Displaced Writing

Surface Translation as Post-Conceptual *Récriture* in Contemporary German Poetry

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Résumé : Certains courants actuels de la poésie de langue allemande utilisent la traduction pour tracer les contours (post)conceptuels d'un travail de récriture envisagé comme outil critique adapté à notre époque de mondialisation accélérée. Ce chapitre part du constat que les pratiques de 'traduction de surface', — c'est-à-dire tout un ensemble de pratiques traductives expérimentales qui, sur le plan du son et/ou du sens, déplacent un texte-source grâce à des stratégies d'appropriation —, sont utilisées de manière créative pour soumettre la pensée politique et culturelle à un examen critique. À partir de lectures d'œuvres d'Ann Cotten, de Yoko Tawada et — surtout — d'Uljana Wolf, cette étude entend proposer une nouvelle façon de rendre compte de la complexité d'une poétique translingue et traductive qui pousse le lecteur au-delà des limites d'une écriture et d'une parole normées, au-delà des modes habituels d'inscription dans une langue ou dans une identité.

1 Translational poetics of the here-and-now

Coming of age during the accelerated globalization of the late 20th and 21st centuries, recent movements in German poetry use translation, both as model and metaphor, to redefine the possibilities and limitations of the lyric genre. Emblematic of this dynamic is the (post-)conceptual function of 'surface translation' [1] practices—i.e., experimental forms of translation that phonologically (sound-wise) and/or semantically (meaning-wise) displace an antecedent text through strategies of appropriation—with which to investigate linguistic differences and the interaction between language, cul-

1. Literal translation of the German term 'Oberflächenübersetzung', which was coined by Ernst Jandl. For the history and usage of the term and its political dimension in the poetry of Jandl and Oskar Pastior, see Weissmann, Dirk, "Übersetzung als kritisches Spiel, Zu Ernst Jandls 'oberflächenübersetzung'", *in* Wellnitz, Philipp (Ed.), *Das Spiel in der Literatur*, Berlin, Frank und Timme, 2013, p. 119-132, and Dembeck, Till, "Oberflächenübersetzung: The Poetics and Cultural Politics of Homophonic Translation", *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 3:1 (2015), p. 7-25. See also the foreword to this book.

ture, politics, history, and creativity. More so than any other form of translation, surface translation conveys the autonomy of translation as an artistic practice while simultaneously challenging traditional notions of translation theory (e.g., domestication, foreignization, translatability, untranslatability). In this respect, it shares a pervasive familiarity with conceptual art, if it is understood as a particular way of rewriting that relies on a wide range of self-reflexive strategies, and distances itself from a position of creatively original authorship. It's no wonder that the New York poets in the 1960s showed an enduring affection for translational recycling and appropriation and that conceptual poets like Kenneth Goldsmith today embrace "creative misuses of language like homophonic translations and mondegreens"[2] as both linguistic and political devices meant to replace humanist translation.

Then as now this school of poetic thought has a vital and sustaining impact on German-speaking poetry. In the introduction to his influential anthology *Silver Screen* (1969), Rolf Dieter Brinkmann ties the work of the American avant-garde to a playful poetics of surface translation, where "one's own poem emerges by putting together several foreign texts, through *surface translation*"[3]. Inspired by poets like Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan, or Ron Padgett, Brinkmann himself is drawn to various procedures of surface translation—the homophonic method in his translation of Guillaume Apollinaire's "La jolie rousse" ("Der joviale Russe", with Rainer Rygulla)[4] or the profanization of imagery in his translation of John Ashbery's "Summer"[5], for example. In this article, I shall examine different concepts and practices of surface translation that operate on different levels (content, style, motifs, visibility, sound). Nearly all of them deal, to some degree, with ambivalent and often stigmatized symptoms in language that map out the topography of a critical lingualism that permeates contemporary German poetry, especially the works of Ann Cotten, Yoko Tawada and, most prominently, Uljana Wolf.

Much has been said and written about the return to form in recent poetry with Oulipian constraints, conceptualism, poet-translations, polyglossia, and theory-bound writing being a large part of that discussion. The sonnet is considered by many to be the most widely practiced and inventive of poetic forms. Yet there still exists a prevailing notion among readers, critics, and sonneteers alike that it should be gov-

2. Goldsmith, Kenneth, "Displacement is the New Translation", *Rhizome* 9 (June 2014) (`www.rhizome.org/editorial/2014/jun/9/displacement-new-translation/`).

3. Brinkmann, Rolf Dieter, "Notizen 1969 zu amerikanischen Gedichten und zu dieser Anthologie", *in Silver Screen*, *Neue amerikanische Lyrik*, ed. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Cologne, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969, p. 7-32, here p. 27. Translation cited from Schumacher, Eckhard, " 'In Case of Misunderständig, Read On!' Pop as Translation", English translation by Allison Plath-Moseley, *in* Müller, Agnes C. (Ed.), *German Pop Culture: How 'American' is it?*, University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 113-129, here p. 117.

4. For a close reading of Brinkmann's translation see Schumacher, Eckhard, " ' ... plan wie eine Sense ... ', Über Oberflächenübersetzungen", *in* Degner, Uta, Mengaldo, Elisabetta (Eds.), *Der Dichter und sein Schatten. Emphatische Intertextualität in der modernen Lyrik*, Paderborn, Fink, 2014, p. 151-165.

5. "Sommer (Aus dem Amerikanischen)" (1974). In his short but intriguing essay on Brinkmann's translation, Joachim Sartorius, almost in passing, distinguishes between these two genealogies of surface translation: on the one hand, Oskar Pastior's linguistic explorations of language, and on the other Brinkmann's transformation of the deep structure of meaning underlying the opaque surface of summer in Ashbery's poem: Joachim Sartorius, "Die Oberfläche des Sommers oder Was Brinkmann mit Ashbery machte", *Akzente* 32 (1985), p. 196-198, here p. 198. On Pastior see Jacques Lajarrige's chapter in this book.

erned by an extremely rigid and restrictive set of formal conventions.[6] Ann Cotten's *Fremdwörterbuchsonette* and Uljana Wolf's and Christian Hawkey's *Sonne From Ort*, a collaborative erasure of Rainer Maria Rilke's German translation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, represent two complex and compelling variants of the disruptive way in which the sonnet explores the boundaries between tradition and renewal. They therefore provide a productive point of departure from which to examine different post-conceptual practices of translation and displacement.

Largely mixing and appropriating other texts and authors, Cotten and Wolf write in what Marjorie Perloff calls *récriture*[7], a language of citation that gains new relevance and application in the cultural moment of the digital age (e.g., advanced copy-and-paste techniques). In Perloff's model, poetry is seen as undergoing a paradigmatic shift from the poetics of expressive subjectivity of the original genius to the poetics of derivative subjectivity of the "unoriginal genius". Accordingly, translation, as second-order form of signification, is one of its key modes, if not the most immediate form of *récriture*. In other words, unoriginal writing is writing in translation, a transformative literature always in the process of being made and unmade. And, as I argue, surface translation in particular conveys an anti-essentialist aesthetic of "unmastering language"[8] that interrogates the teleologically-driven notion of the authentic native speaker/writer with linguistic discontinuities and inconsistencies.

2 The always-already-translated

Cotten's *Fremdwörterbuchsonette* (which could be translated as "Sonnets from the Dictionary of Foreign Words") contains 78 double-sonnets which together are arranged in two complementary strands like a double helix, with sonnet n° 19 "Begriff" and n° 60 "Ingeniös, begriffen" constituting a surface translation of Shakespeare's iconic "Sonnet 18". The ironized DNA-metaphor works on two entwined levels: firstly, on the level of language fields (here, mostly German and English, as well as some French and Latin). As the volume's title indicates, each bonded pair of sonnets is constituted by one or a pattern of foreign words *(Fremdwörter)* that tackle notions of self-contained organic unity, since foreign derived-words are always already transferred[9] and hybridized elements in language that cannot be unambiguously categorized as belonging to a language. Secondly, they are entwined on the level of generic complexity. Cotten's "broken"[10] sonnets are intricately patterned, similar in their very basic design—all sonnets consist of 28 lines (doubling the conventional fourteen-line

6. On this topic see also Till Dembeck's chapter in this book.

7. Perloff, Marjorie, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 4.

8. As Charles Bernstein articulates in his discussion of Gertrude Stein's poetics: "Unmastering language is not a position of inadequacy; on the contrary, master requires repression and is the mark of an almost unrecoverable lack", Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 146-147. See also Bernstein's opening essay in this book.

9. But they remain untranslated and untranslatable in the sense of what Robert Stockhammer calls "the-already-transported" ("das Schon-Über-Gesetzte")—evoking the double meaning of the German word *übersetzen*, which references both "translation" (übersetzen) and "transportation" (über-setzen, with a stress on the first syllable). *Cf.* Stockhammer, Robert, "Das Schon-Übersetzte, Auch eine Theorie der Weltliteratur", *Poetica* 41 (2009) p. 257-291, here p. 270.

10. "trauern im kaputten Sonnet", Cotten, *Fremdwörterbuchsonette*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 2007, unpaginated.

scheme) [11]—but with constant variation and displacement in the execution of that design, where stanza forms, meter, free verse, sound and rhythm structures from entirely disparate traditions are continually broken up and recombined to form novel types with new derivative characteristics. [12] Thus, her experimental program renders visible and thereby rejects purist discourse on language and poetic form by celebrating quirky artifice and the sonnet's surface features that open up an in-between space in which appropriated entities, shapes, forms, ideas, thoughts or sentiments are questioned, unsettled and infused with new meaning.

Sonnet n° 19 "Begriff" (literally "term") [13] transposes the Shakespearean sonnet (three quatrains followed by a couplet) into two quatrains (abba / abba) followed by two tercets (cde / ecd) and two tercets (def / def) followed by two quatrains (abba / bcbc), with the stanza forms doubled and reversed, as if reflected in a mirror. Although Cotten's rewriting (18+1) glides through various surface features of the famous "Sonnet 18", it is the twisted first line ("Darf ich den Sommertag mit dir vergleichen?") [14] that unmistakably indicates the relationship with the source text ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"):

> May I compare the summer's day to you
> It ends while I my sonnet first try.
> Beginning a sonnet while the day goes by
> may I compare the summer's day to you? [15]

All of the sonnets more or less deal with the Wittgensteinian argument that poetry does not translate experience into poetic form; rather, language and poetic form shape the production of experience itself: "Concreticize genetics from whatever, / shuffle it, split it, recombine the parts" [16]. In that sense, sonnet n° 19 conveys awareness of the contrast between the temporality of existence and the eternity of verse behind Shakespeare's "summer's day". Its formal intelligence, however, is not geared toward transcendental condensation (of the moment), but campy exaggeration of surface features. The first quatrain is a tautological diffusion of momentum (youth, love, the summer's day) and initiation (the beginning of a sonnet). Given the fact that "may" and "shall" permit mutual substitution, the very beginning reads like a disclaimer, in which the poem is placed outside any reductive or unifying description of translation.

Cotten's translation is propagated not from contemplations of a youth, but from the foreign word 'ingeniös' ('ingeniously'). It approaches Shakespeare's ingenuity from the perspective of the poetic engineer (Lat. 'ingeniator' > contriver; 'ingeniare' >

11. Of course, there is one exception to the rule: sonnet n° 4, "Ellen Blick", is a triple-sonnet of 42 lines.

12. This reads like Erika Greber's non-essentialist definition of the sonnet, in which she states that there has never been a proper, true, and essential generic variant at work regarding its formal elements, not even one that could be considered its 'Urform'—i.e., the archetypal design underlying all forms and formations—because the sonnet had already been varied as it was coming into being (in *statu nacsendi*). *Cf.* Greber, Erika, *Textile Texte: Poetologische Metaphorik und Literaturtheorie*, *Studien zur Tradition des Wortflechtens und der Kombinatorik*, Cologne, Böhlau, 2002, p. 568.

13. In a collection of current German language writing in English, Cotten and Rosmarie Waldrop (self-) translate the title more poignantly as "Ingeniously, Recognize", see *DICHTEN* 10, ed. Rosmarie Waldrop, Berkeley, Burning Deck/Anyart, 2008, p. 51.

14. Cotten, *op. cit.*, sonnet n° 19 "Begriff".

15. Cotten/Waldrop, *op. cit.*, "Ingeniously, Recognize", p. 51.

16. *Ibid.*, "Content, Teleological", p. 60.

to contrive; 'ingenium' > skill; see also 'Ingenieur' in German): "And like high noon your body blazes / square and planned with ingenuity"[17]. Or, more specifically, from the perspective of ingenious unoriginality, since Cotten translates a foreign sonnet, by accumulating more complex structures from particular elements of the source material. She uses a flexible material to conceptualize her textual expansion: "your hair's like flax"[18]. Throughout the volume, altering the surface of sonnets is compared to hairstyling.[19] Again, this stylization embodies a property of DNA: the metaphor of the text is that of an open and constantly shifting hairpin loop network.[20]

Yet there is a sensual sincerity to Cotten's flirtation with multiple surfaces that encompasses both campy artifice and rough immediacy. It is all there: her language biography ("Flex, Reflex"[21]), her individuation as person and poet,[22] urban love ("An Induction to the Blues"[23]), digital communication ("Sound Synthesis, Digital"[24]), and the fact that her parents are both biologists. Cotten's sonnets, however, deliberately avoid the aura of confessional exposure; instead, the sensory stimulus of experience moves within the fiber of the text by relating surface features to one another so that they resonate beyond themselves.

This can be observed in the palinodic relationship of sonnet n° 19 and sonnet n° 60, where summer turns to winter and fatigued metapoetic discourse loops back on itself—"bette meinen Kopf auf Schrauben, [...] Habs aufgegeben diese schönen Knaben / mit Ingenieurskunst zu beschwatzen"[25]—in the in-between interstices of haptic literality: "Begriff" ("Ingeniously Recognize") and "Ingeniös, begriffen" ("Ingeniously Recognized"). Bruce LaBruce has rightfully argued against Susan Sontag's (otherwise seminal) conception of camp as "neutral with respect to content" and thereby "depoliticized"[26] that camp is "by its very nature political, subversive [...] at least in its most pure and sophisticated manifestations"[27]. It has been notoriously overlooked that *Fremdwörterbuchsonette* begins with a statement on the politico-juridical sphere of the foreign word that, by definition, is not being fully integrated into national language systems, much like a foreigner with a temporary work permit: "I'm only fulfilling a conceptual function, occupying a job for which there's no qualified German

17. *Ibid.*, "Ingeniously, Recognize", p. 51.

18. *Ibid.*

19. For a more detailed analysis of *Fremdwörterbuchsonette* see Claus Telge, " 'in sich verschlungen sind wir manchmal redundant': Ann Cottens Spiel mit der Sprach-DNA", *in* Binder, Eva, Metz-Baumgartner, Birgit, Klettenhammer, Siglinde (Eds.), *Transkulturelle Lyrik*, Saarbrücken, Königshausen & Neumann, 2016, p. 91-107.

20. The flax-like hair also alludes to the genre's poetological metaphor of weaving in general (Lat. *textere* > to weave). See Greber, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

21. Cotten, *op.cit.*, sonnet no. 3 "Flex, Reflex".

22. Cotten was born in Iowa, grew up and studied in Vienna and moved to Berlin in 2006 where she became part of the so-called new Berlin avant-garde.

23. Cotten/Waldrop, *op. cit.*, "An Induction to the Blues", p. 67.

24. *Ibid.*, "Sound Synthesis, Digital", p. 63.

25. Cotten, sonnet n° 60 "Ingeniös, begriffen".

26. Sontag, Susan, "Notes on Camp", *Partisan Review*, 1964; repr. *in Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967, p. 275-292, here p. 277.

27. LaBruce, Bruce, "Notes on Camp/Anti Camp" (`www.brucelabruce.com/2015/07/07/notes-on-camp-anti-camp`).

available at the moment"[28]. It is this fragile space of cultural translation from which Cotten *(re-)engineers* "New idioms / [...] meta-in-motion, a springing up / of naked drives to cross synaptic corpses"[29].

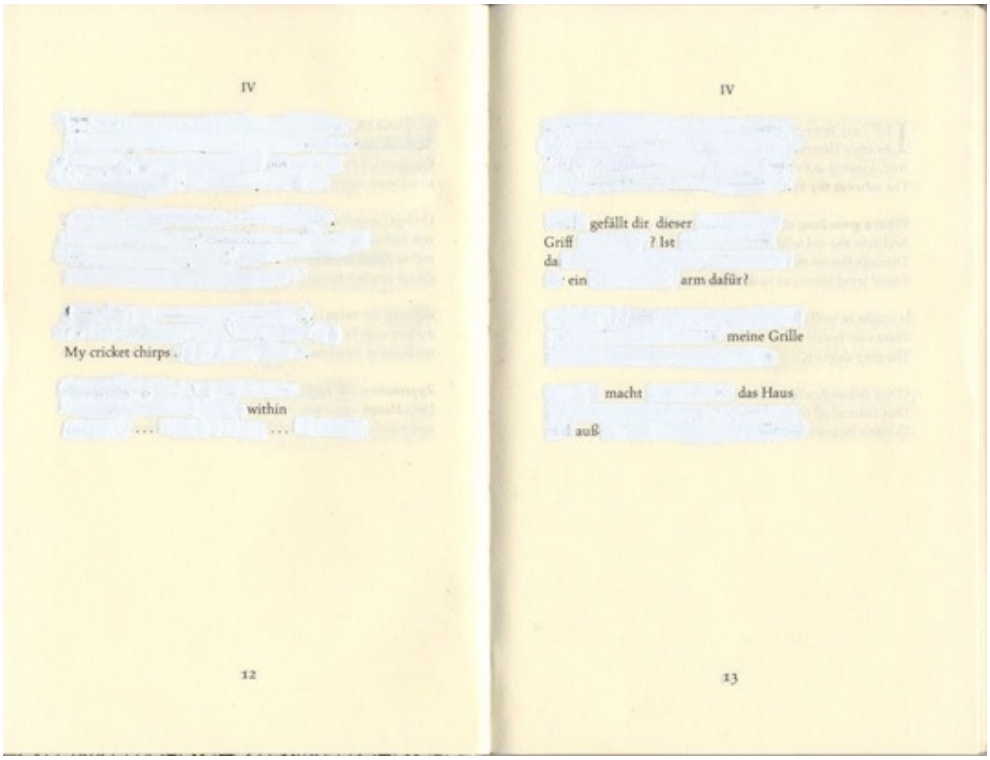


Figure 1 – Erasure of "Sonnet IV" of Rilke's German translation of Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (Hawkey/Wolf).[30]

3 Translatorship

While Cotton's translation of "Sonnet 18" is indebted to the proliferation of words, Uljana Wolf[31] and Christian Hawkey are concerned with removing them from the surface of the page, in their erasure of Rilke's translation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (see figure 1). Yet what they all have in common is that they tie in with the referential and metapoetic dimension of the love sonnet, operating broadly in line with the Petrarchan tradition. In *Sonne From Ort*, the Petrarchan secrecy of the hidden dialogue between Elizabeth, the *poetess*, and Robert Browning, the *poet* (and her husband), through the disguise of a pseudotrans-

28. *Cf.* Cotten, *op. cit.*, unpaginated. The translation can be found in the foreign rights section of the Suhrkamp Website: `www.suhrkamp.de/buecher/sonnets_from_the_dictionary_of_borrowed_words-ann_cotten_12497.html?d_view=english`.

29. Cotten/Waldrop, *op. cit.*, "Standstill, Teleological", p. 55.

30. Wolf, Uljana, "Whiting Out, Writing In, or", *Asymptote* 2012, unpaginated (`www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/uljana-wolf-whiting-out-writing-in`).

31. See also her contribution to this book.

lation [32], is structurally mirrored in the relationship between Wolf and Hawkey—a married American-German poet-couple—, which, again, is overall framed by Rilke's particular affection for the Sapphic tradition 1992 of the loving poets. [33] The Austrian poet once famously called the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* "one of the great bird calls of the heart in the landscape of love" [34]. Wolf takes this up and uses the metaphor of "Zugunruhe", meaning the migratory drive in birds (literally "migratory restlessness"), to conceptualize the whiting-out of most of Rilke's translation (the 'starting text') as "a technique for recording the migratory orientation of captive texts [birds]" [35] by comparing it to an Emlen funnel experiment, where ink colors the bird's (the poet's) claws and marks its (the text's) directorial orientation (see figure 1).

With the pages of the bilingual Insel edition of Rilke's translation as their working surface, Hawkey and Wolf, who both have a long-established practice of playing with translation, [36] create a new poetic text that is the result of a multiplicity of relational constellations brought together in a constrained practice of appropriative writing. Browning's "Sonnet IV" compares the poet's voice to that of another poet: "my cricket chirps against thy mandolin" [37], with the "cricket" referring to Elizabeth and the "mandolin" to Robert. In Hawkey's and Wolf's above-quoted erasure, the female poet chirps not "against" the male poet, but constitutively from 'within' the lines, freed from her self-doubt of being a minor poet.

Interestingly, the German 'Grille' (cricket) directs away from Rilke (another erased "mandolin") to the female voice of his co-translator, Alice Faehndrich. Wolf asserts that the acknowledgement of Faehndrich's contribution is lost in changing the preceding dedication "in Erinnerung an gemeinsame Arbeit" to "In memoriam / Alice Faehndrich" in later editions. [38] Her reworking of the translation, then, is an act of metatranslative recovery, through which Faehndrich's concealed authorial presence is inversely made visible by erasing Rilke's canonical version. Here, it reads as a self-referential conversation between two artisans/translators about the right choice of parts/movements/words ("gefällt dir dieser / Griff? / Ist / da / ein arm dafür"), which eventually indicates that it is the chirping voice of the female co-translator that lays the foundation of the text and guides the process as it constitutes the house/the translation to be built: "meine Grille / macht das Haus / auß" (see figure 1).

32. Following Gideon Toury's seminal definition as "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed", *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1995, p. 40.

33. Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in *Sämtliche Werke in sieben Bänden*, vol. 6, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, p. 924-931.

34. Schnack, Ingeborg, *Rainer Maria Rilke, Chronik seines Lebens und seines Werkes*, Frankfurt/Main, Insel, 1996, p. 718. The quote was translated by Joshua Weiner in his review "Friday Pick: SONNE FROM ORT by Uljana Wolf and Christian Hawkey", *Body* April 2014, unpaginated (`www.bodyliterature.com/friday-pick-sonne-from-ort-by-uljana-wolf-christian-hawkey/`).

35. See Wolf's illuminating commentary "Whiting Out, Writing In, or", *op. cit.*, unpaginated. This most obviously reads as an intertextual variation of Stephen T. Emlen and John T. Emlen's paper "A Technique for Recording Migratory Orientation of Captive Birds", *The Auk* 83 (1966), p. 361-367.

36. In *Ventrakl* (2010), Hawkey uses a variety of experimental methods (e.g., cut-up, homophonic translation, online translation engines, relay translations) to translate and engage with the poetry of Georg Trakl.

37. Barret-Browning, Elizabeth, *Sonette aus dem Portugiesischen, Übertragen von Rainer Maria Rilke, Englisch und Deutsch*, Frankfurt/Main, Insel, 1999, p. 12.

38. Faehndrich shortly died after the first edition of Rilke's translations was published in 1908.

At the same time, in disclosing this unexplored collaborative interaction, Wolf points to what lies at the core of her and Hawkey's erasure piece, and the poetics of erasure in general: questioning singular authorship by radically unwrapping the unity of the selected material. The original formal and semantic features metamorphose in the whited-out surface spaces between and beyond words; broken up and reconnected lines, stanzas, and languages set "a slumbering text"[39] in motion, migrating off the page ("Zugunruhe"). The outcome belongs neither to the author, nor the translator, nor the erasurist, but—and here Wolf is alluding to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin[40]—to the "*Third mind* [of collaboration]"[41] that, as Travis Macdonald puts it, "arises [...] from the creative friction between two inherently different sets of aesthetic tendencies"[42].

What fundamentally distinguishes *Sonne From Ort* from recent erasure projects—such as Jen Bervin's widely received *Nets*[43]—is that translation adds another aesthetic tendency that is not inherently different from erasure. According to Emily Apter, translation offers a "particularly rich focus for discussions of creative property and the limits of ownership"[44]. But where Apter sees translation in general as a "unique case of art as [...] authorized plagiarism"[45], practices of erasure or effacement always run the risk of copyright violation. Nevertheless, both translation and erasure claim "to be *of* the original" and are "possessed of no autonomous textual identity"[46], and this is where they become of particular interest for Wolf, as they both make "paper liquid"[47].

4 Post-conceptual surface translation

Moreover, the process of transforming the original poem and the translation, or more precisely, "the appropriation of an entire work in its materiality as such"[48], challenges the generic categories surrounding the text—i.e., the simplified schemes of translation theory: original and translation, author and translator, source language and target language.

It is here that Wolf's collaborative experiment could be read most clearly as a conceptual surface translation strategy that emerges from a planned and thought-through idea that is mechanically carried out to completion and in which the process of its re-

39. Wolf, "Whiting Out", *op. cit.*, unpaginated.

40. See Burroughs, William and Gysin, Brion, *The Third Mind*, New York, The Viking Press, 1978.

41. Wolf, "Whiting Out", *op. cit.*, unpaginated.

42. Macdonald, Travis, "A Brief History of Erasure-as-Form", *Jacket 2* 38 (2009), unpaginated (`jacketmagazine.com/38/macdonald-erasure.shtml`).

43. Again, a conceptual take on Shakespeare's sonnets. Hawkey and Wolf seem to be greatly inspired by Bervin's erasure work, notably her poetic and conceptual investigation of material and page design in her books *The Desert* and *The Niagara Book*.

44. Apter, Emily, *Against World Literature, On the Politics of Untranslatability*, New York, Verso, 2013, p. 303.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Wolf, "Whiting Out", *op. cit.*, unpaginated.

48. According to Annette Gilbert, this is precisely what distinguishes Wolf's and Hawkey's practice of appropriation from the more general style of Cotten or Brinkmann. See Gilbert, Annette, "Book pirates: On a New Art Making Books", *in* Gilbert, Annette (Ed.), *Reprint: Appropriation (&) Literature*, Wiesbaden, Luxbooks, 2014, p. 49-77, here p. 51.

alization enables translation to describe itself. For example, the white-out redactions bring to light the fact that translation activates the language being translated from and the one translated to (a central thought in Wolf's work to which I will return later). This is most obvious in the bilingual title *Sonne From Ort*[49] that shows, as summed up by Gilbert, "the inextricable interlacing of voices across eras, generations, languages"[50].

Parallels can certainly be drawn here with the works of founding conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt ("The idea becomes a machine that makes the art"[51]) or Joseph Kosuth (*Art as Ideas*). In conceptual poetry, then, in Goldsmith's words, the idea often appears to be "much more interesting than the resultant text"[52]. But even though conceptual art practices can provide a key to understanding the contemporaneity of poetry in the digital age, Craig Dworkin acknowledges that conceptual art and conceptual writing (as translation) cannot simply be equated for various reasons—one being that in poetry, "the relation of the idea to the word is necessary but not privileged: these are still poems made of words; they are not ideas *as poems*"[53].

With regard to this very telling aspect, it should be noted that Wolf and Hawkey create an intuitive balance between concept and execution rather than an intellectual "supremacy of concept over execution"[54]. It is especially in this sense that I consider Wolf's translational poetics in the following as post-conceptual. She conceptually reflects and refracts the processes and categories that bring into being and frame language, translation, and poetry but never fetishizes the use of decontextualized appropriations as refined manifestations of ideas. Her works are neither "detailless" nor "empty"[55], nor do they follow Goldsmith's Dadaist reconfiguration of (non-)reading. For the print publication of *Sonne From Ort*, the white-out erasures are visually translated by graphic designer Andreas Töpfer (another collaboration) into typographical sequences that encode the surface of the correction fluid (e.g., dotted, double, or single lines signify the different forms of brush stroke) (see figure 2).

It stands to reason that both Gilbert and the poet Joshua Weiner choose the iconic first line of Sonnet XLIII ("How do I love thee? Let me count the ways"[56]) to, firstly, illustrate the dialogic complexity of the erasure piece;[57] secondly, to encapsulate how

49. According to Wolf, the title refers to Rilke, the Villa Discopoli on Capri ("sun"), where he began to translate Browning's *Sonnets*, and the interplay of English and German, "even retaining an echo of Elizabeth's London in the Os" (Wolf, "Whiting Out", *op. cit.*, unpaginated).

50. Gilbert, *Reprint*, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

51. LeWitt, Sol, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art", *in Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1999, p. 12-16, here p. 12.

52. Goldsmith, Kenneth, "Conceptual Poetics", *Poetry Foundation* (June 2008), unpaginated (`www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/06/conceptual-poetics-kenneth-goldsmith`).

53. Dworkin, Craig, "The Fate of Echo", *in Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, ed. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2011 (xxiii-liv), xxxvii.

54. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

55. Referring to Lucy Lippard's famous post-aesthetic premises of the "dematerialization of the art object" (*Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972,* New York, Praeger, 1973).

56. Barrett-Browning, *op. cit.*, 90.

57. English-German, erasure-writing, erasure-translation, E. Barrett Browning-R. Browning, Barrett Browning-Rilke, Rilke-Faehndrich, Barrett-Browning-Hawkey, Rilke-Wolf, Rilke-Hawkey, Wolf-Hawkey, Hawkey-Wolf, Wolf-Barrett-Browning etc.

Hawkey inverts the love-theme (undying love becomes dying love [58]) in the original and Wolf undoes the pathos of Rilke's translation. [59] But although the two poet-translators disrupt the conventional modes one typically associates with writing and reading poetry (in translation), they still promote, aesthetically and ethically, the intrinsic value of the migratory text as such, engaging the reader in an overt and substantial rereading of the original and the translation.

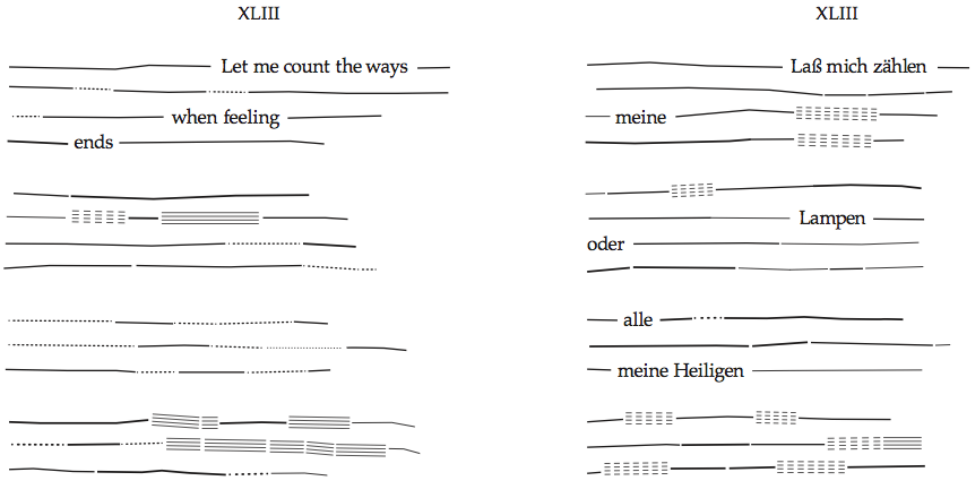


Figure 2 – Typographical translation of the white-out erasures of "Sonnet XLIII" of Rilke's German translation of Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* for the final publication (Töpfer/Hawkey/Wolf). [60]

5 Homonymy and amphiboly

Apart from the widely-studied Yoko Tawada [61], there is no other current body of work in German poetry in which such post-conceptual translational poetics become more evident than that of Uljana Wolf, perhaps even more so in her works on same-sounding, same-looking words across languages. The "DICHTionary" [62] poems in her second book *falsche freunde* (2009) [63] can be characterized along the lines of what Barbara Cassin calls "le mal radical en traduction" [64] ("radical evil in translation"), which not only, as Emily Apter illustrates, "destabilizes language in its very structure", but also "expresses something about language's very essence" [65]: homonymy and amphiboly. Wolf bases her poems on lists of false friends (*faux amis*) formations—

58. See Weiner, *op. cit.*, unpaginated.

59. See Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

60. Hawkey, Christian, Wolf, Uljana, *Sonne From Ort*, Berlin, Kookbooks, 2012, p. 90-91. *Cf.* Joshua Weiner, "Friday Pick: Sonne From Ort by Uljana Wolf and Christian Hawkey", *Body* April 2014, unpaginated (`www.bodyliterature.com/friday-pick-sonne-from-ort-by-uljana-wolf-christian-hawkey/`).

61. See also her contribution to this book.

62. "Dichtung" is the German word for poetry.

63. Wolf, Uljana, *false friends*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky, New York, Ugly Duckling, 2011.

64. See Cassin, Barbara, "Homonymie et amphibolie, ou le mal radical en traduction", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale,* 1 (1989), p. 71-78.

65. Apter, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

words or expressions that look and/or sound similar or identical across languages (homonymy), but differ in meaning, and may also differ in spelling [66]—in German and English. In place of a conventional title, each poem begins with a linguistic tree-like tautogram [67] graphically linking cross-language homophones that start with the same letter (alphabetically ordered a–z): "bad — bald — bet ∼t — brief" [68].

While the diagrams do not adhere to a hierarchical root architecture, the edges between the nodes syntactically connect (upside down, in circles, adjacent, or in separate blocks, via the insertion of tildes or parenthesis) semantically unrelated words, rearranging the selection rules of etymological barriers into a non-orientable surface: where does one language begin and the other end? The following lines of the text play out the principle of "amphiboly", or "a form of ambivalent syntax that normalizes the expression of logical fallacies and grammatical anomalies" [69], by shaping the cluster of homonymically close words (starting with b) into bilingual sentence patterns:

> am anfang bald, und bald [meaning "bald" (adjective) in English and "soon" (adverb) in German] am ende wieder: unsere haare, und / dazwischen sind sie nicht zu fassen, nicht in sich und nicht in griff / zu kriegen, weder im guten noch im bad [meaning "bad" (adjective) in English and "bath(room)" (noun) in German]. [70]

Here, the lifetime process of growing, styling, and losing your hair becomes an everyday allegory of linguistic pluralism. The bilingual migrations read as a poetic language acquisition exercise in deconstructivist pedagogy, probing reductive and repressive thinking about language with ease: like one's hair on a rough morning in front of the bathroom mirror, language and communication cannot be tamed ("in griff / zu kriegen" [71])—or stopped at the border.

There is obviously a strong vein of postcolonial criticism running through Wolf's work. Her illegal crossings (false friends) operate in Homi Bhabha's cultural concepts of social, temporal, and spatial liminality (hybridity, margin, in-between, intersection, border, third space). In the last chapters of *falsche freunde*, she investigates the relation between migratory spatialities and linguistic violence. Turning to the oral histories of immigrants at the inspection station on Ellis Island, the poem "Alien I" retranscribes how medical examination checklists (again, alphabetically ordered: from 'x' for "Suspected Mental Defect" to 's' for "Senility" [72]) regulate and control the physical and psychological translation—in the double meaning of the German word *übersetzen* referencing both 'translation' (word stress on '-setzen') and 'transportation' (word stress on 'über-')—of the immigrant from one country to another: "x marks the spot? [. . .] üble see im leib, imbecile, labil" [73].

66. In other words: Orthographic false friends or phonological false friends.

67. Illustrated by Andreas Töpfer.

68. This is a simplified depiction of the structure chart. Wolf, Uljana, *falsche freunde*, Idstein, Kookbooks, 2009, p. 11.

69. Apter, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

70. Wolf, *falsche freunde*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

71. Literally: to get a handle on hair.

72. This is based on Georg Perec's and Robert Bober's *Récits d'Ellis Island* (1980): "auch auf Ellis Island hatte das Schicksal die Gestalt eines Alphabets" (Wolf, *falsche freunde*, *op. cit.*, p. 55).

73. Wolf, *falsche freunde*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Fredric Jameson articulated one of the most profound critiques of postmodern surface poetics, as they would replace modernist "depth models" with a "conception of practices, discourses, and textual play"[74], discharging art from the sphere of emotional intensity and historical-political consciousness. However, hybrid methods of *récriture*, as Perloff insists, should not be equated with Jamesonian forms of cannibalizing pastiche.[75] In contrast, post-conceptual strategies of translation force attention to the poem's surface in order to precisely intervene with ideological foundations that construct hidden essences ('depth'), increasing—and not reducing—the critical semiotization of poetry. Uljana Wolf expresses deep admiration[76] for the assembled textual bodies in Caroline Bergvall's Chaucerian variations in *Meddle English*[77] and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's autobiographical collage *Dictee*[78]. These works enact what Bergvall instructively terms "plurilingual poetics"[79], a poetics that subverts the regulatory principles of national languages and of monolingual culture, and, at the same time, attempt to forge a distinguishable, yet "unoriginal" style of *récriture* that is radically personal.

In finding their own voice, as I have already intimated, 'plurilingual' poets immerse in the very process of acquiring language. Wolf's prose poem "Babeltrack", which closes the volume *meine schönste lengevitch*, manages to weave a mother's fragmentary aural recollections of early childhood language development and Roman Jakobson's *Child Language: Aphasia and Phonological Universals* into a meditative loop on the connected distinctiveness of languages, evoking Édouard Glissant's geographical figure of the 'archipelago' from his treatise *Poétique de la Relation*, and Uljana Wolf's work can be described as this: a poetics of relation.

Reframing the pathological account of aphasic sound disturbances as that which actually makes the child's acquisition of speech possible in the first place, "Babeltrack" detects the nodal points in plurilingual speech by following homonymic and amphibolic trails:

> these falling trails, exultant foreign arrangement of folds, folds are falten, me falta, es fehlt mir, this word, which means miss, me falta, in the language of this island, in another fala is 'i speak'—a spar, a faltering unresting sway, en-wringed.[80]

74. For example, the hermeneutic model of the "inside and the outside" or the "Freudian model of latent and manifest". See Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capital*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, p. 12.

75. Which he deems symptomatic of the political paralysis of postmodern art: see for example *ibid.*, 16-19.

76. Wolf, Uljana, "Beitrag 8", *in Timber! Eine kollektive Poetologie* (December 2011), unpaginated (`www.timberpoetologie.wordpress.com/2011/12/07/beitrag-8-uljana-wolf/`).

77. Bergvall, Caroline, *Meddle English: New and Selected Texts*, Callicoon, Nightboat, 2010.

78. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung, *Dictee*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.

79. Bergvall, Caroline, "Writing at the Crossroads of Languages", *in* Wallace, Mark, and Marks Steven (Eds.), *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press 2002, p. 207-224, here p. 207. See Vincent Broqua's contribution in this volume.

80. Wolf, Uljana, *i mean i dislike that fate that i was made to where*, translated from the German by Sophie Seita, New York, Wonder, 2015, p. 18.

The poem was written on the Spanish island of La Gomera [81] and forms a de-centered 'archipelago' (Glissant) with the German "faltenwürfe" [82] (compound noun: literally "fall of the pleat", "these falling trails"), the Spanish "falta" (noun: lack of something), and the Portuguese "fala[r]" (verb: used in the imperative "speak!"). These exultant ("frohlockend" [83]) arranged folds are part of a deliberate faulty design ("fehlentwürfe" [84]), of what Brandon Labelle calls (also following Glissant) the methodology of the "unfixed qualities of sound" that "tunes itself to the migratory and the associative" [85].

In her essay on Cha—*Wandernde Errands: Theresa Hak Kyung Chas translinguale Sendungen*—Wolf turns to Yoko Tawada's prose meditation "Musik der Buchstaben" from her book *Überseezungen*. Both titles demonstrate Tawada's preoccupation with surgical-like examinations of surface signs (and sign relations), especially the programmatic (and poetological) misheard near-homophone (or mondegreen) *Überseezungen*, whose signified is associated with "overseas tongues" (*Übersee-Zungen*) or the German expression for "translations" (*Übersetzungen*). When reading in an unknown language at the level of sheer materiality, as Tawada observes in "Musik der Buchstaben", letters and words are cut off from their meaning and become transparent and levitating things, for instance, the German pronoun 'du' and the French preposition 'du' [86].

Wolf writes that, while Tawada's playful act of language acquisition is directed toward a new, far-off place ("in die Ferne" [87]), the traumatic act of language acquisition in Cha's theme of cultural dictation (*dictée* in French) is directed towards deciphering the construction of memory ("aus der Ferne" [88]), as in one of the opening scenes of *Dictee*, a parallel and reversed French-English translation of what looks to be an autobiographical dictation assignment. [89] Wolf leaves the question of narrative(s) open ("vielleicht Immigrantin, vielleicht Sprachschülerin, vielleicht Amnesiepatientin" [90]) and is drawn to the aspects of experimental writing, especially the formative, yet deregulatory function of transitory spacing and literal-punctuation (e.g., the use of "point", "virgule", "period", "comma"). Through this, as Michael Stone-Richards illuminates, not only the surface structure "is made a substance and subject of language" (e.g., homonymy), but also "language use [amphiboly] is made subject to a threshold

81. Wolf, Uljana, *meine schönste lengevitch*, Berlin, Kookbooks, 2013, p. 85.
82. *Ibid.*, 2013, p. 75.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Wolf, Uljana, *meine schönste lengevitch*, Berlin, Kookbooks, 2013, p. 75.
85. LaBelle, Brandon, *Lexicon of the Mouth; Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, New York, Bloomsbury 2014, p. ix.
86. "Eine Sprache, die man nicht gelernt hat, ist eine durchsichtige Wand", Yoko Tawada, *Überseezungen, Literarische Essays*, Tübingen, Konkursbuch, 2002, p. 33.
87. Wolf, Uljana, *Wandernde Errands, Theresa Hak Kyung Chas translinguale Sendungen*, Heidelberg, Wunderhorn 2016, p. 18.
88. Wolf, *Wandernde Errands*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
89. Cha was born in North Korea and moved to the United States with her family in 1962, where she attended a Catholic school and learned French as a child.
90. Wolf, *Wandernde Errands*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

experience"[91] which opens up a distinct spatiality and temporality: "Il y a quelqu'une point loin point / There is someone period From a far period"[92].

Here, surface translation epitomizes what Jacques Derrida describes as the linguistic (dis)locatedness of "absolute translation, a translation without a pole of reference, without an originary language, and without a source language"[93]. Wolf's translational poetics that she hints at in her Schleiermacher-mockery ("mr. veilmaker"[94]) "Doppelgeherrede" emerge from this in-between position, Schleiermacher's "unerfreulicher Mitte"[95] ("unpleasant middle"), without an essentialist pole ("Vaterlanguage", "Vaterland") of reference, a language always already in translation. Without a source language, there is only the constitutive paradox of "target languages" that "cannot manage to reach themselves because they no longer know where they are coming from, what they are speaking *from* and what the sense of their journey is"[96]. For Wolf, reading Cha and writing poetry is reading and writing in 'target languages'.

6 Displaced writing

Wolf dialogically intertwines her reflections on Cha's work with a portrayal of herself engaging with Cha as reader and translator. Her essay opens with a meditation on the stamp art piece *Mot Caché*, a translingual word search game (*cf.* French 'mots cachés'). The central hidden word ("mot caché") appears to be the Romanized Korean family name "cha" (caché: cha), which is not translated into French or English, but instead embodies a cross-breeding of the printed surface signs, while at the same time it remains displaced within the hidden word: "im Innern des verborgenen Wortes ["mot caché"] [...] *displaced*"[97].

Wolf approaches this from a collectivist perspective (including herself as addressee), by asking what is transmitted through this "translinguale Sendung", and if the untranslated (and hidden) name itself should be read as the actual "Transmitter"[98]. In this, she begins a word-play between the untranslatable as a "Störung—error" and an unfulfilled task, "errand"[99], evoking another of Glissant's terms, namely '[l']errance', which reroutes the negative associations between the French verb 'errer' (to wan-

91. Stone-Richards, Michael, "A Commentary on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictee", *Glossator* 1 (2009), p. 158. Stone-Richards is an important reference for Wolf. Strangely, both Wolf and Stone-Richards are inconsistent in omitting the required French accent ("dictée") in the title (*Dictee*) that "signals the multiple accents of her [Cha's] polyglot identity and the activities of translation it implicitly demands" (see Bergvall, "Writing at the Crossroads of Languages", *op. cit.*, 213).

92. Cha, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

93. Derrida, Jacques, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, Stanford University Press 1998, p. 61. This has become a foundational text in the fields of Multilingual Studies and Comparative Literature as untranslatability studies, and has certainly informed the work of many, if not all contemporary plurilingual writers.

94. Wolf, *lengevitch*, *op. cit.*, 9. The poem is also printed on the cover of the book.

95. Schleiermacher, Friedrich, "Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens", *in* Störig, Hans Joachim (Ed.), *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963, p. 63.

96. Derrida, *Monolingualism*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

97. Wolf, *Errands*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*

der) and the noun 'erreur' (error) in a Derridian twist. [100] Thus, Wolf's "Wandernde Errands"—the similarity in sound suggests that the German verb 'wandern' and the English noun 'errand' name the double logic of one thing—are not aimlessly wandering for the sake of wandering nor do they travel to some fixed and certain destination. They follow an unconditional moral gerund ("wandering")—not an imperative—of displacement (disruption, error, trauma), which is bound up with a rootless root relation ("errands') to the Other, as in Glissant's 'errantry'. In doing so, they are promoting a translingual form that has the potential to take the reader outside of the confines of standardized writing, speech, and habitual modes of possessing language and identity.

In both, Wolf and Bergvall, one encounters a recalibrated concept of displacement that departs from the "modernist myth of the inherent exile in language" [101] and transcends the framework of exile literature. Displacement "is not here envisaged as exile but as the very condition for a positive understanding of relocation across and against the unifying, mythicized, and frequently exclusionary principles" [102] of mastering or having a language. Apparently, this not only relates to writers and artists such as Cha, but also to poets such as Wolf, Tawada, and Cotten who use procedures of surface translation (standing in and outside of language families) "to enhance an awareness of dis/locatedness" [103].

These translational poetics are different from Goldsmith's recently presented conceptual model of displacement that radically replaces translation with outright appropriation (the source material is only changed in its context and cultural framework with no movement from one language to another involved). [104] It is true that the digital networks that make up the fabric of globalization call for a new understanding of the general process of translation and the individual product of translation. However—as Hito Steyerl diagnoses—, the decontextualizing machines displacing people, objects and language the conceptual poet celebrates "turn out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism" [105]. I agree with the general notion that German poetry in the 21st century engages with theories and practices of translation to turn upon itself through its own self-transgression. [106] Accordingly, it has been my interest to further a post-conceptual reassessment of the tension between aesthetical particularity (the lyric genre and its relation to general systems of language, economy, law, and ethics) and the deaestheticizing strategies of conceptualism by extending and complicating what surface translation can be, if read as displaced writing in target languages.

100. As rightfully pointed out by the translator of *Poétique de la Relation*: Betsy Wigs, "Translator's Introduction", *in* Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, p. xvi.

101. Bergvall, *Languages*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

102. *Ibid.* See also Sophie Seita's afterword to her translation of Wolf's poetry: Wolf, Uljana, *i mean i dislike that fate that i was made to where*, *op. cit.*, p. 49-50.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

104. Goldsmith, "Displacement is the New Translation", *op. cit.*, unpaginated.

105. Steyerl, Hito, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Berlin and New York, Sternberg Press, 2012, p. 42.

106. As explored by Daniel Graf in "'Unübersetzbar!' Noten zur Begriffspolyphonie oder Nachtrag zu inter_poems", *Merkur* 815 (2017), p. 41-57.