

Balibar – The Infinite Contradiction

- Re-outline

Habilitation Presentation – Université de Paris I

Starts on p142

Goal: “Review the general issues whose insistence I now recognize”

- Pose a number of hypotheses and formulations
 - That can be inserted in an on-going project
- Not deductive

Previous work:

- Driven by events and summations
 - Disparity, palinodes
 - Palinode = retraction (esp in poetry)
 - Unity would be ‘fictitious’
- Shared issues

The three key themes:

- Philosophical practice
 - Writing and conjuncture
- Construction of the subject
- Structural causality (and historical materialism) [143]

Concluded with ‘maxims of an ethics’ that’s linked with “truth effects in politics”

1. Writing and Conjuncture

1. philosophy = practice

- but not reducible to practice (‘not practice itself’)
- NOT
 - Empiricism
 - Subjectivism
- Words to describe it: activity, operation, intervention, experience, work

2. NOT Theory/praxis divided (theoretical activities – practical activities)

- Doesn't 'overcome' T/P (or preserve it)
 - **not even: "though should be action" and therefore "non- or post-philosophical" (from heidegger's letter on humanism)
3. practice requires exterior matter
- matter must be transformed in a way to show its materiality-as-such
 - yet such a transformation doesn't do much
 - parody of Wittgenstein "leaves things as they stand" or even better "return them to where they stood"
 - ***Balibar:
 - "much of which came and still comes from outside what is officially defined as philosophy" (*****)
 - Balibar only interested in phil if also knew their practice
4. "double materiality" of philosophy in the conjuncture = does a work [144]
- "untied and retie from the inside the knot between conjuncture and writing"
 - also said: work within the elements of writing to unite the elements of conjuncture
 - "under the constraint of conjuncture to retie the conditions of writing"
 - ***[AC] Deleuze's double-articulation?

Conjuncture:

- EVENT: (brief or prolonged)
 - Crisis, transition, suspension, bifurcation
 - Manifest by *irreversibility*
 - The impossibility of acting and thinking as before
- INTERVENTION ('theoretical intervention')
- Balibar's 'privileged' conjunctures – individual examples
 - A. state – labor relations, via Marx Engels
 - 1. "rectification of the Communist Manifesto"
 - 2. "the party as conscience" → "party as organization"
 - 3. Class vs mass
 - B. Orangist Revolution of 1672, via Spinoza
 - 1. "science of the state" → "democratic manifesto"

- No only do philosophers always writing within a conjuncture, but within the conjuncture, they write
 - Not just thinking, but writing is key
 - “all philosophy is essentially written” (??) [146]
 - specific relations to writing:
 - Paul Valery notes “technical” modes/genres
 - Gilles-Gaston Granger: styles
 - Philosopher’s singular experience of thought determines philosophers’ relation to writing
- Three modalities of the philosopher in their texts (‘constraining modalities’)
 - Aporia, dispersion/dissemination, intersecting of the signifying chain
 - 1. Aporia
 - determines the need for a constant rewriting of the philosophical text
 - ‘incompleteness’
 - ex:
 - Marx incompleting Capital
 - Heidegger incompleting B&T
 - Spinoza’s Political Treatise
 - 1. Active incompleting
 - 2. Incomplete others (as long as itself)
 - 3. Incomplete the world (or the representation of the ‘world as world’)
 - 2. Dispersion or dissemination
 - ‘no philosopher can write “the same book twice”’
 - 1. To overcome aporias of previous one by:
 - reversing point of view [147]
 - introducing difference
 - 2. Each writing experience is an unpredictable adventure
 - A. trace:
 - After-effects
 - Backlash of words
 - Its own names

- B. opens up to other propositions
 - Through intersecting different paths
 - 3. Intersecting of the signifying chain itself
 - A. rereading of Descartes' ego sum, ego existo
 - B. "dictatorship" in history of "dictatorship of the proletariat"
 - C. equaliberty
 - **the word and proposition around which aporias crystallize and inventions take place always belong to long signifying chains
 - desire to seek origins
 - 3 parts:
 - intrinsic relation of intersecting or reversal of a signifying chain that lets itself be seen
 - radical alternatives or points d'heresie that 'divide philosophers' [148]
 - lines of demarcation or forms of collusion between philosophical and nonphilosophical discourses

conclusion

- 2 determinations of philosophical practice "constraining materialities"
 - necessarily relation to conjunctures
 - writing as short-circuit
- 3 propositions
 - 1. philosophy poses divergences in terms of antinomies & introduces universal antinomies into each particular writing
 - antimony: mutual incompatibility
 - ex: Kants has 4: space/time, whole via atoms, free will vs universal causality, necessary being
 - 2. Bringing back form/category of the theoretical
 - 3. Philosophical writing showing the unmasterability of the conjuncture
 - 'it always contains eve more divergent positions than any strategic representation can apprehend'
- 2 observations

- a 'hermeneutic of philosophy' is structurally impossible
 - but a pragmatics is, via macherey
- even if there is no sep of phil/ideologies, they is a diff in practice

2. construction of the subject

review of his previous work...

- *Three "surprises"
- 1. Spinoza's "etiology of the subject" [150]
 - 1. "first kind of knowledge"
 - 2. 'way of life'
 - 3. 'structure of behaviors and images that give meaning to individual and collective existence'
 - 4. Dual conditioning of imaginary and symbolic
 - imaginary first-person narratives
 - symbolic 'narratives, institutions, representations'
 - "jus, pactum, lex"
 - spinoza's TTP: "justice, construct, law"
 - paper by this name in Montag's "new spinoza"
 - Three aspects of the subject:
 - A. "voice of reason" -- TTC
 - The goal of the State and the conditions of its continued existence (see Butler)
 - B. transindividuated subjectivity -- Ethics
 - Practice of communication
 - Sharing of certain active affects
 - Shared knowledge
 - Love of bodies
 - C. Democratization of equality and liberty – PT
 - Double-process
 - Collective power
 - Decision
 - Spinoza: horizon of subjectivization but also a movement to pass beyond such subjectivization
- 2. Marx as self-construction of revolutionary subject, it's liberty, in/by revolutionary practice [151]

- places Marx within historical idealism
 - intervenes at the same speculative level as Kant, Fichte, Hegel even Schilling
 - **clarifies the intrinsic relation between modern, Idealist philosophy of history and the trace of the revolutionary event as well as the anticipation of its accomplishment
- category: "subject of history"
 - ex:
 - Marx: Prole
 - Kant: Humanity
 - Fichte: People
 - Hegel: World-Spirit
 - Absence:
 - "I challenge you to find it expressed in so many word: ie in its explicit theoretical wording"
 - "in the flesh" it's not there!
 - Ex: 'proletarian ideology' or 'class consciousness'
 - "this category...[is] not to be found and may in fact be impossible is his writing"
 - neither is it found in Kant, or in Fichte, or especially in Hegel
 - the real inventor: Lukacs
 - and ends with Althusser with "process without subject"*****
- 3: Descartes, citizenship, and the impossibility of the sovereign subject
 - D read as thinking of sov subject due to:
 - Spiritualism, neo-kantianism, Hegelianism and phenom
 - Sov subj in Decartes
 - "radically not to be found in his writing"
 - "impossible in his thought"
 - J-L Nancy provoked this reading
 - Read due to presuppositions in history, philology, philosophy

- Q: "who comes after the subject?"
 - A: "the citizen"
 - The subject is NOT ONTOLOGICAL (which would be objectum or hypokeimenon)
 - Rather: legal, political, theological, moral
 - 'subjectus or subditus': dependent, believing, obedient individual
 - what comes after in 1789-93 =
 - citizen
 - 1. Universal
 - 2. National
 - 3. Cosmopolitical
 - figure
 - political
 - philosophical
 - "with the revolutionary event the subjectus irreversibly cedes his place to the citizen"
 - the humility of the one who listen to the Voice of an external or internal "master" gives way in principle to the autonomy of a collective legislator
- "this break is recorded in the insurrectional negativity of the Proposition of Equaliberty"
 - "de jure fact" and "truth effect", from then on ineffaceable even as they are denounced (goes back to the 1789-93 stuff)
 - still, nothing changes (or very little), except for a slight displacement, inscribed in a play on words – although this play on words fits into a very old and long signifying chain almost indissociable from the history of universal languages and law in the west
 - 'displacement' = subjectus → subjectum/subject
- 'nothing changes unless everything does'
 - = "modernity"
 - individual → citizen only if he/she becomes a subject again****
 - "becoming-subject of the citizen"

- Unless what is really taking place (in the other disciplines) is really phil...
 - Weber, Kelsen, Mauss, Freud, Benveniste, Lacan...
- Cannot rely on analytic metalanguage (like other disciplines do),
 - so it can't bring about a reduction to external process
 - only immanent to writing
- not nonphil use of phil text as an element of an archive or the reflection of another structure *****
- philosophy is conjunctural thinking ****
 - re-reading philosophers
 - Alain Badiou: "take another step" [155]
 - play on phrase for paper title = something about bipeds?
 - Ex: rethinking Descartes
 - *****non-subjective freedom
 - Descartes-Spinoza connection
- 2. Task: develop a *program of investigating modes of subjection*
 - 1. Term subjection:
 - subjugation + subjectification
 - includes:
 - active/passive
 - difference and its movement
 - conatus (Spinoza)
 - 2. Mode of sub = linked to mode of production
 - "philosophical anthropology"
 - A. 'classical phil'
 - Interp of subject
 - 1. "inner voice"
 - A. transcendence / Law
 - B. single mode of subjection – which should be shared among many modes of subj

- C. privileging of inner voice set up an evolution/telos
- Alternative:
 - 1. Subject -- > citizen
 - 2. Becoming-citizen of subject
 - other modes of subjection that combine:
 - 1. Relations of power
 - 2. Economy of language
 - 3. Imagination of body/soul
- Aristotle
 - "unilateral discourse" [to discipline???]
 - distributed according the triple inequality of:
 - man/woman
 - master/slave
 - father/son
- beginning of some Marx stuff...
 - alienation
 - structural theory
 - commercial/legal forms of exchange
 - quick stuff...

3. Marxism and Structuralism [157]

"reversals" (no longer would say...)

- 60s:
 - historical materialism
 - science
- 70s:
 - "class struggle is 'irreconcilable in the materiality of history" & "the 'engine' of its irreversible transformations"
 - caveat: would still say:
 - any explanation should be principally causal
 - class division & class struggle is effective
- State
 - Would diff with Althusser
 - No more "outside"
 - 1. Class-for-itself

- 2. Jab at “theoretical anarchism”
 - blames them for current crisis
- 3. A can’t solve neo-fascism
- No “mass practice”
 - But still wants:
 - Insurrectional
 - “that aspect of movements of collective liberation that exceeds the functioning of institutions and apparatuses”
 - communism
 - end of Div of L
 - “underlying anthropological force”
 - diff btwn Governor/Governed
- Model, schema for his work!!
 - 1. Reconstruct Marxism
 - with Althusser
 - find it’s coherence/systematicity
 - 2. Deconstruct Marxism
 - contradiction of Marxism
 - as political theory and historical movement
 - can’t be accounted for outside of marx’s contradictions
 - aporias
 - trace
 - terms/texture = ideology
 - Aporia: ‘double bind’
 - Problem posed in terms of denial or impossibility of its solution
 - Aporia of id:
 - Ideology → conjunction
 - 1. Critique of political economy
 - 2. Theory of the state
 - 3. Dictatorship of prole
 - 4. rev party
 - first neg movement = dogmatic / critical marxisms circle back upon itself
 - → new problematic

- (affirmative / positive)
- ideology (more than 1. description or even 2. critical)
 - 1. Discrepancy
 - tendencies
 - events
 - 2. Interworking (wechselwirkung/ ruckwirkung)
 - causes
 - effects
 - "upon each other" == hist mat
- New Schema***** [159]
 - NOT:
 - 1. Sum of base/super-str
 - compl/suppl of historicity
 - YES
 - 'two bases'
 - MOP & MOS
 - incompatible & indissoc
 - general economy & ideology
 - material
 - but in opposite senses:
 - imag / reality
 - mutually reciprocal
 - structural causes
 - detour through and by means of:
 - the other scene
 - each has 'history of its own'
 - econ & ideo
 - 1. Hist through other
 - 2. Efficiency cause of its own fx
 - absent cause
 - 1. 'cause that absents itself'
 - 2. Cause whose effectivity works through its contrary
 - ex: Race Nation Class, Les Frontieres...
 - 1. Question events
 - 2. Describe tendencies

- 3. Democratic politics that arise in 1&2
 - required: practice
 - only "imaginary communities" are "real"
 - no formalism can prescribe the future (like a break)
- = post-marxism
 - but it's not "after"
 - not 'out of date'
 - or 'surpassed'
 - rather: "Marxism against itself"
 - maybe better: "meta-marxism" [160]
 - confront them with their own antithesis, like foucault
- elements:
 - radically causal
 - not a deterministic representation of the course of history (see Spinoza)
 - 1. determinism = a teleology
 - 2. Causality
 - not a phil OF history
 - but phil IN history
 - 3. Conjunctural
 - NOT predict events
 - YES: diagnose:
 - Configuration of forces
 - 'face' the political/symbolic issues
 - that will 'divide it within itself'
 - Name: structuralism
 - NOT:
 - combo or hierarchy for constraining set/totalities
 - YES:
 - 1. Probability of differential IDs
 - 2. Analysis of the double inscription of cause & their effects of productivity within representation of functionalities
 - 3. Non-contemporaneity of events to selves

ETHICS:

- Not an argument but an "attitude"

If hist = casually determined ==

- There are truth fx in history

? of relativism:

- 1. Materiality is opposed to relativism
- 2. Alt to relativism isn't
 - a. eternal truth
 - b. 'lay version' of eternal truth (like law of evolution, some a priori anticipation of consensus)
- 3. Truth fx sought only in irreversibility of breaks

Truth fx in history are the 1st negative

- interrupt
- suspend
- ex: equaliberty
 - anticipation
 - reiteration
 - ex: from history of subj
- not "empty", it's 'there' because it is a question

Liberty & Necessity

- 1. No 'leaving' necc or liberity
- 2. Max of lib is within the field of necc
- 3. Realiz of max lib = within necc [163]
 - "the proposition that because history is therefore conjectural supposes the becoming-necessary of liberty"
 - this means that politics == ethic
 - not an amor fati
 - but that politics acts to render liberty necessary (???)

imag/subj

- not super-structural
 - (cannot be manipulated at will)
 - NOT
 - master, shape, organize – history/humanity
 - not even law/science/institution
 - YES
 - Play a game
 - Sometimes tricks/finesse
 - In & against ideology/economy

Indiscernible stuff about:

- Gramsci's "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will"
 - Not a combo of activism + fatalism
- Weber's joining of "ethic of conviction" with "ethic of responsibility"
 - Presumption of truth + attention to FX
- Against:
 - Rationality : inevitability of progress
 - Mysticism: imminent catastrophe
- Question:
 - B suggests "silence"
 - But silence of what? Just gram/weber? Is it just an eloquent way of saying he "I won't try talking about what I don't know"??