ‘natural’ determinations and relies exclusively upon those formal determinants pertinent to its abstract relation of symmetry, it is not only a language of exchange but also a language of turning, of reversal, of specular inversion” (GD, 171). Hamacher emphasizes the abstraction of the commodity-language, which represents the value of one commodity (the linen) by the body of another equivalent commodity (the coat) in the statement of equivalence “20 yards of linen = 1 coat.” In order to appear as a commodity, the linen must negate its materiality as linen and sublimate itself into a “value-soul” (*Wertseele*) expressed only in the physical form of the coat. And in its value-relation with the linen, the coat matters only insofar as it serves as the “value-body” (*Wertkörper*) for the linen’s “value-soul” (C, 143; K, 66; translation modified).

We might extend Hamacher’s emphasis on the “turning” (*Verkehrung*) quality of such abstracting language, suggesting further that the commodity-language is structured as translation. Insofar as translation involves an original that takes leave of itself and becomes another (or more than itself) in its re-presentation in the phonic and graphemic signifiers of another language, the statements of the commodity-language might well

29. Werner Hamacher, “Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s “Specters of Marx,”* ed. Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 2008), 168–212; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *GD*.

be read as translational statements themselves: the value of the linen is abstracted from its body and expressed by its translation into the physical form of the coat. And insofar as the coat serves as the *medium* of translation for the “value-soul” of the linen, it is transformed into a new kind of animated body-form—one that we might describe, following Hamacher, as a “morphantom” (*GD*, 178).

Working as a critical translator of this language, Marx reveals the content of the “value-soul” mediated by the commodity-language: it is the magnitude of the socially necessary labor-time that goes into producing the linen and the coat, and that is itself an abstraction from the particular forms of human labor producing each item, in weaving and tailoring. But Marx’s critical translation has a dual character, involving more than a mere revelation of content. Equally important is his emphasis on the *unheimlich* translational form of the commodity-language that “transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic” or enigma (*C*, 167; *K*, 88). “Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity?” Marx asks. “Clearly, it arises from this *form* itself” (*C*, 164; *K*, 86; emphasis added). The commodity form possesses a fetish character because it conceals its true content in and through the peculiar materiality that it dons, as it were, in translation. Here the translating *medium* does not merely alter but actively *veils* its content, as it is itself radically transformed.

If the genealogy of Western translation theory might be traced back to ancient theories of metempsychosis, we might say that here a *Seelenwanderung*, or soul migration, occurs in translations of the commodity-language.³⁰ Irreducible to a mere thing, the commodity is indeed an animated body-form, a “morphantom,” that signifies above and beyond its sensuousness as the bodying forth of a social relation, the specter of social labor. Imbued with souls captured from working human bodies, incarnated commodities act as if they are the sources and origins of their own movement in the social sphere, obscuring the relations of production that produce and animate them. As Marx observes, “The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the com-

30. On *Seelenwanderung* in *Capital*, see Marx, *Capital*, 314–15; and *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 23, 221. For an explication of “soul migration” in Marx, see Christopher Bracken, *Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 155–65. On the relation between translation theory and theories of metempsychosis, see Douglas Robinson, *Translation and Taboo* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 61–73.

modity reflects [*zurückspiegelt*] the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers" (C, 164–65; K, 86). Where the objective language of capitalist relations organizes reality in and as a concealment, veiling not just the real but also its own mode of translation as concealment, Marx's practice of critical and, arguably, interlinear translation exposes the dual structure of translation inherent in the commodity-language and its animated forms of self-concealment.

Thus while for Althusser the "necessary invisible connexion between the field of the visible and the field of the invisible" in Marx ought to be *read* as "*the effectivity of a structure on its elements*," we might instead place emphasis on the *transformative* dynamic of this relation, reconceptualizing it as a dual structure of translation (RC, 20, 30; LC, 18, 30). More than a merely phenomenological question of (in)visibility, fetishism is also, then, a hauntological question of alteration.

This emphasis on translation also allows us, pace Althusser, to account for the reproductive expansion of capitalist objectivity across different linguistic and social formations without making the history a question of only secondary importance. Morris's reflection on *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* offers the alternative translation "originary accumulation" as the recursive *form* of the historical translation of capitalist relations across different historical and social formations at both the subjective and objective levels. Her essay helps us to account for the universalizing and particularizing forces of capitalist modernity, refusing to approach non-European modernities as mere imitation or essentialize their difference as alternative modernities. In focusing on the domestic space of the family and the household as the originary site of this historical translation, across mainland Southeast Asia and South Africa, Morris suggests that capitalism's parasitic consumption of the use-value of labor-power and the household reproduces and produces anew not only the desiring subjects of household consumption (and debt) but also the desiring subjects of production "freed" into wage labor.

But there is one more crucial use of the concept-metaphor of translation in Marx's writings: Ryan demonstrates that Marx repeatedly employed the concept-metaphor of translation in his criticism of the distorted "translational" practices of vulgar economists. Distinguishing vulgar economists

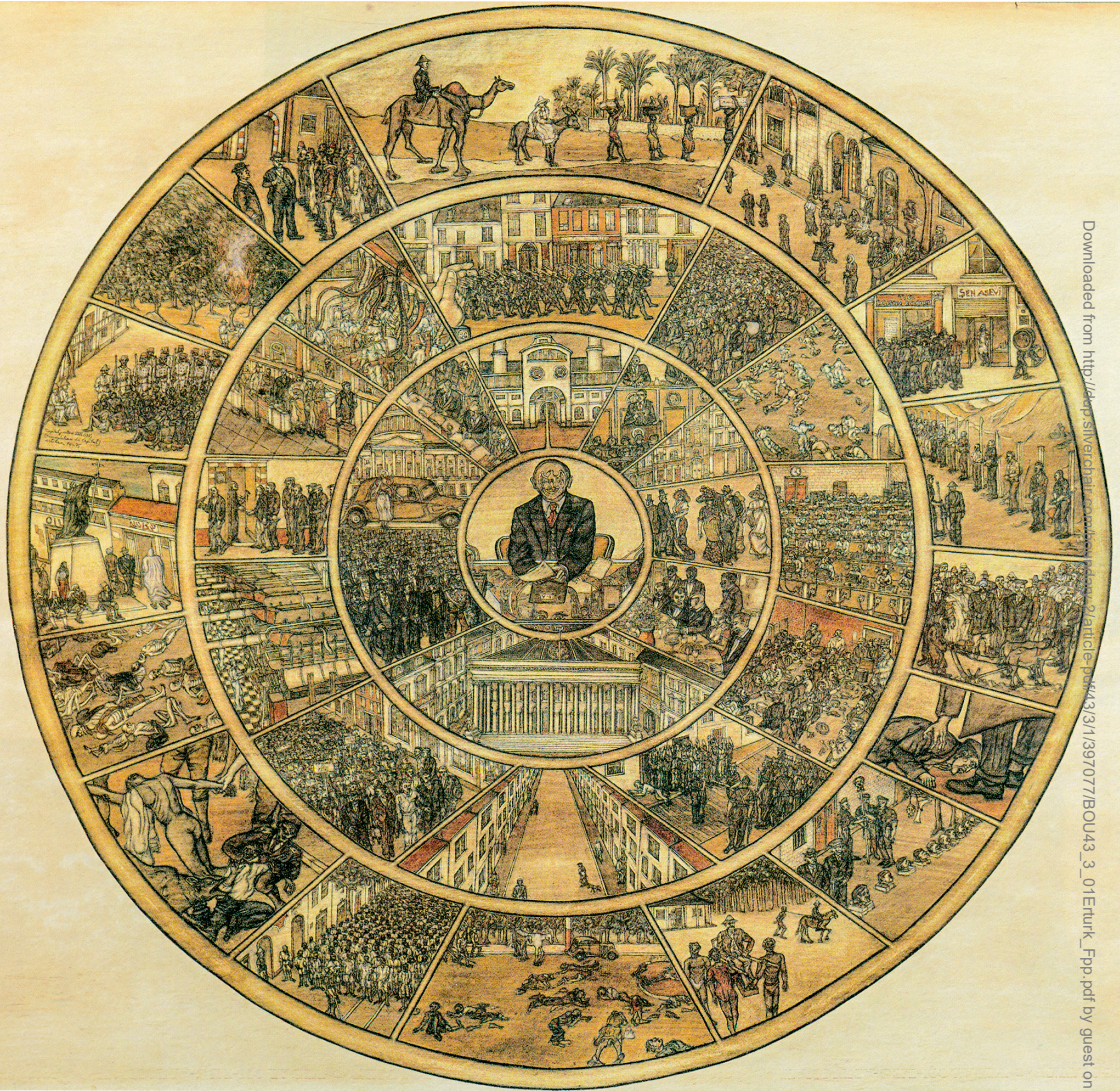


Figure 1. Yüksel Arslan, *Arture 178, Kapital XXV (Sermaye birikimi) (Capital XXV [Accumulation of Capital])*, 1975, 75.2 × 81 cm. Reproduced from *A Retrospective of Yüksel Arslan, Catalogue/Yüksel Arslan Retrospektifi, Katalog*, edited by Levent Yılmaz (Istanbul: Santral, 2009), 140.

from political economists, Marx noted in *The Economic Manuscript of 1861–63* that the former “translate [übersetzen] the concepts, motives, etc., of the representatives of the capitalist mode of production who are held in thrall to this system of production and in whose consciousness only its superficial appearance is reflected [in denen sie sich nur in ihrem oberflächlichen Schein reflectirt].”³¹ If vulgar economists offer merely “doctrinaire” and “apologetic” translations of “commonplace appearances into equally commonplace notions,” political economists “seek to uncover the essence which lies hidden behind commonplace appearances,”³² but they lack the critical capacity to confront the necessary condition of their own production. Following Ryan’s analysis of vulgar and classical economists’ possessed immersion in the language of capital, one might say that ideology for Marx is a debility in self-translation and that this failure to retranslate concepts back into their material origins bespeaks the “blindness” of ideology to itself. Earlier, we suggested that Marx himself only uses concepts that are historically available and that he responds to this “first language” instead of creating abstractions ex nihilo. He often ventriloquizes the language of classical political economy in his uncompromising refusal to adopt a transcendental critical position, enjoining his readers to provide missing quotation marks. This both descriptive and performative ventriloquism should be distinguished from the speech-acts of vulgar economists, who are merely spoken by the commodity-language. Against the echoes of bourgeois ideology in vulgar and classical economy, Marx outlined his own critical translational methodology in the well-known 1857 introduction to *Grundrisse*:

The concrete is concrete because it is the compilation [*Zusammenfassung*] of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of compilation, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation [*Anschauung*] and conception [*Vorstellung*]. Along the first path the full conception was distilled out [*verflüchtigt*] to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract deter-

31. *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 32, *Karl Marx: 1861–1863* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 450; *MEGA*, vol. 2.3.4, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript 1861–1863)* (Berlin: Dietz, 1979), 1453.

32. *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 34, *Marx: 1861–1864* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), 86; *MEGA*, vol. 2.3.6, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript 1861–1863)* (Berlin: Dietz, 1982), 2117.

minations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought.³³

The first form of abstraction is, of course, the conventional method of political economy, which begins with the “real-concrete” as if it were immediately present to itself, as if it were not the product-effect of a historical process. Political economy abstracts *from* this apparent immediacy to a generalized law, establishing an inner unity between appearances. Marx’s rejoinder to this formal abstraction is to posit the concrete as a “result” and abstract *toward* the mediated reality in the “thought-concrete.”³⁴ Marx’s reverse translation seeks to ground anew the relationship between concept and reality, concept and truth, and concept and politics, formulating a new understanding of abstraction that is neither *homoeosis* nor adequation but rather, as Antonio Negri suggests in *Marx beyond Marx*, a political “project.”³⁵ From Marx’s perspective, political economy’s formal abstraction is obfuscatory rather than clarifying: political economy grasps the antagonistic, hence necessarily dynamic and incomplete material reality of capital with immutable, closed, and unified categories, positing capital as an autonomous, self-generative Subject. Against this projection, Marx insists that we leave abstractions open and recognize their heterogeneous determination. It is through such an approach that we radicalize the antagonism inherent in material reality.³⁶ No doubt Marx had this in mind when he began his examination of real abstractions with a sentence whose senti-

33. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 101; *MEGA*, vol. 2.1.1, *Ökonomische Manuscripte 1857/1858*, 36, MEGADigital, <http://telota.bbaw.de/mega/>.

34. Althusser’s reading of Marx revolves around this necessary nonidentity between the “thought-concrete” and the “real-concrete.” Distinguishing Marx’s method from the methods of speculative and empiricist idealisms that confound thought about the real with the real, Althusser argues that Marx maintained the order of thought and of the real in strict separation. Althusser and Balibar, *Reading “Capital,”* 96; Althusser and Balibar, *Lire “Le Capital,”* 107.

35. Antonio Negri, *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the “Grundrisse,”* ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano (New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 49.

36. For example, see the 1857 introduction, in which Marx describes the concept of production as a kind of a catachresis that posits commonalities through difference: “*Production in general* is an abstraction, but a rational [*verständige*] abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element [*das Gemeinsame*] and thus saves us repetition. Still, this *general category*, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented [*Gegliedertes*] many times over and splits into different determinations.” See Marx, *Grundrisse*, 85; *MEGA*, 2.1.1:23.

ment might appear to have arrived intact from political economy, but which took on a very different, if not diametrically opposed, meaning in transit: “Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category ‘labour,’ ‘labour as such,’ labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.”³⁷

It is only when abstraction is not reduced to adequation to or “verification” of material reality,³⁸ Marx maintains, that critical epistemology can bring to crisis the categories of capital riven by contradictions and disproportions, opening their constitutive antagonism to a new political horizon. It is in its exposure of the antagonistic mediation of reality that the Marxian concept of translation may be understood as the condition of a new politics.

Lenin and Translation

In his afterword to *Revolution at the Gates*, Slavoj Žižek suggested that “to put it in brutal and direct terms: it is obvious that ‘Lenin did not really understand Marx’—if nothing else, the Hegelian complexity of Marx’s ‘critique of political economy’ was beyond his reach; the paradox, however, is that it is only because Lenin did not ‘understand Marx’ that he was able to organize the October Revolution, the first properly Marxist revolution.”³⁹ Treating Lenin similarly as a revolutionary (non)translator of Marx, the third main goal of this special issue is to trace the dynamics of Leninist translation in the Soviet Union and beyond.

In “North Korea’s ‘Succession’ of Marxism,” Hoon Song revisits these remarks by Žižek, suggesting that Lenin’s creative translation of Marx has its own roots in Marx’s work. Of essential importance, Song suggests, is the analogy Marx draws between the equivalent form and the person of sovereign monarchical power. Emphasizing that the equivalent form of the coat “holds good only within the value-relation, in which the commodity linen is related to the commodity coat as its equivalent,” Marx proposed the following comparison in his analysis of the commodity relation between linen and

37. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 104–5; *MEGA*, 2.1.1:39–40.

38. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*, 49.

39. Slavoj Žižek, afterword to *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, by V. I. Lenin, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2011), 315n27.

coat: “For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects [*Untertanen*] to him. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king” (C, 149; K, 72). Locating in this Marxian “digression” the true political content of capitalist relations, Song suggests that the forms of capitalist economic exchange embody or represent (in the sense of *darstellen*) immeasurable difference as equivalence, concealing the historical conditions of their emergence. In addition to their fetishistic objectivity, these forms are supported by ideological temporalizing narratives (*Vorstellung*) that are invented after the fact to cover over and legitimize the rupture of exchange. For Song, Marx’s analytic method is telling in itself: rather than seeking the “missing representation” of capital’s historical inception, Marx approaches “capitalist history in terms of the *Darstellung* of cuts, fault lines, or faces.” Marx’s intervention thus involves appropriating “that dissimulated or covered-over transit distance of immeasureability called ‘antagonism’” immanent in the form, so as to free oneself from the order of general equivalence.⁴⁰ The Marxian intervention is a refusal to let one’s inner truth be bound to and effectively canceled by the sovereign, fetishistic exteriority (or “faciality”) of an equivalent other. Song suggests that if Lenin succeeded in translating Marx, he did so by repeating the Marxian gesture of arresting history, appropriating the immeasurable power of subjugation to perform a sovereign revolutionary act. A similar translation might be observed in Kim Il Sung’s “creative succession” of Marxism-Leninism: Song suggests that although the West reduces North Korean national politics to an irrational cult of the leader, the philosophy of *Juch’e* (self-reliance) composed by Kim Il Sung is a preparation toward authoring one’s own singular event and encountering knowledge in one’s own existence.

In its valuable analysis of the semiotics of “self-reliance” in North Korean political thought, Song’s essay also contributes to a recent conversation in Marxist criticism formulating interventions in contemporary politics through a return to the Lenin of the war years, who took the historical crisis of imperialist war and the disintegration of socialist alliances as an opportunity to reinvent Marxism.⁴¹ If this Marxist conversation does not have much to say about the legacies of Lenin in Asia, one of our goals here is to trace

40. Hoon Song, “North Korea’s ‘Succession’ of Marxism,” this issue of *boundary 2*, 100, 98, 100.

41. See, for example, Žižek’s *Revolution at the Gates*. See also Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

the other birth of the Leninist act in translation across Asian languages. We should remember that the proper names “October Revolution” and “Lenin” marked the place of a “knowledge to come” for many “Eastern” revolutionaries, in much the same way as Marx himself did for Lenin, mediating the translation and dissemination of Marxism-Leninism into Asian languages.⁴²

Žižek’s *Revolution at the Gates* is a valuable collection of Lenin’s writings from February through November 1917, representing a Lenin in the making of the revolutionary act. “With Lenin, as with Lacan,” Žižek writes, “the point is that the revolution *ne s’autorise que d’elle-même*: we should venture the revolutionary *act* not covered by the big Other—the fear of taking power ‘prematurely,’ the search for the guarantee is the fear of the abyss of the act” (RG, 8). Excluded from Žižek’s collection is the “Appeal to All Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East” (“Obrashchenie ko vsem trudiashchimsia musul’manam Rossii i Vostoka”), which Lenin cosigned with Joseph Stalin on December 7, 1917. We contend that the wager of the Leninist act cannot be fully grasped as such without some consideration of this other document of 1917, which soon was translated into other languages, and that this document serves as an important historical frame for the section on Lenin.⁴³ Recognizing the “great events” (*velikie sobytiia*)

42. As the first mass meeting of representatives of Western European, US, and Russian communist parties with communist and nonparty delegates from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia to Afghanistan, India, and China, the First Congress of the Peoples of the East convened in the Caucasian city of Baku, September 1–8, 1920, is crucial to consider in this respect. Though it failed to have long-lasting political effects, the congress was nevertheless a remarkable linguistic event, marking the Third International’s opening to the languages of the “East” (*Vostok*) including Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Turkish, Azeri, Kumyk, Uzbek, Chechen, and Kabardian, among others. For the congress proceedings, see John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920—First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder, 2010). For a brief analysis of its language politics, see Nergis Ertürk, “Baku, Literary Common,” in *Paradigms: American Comparative Literature Association 2014–2015 Report on the State of the Discipline*, September 14, 2014, <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/baku-literary-common>.

43. V. I. Lenin and I. V. Stalin, “Appeal to All Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East,” in *To See the Dawn*, 282–85; “Obrashchenie ko vsem trudiashchimsia musul’manam Rossii i Vostoka,” in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1957), 34–35. Hereafter, the English version of this essay is cited parenthetically in the text as A and the Russian version as O. For a Turkish translation of the “Appeal,” published in the newspaper *Yeni Dünya* (*New World*), an official publication of the Central Commissariat on Muslim Affairs in Inner Russia and Siberia (Muskom) edited by Mustafa Suphi, see “Teşrin-i Evvel İhtilalinden Sonra Mevki-i İktidara Geçmiş Olan Halk Komisarları Hükümetinin Büyük Şarkın İççi ve Köylü Müslümanlarına Hitabı,” *Yeni Dünya*, April 27, 1918,

taking place in Russia, the “Appeal” makes certain declarative statements, including those extending protection to the beliefs and customs of Muslims of Russia and annulling treaties signed by the tsar concerning the seizure of Constantinople and the partition of Persia and the Ottoman Empire (A, 282; O, 34). At the same time, the “Appeal” as an “obrashchenie” (the noun derives from the imperfective verb *obrashchat* [“to turn”]) differs from other documents composed by Lenin during this period that are classified as “doklad” (report or statement) or “tezisy” (theses). Offering something more than foundational statements, the speech-act of the “Appeal”—“my obrashchaemcia k vam”—registers the impossibility of realizing the revolutionary act without Muslim “sympathy and support” (A, 283; O, 34).

The imagination in the “Appeal” of the relation between the Russian and Muslim populations of the Soviet Union does not follow a model of intersubjective mutuality that presupposes (as Song puts it in another context) “a common measure” between the two groups. The relation ought to be read, rather, as a gift/countergift exchange organized by the “great event” of the Russian Revolution. As anthropological literature on the gift emphasizes, the gift cannot be reduced to the volition of any one individual. It harbors an element of strangeness for both the donor and the recipient: “No one who holds the object can ever claim complete ownership; the foreign element obliges him to put the object back in circulation.”⁴⁴ Insofar as the inner content of the gift is illegible, we might further suggest, with Song, that it stands for a “sign” of something to come.⁴⁵ The “Appeal” describes “a new world [that] is being *born*, a world of the toilers and those fighting for liberation,” but it cannot be any more specific than that: the great events are a sign of the future in the making (A, 282; O, 34; emphasis added). It identifies the “workers’ and peasants’ government of Russia, the Council of People’s Commissars” at the head of this revolution, but insofar as the sublime event of the revolution exceeds the wills of the agents who participate in it, the gift of revolution is both everyone’s and no one’s (A, 282; O, 34). Furthermore, in a gift relation, just as the donors are compelled to present the gift, the indebted receivers feel obliged to respond with a countergift. It is of this obligation or duty that the “Appeal” reminds its addressees: “When

transliterated and edited by Mete Tunçay, in *Mustafa Suphi'nin Yeni Dünyası* ([Istanbul]: BDS Yayınları, [1995]), 24–25.

44. James T. Siegel, *Naming the Witch* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6.

45. Compare Jean-François Lyotard’s explication of the concept of the sign of history (via Kant) in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 161–71.

the entire world burns with indignation against the imperialist annexations, when the least spark of discontent bursts out in the mighty flame of revolution[.] . . . one *must* not remain silent [*teper' molchat' nel'zia*]” (A, 284; O, 35; emphasis added). Translated into Muslim languages, the “Appeal” is at once a plea and a summons of the counter-gift of Muslim “support and sympathy,” without which the gift of revolution could not last. At the same time, it is an intimation that the counter-gift to Russians will include a supplement: because supporting the revolution will entail Russian Muslims to “ris[e] up against their slave drivers,” the counter-gift will include an offering to the Muslim self. “Lose no time in throwing off the ancient oppressors of your homelands. Permit them no longer to plunder your native lands,” states the “Appeal,” promising Russian Muslims a gift of giving birth to themselves as sovereign subjects: “You yourselves must be [*dolzhy byt'*] the masters in your own land. You yourselves must build your life as you see fit” (A, 284; O, 35).⁴⁶

As a foundational document of the 1917 Leninist act, the “Appeal” reveals that the logic of Leninist translation is a (counter)gift relation. The “Appeal” was certainly not alone in its representation of translation as a crucial practice for Lenin. In his “Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East” (“Doklad na II vserossiiskom s’ezde kommunisticheskikh organizatsii narodov Vostoka”), dated November 22, 1919, Lenin explicitly told the communist representatives of Muslim organizations of the East that “the task is . . . to translate [*perevesti*] the true communist doctrine, which was intended for the Communists of the more advanced countries, into the language of every people.”⁴⁷ The communist translations of the revolutionary period ought not be considered as mere secondary reproductions but rather as fulfillments

46. Soviet rule does not grant the gift of liberation in the “Appeal.” Rather, it allows Muslim subjects to give the gift of self-determination to themselves. The gift/counter-gift relation is important because it marks the difference of Soviet rule from other imperial formations. It is also noteworthy that the gift/counter-gift logic is transformed in its translation into Turkic languages: Azeri documents from the period emphasize only the gift logic (without the counter-gift). On the gift logic of Soviet Azeri texts, see Nergis Ertürk, “Toward a Literary Communism: The 1926 Baku Turcological Congress,” *boundary 2* 40, no. 2 (2013): 183–213.

47. V. I. Lenin, “Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East,” trans. George Hanna, in *Collected Works*, vol. 30 (Moscow: Progress, 1965), 162; Lenin, “Doklad na II vserossiiskom s’ezde kommunisticheskikh organizatsii narodov Vostoka 22 noiabria 1919,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 39 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 330.

of the original Russian documents themselves. Insofar as the original gift message marks a hollow state to come and a temporal gap, it calls for translation to realize its content. Equally important, the practice of Leninist translation offers a displacement of the tension between the universal and the particular, by imagining a dual birth. At stake in Lenin's writings is not only the subsumption of the particular under a new communist universal but also a dual birth of the universal and the particular in a relation of gift/countergift exchange.

One encounters this dream of a dual birth in other Marxist-communist movements across the world—for example, as in the camps at Digoel and Terezín, as Mrázek suggests, where the internees, naming their children after Lenin, gave birth to him again anew, or as in Socialist Lebanon, a militant organization founded in the mid-1960s critical of the hegemony of Soviet socialism, and under no direct influence of Lenin. In “Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon’s World and Ours,” Fadi A. Bardawil examines the legacy of Socialist Lebanon through a reading of the group’s practices of translation and a reading of *The Communist Manifesto*. When asked in a 2004 interview if the project of Socialist Lebanon had been to produce a Lebanese communist manifesto, one of its cofounders, Waddah Charara, responded as follows:

There was a dream that a number of people had. I was one of them. It was a dream of a dual birth: the birth of a contemporary history from the womb of a local subjective history—an Arab Islamic history whose meaning then was very different from the one it would take later on—and [the dream] that this same history be born at the same time from a general, common, universal human womb. . . . These two concurrent births—and it is most likely that we did not give ourselves the necessary tools to understand them—remained closer to a metaphor than to a concept. And even the metaphor remained foggy.⁴⁸

Recognizing that all theoretical concepts are originally metaphorical, Charara uses a sexed (and sexing) metaphor to describe Socialist Lebanon’s concept of translation, a metaphor that resonates with Lenin’s figuration of birth in the “Appeal” (though it is not identical to it). Refusing to render the womb—“the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings”—as

48. See Fadi A. Bardawil, “Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon’s World and Ours,” in this issue of *boundary 2*, 332–33.

unheimlich,⁴⁹ Charara reclaims a suppressed feminine difference, imagining an originary repeatability or historical “surplus” at origin, offering a new conceptualization of the relation between the universal and the local that sits alongside that of Lenin as well as those of the interneers of Digoel and Terezín.

Whereas contemporary thinkers from Susan Buck-Morss to Alain Badiou have advocated a return to the “idea of communism” as a practice of universalism or a principle of One World, we propose that we revisit communism as a translational practice of dual birth, not without coming to terms with the limits of its historical realization.⁵⁰ The Leninist practice of communist translation encountered its limits in equating the gift and the counter-gift with sovereignty and in domesticating, in that equation, the irreducible otherness of revolution as an event. Influenced too strongly, even if despite and against itself, by European Enlightenment tradition and lacking in radical “transnational literacy,” Lenin’s practice failed to account for and affirm the heterogeneity of local social practices not subsumable under a recognizably secular nation form. Fearful of the revolution’s own radically transformative potentiality, it molded the singular into a recognizable particular or in some cases effaced it, rather than affirming its difference as universalizable.

Serguei Alex. Oushakine’s essay on Soviet Russian children’s books from the 1920s and 1930s and Leah Feldman’s essay on Soviet Azeri posters offer us valuable accounts of what we might call this “emptying” of the revolution. Tracing the “transposition of the revolution’s *langue* into a *parole* of daily life” for children and semiliterate or illiterate masses, Oushakine’s essay provides a valuable theoretical framework that accounts for the neutralization of the revolution in its translation into a homogeneous set of visual schemes and discursive templates.⁵¹ We suggest that what remains as the inexhaustible promise of the revolution in Oushakine’s essay as well

49. Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955), 245; Freud, “Das Unheimliche,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, ed. Anna Freud et al. (London: Imago, 1947), 259.

50. See Susan Buck-Morss, “The Second Time as Farce . . . Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present,” in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 70–71. See Alain Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 38–39.

51. Serguei Alex. Oushakine, “Translating Communism for Children: Fables and Posters of the Revolution,” in this issue of *boundary 2*, 170–71.

as others in this special issue is not the self-identity or presence of an autonomous political subject but rather a necessary *relationality*:⁵² insofar as the event of the revolution takes place across a “transindividual” connectivity, it entails a necessary extension and generalization of one’s own language—both in the narrow sense of speaking without delegation but also in the more general sense of opening to a relationality between languages.⁵³ Translation is as such the promise of communism, and above and beyond that, it is the event of the revolution, which manifests itself in open, freed communicability. To affirm translation as dual birth, as we have done in this collection, is not to be lost in difference but rather to give oneself up to the common of the event that takes place in simultaneous translation into multiple languages.

52. On revolution as relationality, see Etienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1977).

53. Here is how Abdullah Battal Taymas (1883–1969), a Kazan Tatar émigré, describes the 1917 February revolution in his 1947 memoir *Rus İhtilâlinde Hâtıralar, 1917–1919* (*Memories from the Russian Revolution, 1917–1919*): “In the beginning of the revolution’s first months, the country started talking together [*mемлекетин dili adamakıllı açılmıştı*; literally, the country’s tongue opened fully]: the country shut its eyes, opened its mouth, talking nonstop, speaking continuously. . . . Not only the Russians but also the non-Russians (*inorodtsy*) [*gayri Ruslar (inarodetsler)*], who had been treated like stepchildren in the past, reached the bliss of speaking openly and giving speeches at gatherings and meetings in their own languages without being shy or afraid of anyone, publicizing their pains, describing their troubles, criticizing the fallen government, and further sinking the sunken regime underground. . . . For once, the country wanted to hear its own voice, to account and tell its own troubles. But what did all these speakers say? What did they want? This didn’t matter so much. The really important thing was to speak, was the event of being able to speak. The country engaged in a competition of endless talking [*Memleket çene yarışına çıkmıştı*; literally, the country began to compete with their chins].” See Abdullah Battal Taymas, *Rus İhtilâlinde Hâtıralar*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Ötüken, 1968), 51. For another satirical representation of the explosion of congressing and speech-making in 1917, see also the brilliant November and December 1917 issues of the Azeri newspaper *Molla Nəsrəddin* edited by Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə (1866–1932), in *Molla Nəsrəddin: On cildə (1906–1931)*, vol. 5 (1917, 1921–1924), transliteration edited by E. Qasımova et al. (Baku: Çinar-Çap, 2009).