

# 14

## Acts of Translation

Organized Networks as Algorithmic  
Technologies of the Common

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## Exodus from the General Intellect

Defined by the informatization of life and labor, the networked condition is characterized by the comprehensive connection of users to circuits of capital via predominantly corporate communication and information infrastructures. The economic value of these engines of entry into a world of communicative commerce is largely determined by the very acts of communication they elicit, structure, and sustain. And as the proliferation of proprietary mobile devices separates a new generation of users from previous, more localized generations of personal computing, the corresponding establishment of cloud computing as the primary infrastructural paradigm of storage and service delivery aimed at efficient data-mining establishes a new technocentrism that should give the evangelists of decentralization-as-democratization pause for thought. At stake is, once again, the “authority to act” and, with it, the question of action itself.<sup>1</sup>

A mere political economy of digital media cannot grasp this enmeshment of individual and institutional forms of affective articulation, expression, and inscription that fuels the production of value in today’s information economies. Why not? Because political economy cannot handle elusiveness terribly well, which makes it difficult for this approach to register subjectivity and affect as holding economic potential. By contrast, Paolo Virno has suggested that in contemporary ‘bio-linguistic capitalism ... the capitalist organization of work takes on as its raw material the differential traits of the species’ and raises anew the question of human nature, thus returning us to the perspective of political anthropology.<sup>2</sup> While we find this vision too grand to offer much analytical advice to the very actors whose transnational organizing efforts are all-too-quickly conflated into global movements and endowed with epochal agency, it is this primacy given to the communicative constitution of relations as the core element of labor and life that has also increased interest in conceptualizations of the common and the specific relation the common holds to the political as one of its contemporary iterations.

Transversal relations immanent to the media of communication underscore the production of the common—a form of relation that holds substantive conceptual and material distinctions from that which it is often confused and conflated with: the commons, which serve as a central resource for the information economy and are a defining feature of the network condition. If we understand *the commons* to refer both to the material context and the consequence of practices of peer production, *the common* is the political potential immanent in such practices. Such an understanding of the common situates it conceptually as the latest

iteration of the political; just as there exists an “excess of the political over politics,”<sup>3</sup> the affirmation of the common is offered as a condition of possibility for collaborative constitution; for the sharing of affects of love, solidarity, and wrath; and for the translation of such affects and experiences across the “irreducible idiomaticity” of ethico-political practices and the production of subjectivity.<sup>4</sup>

Frequent slippage occurs between the invocation of the terms *the common* and *the commons*. The latter is often understood as a collaboratively produced, open yet scarce resource to be protected from regimes of enclosure, as seen in the rise of intellectual property rights as the politico-juridical instrument for governing the circulation of cultural commodities within information economies. As we have noted elsewhere, “The common is not given as a fragile heritage to be protected against the ravages of new forms of primitive accumulation and enclosure. Rather, it is something that must be actively constructed, and this construction involves the creation of ‘subjects in transit.’”<sup>5</sup> What strikes us as significant about what Hardt and Negri phrase as the “commonality of a potential community” is the question of form as it relates to the production of the common understood as a community to come, a potentiality held in common that may include but is not exclusive to the commons.<sup>6</sup> How, in other words, does the common reveal itself if it is to manifest in more concrete, less elusive ways? Is there a materiality to *potentia* beyond sensation and affect (keeping in mind that sensation and affect are composed in acutely material ways)? We suggest that the multiple forms of movement, occupation, and encampment that intervene in public, state, and corporate spaces in recent months and years can be seen as material iterations of a political potential that distinguishes the common from the commons.

In proposing an exodus from the general intellect, we are calling not for an abandonment of the common. Such a force of *potentia* refuses any singular action, since the *potentia* is situated within the field of immanence and thus refuses capture or control, yet is modulated and revealed through the singularity of the event and the instantiation of expression. Again, the history of movements illustrates this point well. No matter how much news media is compelled by its form—column inches, airtime, and updates—to contain dissenting voices and reduce heterogeneity, the dispersed energies and interests of movements themselves are always in the process of transformation. While the production of the commons as an open resource is something to be welcomed, and even celebrated, we wish to sound a note of caution. Coextensive with the proliferation of open access systems (publishing, software, code) is the social production of value, which frequently becomes exploited as a resource or data set in the reproduction of capital. Within network societies, the general intellect is an informational mode of primitive accumulation or social production of value, and, as such, living labor is subjugated as labor-power without

the classical exchange of a wage.<sup>7</sup> Instead, a symbolic economy prevails at best and very rarely for most. The social-political challenge within such a horizon is to appropriate the means of biopolitical production.

Our interest is to question the valorization of the common less by drawing attention to the more obvious register of political economy and the exploitation of free labor than by highlighting the role of the common as a political potential in biopolitical assemblages organized around logistics industries and the politics of the human. As Fiona Jeffries maintains, “One place where we find the common and the commons converge is in globalizing communication infrastructures.”<sup>8</sup> It is from within this conceptual context that we want to raise the possibility of alternative cartographies of the political. The question of translation is a crucial element in the conceptual elaboration of these emergent configurations.

## The Task of the Translator

Boris Buden has suggested that

culture has not, as it is often believed, simply pushed away the notion of society from the political stage and taken its leading role in theoretical debates and practical concerns of political subjects. The change is more radical. Culture has become this very stage, the very condition of the possibility of society and of our perception of what political reality is today.<sup>9</sup>

This centrality of culture has given the practice of cultural translation new significance and a political purpose. From within the horizon of multiculturalism, its “political purpose is the stability of the liberal order, which can be achieved only on the grounds of non-conflictual, interactive relations between different cultures in terms of the so-called multicultural cohabitation.” Understood in the more radical (if still liberal) sense Buden derives from Walter Benjamin, Homi Bhabha, and Judith Butler, cultural translation refers to “the process by which the excluded within the universality is readmitted into the term,” which implies that “cultural translation—as a ‘return of the excluded’—is the only promoter of today’s democracy. It pushes its limits, brings about social change and opens new spaces of emancipation. It does so through the subversive practices, which change everyday social relations.” Over and against what remains an essentially liberal articulation of cultural translation, Buden turns to Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” to acknowledge that “she simply admits that there is no direct correspondence between these two languages” since the language of antiessentialist theory and of essentialist political practices “cannot be sublated in an old dialectical way by a third universal term which could operate as a dialectical unity of both. Therefore, the only possible way of a communication between them is a kind of translation.” Cultural translation is, then, the *mise-en-scène* that brings new visions of the political onto the stage of culture.

Such translation, at least in the sense of Walter Benjamin—translation is the “afterlife” of the original—necessarily does away with any notion of originality. In the case of universalism, “what is irretrievably lost in the translation, what died with the original and can therefore no longer be grasped in the translation, is the revolutionary meaning of the old concept of universalism, its practical aspiration to change the world.”<sup>10</sup> Here, Buden adopts Paul Gilroy’s notion of a strategic universalism, which “was developed to close the non-reducible gap between two languages of our historical experience, between the language of reflexive critique and the language of

political practice.” For Buden, this is an eminently practical question:

Is it not time now, after all the attempts to articulate a leftist political engagement in the sense of strategic essentialism, to try out the other, universalist strategy? The best that one can do in this dilemma is probably to make a decision for the dilemma itself. That means lingering in the gap that neither of the concepts can close. It would not mean evading all the extorted decisions and foul compromises once and for all, but rather recognizing them as such.

Lingering in the gap of a new politics of the universal is, then, our point of departure for reflections on alternative articulations of the global—understood as the “afterlife” of the universal, over and against which new visions of the political have to be created.

A politics of the universal is not, of course, always-already a politics beyond liberalism. Quite the contrary:

Universalization is conventionally understood as a proto-democratic and thus also a proto-political event. An inherently particular position suddenly raises a universalist claim, thus evoking a new antagonism, which divides and newly articulates the given political field.... Strategic universalism ... always remains bound to the hegemonic liberal-democratic order— and not its critique.

What strategic essentialism and strategic universalism “have in common is the vision of a gradual progress of emancipation that takes place as a clever balancing between the two poles of the existing political world order, the particular essentialist and the universal constructivist world order.” The task of critique, however, is different:

Today it is actually impossible to offer resistance against global power that is politically effective at the same level. In the same way, it is impossible to articulate a reflexively effective critique at the local level. Local, political essentialism makes all critical thinking mute, just as reflexively universalist critique leaves every locally effective political act untouched. Seeking to overcome this division can be a noble task, but it is not the task of critique. It is not there to balance a world again that has lost its balance, but rather to probe the depth of the crisis in which this world finds itself.

To probe the depth of the crisis is, it turns out, to return to the question of culture; if culture is to be the stage for new productions—of subjectivity, of modes of relation—we need a better sense of the scope of scenography, of collaborative choreographies, of performative practices. And indeed of dominant articulations of the global over and against which a

different politics of the universal (such as the common) could be articulated.

In his reflections on a politics of the universal, Étienne Balibar turns to the question of “the institution of the universal, or even the institution of the universal as truth.”<sup>11</sup> What complicates the task of critique is that “certain forms of universality at least derive their institutional strength not from the fact that the institutions in which they are embodied are absolute themselves, but rather from the fact that they are the site of endless contestations on the basis of their own principles, or discourse.” Balibar, following Hannah Arendt, proposes “equaliberty”—the right to have rights—not as another institution of the universal but as “the *arch-institution*, or the institution that precedes and conditions every other institution” in modern democracies. But if equaliberty, democracy, civic universality as the pursuit of equality and liberty are the horizon of a democratic politics of the universal, their “simultaneous realization is rarely seen or only visible as a tendency, as exigency.”

In the current call for democratic control of financial markets and processes of financialization, arguably the most influential figure of the global and perhaps the most dominant dynamic of universalization today, activists not only call the self-universalization of regimes of financialization into question but quite literally interrupt it through occupations that establish a cartography of sites through which the institution of financialization as the dominant figure of the global occurs.<sup>12</sup> Financialization is an instance of the global whose advocates have not failed to present it in the terms of the inevitability of a progressive universalization of its practices and policies, of the universal as truth. In the course of a series of financial crises, these truth claims have been visibly unmade, giving rise to contestations that are perhaps endless only insofar as they don’t envision a politics beyond a reconfiguration of the relationships between states and markets. But to conduct critique in and on exclusively these terms, retranslating it as a mere negotiation within the ontopolitical matrix of states, markets, and everybody else is to already cede the terrain of culture; instead, we want to reclaim a more radical sense of translation that takes seriously the return of the machine.

## Labor, Code, Logistics

Contemporary social-technical arrangements are defined by ubiquitous media and their distinct formats of communication. Coupled with new geopolitical configurations of space shaped by the rise of what we call “logistical cities” and their infrastructural components,<sup>13</sup> the predominance of supply chain and workplace software along with technologies such as RFID, GPS, and voice picking marks the inception of new systems of measure that govern labor performance across a range of trade sectors and service industries.<sup>14</sup> This is the new horizon of politics and labor organization today.

The global logistics industry is an emergent regime of what Alexander Galloway terms “protocological control” that already shapes the conditions of labor and life for many<sup>15</sup> and increasingly affects how knowledge production is governed and undertaken now and in the future.<sup>16</sup> With military origins, logistics emerged as a business concept in the 1950s concerned with the management of global supply chains. The primary task of the global logistics industry is to manage the movement of bodies and brains, finance and things in the interests of communication, transport, and economic efficiencies. There is an important prehistory to the so-called logistics revolution to be found in cybernetics and the Fordist era following World War II. Logistics is an extension of the “organizational paradigm” of cybernetics. Both belong to what Foucault terms the “machine stream ensemble” of neoliberal economics as it emerged following the war.<sup>17</sup> Common to neoliberal economics, cybernetics, and logistics is the calculation of risk. And to manage the domain of risk, a system capable of reflexive analysis and governance is required. This is the task of logistics.

Logistics, as it emerged in the period of the so-called Second Cold War (1979- 1985),<sup>18</sup> operates as a kind of third force or articulating device that, on the one hand, negotiates the economic and structural demand for secure national and increasingly global supply chains, while, on the other hand, serves as an adjunct to the arms race by advancing new organizational systems aimed at efficiently managing labor, mobility, and the accountability of things. Logistics was later consolidated as a business management practice as the Cold War began to thaw in the 1980s, and Western economic interests began to penetrate the new markets and, more particularly, harness the surplus labor of ex-Soviet states. For Brian Holmes, “The 1980s were the inaugural decade of neoliberalism, which brought new forms of financialized wealth-creation and motivational management into play, alongside the militaristic technologies of surveillance and control that had been inherited from the Cold War.”<sup>19</sup>



Edna Bonacich and Jake Wilson date what they call the “logistics revolution” from the 1970s, with a particular emphasis on the Reagan and Thatcher eras of market and institutional deregulation along with neoliberal international free trade agreements.<sup>20</sup> They characterize this organizational revolution in terms of changes in production (flexibility and outsourcing), logistics (“intermodalization”), and labor (intensification of contingency, weakening of unions, racialization of labor, lower labor standards). Contemporary logistics aims to minimize inventory buildups, or overaccumulation, which leads to overproduction by manufacturers and retail overstocking (or understocking, as the case may be).<sup>21</sup> In both instances, manufacturers and retailers strive for efficiency in communications to minimize overinvestment in stocks that decline in economic value over time.

The software applications special to logistics visualize and manage the mobility of people, capital, and things, producing knowledge about the world in transit. The political challenge today is to devise techniques and strategies that operate outside the territory of control exerted by logistics technologies and their software algorithms that shape how practices of knowledge production are organized, which in turns shapes the conditions and experiences of contemporary labor. As much as the emergent field of software studies celebrates the collective innovation of open source initiatives and radical gestures of hacker cultures, there is a much more profound and substantive technological impact exerted upon labor-power in the formal and informal economies concomitant with the global logistics industries that has not yet received critical attention in analyses of the cultures of code. The challenge of political organization within the logistics industries is steep. Not only are unionized forms of labor organization marginal, where they do exist—in the maritime industries of some countries, for instance—there is great pressure for workers and their representatives to conform to ever-increasing demands for greater workplace productivity and enhanced efficiency modulated by computational systems that manage key performance indicators.<sup>22</sup>

Against these pressures for increased labor productivity is the savage collapse of labor-power as economies across the world are saddled with the blowout of sovereign debt passed on by massive corporate welfarism in the form of state bailouts of financial institutions—the health of which politicians, shareholders, economists, and traders argue is necessary if consumer life is to continue on its merry path of planetary annihilation. Yet the very model of such institutional-social organization is never questioned—except by the people now mobilizing in urban squares and financial districts across the world. Do we understand this in terms of a politics of action, however, or can we gain greater analytical traction and organizational insight by seeing these movements as a politics *beyond the actionable*, foregrounding nonrepresentational practices rather than

repowering the politics of representation?<sup>23</sup> Here, we need to return to the work of translation and collaborative constitution as social-political practices immanent to media of communication.

## From Generation to Seriality

Reapproached from within the horizon of logistics and the assemblages organized according to its systems of measure, the work of translation as a social-technical *dispositif* and modality of organization shifts from generation to seriality. What is the generative role of communications media in the production of politics beyond the actionable and invention of the common? Jonathan Zittrain's analysis indicates that *generative technologies* are typically found in their nascent phase, where the rules of operation can be built upon to contribute innovative adaptations to the population of the common. Stand-alone technologies such as the PC and iPhone, by contrast, are defined by proprietary, static, and preprogrammed systems that lock out any generative potential, at least according to Zittrain's argument. The social technology of occupation and encampment indexes a generative capacity for political intervention across geocultural scales. Proprietarization or enclosure can go beyond juridical architectures and take the form of net-cultural practices that become absorbed into mainstream social-political organization. Look what happened to flash mobs: very quickly they became empty gestures of commercial stunts and lost whatever political potency they may have harbored in their gestation phase. TED Talks and Pecha Kucha could be seen as equivalents of net-cultural absorption into the mainstream, except they never even went through a generative stage of producing political subjectivities and new modes of expression.

How, then, are generative political technologies and their concomitant practices distributed across networks? In a recent opinion piece, Hardt and Negri draw a long line of affiliation from Seattle to Cairo to Wall Street, indicating what, in effect, is the *seriality* of political organization as interventions across time and space.<sup>24</sup> Some of the connecting devices along the way to Occupy Wall Street and the thousand or so affiliated occupations in cities across the world include WikiLeaks, Anonymous, and the Arab Spring—itsself a *series* of connective devices that encourages us to invoke theories of assemblage despite frequent criticism of their unwieldiness as heuristic, let alone analytical, instruments.<sup>25</sup> Across these disparate, even incommensurate spaces of occupation and encampment we see the production of the common through the mobilization of desire and a seriality of formats. The tipping point registered once a critical mass has galvanized itself into and then beyond action appears crucial in each instance. In these occupations, the emergence of organized networks as proto-institutional forms becomes manifest. Whether they can sustain themselves over time is a question we have asked ourselves repeatedly. Shortly after its political victories, the Arab Spring was confronted with a problem Foucault identified

as common to revolution: how to maintain the production of difference when inheriting the political architecture of the state?<sup>26</sup> This is why we speak of organized networks as new institutional forms, bracketing the statist conceptualization of the political not to ignore the actuality of state apparatuses and their geocultural reconfiguration, the material dis- and rearticulation of elements of state sovereignty at sub- and suprastate levels, but to create figures of the universal capable of grasping the political dimension of processes of collaborative constitution at an unprecedented scale.

The network practice of seriality should not be mistaken for the Frankfurt School critique of standardization, which relegated cultural production as an industrialized output of the assembly line. While seriality assumes an element of repetition, the differential work of translation bestows upon network practices a set of social-technical contours specific to the situation, event, and production of desire. When seen in terms of seriality, the uncertain capacity to sustain network politics and culture appears less of an issue. There is a passage of communicating tactics, strategies, and concepts across network settings. In this sense, seriality is best understood as an iterative process over time and space that corresponds loosely with the remix logic of digital culture and the shift toward strategies of a stream-based sharing of serialized content.<sup>27</sup> Both in social and technological terms, it is the work of translation that indicates organized networks are much more robust new institutional forms than their often short-term, even ephemeral, composition suggests. The political and organizational question, therefore, becomes less one of whether Occupy Wall Street can transform into a social movement or whether the Arab Spring can produce state-based forms of governance and more a case of how the techniques and concepts from any particular network instantiation will move in time and across space to another situation. What sort of social-technical transformation and production of new organizational concepts, subjectivities, and desires will define this grammar of iteration, of its constitutive practices and modes of relation?

## Algorithmic Futures

If, as we believe, culture in the networked condition must be understood as “algorithmic culture,” cultural translation and the politics it may articulate must include the cultures of code.<sup>28</sup> To affect a politics of the universal on its computational terrain is to take this condition of variational territories and topologies of code seriously. Such an action goes beyond the organizational capacity of social media to help oust authoritarian political regimes, and intervenes instead at the algorithmic level. We have already seen the tendency toward such a politics of the universal in the practices of Anonymous and WikiLeaks, even if the rise of pirate parties founded in response to governmental interventions in the technosocial fields of peer-to-peer culture seems to fold such dynamics back into the mechanisms of representation.

Yet to return to the question of code as the terrain of organization is not simply a reaffirmation of the politics of free software as the dominant—indeed, paradigmatic—net-cultural dynamic.<sup>29</sup> Instead, we see the question of algorithmic interventions as linked in a more concrete, substantive sense to the new geopolitical and geocultural configurations of information, labor, and economy wrought by the force of infrastructure associated with the global logistics industries. The year 2009 saw not only the initial peak of the ongoing financial crisis, it also occasioned the entry of Chinese state-owned shipping and logistics company COSCO into a 35-year lease agreement with Greek authorities to access and manage port space at Piraeus, one of the largest shipping ports in Southern Europe.<sup>30</sup> Along with upgrading port facilities and dramatic increases in productivity, local Greek workers have found themselves confronted by employers with substantially different ideas about working conditions, pay rates, and safety. As Greece cedes its sovereign authority to more powerful economic actors, Greek citizens and organizations such as unions have diminished ground upon which to contest perceived and experienced inequalities. With software programs devised to manage key performance indicators and global value chains, algorithmic cultures are key agents that govern subjects and things in logistical operations such as those found at Piraeus, among countless other global sites.

This does not mean that political organization within a logistical world ipso facto submits to algorithmic technologies of control. As Galloway puts it, “What is an algorithm if not a machine for the motion of parts?”<sup>31</sup> WikiLeaks has shown it can handle the U.S. arm of the military-industrial complex, so what might it do to scramble the system of more socially and economically pervasive powers embodied by the logistics industries? We imagine a WikiLeaks or Anonymous raid not on modern institutions of

control (the state, firm, military, union, etc.), but rather on the algorithmic architecture that increasingly determines the experience and conditions of labor and life.

At the same time, the concerns of a more conventional politics of representation are never far away, suggesting that the seriality of emergent political forms may translate across a representation/nonrepresentation divide whose enthusiastic conceptual affirmation in the name of a “post-representative politics” has rarely done justice to the ontological heterogeneity of actually existing political assemblages. In the end, the same processes of informatization that support and sustain the becoming-cultural of labor and life are the material conditions of possibility for contemporary regimes of financialization. As big data—data sets too large to be processed in small-scale infrastructures—becomes the new watchword of stock markets and governments alike, a new brand of “cultural analytics” has already emerged, waiting to be harnessed for activist ends.<sup>32</sup> These new encounters between data analysis and information visualization once again call on us to restage aesthetic interventions in emerging publics and engage, above and beyond the demand for transparency and the investigative heroism of freedom of information inquiries, in the algorithmic constitution of new publics.<sup>33</sup>

If new figures of globality emerge in the realm of financial politics, so be it—it is perhaps no accident that the peer-to-peer currency Bitcoin (money without banks) offers us a political metaphor not unlike that of Virno’s “republic without a state.”<sup>34</sup> We are still waiting for data hacks tracking the money hidden in “secrecy jurisdictions.”<sup>35</sup> And a new politics of multimodality brings reverse engineering to the latest generation of motion capture devices, signaling the autonomous creation of multidimensional data and the possibility of a tactical relationship to the “sentient city.”<sup>36</sup> Because in the end, “It is the body, and the body alone, that can act as a libidinal force breaking through the containment of the virtualised ‘circuits of drive’ that attempt to capture the restless desire of the contemporary subject for the encounter in public with the unknown other.”<sup>37</sup> These open spaces are not simply spheres of unmediated free speech and democratic deliberation but are structured by algorithmic medialities.

Finally, a misunderstanding perhaps exists—that new technologies call for radically new forms of political organization. Needless to say, this is not the case, and the exaggeration of the role of real-time social media has justly been ridiculed.<sup>38</sup> Instead, we want to stress the archival dimension of contemporary figures of the collective, not in the sense of a straight lineage but in the affirmation of the “will to connect” (Stuart Hall). Encouraging and sustaining a wide range of practices of relation, communication, and organization are part of a dynamic transcultural archive, stored and reproduced in a decentralized fashion, protected by its redundancy. We should not, therefore, allow the metaphor of the cloud to be understood exclusively in terms of corporate server networks and software as service economies. We are the cloud,

and in acknowledging the forces of seriality we can invent new logistical protocols to draw more widely on this archive. And as we engage in the work of cultural translation—of relating, for instance, the codes that drive the algorithmicization of our communicative practices, to the social codes that emerge across new cartographies of the political—we may already find ourselves on different terrain, ready to once again reinvent our relationships to the political.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an example of such a gloomy extrapolation of contemporary trends, see Jonathan Zittrain, *The Future of the Internet—And How to Stop It* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). Needless to say, such an explicit exaggeration of contemporary trends is not meant to obscure the many creative uses to which such infrastructures have been put, or deny that corporate and military infrastructures can also provide public goods, but to counter the unbearable evangelism of decentralization-as-democratization. As Benkler notes:

For the first time since the industrial revolution, the most important inputs into the core economic activities of the most advanced economies are widely distributed in the population. Creativity and innovation are directly tied to the radical decentralization of the practical capability to act, on the one hand, and of the authority to act, on the other. The critical policy questions of the networked environment revolve round the battles between the decentralization of technology and the push of policy to moderate that decentralization by limiting the distribution of authority to act.

Yochai Benkler, “For the First Time Since the Industrial Revolution,” in Richard N. Katz (ed.), *The Tower and The Cloud: Higher Education in the Age of Cloud Computing* (Boulder, CO: EduCause, 2008), 52, <http://www.educause.edu/thetowerandthecloud>. On the transformation of action, see the discussion on Arendt and Lazzarato in Soenke Zehle and Ned Rossiter, “Organizing Networks: Notes on Collaborative Constitution, Translation and the Work of Organization,” *Cultural Politics* 5, no. 2 (2009): 237–64.

<sup>2</sup> “Human nature returns to the centre of attention not because we are finally dealing with biology rather than history, but because the biological prerogatives of the human animal have acquired undeniable historical relevance in the current productive process.” Paolo Virno, “Natural-Historical Diagrams: The ‘New Global’ Movement and the Biological Invariant,” in Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (eds.), *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2009), 131–47, 142. On the role of language in contemporary capitalism, see Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. Gregory Conti (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008). See also Jon Solomon’s critique of human speciation vis-à-vis translation and the differential production of knowledge:

When repetition is required, it is called “translation”; where failure is present, it is attributed to exteriority.<sup>295</sup>



Today, the historicity of these assumptions is becoming ever clearer. Needless to say, the fact that human beings are disposed to share signs does not guarantee successful communication anymore than sharing itself produces homogeneous community; neither can such sharing be reduced or equated to the notion of an individuated collective intentionality. Yet this is precisely what forms the basic presupposition for the modern thought of community, crystallized in the nation-state.

And:

To approach the problem of the trans/national study of culture without addressing the way in which knowledge, as it is embedded in various social practices of language, labor, and life, is intrinsically part of the speciation of the human is to continue to blindly defer to the defining search of colonial/imperial modernity for the ultimate technology of human population engineering.

Jon Solomon, "The Trans/National Study of Culture and the Institutions of Human Speciation," *Construction des savoirs en mondialisation. Changements de paradigmes cognitifs: Une révolution épistémologique?* Colloque coorganisé par le Collège international de philosophie ([www.ciph.org](http://www.ciph.org)), la revue Transeuropéennes ([www.transeuropeennes.eu](http://www.transeuropeennes.eu)), Paris, November 7-8, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière," *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 122.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the central role of the common in Negri's antinaturalist ontology of liberation, in which the common and the multitude exist in a relationship of mutual constitution. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008). We think it makes sense to maintain such a conceptual distinction rather than conflate them; for a different approach, see, for example, Michael Hardt, "The Politics of the Common," *ZNet*, 2009, <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/21899>. For reflections on "irreducible idiomaticity" in the context of translation, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Questioned on Translation: Adrift," *Public Culture* 13, no. 1 (2001): 13-22. For a more elaborate typology of the commons, see David M. Berry, *Copy, Rip, Burn: The Politics of Copyleft and Open Source* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 79ff.

<sup>5</sup> Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception," *Theory, Culture and Society* 25, no. 7/8: 55-66. See also Sandro Mezzadra, "Living in Transition: Toward a Heterolingual Theory of the Multitude," 2007, <http://roundtable.kein.org/node/653>, and Naoki Sakai,

*Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[6](#) Hardt and Negri state: "Protection and oppression can be hard to tell apart. This strategy of 'national protection' is a double-edged sword that at times appears necessary despite its destructiveness. The nation appears progressive in the second place insofar as it poses the commonality of a potential community." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 106.

[7](#) Christian Marazzi, "The Privatization of the General Intellect," trans. Nicolas Guilhot (n.d.). See also Tiziana Terranova, "Another Life: The Nature of Political Economy in Foucault's Genealogy of Biopolitics," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 234-62; and Solomon, "The Trans/National Study of Culture and the Institutions of Human Speciation."

[8](#) Fiona Jeffries, "Communication Commoning Amidst the New Enclosures: Re-appropriating Infrastructures," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2011): 349-55.

[9](#) Boris Buden, "Cultural Translation: Why It Is Important and Where to Start with It?" *transversal: under translation* (June 2006), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0606/buden/en>. All quotations hereafter from Buden.

[10](#) Boris Buden, "Strategic Universalism: Dead Concept Walking on the Subalternity of Critique Today," *transversal: under translation* (February 2007), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0607/buden/en>. All quotations hereafter from Buden.

[11](#) Étienne Balibar, "On Universalism: In Debate with Alain Badiou," *transversal: on universalism* (February 2007), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0607/balibar/en>. All quotations hereafter from Balibar.

[12](#) <http://occupywallst.org>. It has often been remarked that the Occupy movement has failed to articulate specific demands. This is not where we see its greatest strength; rather, it reaffirms the centrality of physical performative practices in any cartography of the political.

[13](#) Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "The Logistical City," *Transit Labour: Circuits, Regions, Borders*, Digest 3, August 2011, <http://transitlabour.asia/documentation/>.

[14](#) See Anja Kanngieser, "Tracking and Tracing Bodies: New Technologies of Governance and the Logistics Industries," *Development, Logistics, Governance*, Fourth Critical Studies Conference, Calcutta Research Group, Calcutta, September 8-10, 2011.

[15](#) See Alexander Galloway, "Protocol," *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, no. 2-3 (2006): 317. See also Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

[16](#) See Ned Rossiter, "Logistics, Labour and New Regimes of Knowledge Production," *Transeuropéennes: International Journal of Critical Thought* 8 (August 2011), [http://www.transeuropeennes.org/en/76/new\\_knowledge\\_new\\_epistemologies](http://www.transeuropeennes.org/en/76/new_knowledge_new_epistemologies).

[17](#) Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 225.

[18](#) See Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1983).

[19](#) Brian Holmes, "Guattari's Schizoanalytic Cartographies, or, the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics," *Continental Drift: The Other Side of Neoliberal Globalization*, February 27, 2009, <http://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/guattaris-schizoanalyticcartographies>. See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[20](#) Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 5.

[21](#) *Ibid.*, 4-5.

[22](#) See Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Still Waiting, Still Moving: On Migration, Logistics and Maritime Industries," in David Bissell and Gillian Fuller (eds.), *Stillness in a Mobile World* (London: Routledge, 2010), 51-68.

[23](#) On Arendt and the contemporary dissolution of the borders between labor, action, and intellect, see Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. James Cascaito Isabella Bertolotti, and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 49-51. See also Zehle and Rossiter, "Organizing Networks": "How, then, to account for a politics *beyond the actionable*? Such work requires a conceptual constellation that foregrounds translation as a conflictual dynamic and social practice immanent to networks of collaborative constitution" (258, note 1).

[24](#) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street: The Encampment in Lower Manhattan Speaks to a Failure of Representation," *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com>. For a different account of such filiation, see Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (New York: Verso, 2011).

[25](#) Arguably the most consistent articulation of assemblage as a social ontology scalable beyond analytical micro-/macro-dichotomies can be found in the work of Manuel De-Landa. See *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, <sup>298</sup>

2006). See also Manuel DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

[26](#) Michel Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 1-36.

[27](#) See David M. Berry, *The Philosophy of Software: Code and Mediation in the Digital Age* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[28](#) See Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). See also Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Matthew Fuller, *Software Studies: A Lexicon* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); and Konrad Becker and Felix Stalder, *Deep Search: The Politics of Search Beyond Google* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2009).

[29](#) The sociotechnological process of free and open-source software development has long been considered a paradigmatic net-cultural dynamic—to understand the web is to understand free software. See Samir Chopra and Scott Dexter, *Decoding Liberation: The Promise of Free and Open Source Software* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Joseph Feller, Brian Fitzgerald, Scott A. Hissam, and Karim R. Lakhani (eds.), *Perspectives on Free and Open Software* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Chris Kelyt, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). Free software continues to serve as a foil for critiques of alternative licensing schemes such as creative commons; see Berry, *The Philosophy of Software*.

[30](#) See, for example, Louisa Lim, "In Greek Port, Storm Brews over Chinese-Run Labor," NPR, June 8, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/08/137035251/in-greek-port-storm-brews-over-chinese-run-labor>. See also Ferry Batzoglou and Manfred Ertel, "'Good Friends Are There to Help': Chinese Investors Take Advantage of Greek Crisis," *Spiegel*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,797751,00.html>.

[31](#) Galloway, *Gaming*, xi.

[32](#) <http://lab.softwarestudies.com>.

[33](#) Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002). Warner develops a taxonomy of reflexive practices around a notion of the public as an "ongoing space

of encounter” (90) but fails to engage the constitutive dynamic of hybrid online/offline publics.

34 Bitcoin remains subject to speculation like any other currency. See Benjamin Wallace, “The Rise and Fall of Bitcoin: Inside the Virtual Currency You Can Actually Spend,” *Wired* 12.01 (January 2012), <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2012/01/features/the-rise-and-fall-of-bitcoin>.

35 See Paul Shaxson, *Treasure Islands: Uncovering the Damage of Offshore Banking and Tax Havens* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), as well as reports by organizations such as Publish What You Pay (<http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org>), Tax Justice Network (<http://www.taxjustice.net>), and Global Witness (<http://www.globalwitness.org>).

36 See <http://www.kinecthacks.com>. On the sentient city, see Mark Shepard (ed.), *Sentient City: Ubiquitous Computing, Architecture, and the Future of Urban Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), as well as <http://survival.sentientcity.net>.

37 Eric Kluitenberg, *Legacies of Tactical Media*, Network Notebooks 05 (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 10.

38 See Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Changes: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” *New Yorker*, October 24, 2010, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell). While we do not necessarily second Gladwell’s call for a return of (and to) hierarchical forms of organization, we share the concern that “[t]he instruments of social media are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient” (ibid.).