

IN OTHER WORDS

The Black Market of
Translations - Negotiating
Contemporary Cultures

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TRANSLATIONS - NEGOTIATING
CONTEMPORARY CULTURES

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One of the ways to get around the confines of one's identity is to work at someone's words, working the language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self.

(Gayatri Spivak, *The Politics of Translation*)

IN OTHER WORDS. The Black Market of Translations - Negotiating Contemporary Cultures is the title of an art exhibition which uses the operations of translation – reading, understanding, interpreting and rewriting a foreign text – as a cultural strategy to cross into other cultures. The exhibition displays a market of the foreign and otherness, inviting artists that explore the language of the Other to work in-between languages and cultures, penetrating, embodying and ‘contrabanding’ Others’ words.

Beyond the prevailing passive co-existence of multiculturalism and static cultural diversity, it is necessary to explore a significant exchange between cultures by taking up the active practice of translation. In the spirit of a black market, the exhibition temporally exposes and reveals the acts of cultural transaction, transference, and translation of this cultural economy of the in-between, posing the question whether translation could reconcile the differences that separate languages, identities, and cultures, while proposing a form of ‘cultural translation’ which could ultimately become a concept for further cooperation and negotiation for contemporary cultures.

Artists are invited to explore four spheres of action of contemporary translations: critical analysis of the global operations of translation in the English domain or the dominant language in a community; production of new enunciations and translations that reveal others’s imagery and identity; the rescue and restoration of forgotten languages and cultures, giving them the right of contemporaneity; experimentation of different operations of re-writing, de-coding, and transference from one code or medium to another.

International languages, such as Latin and English, were historically imposed by the empires of their time: first by the Romans, then by the British, and from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, by the North Americans. Languages are then forced to postpone their own voice and adopt the words of the dominant linguistic currency, such as English, whose dynamic efficacy springs from the planetary spread of mass marketing, technocracy, and the media. The large operations of translation in the English domain or the dominant language within a community are analyzed critically by several works in the exhibition. As Sarat Maharaj stated, translation could be ‘a model through which to examine globalization’. [1]

Michel Hardt and Toni Negri’s book *Empire* [2] describes how in the current globalized economy one finds ultra rapid forms of translation, which they call ‘monsters of translation’. Google offers free on-line translation systems, based on the comparative formula of the Rosetta Stone matrix, but expanded into almost 60 possible languages to click for an automatic translation. Microsoft programs provide an automatic grammar and orthographic correction system in almost 40 different languages, where the writer-translator can become a user of this potential automatic support for the writing-translating of the text. At the same time, chat, texting, and twitter fragment words to their minimum, so as to communicate at a maximum speed. Colons and parentheses become extra-linguistic expressions, a smile :-) or a sad face :-(, thus a new universal code with a neo hieroglyphic alphabet emerges.

Detanico Lain’s *New Roman Times* installation opens this analysis. Inspecting the automatic typography that Microsoft offers when you first enter the program, the Times New Roman, Detanico Lain deciphered its secret. Meant to be analyzed, they took the component’s parts to understand the whole. And by altering the order of the words and applying an anagrammatic switch, they arrived at what sounds like a suitable title for our era: *New Roman Times*. This simple and profound work reveals the global and domesticated conditions of production of most of the texts in our (new Roman) times. There is no white page, as there is no white cube. Once you start typing, your words are being shaped, adopted, and ultimately translated into Times New Roman’s words. Mounted over the arch’s entrance of Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, the 2 x 3 meter installation names the public’s pathway and crossing moment into the words of others, announcing a subsequent terrain and journey through various operations of translations and critical awakening.

As Karl Vossler stated in 1925, imperialism might be the dark underside of translation. [3] Untranslatability is an irrefutable outcome of many encounters between communities, as well as between contemporary users and the new translating machines.

Further contributions towards deciphering the prevailing languages of today are by Adel Abidin, Emilio Chapela Pérez, Ofir Feldman, Oliver Laric, Miguel Monroy, Soledad Pinto, Sona Safaei-Sooreh, Mihalís Theodosiadis and Dilek Winchester, including critical exercises on translation engines by Takehito Koganezawa and Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio.

II

Besides the dominant translations that impose a language and domesticate messages during global times, the exhibition gives room to languages rather than to a language and to a translating attempt that tampers with usage, and seeks to match the polyvalence and expressive stresses of the original. Artists present works that express a specific imagery, rather than the standardization inherent to global capitalism, thus building up a new space of negotiation for intercultural exchange.

The Tower of Babel is not completely dismantled. In the world today, around 6,900 different languages still exist. In addition, new languages emerge from the exchange at borders, multilingual trade environments and nomad speakers, such as *Portuñol*, *Spanglish*, *Taglish*, *Hinglish*, *Franglais*, *Guarañol*, *Quechuañol* and *Creoles*.

The Google translator engine doesn't provide translations for all these languages. There is no Google translation for a language such as *Guarani*, a native South American language spoken by 8 million people between Paraguay, Northern Argentina, and Southern Brazil, which resists and crosses the cultural borders of dominant Spanish and Portuguese, which were imposed in these regions since the colonial times of the sixteenth century. Beyond Google's screens, a variety of untranslated words and worlds exist.

The artists of this section displace and recontextualize signs by translating and smuggling them from one milieu into new situations, exploring the translation's gaps. As Nicolas Bourriaud states, the contemporary artists work in between cultures, building up new connections and exchanges: 'To describe this new figure of the artist, I have coined the term *semionaut*: a creator of paths in a landscape of signs. Inhabitant of a fragmented world in which objects and forms leave the beds of their original cultures and disperse across the planet, they wander in search of connections to establish'. [4]

The site-specific intervention by James Webb, the Arabic translation of *Know Thy Worth* at the entrance of NGBK's exhibition space, relocates the adaptation of the Greek aphorism *Know Thyself*, displacing it from the entrance of the 8th Century BC Oracle of Delphi's service to a doorway on the main street of Kreuzberg; a Berlin neighbourhood with a large Arab community. Others'

words are addressed, and temporally a supplementary message is sent out from NGBK's door: know yourself and your value. With a mysterious shape for westerners, Arab calligraphy dissidently reads from right to left, thus inverting many viewers' gazes and alerting them to further acts of interpretation.

Kader Attia, Marwa Arsanios, Cherimus, Elena Bellantoni, Julian D'Angiolillo, Braco Dimitrijević, Christoph Keller, Moridja Kitenge Banza, Timo Nasser, Nana Oforiatta-Ayim, Damian Ortega, Jorge Pedro Nuñez, Demian Schopf, and Sandra Vásquez de la Horra contribute to this section, exploring various forms of possible translatability.

III

'When a language dies, a possible world dies with it' [5], George Steiner wrote so memorably. The circulation and currency of languages in extinction, or underestimated under the sovereignty of the so-called major languages, is something to notice in the artists' projects in this exhibition. They reveal the exclusions and hierarchies that are masked by the illusion of total globalization and create a new dialogue between the past and the present.

Some of the mistakes of colonialism could be defined as a translation deficiency. Even when the language is spoken by a handful of group members or by the last person of a destroyed community, it can reveal how language, in itself, contains the boundless potential of discovery, of re-composing reality and of re-articulating dreams.

Though arriving late, as in the cases of extinct languages, the artists' projects dig and negotiate the loss. Beyond the mystification or an ethnographic view, the curatorial tone follows Ticio Escobar's demand for retroactive value: 'Western History has not retroactively granted the title of art to previous formations of the modern concept of art'. [6]

More than transmitting unsaid, unknown, old or censored words, the artists had the challenge to recreate their values and speak in other's words, which was accrued over time. The translator is accountable to the mobility and conservation of the energies of meanings and is perhaps the only accountable to give life, legitimation and contemporaneity to dead, forgotten and undermined languages.

Yoel Díaz Vázquez's one-year research project *Sprich Deutsch oder Stirb* explores the sign language, poetics, and politics of deaf communities in Berlin; a minority within the hearing linguistic society. Working together with deaf poets such as Okan Seese, deaf community leaders and members, sign language translators, and with the rapper Volkan T., who can communicate

in sign language, Díaz Vázquez developed the *Deaf Urban Poetry* workshop with them. The participants were invited to bring their own compositions and express their situation in Berlin, while others were invited to translate and re-interpret polemical lyrics into sign language; lyrics which refer to the critical relation between language and society, such as the song *Sprich Deutsch oder Stirb* by Volkan T., a German-Turkish rapper. Prominently iconic and corporal, deaf poetry contains its own means of representation. It is a performance for those who do not know the language, and a crucial message for those who do understand it.

The works by Graciela Guerrero Weisson, Daniel Knorr, Adrian Lohmüller, Timea Oravec, Bernardo Oyarzún, Rosângela Rennó, Olaf Nicolai, Gabriel Rossell Santillán/Nik Novak, Paolo W. Tamburella, Humberto Vélez, and Luca Vitone contribute with further explorations of minor and censored languages.

IV

Translation operations constantly occur within the media realm. Mechanisms of transcription, decodification and re-codification activate flows of transformation in and in-between texts and images, conforming and redefining them, including the counter-texts and counter-images. Reflecting an increasing awareness of the materiality of language, various projects focus on the intrinsic machinery and on the changes between the procedures for data processing, on a basis of medial otherness.

By linking physical with technological, discursive and social systems, several artworks provide us with strategies to select, store, produce and transmit relevant data, and in doing so reveal forms of perception and administration of knowledge and power.

Mariateresa Sartori records poems in eleven languages, transferring sound waves into bytes of digital information. Considering only the acoustic materiality of language, she further edits the data, recomposing the consonants' order. The result is a meaningless speech with an immense familiarity. Collaborating with glottologists, Sartori managed to decipher and maintain the distinctive accent, metrical scansion and rhythm of each language. By separating the signifying function of the speeches, she obtained the oral code of the language. Sartori's ongoing project *The Sound of Language* offers the experience of perceiving the sound of a tongue by liberating it from the regime of meaning and writing, thus contributing to an oral history of language.

An interest in the materialities of language and medial translations characterizes the works by Julien Audebert, Emilio Chapela Pérez, Karl Larsson, Mounir Fatmi, Demian Schopf, and Dani Umpi.

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Within a politics of translation, the question of this project was not to count languages, but to give each voice and translation's strategy a place to be heard and seen; the provisory exhibition – 'exhibition' as public display, from *exhibere*, ex- 'out' and *habere*, 'hold' –, originally meaning in the context of a court of law, to 'submit evidence for consideration'.

The violence against translation is thus the disappearance of places for such voices and their silence. The exhibition therefore functions as a project –*project* as projection into the future, from *proicere*, 'to throw forth'–, and a cultural plan, where the figure of the translator occupies a main role, assumes authorship and moreover, a cultural agent's position.

With the strategy of a Black Market, the exhibition temporally reappropriates the given art spaces, building a provisory context for the display and circulation of exhibition 'goods'. While 'exhibition' and 'display' lead the meaning towards an arrangement of the artworks and how to *see* them, the metaphor of the market enhances the understanding of the space also as a dynamic location; for gathering, exchange, and circulation. To a great extent, the artworks of the project are not only 'exhibited', rather, they demand a vigorous participation in the active trade of translation by the actions of listening, reading, understanding, and interpreting.

As a Black Market, the metaphor of 'illegal traffic' gives room for several counter-translations and adjoins the notion of a *double-exhibition*, which exposes multiple translation operations – major and minor; dominant and in resistance; official and censored – thus achieving a broader understanding of the experience of globalization, including the consideration of popular, informal, and alternative practices. As a special area in the exhibition, 'The Black Market Room' at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien is built as a meeting point dedicated to welcome the audience and invite them to consult, 'consume' and attend several initiatives. Following the multifunctional displays at black markets, this room receives the public with a reading platform, a popular shop, screenings, and a carpet-stage. Specially conceived for this project, Karl Larsson contributes with *The Carpet of the Researcher, Author and Mystical Entertainer* a small stage for performances and readings, as well as a reading place for sitting or lying down at leisure with the publications around.

While the exhibition operates as a temporary market, storage, and channel of multiple tongues, the publication compiles and largely archives the main reflections, images, and multiple operations of translations on show, thus becoming the memory of the exhibition. As a threshold into the exploratory terrain of around 40 artworks, we are republishing Sarat Maharaj's seminal essay 'Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other', which has

strongly influenced the project's theoretical inquires and the search and commission of artworks which fruitfully reveal the successes or failures of translation; two fronts to be aware of in the making and display of an ethical encounter of cultures. For the present bilingual German/English publication, we are contributing by publishing the German translation of the aforementioned essay for the first time.

The methodology of an explorer of otherness has drawn us towards Beatriz Sarlo's writings. By 'reading' the city of Buenos Aires as her cultural object for years, she had contributed with several compilations of short narratives – as literary snapshots – which invite the reader to engage in a visual journey through the manifestations of the ever-changing urban life and its different communities. For the occasion of this project, we are publishing the English and German translation of the short story 'Especias y Hechizos' [Spices and Spells], an excerpt of the chapter 'Extraños en la Ciudad' [Strangers in the City] from the book *Ciudad Vista* [The Seen City] (2010) for the first time, in which Sarlo walks through the Bolivian market in Buenos Aires, taking visual notes. Sarlo's report, though quite descriptive, opens fissures for the attentive reader, who will soon recognize the signs of the market's conquest over a territory, as well as its social marginalization. The Bolivian immigrants, mostly undocumented, resist and negotiate their otherness iconographically, musically, gastronomically, and ultimately culturally. Sarlo's writings provide a methodology to capture cultural differences and their contemporary dynamism, struggles and conquests; a writing modality that we provide for international consideration.

[1] Sarat Maharaj (interviewed by Daniel Birnbaum), "In Other's Words", Artforum, February 1, 2002.

[2] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.

[3] Karl Vossler, "The Spirit of Language in Civilization", [1925]. In: Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, New York; London, Routledge, 2004, p. 73.

[4] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, New York, Lukas & Sternberg, 2010, p. 102.

[5] George Steiner, *After Babel*, [1975], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

[6] Ticio Escobar, *El Mito del Arte y el Mito del Pueblo. Cuestiones sobre Arte Popular*. Santiago de Chile, Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2008. p. 45 (our translation).

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Braco Dimitrijević
Mounir Fatmi
Ofir Feldman
Graciela Guerrero Weisson
Christoph Keller
Moridja Kitenge Banza
Daniel Knorr
Takehito Koganezawa
Oliver Laric
Karl Larsson
Adrian Lohmüller
Miguel Monroy
Timo Nasser
Olaf Nicolai
Jorge Pedro Nuñez
Nana Oforiatta-Ayim
Timea Oravec
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Mihalis Theodosiadis
Dani Umpi
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Humberto Vélez
Luca Vitone
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Gender_Gap:

It is NGBK's policy to use the Gender_Gap in all publications in order to underline an explicit lingual exposure of all social genders and gender identities beyond the hegemonial binary conception of gender.

CAPITAL ['S] PUNISHMENT