**Translations**

(Prepared for the *Understanding Capitalism* class, April 27, 2014.)

Gender does not equal sex. Sexual differences are “given” to us by Nature (who brought us to the dance but need not dictate our dance partners). Gender is a social, historical, cultural construct that interprets those sexual differences. Indeed, it tells us whether biological differences are to be noted as relevant at all – compare the difference in emphasis between shapes of toes to shades of eye color to differences in genitalia.

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Not inter-sectionalist, or even trans-sectionality, but translations across ephemeral categories is where I want to place my bets. On which, see more below.

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*Dialectics*

Dialectics is a kind of logic. In dialectics opposites are simultaneously different and the same. Dialectics can be differentiated from what we might call “linear logic” in which opposites are opposites but never the same.

Linear logic: A is A; A is never –A. Between A and –A is a vacuum, an excluded middle. There is not overlap between these opposites.

Dialectical logic: as in linear logic, A is A; A is not –A. However, in dialectics, A is also –A. In one moment A is A and not –A; but in another moment, A is also –A. Yin and Yang. A is both A and –A at the same time. Instead of an excluded middle or vacuum between the two, there is an overlap.

The practical importance of dialectics is that whenever someone is trying to get you to see the sameness of two categories (“why can’t we all just get along, we are all human”), they are also hiding the differences (we are not just abstract humans, we are particular humans – particular genders, races, cultures, etc.) Likewise, when someone is trying to get you to see differences between categories (after all blacks and whites are different), they are hiding similarities – namely that despite and because of our differences we are all also human). What we usually do not do in our theoretical lives (but do all the time in our practical lives) is treat sameness and difference as “moments” in the process of understanding.

Dialectics is a tool we can (and do) use in almost every minute of every day.

In summary:

A is A and A is not –A (the moment of difference);

A is A and A is also –A (the moment of the sameness of opposites)

Both are partly correct. Any emphasis on the partial correctness of each moment is a political moment; a perhaps unintended sleight of hand, a kind of deception.

Examples:

An apple is an apple; an apple is not a banana.

An apple and a banana are both fruit.

Capitalists are capitalists; they are not workers.

Capitalists and workers are the products and victims of the rules of capitalism.

Men are men; they are not women.

Men and women are the products and victims of the rules of patriarchy.

A heroic sensibility is not a tragic sensibility.

A heroic sensibility and a tragic sensibility are both the result of an impossible human drama that tries to change the world.

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*Binaries*

Question: What is a binary?

Answer: a pair of opposites in which one term is valorized and the second term is de-valorized.

Examples:

Logic of capitalism: small s socialisms

Capital: labor

Human: nature

Biology: culture

Masculine: feminine

Man: woman

Heterosexuality: homosexuality

First World: third world

European: the rest

Teacher: student

Parent: child

White: black/brown/yellow

Human: animal

Agency: structure

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*Types of Feminisms*

Moto: “If it is out there, it is in here.” Translation: feminisms have become so broad and rich that anything outside of feminism is also within feminism. Examples: anarchist feminism; libertarian feminism; Marxist feminism; conservative feminism; third world feminism; imperialist feminism; etc.

Nevertheless, we might find something common to all feminisms: a recognition that two binaries are of prime importance and perhaps even decisive:

Masculine: feminine;

Man: woman.

One way to differentiate feminisms is to distinguish their strategic responses to these two binaries. Here are three strategies:

1. Inversion

The most common strategy is inverting the binary so that the de-valorized term becomes valorized, and, quite possibility, the valorized term becomes de-valorized. I want to say three additional things about this strategy: first, I think it is absolutely necessary as a moment. Second, it is common to most but not all feminisms. (Note well, inversion is not merely a strategy employed by feminisms. Rather, it is common to all those who want to destabilize any binary.) Third, inverting a binary inverts the poles but it does not change the structure that produces the binary. The practical consequence of this inversion is to unsettle the matrix of valorization.

1. Power of the negative

Some feminists insist that the negated part of the binary is and always has been the most powerful of the two. This is why the more powerful partner must be de-valorized. The practical consequence of this vision is to find a better balance between the polarities; a good or right mix of the feminine and masculine. Example of such a feminist: Jessica Benjamin in her book *Bonds of Love*.

1. Dissolve the binary

Here, “inversion” is seen as a necessary moment (also called “strategic essentialism” or “anti-anti-essentialism” or in my simpler language “separatism”). But inversion is merely a moment towards the dissolution of the binary. [A part of dialectics, I failed to mention above.] The practical consequence of this strategy is to eventually produce a world of people who seem “androgynous” – no men, no women, just people. The creation of this world is done via the destruction of heterosexuality and patriarchy. Monique Wittig provides a succinct analysis of this strategy in her “One is Not Born a Woman.” See, <http://theoriealspraxis.blogsport.de/andere/monique-wittig-one-is-not-born-a-woman/>

Here the project is to dissolve the binary and the structure that produces it.

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*Application: Smith, Marx, and Polanyi (again)*

The central binary, in my interpretation of these three thinkers is, Capital: labor.

**Smith** understands this binary but wants to ignore it. The problem is that he is too smart to actually ignore it. His desire and his work oppose each other.

**Marx** thinks the first step is to *invert* the binary, to turn the dictatorship of the capitalists into the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, into (big S) Socialism. Only then does he think we can *dissolve* the binary. Doing so takes us to communism – in which there is no capital and no labor.

**Polanyi** understands the binary but makes no theoretical moves to ignore it (as does Smith) or dissolve it (as Marx does). He wants to sustain the tension between capital and labor and for us to find ways to live within this tension.

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*Intersectionality versus Translation*

Inter-sectionality participates, I think, in the non-dialectical moment. That is, it thinks of different kinds of binaries as “sections” (or silos, or funnels). It then wants us to do the inter-sectional work – work between the different sections, or in my terms, between the binaries.

This troubles me this for three reasons. First, I think “intersectionality” is an attempt to do “race,” “class,” and “gender” together. But from what I have seen, “gender” is usually the key category. Second, because of this, I think the net result of “intersectionality” is that it covers over issues of “class” and class war. Third, I think I can offer what I think is a better option than “intersectionality.”

I want to reject “sections” as a trope (metaphor) because it participates in non-dialectical logic. Under intersectionality, sections are treated not as “moments” but “real” or “actual” – thus I think intersectionality participates in the moment of difference without seeing both difference and sameness together. A dialectical understanding of the motive for “intersectional work” moves us to the concept of “translation.”

“Translation” takes the following positions:

* all terms in the valorized part of binaries can be seen as translatable to each other;
* likewise, all terms in the de-valorized part of the binaries can be seen as translatable to each other.
* No doubt we lose something in these translations; but we also gain an ability to move or travel across them. [See my appendix below called “Travel Hypothesis”.]
* The practical consequence of “translation” is that rather than asking “why are you not doing x analysis?” (where x = gender or class or race or third world or queer), we instead ask this question: “is your analysis something I can use in my x analysis?”
* The shift in the question – from “why are you not doing x analysis?” to “can your work serve my needs?” seems rather important to me. But I am not exactly sure why. Perhaps because the moment of generosity allows for a deeper creativity. That, by the way, is the punch line.

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*Appendix: Travel Hypothesis:*

I. Themes/ Hypotheses:

a) Travel may be seen as:

- movement over space;

- conceptual movement;

- movement across developmental time.

b) Modernity creates developmental time in order to move others into a time before our own – a time we have already lived and through which they must also pass. This placement or displacement creates a tension. We suspect, perhaps only subconsciously, that as we displace others through developmental time -- an act we can call temporal othering,” -- we also share the present with them. “Temporal othering” conflicts with “time sharing” and “co-presence.”

c) This tension produces a space/time/conceptual trauma that characterizes most every aspect of the culture of Modernity. Modernity’s fear of difference (different cultures; different genders; different classes; different ways of knowing and being) creates this temporal trauma.

d) To move away from temporal othering (i.e. to move away from b and c above) is to insist on “co-presence.”

e) “Co –presence” is the “real” of modern travel – both what the modern traveler desires and avoids. Such travel encircles the trauma of Modernity.

f) The search for external others through travel may also be a means for uncovering temporally/developmentally prior internal others -- both at home and within the self. The hidden purpose of this uncovering is to confront the necessary overlap in space and time between these various internal selves and various external others. Such a confrontation may transform the culture of modernity into something more whole, something healthier, and something more in tune with itself.