

“走向同情的政治”：特邀编辑介绍与概述

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Title: Guest Editor's Introduction and Overview

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2023年1月，塞缪尔·韦伯应我和上海大学之邀，在线上作了三场系列讲座。讲座是2022年10月在巴黎初步构思的，当时的想法是讲座内容可以在某种程度上继续他在2022年刚出版的新书《先存条件：重述瘟疫》（*Preexisting Conditions: Recounting the Plague*，区域图书出版社）中对新冠疫情经历的思考，同时考虑到近两年国内文学和批评理论界的部分同行对他在2021年出版的著作《独异性：政治和诗学》（*Singularity: Politics and Poetics*，明尼苏达大学出版社）中的“独异性”概念也甚为关注，因此我们商定讲座的内容将综合这两部近作中的一些重要概念和文献，同时保持其开放性，自然地融入韦伯目前正在思考和撰写的新的主题。

韦伯为该系列讲座提供了一个总标题：“同情的阅读”（Reading as Compassion）。这个题目立刻就吸引了我，因为我觉得这正是我们在经历了近三年的疫情之后亟须交流的一种感情。到2023年1月讲座正式开始的时候，从大城市到农村，中国各地都陆续达到了感染高峰。于是，讲座的题目变得更加应景了：讲座中的一些内容和现实中正在经历的事件不谋而合，似乎一方面在呼吁对受疫情影响的人们赋予更多的同情，另一方面也在对全人类的生存境遇进行整体的反思。

什么是“同情的阅读”？这个标题的含义，随着三场讲座在两周内的展开慢慢清晰起来。“阅读”首先指的当然是阅读行为，其对象包括但不限于书籍、政治话语、媒体或社交网络所提供的信息，但它的定义与其说由阅读的对象所决定，还不如说由一种态度来界定。这种态度是对语言本身的关注，德国文学评论家维尔纳·哈马赫（Werner Hamacher）称之为“语言的不断增殖”现象。阅读是一种享受，但也是一项任务，即把语言当作一种缓慢指向意义的过程来感受和理解，无论它所处的语境是文学、政治还是社会或文化。至于“同情”，我们首先可以从德里达晚期为动物权利辩护的意义上理解：它呼吁恻隐之心，呼吁站到动物以及沦落到人-动物极限状态的赤贫生命这一边去感受世界的权利和立场。在《十日谈》里，薄伽丘则赋予了“同情”另一层含义。作者将一种自传式的经验，即他依靠友人的安慰及与他们愉快的对话才得以从爱情的痛苦中生存下来这一经历，转化为对文学共同体的建构。薄伽丘决定写

《十日谈》不仅是为了回报他从朋友那里得到的帮助,同时还希望将同情心置于他与听众和读者关系的核心位置。《十日谈》里集体轮流叙事的方式,旨在安抚1349年致命的大瘟疫给佛罗伦萨人民带来的悲伤和痛苦。

韦伯用英语作了三场讲座。因为现场没有翻译,也因为他讲座所涉及的文献广博而错综,我在每场讲座结束之后都用中文作了一个“概述”。这些概述意在总结讲座内容,并为他详细分析的、一些不一定人尽皆知的西方文学和哲学作品提供背景信息。同时,它们还试图将他讲座中不同部分之间暗藏着的关系进一步明朗化。当然不可避免地,我代入了我自己的视角和阐释。我希望我的解读能够突出每场讲座的一些要点,而不削弱其原有的敏锐性和丰富性。

讲座一:“走向同情的政治”

韦伯在第一讲中首先描述了新冠疫情的背景及2020年以来我们在生活中经历的一些不确定性。他注意到,在世界上许多地方,人们都可以感受到民众对其政府的不满情绪越来越强烈。但最引人注目的现象,也许是社会各方面的财富更加集中在一小部分人手里:“至少在最近的记忆中,所谓‘发达的西方’社会比以往任何时候都更成为或已经成为‘富豪统治的国家’,对大众的福利越来越漠不关心。”虽然这不是什么新鲜事,但它在当前采取的方式已使社会最基本的生存和运作受到了威胁。随后,韦伯介绍了他讲座的主要内容,即对待瘟疫的两套理想和价值观之间的斗争:“一方面是独立自主的个人,另一方面是集体的相互依存。”他通过重访两个关于瘟疫的经典叙述来阐述这一观点:第一个是公元前430年左右在雅典爆发的瘟疫,适逢伯罗奔尼撒战争开战的第二年,雅典人被斯巴达人围困着,修昔底德在他的《伯罗奔尼撒战争史》中见证并讨论了当时的情景;第二个是在14世纪中叶(1349年)肆虐佛罗伦萨的黑死病,它造就了欧洲文学历史上一部伟大的叙事作品——薄伽丘的《十日谈》。

讲座的第二部分专门讨论了修昔底德对瘟疫和战争的叙述。我们知道,第一次伯罗奔尼撒战争(公元前431—421年)以雅典人的失败告终。在雅典暴发的瘟疫夺去了雅典领导人伯里克利,以及其他大约十万名雅典人的生命。但在某种程度上,伯里克利应该为此负责,因为他下令在瘟疫期间继续军事行动,将雅典文化的“勇气”和“美德”置于了个人的生命安全之上。伯里克利在阵亡将士的葬礼演说中,称赞雅典人具有“自愿迎接危险”和“敢于冒险并预估风险”的独特能力。然而,事实证明,瘟疫的危险性超乎了他们的想象。伯里克利的敌人——伯罗奔尼撒人,在他们的国王阿基达摩斯二世的领导下,采取了不同的行动。因为害怕感染,他们比原计划提前离开了阿提卡。换句话说,伯罗奔尼撒人比雅典人更加灵活,他们毫不犹豫地改变了计划,也敢于承认自己对瘟疫的恐惧。在这里形成对比的是雅典人的傲慢(hubris)和伯罗奔尼撒人的谨慎(prudence),前者忽略了思考需要的时间和空间,仓促地作出判断和行动,而后者恰恰保留了语言、思考和行动之间时间和空间所起到的作用。

在第三部分,韦伯分析了另一种叙述瘟疫的经典模式:薄伽丘的《十日谈》。他首先指出,《十日谈》的叙述框架很重要,这个写于14世纪中叶(1349—1353年)的文本收集了一百个短小的故事,这些故事由七个女人和三个男人讲述了十天十夜。他们从佛罗伦萨撤离到了郊外的山上,以躲避城市里将夺走一半人生命黑死病。这群人在离开佛罗伦萨之前和从乡村别墅回来之后选择的聚集地,叫作新圣母玛利亚教堂(Church of Santa Maria Novella)。Novella这个词在这里既指新事物,也指短篇小说的形式。也许,我们可以把新圣母玛利亚教堂看作混乱城市和田园乡村之间的一个中间地带,或者把它象征性地视为城市中正在发生的瘟疫和短篇故事里叙述的超出“当前”时空的事件之间的纽带。

韦伯感兴趣的是在佛罗伦萨发生的瘟疫与《十日谈》中叙事之间的间接关系。《十日谈》所讲的一百个小故事没有叙述瘟疫本身,并且每个人选讲的故事也都是根据当天给出的主题即兴发挥的内容:有些是关于人类的恶习的,另一些是关于悲剧性的爱情的,还有一些关于诡计、欺骗,等等。佛罗伦萨的黑死病和这些故事之间究竟有什么关系呢?换个问法:为什么薄伽丘觉得有必要用瘟疫作为这些故事的框架?韦伯认为,薄伽丘在序言对女性读者的致辞中流露出来的“同情心”指明了一种可能的态度。但

是,要解释什么是“同情心”,他必须先介绍他的“摩擦性叙述”(frictional narration)的概念^①。

在讲座中,韦伯将摩擦性叙述定义为对社会和文化“既存状态”的移位性影射。具体地说,它指的是这样一个事实:在《十日谈》里,词语的传统意义,尤其是基督教的救赎希望,仍以潜在的方式活跃着,但它将会以一种扭曲的、“新颖的”(novel)方式重新出现。韦伯举的例子是《十日谈》里由潘菲洛(Panfilo)叙述的第一个故事。这是一个关于塞帕雷洛爵士(Ser Cepparello)的故事,这个人被描述为“有史以来最糟糕的人”,但他足够聪明,在临终前成功地欺骗了前来接受他忏悔的修士。在他死后,他被奉为圣人,连名字也被改成了带有宗教意味的圣-塞帕雷托(Saint Ciappelletto)。我们可以说,这个小故事是一个“回到上帝身边”的故事,它在上帝的恩典、仁慈和宽容中找到圆满的结局。但韦伯指出,故事并没有就此结束,它是在潘菲洛的一句奇怪的话中终结的,这句话敦促他的听众“赞美他(上帝)的名字,(因为)它是我们的原初,并敬畏他(上帝),在我们需要的时候向他推许自己,因为我们确信我们会被听到”。韦伯进一步指出,这句话也并不是文本的最后话语。因为潘菲洛在以“在我们需要的时候……我们会被听到”这个安慰性断言结束他的故事后,又在叙述中增加了一个短句,而这个短句在整个《十日谈》中完全是单独存在的:“*Et qui si tacque*”,这句拉丁语可以翻译为“到这里他就不说话了”,或者更字面的翻译为“到这里讲述停止了”。叙述中的这一中断,使我们对最确定的期待产生了疑问,即上面提到的,对被(上帝)听到和被拯救的期待。值得注意的是,潘菲洛并没有揭示这句话的含义。他“咬住舌头不说”,就像本雅明定义的“高度政治化的写作风格”一样:“通向那被拒绝的词”(Hinzuführen auf das dem Wort versagte)。潘菲洛阻止自己说出言不可达的东西,让他的听众自己去判断人类是否真的能被(在上者)“听到”。而根据韦伯对薄伽丘的解释,正是这个“被拒绝”的词或这种言不可达的领会为可能的“同情”提供了基础,因为在这种令人不安的缄默中,人类可以将这个故事与他们自己所需要的“被倾听”的欲望联系起来,尤其在他们身处瘟疫,经历各种灾难和个人隐痛的时候。

在讲座的最后部分,韦伯借助本雅明和德里达的著作来进一步思考同情的概念。他首先讨论了本雅明对当时被认为是“有效政治话语”的拒绝,这种话语将单个单词串联成短句(Wort-an-Wort-Reihen),从而产生一种“扩张性倾向”,并排除一切不可被言说的东西。本雅明把这类语言称为“澄澈”的语言,因为它创造了一种“绝对意义”,使语言和行动都成为工具。本雅明倡导的是一个相反的模式,在他的《讲故事的人》一文中进行了阐述。这是一种不消除单词和单词之间的空间,即“差异性关系”的叙述艺术。它通常是“纯粹描述性”的,即保留词语的复杂性和模糊性,唤起了一些联想和意义,却不一定给出答案。如果说伪有效的政治话语旨在揭示“绝对”的意义,那么本雅明所说的“讲故事”是一个制造意义的工作,它是一个持续不断且永远无法完成的过程。

这个否认词语可以达到全权意义的过程与韦伯所说的“同情的政治”(Politics of Compassion)有何关联呢?或许,德里达的遗作《我之所以就是个动物》(*L'animal que donc je suis*,也可以译成《我之所以就追随这个动物》)可以在两者间搭建一座桥梁。韦伯指出,德里达对动物的“感觉”或“感情”的强调,可以在90年代末他对“同情的政治”的反思这一更大的背景下去理解。和年轻的本雅明一样,德里达也认为战争涉及语言。在他看来,过去的两个世纪不仅是战争的世纪,也是西方通过资本和技术,通过“扩张”“军国主义”倾向,将其意识形态确立为一种普遍的“绝对正当”,从而对其他文化进行急速普遍化(或“人类学化”)的历史时期。从这个意义上说,德里达在《我之所以就是个动物》这个标题中玩的文字游戏力争解构一种政治上具有侵略性的“绝对正当”,从而重新引入了“存在于文字中心地位的异质性差异”^②。它同时也强调了可以被无限分割的、脆弱的、终有一死的普通生命的独异性,这些生命一直在被以人类美好前景为名义的战争否定着。将微小的独异性联系起来的,不是一个具有普遍性的专有名词(韦伯在别处称之为“一神认同范式”),而是不同性质的、多样化的情感体验,从焦虑和具有攻击性,到快乐和满怀希望,当然最重要的还是同情(compassion),因为compassion一词的前缀“com-”最好地表述了一种“感受自己犹如他人”的情感。

注释[Notes]

①《先存条件:重述瘟疫》中的第四章(关于薄伽丘的章节)详细讨论了“摩擦性叙述”。*Preexisting Conditions: Recounting the Plague*, New York: Zone books, 2022, pp. 71–92.

②我们将在第三个讲座中具体讨论德里达的一些新造词和文字游戏,比如 animot(动物词、动物)和 je suis(我是、我跟随)。

Guest Editor's Introduction

In January 2023, Professor Samuel Weber delivered a series of three lectures online at my invitation on behalf of Shanghai University. When we first conceived these lectures in Paris, the idea was to continue, somewhat peripherally, his reflections on the experience of the Covid – 19 pandemic assembled in a newly published book entitled *Preexisting Conditions: Recounting the Plague* (New York: Zone Books, 2022). In parallel to this thought was the keen interest that the notion of singularity, developed in his previous book, *Singularity: Politics and Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), has recently generated in certain academic circles of literary and critical theory in China. We therefore agreed that the themes of the lectures would combine a number of important issues in these two recent works while remaining open-ended, allowing current as well as future projects to settle in as they develop.

Professor Weber proposed an overarching title, “Reading as Compassion,” for the lecture series. The title immediately appealed to me as I felt it was exactly what we needed after having lived with the pandemic for almost three years. By the time the lectures were delivered, China was swept by a violent outbreak of Omicron, spreading from big cities to rural areas. The title became thus all the more pertinent, as the reality coincided with some of the content in the lectures, calling for more sympathy toward the vulnerable population affected by the pandemic and more reflection on the survival of the human species in general.

The meaning of the title, “Reading as Compassion,” would only gradually unfold as the lectures were delivered at an intermittent pace, in the space of two weeks. “Reading” here refers first, of course, to the act of reading — of books, political discourses, information made visible by media outlets or social networks, but it is perhaps defined less by the object of the act of reading than by an attitude of attention paid to the language itself, to what the German literary critic and philosopher Werner Hamacher calls the “perpetual multiplication of languages.” Reading is an enjoyment but also a task to feel and understand language as a slow signifying process, whether the context is literary, political, or social. As for “compassion,” it can first be understood in the Derridean sense of appeal for pity, for the right and duty to stand *alongside* animals as well as the human beings reduced to a limit human-animal condition. Boccaccio’s *Decameron* gives another dimension to the word “compassion.” It transforms an autobiographical experience (Boccaccio survived his suffering of love affairs thanks to the pleasant conversation and consolation he received from his friends) into the building of a literary community. Not only is his decision to write the *Decameron* an attempt to repay this debt he received from his friends, but he also places compassion at the heart of his relationship to his listeners and readers. His stories, in the form of collective narrations, were aimed at appeasing the sadness and suffering that the deadly plague had brought to Florence in 1349.

Because Professor Weber’s lectures were given in English without translation, and because his references were ample, erudite and interwoven, I deemed it necessary to give an “overview” in Chinese at the end of each lecture. These overviews meant to summarize the lectures and provide extra background information on some of the works he analyzed in details. They also attempted to make hidden links of different parts of his

lectures more explicit. Inevitably, I brought in my own perspective and interpretations. I hope that my readings can contribute to highlight some of the main points of each lecture without reducing any of its original richness.

Overview of Lecture 1: *Toward a Politics of Compassion*

Professor Weber starts the first lecture by giving a description of the Covid – 19 pandemic and some uncertainty in our experience in living it. He contends that in many parts of the world, a growing disaffection of the population with regard to their government can be felt. Perhaps the most noticeable phenomenon linked to this pandemic is the growing control of wealth in a small group of people in all aspects of society: “More than ever in recent memory at least, ‘developed Western’ societies are becoming or have become ‘plutocracies,’ with increasing indifference to the general welfare.” Although this is nothing new, it is taking forms that call into question the very conditions that enable societies to survive and function. Professor Weber then introduces the main content of his lecture, which is the struggle between two sets of ideals and values that deal with the plague: “that of the autonomous individual on the one hand, and that of collective interdependence on the other.” He does so by examining two classical accounts of the plague: the first is the one that struck Athens in 430 BC, while the city was under siege by Sparta during the second year of the Peloponnesian War, and which is witnessed and recounted by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*; the second is the Black Death that ravaged Florence in the middle of the 14th century (1349) and that gave rise to one of the masterpieces of narrative literature, Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.

The second part of the lecture is devoted to Thucydides’ description and discussion of the plague. We know that the first Peloponnesian War (431 – 421 BC) ended with the defeat of the Athenians. The plague that broke out in Athens was bad enough to take the life of Pericles, the leader of Athens, along with some 100,000 other Athenians. But in a way Pericles “asked” for it because it was him who ordered to continue military operations during the plague, putting the “courage” and “virtue” of the Athenian culture above the safety of individual lives. Pericles lauded the Athenians for their unique ability to “meet danger voluntarily” and to “take risks and estimate them beforehand;” however, the danger of the plague turned out to be incalculable for the human mind. The Peloponnesians, under the leadership of their King Archidamus, on the other hand, acted differently. They left Attica earlier than they had intended because they were afraid of the infection. In other words, the Peloponnesians proved to be more flexible; they did not hesitate to change their plans and they also acknowledged that they were fearful of the plague. What is put into contrast here is the Athenian hubris and the spartan *prudence*: the former eliminated the time and space for reflection, and rushed to judgement and action, whereas the latter tried precisely not to reduce the temporal and spatial gap between language, thought and action.

In the third part, Professor Weber analyzes another classical model of recounting the plague: Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. He first points out that the frame of the story is important: written in the middle of the 14th century (1349 – 1353), the text presents a hundred little stories told over ten days and nights by seven women and three men, who have retreated in the hills outside Florence to flee the plague that will kill almost half of its population. The place that the group chose to gather before they left Florence and after they returned from the rural villa is called the Church of Santa Maria Novella. The word “Novella” here signifies both something new and the short story form, *novella*. The Church of Santa Maria Novella can therefore be conceived as an intermediate place between the chaotic city and the idyllic countryside, as well as a symbolic link between the plague happening in the city and events narrated in the short stories, which are outside the “present” time and

space.

Professor Weber is interested in the oblique relation between the plague that was occurring in Florence and the storytelling in the *Decameron*, which does not recount the plague as such, but short stories each person chooses to tell based on the themes given on the day: some on human vices, others on tragic love, yet others on trickery, deceit, etc. What is the relation between the Black Death and these stories, or, to ask it differently, why does Boccaccio feel the necessity to use the plague as the frame for these “novellas”? Professor Weber suggests that “compassion” in Boccaccio’s address to his female readers in the beginning of the *Decameron* might indicate a possible response. But, in order to explain what he means by compassion, Professor Weber first needs to introduce what he calls the “frictional” narration^①. Here in the lecture, frictional narration is defined as a *displaced* allusion to the social and cultural “pre-conditions”; more precisely, it refers to the fact that the conventional meaning of words prior to their use in the *Decameron*, especially the Christian hope of salvation, remains active, but that its re-inscription in the *Decameron* is somewhat twisted, displaced, recounted in a “novel” manner. The example he gives is the first story, which was recounted by Panfilò. It is the story of “Ser Cepparello,” who is described as probably the “worst man who had ever been born,” but who is smart enough to sufficiently deceive a friar who has come to take his confession on his deathbed, so that after his death he is considered to be a saintly character and was indeed known then as “Saint Ciappelletto.” We can say that the story ends on a happy note of “returning to God,” to his Grace, his kindness, his tolerance. But Professor Weber points out the story does not end here; it ends on a strange sentence of Panfilò urging his listeners “to praise His name, which is what we began with, and venerate Him, commending ourselves to Him in our need, *in the certain knowledge that we will be heard*.” Furthermore, these last words of the first story of the *Decameron* are not the last words of the meta-narrative that frames the text. For after Panfilò has finished his tale with the comforting assertion that “in our need (...) we will be heard,” the narrative adds one short sentence, which stands entirely alone in the entire *Decameron*: “*Et qui si tacque*,” which can be translated as “And here he stopped speaking,” or even more literally, “And here speaking stopped.” This interruption of the narrative calls into question the most sure expectation, which is *being heard* and *being saved*, but Panfilò does not reveal the meaning of this sentence. He “bit his tongue,” in the same fashion as what Benjamin defines as the “highly political style of writing”: “To lead up to that which is denied the word” (*Hinzuführen auf das dem Wort versagte*). Panfilò stops himself “from speaking what could not be spoken,” leaving his listeners to decide if humans can indeed be “heard.” It is however this word “denied,” according to Professor Weber interpreting Boccaccio, that provides the basis for a possible “compassion,” for it is in this disturbing silence that human beings can relate the story to their own need for “being heard,” especially in the times of natural catastrophes such as the plague.

In the last part of this lecture, Professor Weber resorts to Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings to further reflect on the idea of compassion. He first discusses Benjamin’s rejection of what was then considered a dominant notion of politically effective discourse, which is based on a “*Wort-an-Wort-Reihen*” (chain of individual words in sentence) that produces “expansive tendency” and eliminates the unsayable. Benjamin calls this type of language “crystalline” because it creates an “absolute meaning” that instrumentalizes both the language and action. The opposite model, the one that he advocates, is discussed in his article “The Storyteller.” It is an art of recounting that does not eliminate the space in between words, the space of “differential relationality.” Often “purely descriptive,” it leaves room for complexity and ambiguity of words, evoking something without necessarily giving an answer. If the pseudo effective political discourse imposes “absolute” meaning, the modest storytelling in the Benjaminian sense is the work of significance, which is an ongoing and never completable process.

How does this complex process, which denies the full meaning of words, relate to what Professor Weber calls the “politics of compassion”? Perhaps Derrida’s posthumous book, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (Follow)* (*L’animal que donc je suis*) can provide a bridge between the two. Professor Weber points out that Derrida’s emphasis on the “feeling” for or empathy with animals can be viewed in the larger context of the philosopher’s reflections on the “politics of compassion” at the end the 1990s. Like the young Benjamin, Derrida also sees war as involving language, and the past two centuries are not only centuries of war, but also a historical period in which the West inflicts a precipitous universalization (or “anthropologization”) onto other cultures, via the capital and technology, but also via an “expansive,” “militaristic” tendency to establish its ideology as a generalized “absolute proper.” In this sense, Derrida’s wordplay in the title *The Animal That Therefore I Am (Follow)*^② deconstructs the aggressive political “absolute proper” and reintroduces a “heterogeneous divergence at the heart of words.” It also puts an emphasis on the differential singularity of the “dividual,” vulnerable, mortal lives that have constantly been denied by the war in the name of species. What links the differential singularity, however, is not a generalizing proper name (what Professor Weber has called elsewhere the “Mono-theological paradigm”), but heterogenous affective experience ranging from anxiety and aggressivity to joy and hope, and above all, compassion.

[Notes]

① The concept of “frictional narration” is discussed in detail in the chapter four (the chapter on Boccaccio) of *Preexisting Conditions: Recounting the Plague* (New York: Zone Books, 2022).

② We will come back to discuss some of Derrida’s neologisms and wordplay, such as “animot” and “je suis” (meaning both “I am” and “I follow”) in the third lecture.

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