THE ARTIST AS TRANSLATOR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project explores an artist figure that has risen to prominence in the context of the art world's growing global interconnectedness: the figure of the (cultural) translator who shifts between multiple cultural and linguistic zones, speaking between them. In order to approach this figure I map out the international art world and its institutions as places marked by linguistic operations and acts of cross-cultural address, arguing that the translatability of an artist's work is key to its circulation within an expanding international circuit. I argue that the translator figure can be viewed as a response to the demands posed by institutional politics of diversity, neoliberal economics of cultural circulation, as well as the changing roles of art as a global medium — with artists becoming cross-cultural public intellectuals and commentators. In dialogue with selected artistic practices and their specific contexts (Nicoline van Harskamp, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué, Dilek Winchester and others) and drawing from translation studies (especially Naoki Sakai's notion of translation not as a binary activity but as a relational practice and form of address), I explore the various intellectual, artistic, and critical potentialities immanent to the role of the translator, and argue for translation to be developed as a form of critical cross-cultural authorship in the field of international contemporary art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

I herewith declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Martin Waldmeier
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Introduction

A large film festival in Western Europe invites filmmakers from Egypt to submit new work, encouraging them to cover the Egyptian revolution and offering them production funds for films that feature *Tahrir Square*. In an art school auditorium in the U.S., an artist presents a film that uses Palestinian iconography that is unknown to fellow students from other parts of the world, requiring her to contextualise her work with a historical narrative that is quickly disputed by several other students present in the auditorium. At a residency program in Europe, a young artist from India delivers an autobiographical presentation of his work to a captivated audience, but later admits that most of it was actually made up. On a major English-language global satellite channel, a Chinese dissident artist who studied and lived in the United States criticises the situation regarding human rights in his native China. A public art institution in a formerly socialist country in Europe eliminates a cultural exchange program with artists from the Ukraine because the artists in question can't speak English. At a regional art institution in France, employees are offered free weekly language lessons to cope with the growing need to communicate with partners abroad. An internationally successful Mexican artist refuses to communicate in English with curators and museums in the United States, insisting that the museums hire Spanish interpreters. As several European museums decide to collaborate on staging a travelling exhibition, a conflict emerges over the effort to localise the exhibition as the costs of subtitling works from English into each local language nearly exceed the projects' overall budget.[1]

International exhibition culture — or what Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2016) refer to as the trifecta of Biennials, Triennials, and *Documenta*, with internationally-oriented art institutions and fairs to be added to the list — is ripe with cross-cultural encounters, and yet, their dynamics and politics tend to be overlooked by art historians and critics. While much has been written about how art has been transformed by the impact of globalisation, little theoretical or

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[1] These brief anecdotes are rumours and/or fictionalised accounts of my own experiences in the art world.

critical attention has been directed towards how artists conceive of, and relate to, their audiences in the era of the global contemporary. Unjustly so, I believe: the act of addressing a community of viewers or spectators is a key gesture where artists (or curators, writers, and others) situate themselves in the world and make their work relatable. But in what terms, in whose language, do these relations take place? If no shared language exists, who translates what, for whom, to what effect? Rumours and anecdotes such as the ones noted above already hint at what scholars of international exhibition culture and art critics generally agree on: that globalisation has not led to a true decentring, despite many constructive attempts. In this context, language can be both a unifying force as much as a new frontier — it certainly is one of the numerous sites of contestation between the local and the global; between cultural nationalisms that present themselves as the sanctuaries of the untranslatable, and a neoliberal logic of global circulation that claims that everything is translatable.[2]

This dissertation project explores the role of an artist whose work speaks to audiences cross-culturally, and who inhabits these transnational zones of encounter: the artist who lives and works here and elsewhere, operating simultaneously in multiple countries, often with substantial cultural, economic, social, and political gaps as well as clear divisions between places of production and places of presentation and dissemination. It is the figure of an artist who operates both from within a centre and its various outer parameters, who moves back and forth between them: the diasporic or migrant artist, the polyglot or the nomadic traveller whose work speaks of an *other* or an *elsewhere* — perhaps an excluded cultural other, an underrepresented history, a little-known place or voice that has not been part of mainstream discourse. In this dissertation, I will call this figure a *translator,* and by doing so, I will use a designation that has both a linguistic and a cultural dimension: the *translator* is a polyglot as well as a hybrid individual who enjoys access to multiple cultural zones, and is hence able to transfer and speak between them. The *translator,* as I will show, is a paradox figure: regarded both as socially, historically, economically, and politically marginalised and as celebrated and in great demand by the institutions of

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2   Regarding the notion of the untranslatable and the translatable, as well as their relations to
       cultural nationalism and neoliberalism, see Emily Apter's "Twenty Theses on Translation"
       (Apter 2006, VXI).

capitalism as a diverse, mobile, colourful, and flexible individual who participates in and contributes to a global flow of ideas, voices, and representations.[3]

To speak of the translator as a *figure* may sound abstract, on the verge of caricature. What can be observed in today's art world is a pattern of internationally successful artists whose careers have unfolded in a certain predictable way: working at a distance from their cultural origins, they continue to draw from various ethnic, cultural, or linguistic places of belonging while simultaneously addressing themselves to global audiences. As I will show, one can locate this figure within certain institutional contexts: for example, in discursively driven and politically and socially engaged exhibition and presentation formats where art is presented as a medium for political, social, and cultural commentary, placing the artist in the position of a cultural representative. In this sense, the artist as translator is certainly a phenomenon of a global art market, as well as an international exhibition culture marked by an ambition to represent the contemporary world in its entirety, and particularly those that are — or have traditionally been — excluded from it.[4] Or, within the university, where convergences between artistic practice and academic knowledge production have encouraged artists from across the globe to write, speak, and engage with social, political, and historical realities — and often those situated at a distance from the university and its protagonists. And then there is a growing industry of residency programs that has recoded artists as nomadic cosmopolitan citizens while making their international exposure and ability to

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[3] Buden and Nowotny (2008, 12), for example, identify the subject of translation within Western multiculturalism as those living "socially, politically and culturally" on the "extreme margins" of society, and hence, they have no choice but to surrender to a translation process "they are completely estranged from." This view of the migrant, involuntarily subjected to translation, stands in radical contrast to the notion of "flexible citizenship" developed by Aihwa Ong, who suggests that for privileged migrants, translation is a way of accumulating power and capital whereby the citizen, by means of speaking multiple languages and obtaining multiple citizenships and cultural roots, responds "fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions" (Ong 1999, 6). For a more in-depth exploration of the translator figure see chapter 3, section 1.

[4] Throughout this thesis I will use the term "international exhibition culture" to designate the fact that contemporary art's most rapidly growing public is found primarily at large recurring international exhibitions, attracting millions of visitors and usually soliciting contributions from hundreds of artists from across the world. However, as opposed to focusing on biennials and large-scale exhibitions as do Gardner and Green (2016), I also count local art institutions working with international artists, art fairs, residency programs, and "feeder institutions" like art schools with substantial international student bodies to be part of international exhibition culture.

address themselves to ever-new audiences a hallmark of originality. Likewise, cultural diversity programs in Western art institutions and universities have embraced artists promising to speak from outside a predominantly white, male-dominated, and Eurocentric canon; and art schools have encouraged young artists to reflect on their local and global cultural identities and develop languages — literally, and metaphorically — to express these identities with. Hans Belting has written of the global contemporary as an era in which artists are constantly occupied with *performing* their own selves — as opposed to *expressing* it (Belting 2009, 11).

Granted, using an abstract and often vaguely used term like *translation* within the visual arts context can be contentious, and as Boris Buden and Stefan Nowotny have noted (2008, 7), translation is a term all too often (mis-)used as "conceptual universal glue" for all sorts of gaps and fissures in contemporary reflection. It is true that, in recent years, the term has seen growing popularity in the visual art context, and it has all too often been carelessly used to broadly designate cultural encounters, transformations, and transmutations of all kinds. There are, however, certain indisputable merits to using the term, particularly in a time of accelerating global migrations and displacements. The notion of translation is powerful and increasingly indispensable to the humanities, precisely because it captures movement, cultural flux, and transformation while simultaneously acknowledging difference and the work needed wherever difference wants to be overcome. As such, the term contributes to an understanding of visual culture that is not the product of stable, permanent, and separate cultural spaces and identities, but of interactions and cross-fertilisations, accounting for the impact of the many movements, displacements, and migrations taking place in today's world. Here, the term translation can highlight the challenges and potentials of speaking across cultural and linguistic boundaries as work in and by itself, as opposed to being nothing but a means to an end. If art today "carries a global message," as Hans Belting (2009, 15) has claimed, then whom does that message address itself to? What is the message, how is it delivered, and how does it work to create new relations?

Throughout this dissertation I will also use the term translation to designate

a specific mode of addressing "foreigners"; and in a wider sense as the activity of forging relations between cultural producers and their multiple and diverse readerships and audiences. Here I draw from Naoki Sakai's theoretical writing on translation, which conceptualises the role of the translator not as a secondary producer but as an author whose use of language and mode(s) of address inform the production of a community of 'readers'. The key concept in Sakai's thinking on translation is the notion of address, which he defines as something "anterior to communicating"; a kind of attitude the speaker takes with respect to his or her addressees (Sakai 1997, 4). Sakai distinguishes between two types of address: the *homolingual* and the *heterolingual* address. As I will show in chapter two, in the homolingual address, the speaker adopts the position of a representative of a homogenous cultural community, of which the speaker assumes the addressees to be a part of (4–5). In the heterolingual address, the speaker does not make the assumption that his or her addressees share the same cultural knowledge or linguistic background, and accordingly adjusts his or her language to take into account the possibility of misunderstandings (8–9). Both modes of address affect how a community of addressees is constituted: while homolingual forms of address act to create a sense of sameness among the addressees — and hence is associated with notions of linguistic purity and cultural nationalism, where each individual speaks the same language and inhabits the same referential system — heterolingual forms of address anticipate difference and hence require the speaker to embark on a process of negotiation in order to successfully communicate. In the homolingual address, translation occurs between the interior of a language community and its various outsides, whereas the heterolingual address points to a form of speaking that can be thought of as a form of translation in and by itself. While Sakai does not deliver concrete final answers as to how to practice these modes of address, as theoretical concepts, they open up productive and complex questions about the relation between language, identity, and community: how does the way we use language embody certain social relations? How do we use language to create inclusive, transcultural spaces of communication — or, conversely, zones of 'restricted' access?

I argue that the work of Sakai, which has so far received little attention in visual culture, opens up a new way of approaching what Sarat Maharaj (1994) has called the "scene of translations" — the international art world and its "scenes" where "a multiplicity of tongues, visual grammars and styles" meet — and, as Maharaj claims — "not so much translate into one another as [to] produce difference." The question remains open whether the encounters on the stages of international art institutions really produce difference, or whether they, rather, produce the illusion of cosmopolitan diversity while simultaneously masking a tendency towards a global cultural homogenisation, as Nicolas Bourriaud (2009, 15) has suggested. While I agree with Maharaj's view of international exhibition culture as a communicative space where language plays a key role in the formation of cultural and social relations, I want to ask: what would it mean to preserve difference in translation, even though the very activity of translating is, paradoxically, concerned with overcoming it? What could be a translation methodology that can counteract the centripetal forces of the global centres? If, as Pamela Lee (2012, 4) has argued, visual art is subject to the forces of globalisation as much as it actively produces and advances globalisation, then I would claim that it is precisely the figure of the translator who is capable of imagining, articulating, and producing these global and cross-cultural relations and encounters *differently*. The vision of contemporary art that underpins this thesis is that of a decentered, multi-focal, linguistically and culturally polyphonic exhibition culture – and hence a vision not of a singular art world but of plural *art worlds*, as Belting and Buddensieg (2009) and others have described it.

Revolving around these questions, the body of this dissertation consists of different readings of global artistic practices through the lens of translation. What all of the artists that I will discuss have in common is that their work involves cross-cultural speech acts — from lecture performances to documentary video, artist publications, and performative workshops — where, as Sakai writes, "translation and enunciation [can] not manageably be distinguished from one another" (1997, 8). Often, the art practices that I will discuss are born of acts of translation; themselves constituted by acts of cultural and linguistic border-crossing. Those that are highly conscious of the various creative and critical opportunities this gesture provides are the ones that I will focus on in the second

part of this dissertation. Ultimately, what I aim to show by discussing these artistic practices is that translation can be practiced as a critical artistic methodology, and that its potentials for artistic practice are not only vast, but deserve broader attention and further research. Translations may be used, for example, to remake, reinvent, and reinterpret collective histories and memories; to subvert or circumvent predominant cross-cultural representations or power relations; to interfere with mainstream media representations, or act to imagine and produce new, heterolingual communities and forms of togetherness – or, conversely, to offer forms of contestation, and question the very validity of community.

Aside from Sakai, I will draw upon a number of other contemporary translation theorists such as Lawrence Venuti, André Lefévère, and Douglas Robinson, who have all situated translation in a context of global economics and politics of circulation — as a movement between places of supply and demand, and often within existing geopolitical or post-colonial relations of power. André Lefévère (1992) has demonstrated how translation works as a form of rewriting governed by certain ideological motives that determine why a certain text deserves to be translated and how, raising the question whether translators can — or should — resist these power dynamics. Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) and Douglas Robinson (1997) have written on how the practice of translation has been complicit in the exercise of colonial, post-colonial, or neo-colonial power, prompting both to call for translation to be reframed as a site of anti-colonial resistance. Both have contributed to a widespread consensus on the need for a counter-hegemonic translation ethics — a subject that Lawrence Venuti (1995, 1998, 2000) has worked on extensively, developing the rivalling paradigms of domesticating and foreignising translation and their respective politics, each of which will appear throughout this thesis, and highlighting the fundamental challenge of preserving cultural difference in translation.

If there is an academic discipline that has theorised the figure of the cross-cultural translator as an author whose work speaks — literally or metaphorically — to a foreign readership, then it is comparative literature; and this dissertation draws substantially on the work of comparatists like Emily Apter, Hamid

Dabashi, and Paolo Bartoloni, who have conceptualised what could be called the figure of the writer as translator. Emily Apter (2001; 2006) has observed how authors increasingly build translatability into their writing, aware that success in international cultural markets — especially for non-Western or 'minority' authors — often depends on their work's ability to make itself relatable to multiple readerships, even if that means addressing existing perceptions or stereotypes. Conversely, Paolo Bartoloni (2008) has discussed the relation between displacement, diaspora, and writing a non-native language, arguing that it can actually be a liberating experience for writers to situate themselves outside the discourse associated with their mother tongues and native cultures, and moreover, that the act of addressing foreign audiences offers certain creative potentialities to rethink and rearticulate cultural memory and identity. Lastly, Hamid Dabashi (2011) has shown how problematic this role can be when such authors allow their writing to become geopolitically instrumentalised. While the work of these comparatists has rarely taken into account visual artists, they nevertheless provide an illuminating perspective on the politics and economics of international literary markets that are in many points similar to those of the art world. Moreover, they have produced pioneering accounts of the creative potentialities as well limits and tensions immanent to the gesture of addressing foreign audiences.

Western art history has been struggling to come to terms with the rapid expansion of art into areas and practices well outside the Western canon. Thomas McEvilley has shown how deep-seated the problem of Western art history in dealing with its others is, tracing the often problematic efforts on behalf of Western European and American institutions to introduce non-Western or 'minority' artists for their publics. While conceding that strategies aimed at refashioning the ethnographic as contemporary, such as in the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in Paris in 1989, were driven by counter-hegemonic ideas and ethical intentions, McEvilley (1992, 153–158) argued that these strategies often failed to overcome colonial power relations and attitudes (such as the use of stereotypical or exoticist tropes) — a task that is, arguably, not as easy as it may seem in a world shaped by colonial histories and post-colonial relations of power. As Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2016) have shown,

the most radical attempts to create a polyphonic vision of the global today are most likely to be found in the history of non-Western Biennials and large-scale exhibitions such as the Havana or Sao Paulo Biennials (or even *Documenta 11*), all of which have tried to foster cultural ties and exchanges outside the hegemonic circuits dominated by the West. The ever-more powerful art market, however, still largely mirrors the global geography of capital, maintaining a steady demand for artists who differentiate themselves from their mainstream Western colleagues by turning to whatever cultural uniqueness is available to them as members of the periphery (Ramadan 2007, 27). In doing so, Ramadan argues that these 'Other' artists, even though their work is no longer considered "ethnographic," are often constrained to performing the role of a cultural other that is "allowed to express itself only as long as it speaks of its own otherness." (ibid.) This problematic politics of inclusion has become so pervasive in the global art world that Hal Foster (1995, 306) has spoken of a certain envy among Western artists to likewise engage in "ethnographic self-fashioning," situating themselves within culturally different or marginalised communities so as to endow their own careers with a sense of authenticity and originality. The cultural translator figure I wish to establish in this thesis is, however, neither a silent nor a passive 'Other' in need of translation, but rather an active agent of the transformation of cross-cultural relations.

What has so far been lacking is a broader debate on how artists can resist the above-mentioned trap.[5] This is where I believe a shift towards language and a focus on the relational potential of speech acts may promise new answers. In this sense, I will develop and use the concept of the artist as translator less as an art historical designation but rather as a site of critical and creative potentiality from where we might not only better understand, but also respond to the challenges of

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[5]   The perhaps most valuable proposals for how post-colonial power relations in artistic practice could be overcome have probably originated from artists themselves (including some discussed in this dissertation), as well as from curators and art critics: The 1989 Havana Biennial curated by Gerardo Mosquera, for example, operated as a kind of hub for non-Western artists, and Kassel's *Documenta,* particularly in its 10th and 11th version under the curatorship of Catherine David and Okwui Enwezor, actively pursued a curatorial policy aimed at decentring an institution that was once firmly rooted within the renascent post-war German nation state. While there are certainly many more examples, including many lesser-known ones, the common denominator has been a consistent attempt to develop more inclusive formats for bringing artists and diverse publics together while simultaneously developing new centres in places formerly considered peripheries, or to be outside the international circuit of contemporary art. Also see Gardner and Green 2016.

globalisation by developing, literally and metaphorically, new idioms and discourses. With this interest in mind, I have structured this dissertation as a dialogue between practice and theory: on the one hand, I draw from translation theory to read or re-read artistic practices, while alternatively, I take artistic practice as a point of departure to demonstrate the potential of translation for the field of visual culture and the experience of practicing artists.[6]

It should be noted that my thesis is, of course, not the first attempt to use the concept of translation as a lens to reflect on global art. Writers and curators like Sarat Maharaj (1994), Rey Chow (1995), Hito Steyerl (2005, 2013), Suzanne Cotter (2006), Boris Buden (2006, 2008, 2009), Nicolas Bourriaud (2009), Marcus Verhagen (2015), Stefan Nowotny and others have previously used the term in various ways to designate processes of transcultural exchange, circulation and transformation in art contexts. Moreover, some of these writers have explored the political and ethical implications of translation acts. The perhaps most extensive use of the term can be found in Nicolas Bourriaud's book, *Radicant* (2009). However, in an attempt to sketch out a global, multiply-rooted, 'translating' artist subject, Bourriaud regrettably uses the very kind of ill-defined or metaphorical notion of translation that has raised eyebrows among theorists of translation "proper" who have observed the proliferation of "their" concept throughout the humanties with skepticism. There are parallels between this thesis and Bourriaud's — notably a shared vision for a deceteered notion of global art that accommodates difference without instrumentalising or essentialising it — but what I am mainly hoping to achieve here is to develop the translation concept from a broad metaphor for cross-cultural exchanges into a more clearly defined method that, while rooted in language, comes with yet-unexplored creative and critical potentials within the domain of the visual arts.

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[6] It should be noted that the concept of the artist as translator differs from existing concepts such as the "diaspora" or the "minority artist" (Mathur 2011), or the "non-western artist" (McEvilley 1992), all of which are associated with specific art-historical discourses and identity politics. The concept also marks a departure from more static art historical terms such as "reception aesthetics" (Kemp 2012) or "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud 2002) that, while emphasising the role of the audience in the production of meaning, fail to take into account artists' agency in the production of meaning [signification] through their encounters with different publics. Instead, the concept of translation allows that the artist be freed from fixed geographic, geopolitical, or sociological categories. This is not to say that these factors are insignificant, but to acknowledge and explore how language and its uses produce social relations within a global context beyond these ethnic and sociological categories.

As Emily Apter and others have observed, translation processes in the global marketplace are linked to an industry that filters and directs traffic between different cultural zones (Apter 2001). Similar to the markets of non-Western and minority literatures, the global arts sector acts as a filter through which foreign cultural "goods" enter their spaces, screening rooms, or lecture halls in order to find local audiences. An artists' ability to make themselves and their work translatable becomes a growing criterion for participating in the global art circuit. This makes the figure of the translator particularly paradoxical: shifting between exilic displacement, minority status, and late-capitalist mobile cultural entrepreneurship, the translator simultaneously inhabits these different zones. Translators may be members of cultural minorities while at the same time "capitalising" on their access to other cultural, linguistic political zones, creating cultural "added value" by acting as cultural or political gatekeepers or informants.

This ambivalence is also why I refrain from using the concept of "cultural translation" that has often been used to frame issues of migrant social justice and cultural identity. Boris Buden and Stefan Nowotny, for example, evoke a cultural translator figure situated at the "social, political and cultural margins" (2009, own translation) of our societies — among refugees, migrants and other groups that are asked to "translate themselves" into a dominant culture or set of values. I believe that caution is needed when applying this concept to an art world that remains, after all, a bastion of socioeconomic privilege and prestige. In the art world, acts of cross-cultural translation rarely take place out of conditions of socioeconomic precarity: rather, the success of many contemporary artists, Western or otherwise, rests upon a certain mastery of late-capitalist modes of self-entrepreneurship, paired with educational privilege and strong international mobility. Moreover, as much as international exhibition culture can be a place of social regeneration and inclusion, it also remains a place where cross-cultural transfers, encounters and exchanges are actively celebrated, marketed and commodified. While my thesis does not constitute a critique of the concept of "cultural translation" (and some of the artists discussed here are concerned with social justice), my priority is to keep the concept of translation tied to its

linguistic roots, positing that processes of cross-cultural address always also involve linguistic acts of translation. While it seems unfitting to refer to the works discussed here as "language-based" works of art, it will be my aim to show how language and translation do play a key "structural" role in each of them.

It should also be added that by conceiving of the artist as a translator, I deliberately do not aim to reiterate multicultural identity politics. The concept of translation rather makes a counterproposition: instead of looking towards minority or non-Western artists as representatives of certain cultural, social, or ethnic communities — a logic that I regard as essentialising and limiting — the emphasis on the translator serves to highlight individual artistic agency and autonomy. Primarily, to be a translator means to speak different languages. But by extension, translators are members of different communities, can participate in different debates, enjoy insight into different and often mutually inaccessible worlds of meaning, and have at their disposal multiple ways of making meaning — and this is where the potential for socially and politically relevant creative work emerges. Regarding identity politics I share the view of Anne Ring Petersen (2012) and others who have pointed out how a focus on group identities fails overcome the hierarchies of cultural production on a global scale, producing instead a reactionary model of diversity where non-western and or minority artists remain, despite their "inclusion", de facto excluded from any notion of aesthetic universality and autonomy they deserve. By developing the concept of translation I argue that the encounter with difference, wherever it occurs, can produce a new language that is neither quite here nor there; a hybrid tongue that by definition stands outside existing categories of linguistic, cultural or social identity. It must also be noted that I do not frame translation as an imperative: indeed, I am interested in modes of cross-cultural address that shift precisely between translating and not-translating; between granting access and withholding it; between moving towards the audience and away from it again.

From a methodological point of view, writing about translations is challenging. It is impossible to critique literary translations, for example, without a grasp of both the source and the target language, which is essential in order to assess what creative choices the translator has made, and how a text

accommodates the transfer from one language to another — or, conversely, how the target language accommodates the foreign text. Likewise, it is impossible to critique cultural translations without a grasp of the different cultural zones between which certain acts of translation occur. It is no surprise then that the most powerful critics of translation in the art context are often cultural translators themselves; individuals with biographies and life trajectories that permit them a greater understanding of what is at stake in acts of translation. It is difficult, for example, for a non-Lebanese and non-Arabic-speaking individual attending one of Walid Raad's presentations of *The Atlas Group* to fully grasp the work's relation to Lebanese history precisely because most likely, they are outsiders to the very collective historical experience and knowledge that Raad's work speaks from.[7] Alternatively, this epistemological gap may be precisely what permits the artist as translator to take creative license and build a new discourse through which these collective experiences can become relatable to outsiders. Curators, art critics, and scholars working in international visual art contexts are all confronted with this challenge. As they attempt to share, promote, and expand positions outside of their own, they depend on translations that shape the perceptions of the other, and whose availability — or more often, the lack thereof — may reflect the very state of cross-cultural relations they hope to change. Throughout this thesis I have taken a comparative approach that acknowledges this challenge, seeking to incorporate wherever possible the multiple cultural and linguistic positions within a given artist's cross-cultural practice. This approach holds that in order to read a work like Walid Raad's, we need not only to listen to the artist's many international critics, but to also consider the reception of his work in his native country and the geographic and cultural movements in and out of Lebanon that have characterised his artistic career.

As the research questions that guide this dissertation project already suggest, there is an underlying ethics of translation that informs my selection of artist

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[7]   Under certain circumstances, the artist as translator inhabits a position of authority; a phenomenon that can easily be illustrated by the celebrity status of artists like Shirin Neshat, Doris Salcedo, Pussy Riot, or Ai Weiwei, each of whom have come to be treated by the art world and Western media as cultural ambassadors of their native countries, often denouncing political conditions in a manner that is congruent with pre-existing geopolitical and media narratives in the West.

practices, as well as my interest in translation as artistic methodology. It is, at large, the view that cross-cultural flows occur within an uneven playing field, and that translators can play a politically, culturally, and socially transformative role. Drawing from Antoine Berman, Lawrence Venuti has outlined this ethical position as follows:

> Bad translation shapes toward the foreign culture a domestic attitude that is ethnocentric: 'generally under the guise of translatability, [it] carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work.' Good translation aims to limit this ethnocentric negation: it stages 'an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentring' and thereby forces the domestic language and culture to register the foreignness of the foreign text. (Venuti 1998, 81)

Venuti argues that the translator's task consists of more than merely identifying a functional equivalent in one language for something that was originally expressed in another language. The translator, Venuti writes, has an opportunity to transform the receiving language and culture and thereby shape its perception of the foreign, moving it linguistically and culturally towards it (Venuti [1995] 2004, 308; Venuti 1998, 170–171). Essentially, Venuti posits that bad translations create the illusion of transparency, extracting the foreignness from the foreign text and hence subsuming the foreign to the domestic imagination. Conversely, good translations expand and challenge readers, resulting in texts that are complex, perhaps even inaccessible, at first — as challenging for the reader as reading in a foreign language. The latter, so Venuti argues, serves not only to protect the integrity of the foreign culture, but also frame an encounter between the domestic reader and the foreign author on an equal footing. The key to an ethical translation practice, as I will discuss later, is hence not just the discursive strategy used (assimilating or resisting, for example), but its effects, i.e. "whether the translating realises an aim to promote cultural innovation and change" (Venuti 1998, 187–188).

Literary translators have a range of tools available to achieve this: they may shift familiar linguistic norms, highlight and explore untranslatables and the very limits and possibilities of translation, or provide commentary. While these strategies and their effects are by no means undisputed among translation

theorists,[8] the view that translation is worthwhile not merely as a means to an end but as a transformative process is a key idea in translation-theoretical writing. Contemporary art, as I will show in this thesis, can be a veritable testing ground for translation ethics and their corresponding strategies and poetics. In an era of resurging nationalisms and a potential collapse of the European project, the ethical task of searching for a mode of address "that establishes the 'we' of a community without taking national, ethnic, or linguistic affiliation for granted" (Sakai 1997, 8) seems as urgent as it can be.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Chapters one to four map out the figure of the artist as translator and the role of language in the context of international visual arts, focusing particularly on art's institutional landscapes and "scenes" where translation phenomena can be observed. Drawing from Sakai I develop the notion that the cross-cultural address constitutes one of the core problems of international visual art as much as a site of social and cultural transformation. Using various examples and materials from the international art world I will demonstrate the tensions that emerge around moments of address, and highlight the need for models to inhabit and perform the role of the translator *differently*. The second part of the dissertation — chapters five to nine — presents various potential answers to that question and consists of five in-depth readings of selected cross-cultural artistic practices through the lens of translation. I have selected these case studies in such manner to illuminate what I think are different productivities in practicing translation both as a creative method and an ethical practice.

Using *the artist as* … as the guiding trope for this thesis may appear a predictable move. Post-war art history and theory has seen a steady stream of such designations, seeking to frame artists in different ways as agents of social, cultural, political or economic transformation. From *the artist as ethnographer* to

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[8]   An interesting counter-claim against this approach has been made by Douglas Robinson (1997, 149–165), who pointed out that "foreignising translations [can] have adverse effects, such as making the foreign culture appear immature, stupid, backward, and childish, as it may happen in literal translations, directly undermining the lofty aspirations championed by postcolonial translators." As a solution, Robinson suggests that postcolonial texts — "originals and translations alike [should] begin to inhabit a middle or hybridised ground between 'source' and 'target,'" breaking down the boundaries between both categories and meeting on a middle ground, where slippages between languages can form novel idioms or discourses.

the artist as public intellectual, the list is potentially endless. In a book titled *The Artist As …,* Matthias Michalka (2007, 7-9) suggests that this development mirrors how art has generally moved towards knowledge production and, in consequence, created a desire among cultural theorists to come to terms with this shift. For Michalka, the trope of *the artist as …* serves to articulate this new relation between art and knowledge; to make a disctinction between art-as-such and art as knowledge. What might be added is that the proliferation of this trope certainly also reflects how neoliberal ideology has left its mark on contemporary art, celebrating and supporting art practices that claim to make some kind of contribution to society that can be measured and evaluated. Moreover, Michalka (14-16) speculates that the popularity of the trope engenders a return of the author, having prematurely been proclaimed dead. In fact, as I will show throughout this thesis, it has become commonplace in international exhibition culture that artists perform their identities as cultural border-crossers, and every visitor to a biennial will likely agree that artists' identities and life trajectories are frequently presented as keys to their work. However, if we agree that art can make a meaningful and transformative contribution to our aesthetic, cultural, social, and political consciousness, then the trope of *the artist as* remains useful both as an analytical device as well as a proposition. My thesis precisely attempts that move: from critique — in the sense of an examination of certain conditions that give rise to a set of problems — to a proposal for "a different mode of inhabitation," as Irit Rogoff writes (Rogoff 2006).[9]

Lastly, the idea of the artist as translator and the problem of addressing audiences cross-culturally is a concern that many internationally working artists face today, but not only: writers, researchers, activists, documentarists, journalists, theorists and other cultural producers face similar challenges. In many ways, this dissertation is informed by my own trajectory through various educational and institutional contexts, from a public art space and residency program in Switzerland to study programmes in the U.S. and Britain, as well as

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[9]   Here I draw from Irit Rogoff's notion of "criticality," which she defines as a mode of being critical while simultaneously acknowledging that "it is not possible to stand outside of the problematic and objectify it as a disinterested mode of learning" (Rogoff 2006). Criticality hence refers to "a state of duality in which one is … both empowered and disempowered, knowing and unknowing," whose aim is not "resolution but rather heightened awareness" — "not to find an answer but rather to access a different mode of inhabitation."

international curatorial contexts. The decision to leave the perceived insularity and homolinguality of the discipline of art history as practiced in my native Switzerland and Germany, pursue interdisciplinary postgraduate studies in the U.S., and then continue this experience by writing my Ph.D. in the U.K., has shaped my curiosity for the challenges and potentials of translation. In that sense, my own trajectory into the "global" is certainly not dissimilar to the trajectories of other aspiring artists and curators. For me, then, the artist as translator is not merely an abstract figure, but an inhabitant of the very same institutional, economic, and intellectual environment in which I work, and hence a colleague, a collaborator, a friend. This means that, for the most part, the translations I am referring to in this thesis are movements into and out of that environment, whose confinements and limitations I am likewise well aware of. While I think that reflecting on the challenges of translation is important to develop our practices as academics, educators, curators, and artists, I believe that in this age where the state of the humanities is uncertain, it might perhaps be our greatest challenge to avoid lapsing into forms of homolingual address ourselves. Rather, we should break out of self-referential codes and jargons of the art world and academic disciplines, where we may so easily take comfort in merely addressing our peers. To practice translation, then, also means to imagine, create, and shape a public sphere that can transcend borders — and this is a task that falls on us as cultural producers in the widest sense.

PART I

Translations in the Global Art World

2

The Problem of Address

Who does the work of art address itself to and how? Who is its audience, and how does it meet that audience? In light of a booming international exhibition culture with increasingly heterogeneous and dispersed publics, as well as an austerity-driven funding squeeze on many large art institutions in Western Europe that has put pressure on curators and arts administrators to get to know and develop their audiences both quantitatively and qualitatively, these questions have recently gained more traction.[10] In 2008, the Arts Council of England, which requires all arts organisations it funds in the U.K. to develop and diversify their audience base, published a survey on visual arts audiences across the country (Arts Council England 2008). They list a number of demographic groups: from the highly engaged "urban arts eclectic" to "mature explorers" — and, further down the line, some less actively engaged sections of society, like "mid-life hobbyists" or "retired arts and crafts" persons (17–41). By studying visual art audiences, the Arts Council's aim was to "inform marketing and audience development plans for arts organisations, local authorities and other agencies working in the arts" (2). Regardless of these findings, such studies on the demographics of cultural participation make a crucial assumption about art's relation with its audiences(s): the Arts Council assumes that visual art does not a priori address itself to a specific viewer, and that therefore, this relation can, and must be, created *after* the work of art; a task that is then identified as the work of galleries, museums, and cultural institutions. While this may undoubtedly be true in practice, as a theoretical proposition I would like to invert this logic: what if contemporary art (and, by extension, the medium of the exhibition) already imagines, or even creates, its public? What if the audience is already, whether symbolically or literally, "written" into it to some degree? Could the way artists

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(and, by extension, curators) conceive of, and address their audiences hold the key to a more diverse and pluralistic notion of contemporary art?

In this chapter I will outline the basic theoretical ideas that underpin this thesis. I will make the proposition that the production of a relation between artists and their audience forms an integral part of many contemporary artists' work; especially for artists who create work for the highly heterogeneous contexts of international exhibitions, whether through commission or otherwise. I will argue that the conception of an audience might not come *after* the work of art, but *with it*, at the time of its making and staging. In other words, I make the claim that the public of contemporary art is not a given, but constitutive; that artists themselves play a role in how their work travels and "translates" itself into different contexts of reception. By making this proposition, my intention is not to reiterate relational aesthetics, or what Nicolas Bourriaud called "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context[s]" (Bourriaud, 1998, 113) — rather, my argument will focus on the effects of addressing an audience of strangers in international settings where the audience is inherently heterogeneous, and where cultural artefacts, as well as artists themselves, constantly travel to different cultural, political, and geographical places of reception. The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the translator figure I will introduce in the next chapter, and the subsequent question of what the transformative potential of that figure can be.

'CNN Documenta'

The problem of address presents itself most clearly in places closely or loosely associated with the international art world (and particularly its examples in the West): biennials, large-scale international exhibitions like *Documenta* or *Manifesta*, residency programmes, art fairs, even art school graduate programmes. As some of these environments will be explored in subsequent chapters I will, for now, focus on what I regard as the common denominator among them: a largely detached relation between the places of production and

dissemination, and the encounter between artists and their audiences as foreigners to each other.[11]

As Anthony Gardner and Charles Green have written, biennials are inherently linked to the idea of encountering the foreign through art. "Biennials bring artists and workers from one culture or region to another, ideally to establish dialogues, tensions, and resonances between different cultural products" (Gardner/Green 2016, 10.2). Today, most biennials and large-scale international exhibitions like *Manifesta* or *Documenta* not only invite artists from dozens or hundreds of countries, they also draw mixed publics that include both curious locals and external visitors and tourists (de Duve et al. 2009; Filipovic/van Hal/Øvstebø 2009). As such, the biennial model distinguishes itself from the typical museum or cultural institution.[12] While the latter often derives its *raison d'être* (as well as its funding) from a specific cultural history or community that it symbolically serves (such as a city or a nation), the former is often exempt from that sort of cultural rootedness and instead derives its legitimation from an ambition of regional, transnational (or universal) representation, a narrative of contemporary urgency, an appeal to tourists and temporary visitors, and a late-capitalist logic of flexible cultural

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[11] At a 2006 roundtable debate at the Maison Française in Oxford, a number of prominent Lebanese artists and critics (including Negar Azimi, Akram Zaatari, Joana Hadjithomas and Walid Sadek) debated how the imperative for travel and mobility associated with international exhibition culture affected their work as well as their relations with different publics and cultural contexts. The general consensus was that once artworks enter the global circuit, they find themselves within constantly changing epistemological, discursive, cultural, and linguistic contexts of reception, and that navigating these changing contexts posed a growing concern for them: "what happens … when art travels? Must it be contextualised?" (Cotter 2006, 38). Or, as Akram Zaatari put it: "How does work encounter different cultural contexts, get through the minds of people coming from totally different backgrounds? How can work be immune to misreadings or actually how can work be designed to be submissive to misreadings, to dissolving into people's ideas?" (42). The problem, so the participants observed, posed itself specifically for artworks that used local or vernacular iconographies or languages, but more generally for any work that made specific cultural, social, or political references that the "average" biennial-goer is not familiar with. The ability to address oneself to a foreign audience — one's "translatability" — becomes an essential characteristic for artworks and artists included on international platforms (2–3).

[12] The Netherlands-based Biennial Foundation currently lists 154 Biennials around the world — and counting, all of which contribute to the growth in cultural circulation and the reshaping of the role of the artist as a mobile subject. The 19th Sydney Biennale in 2014, for example, included 185 artists from 31 countries, out of which 80 travelled to Sydney to install their work or participate in public programs; and out of more than 600,000 visitors, 125,000 had come to visit the Biennale from abroad, making what the consultancy firm Deloitte calculated to be a 60 million dollar contribution to the Australian economy (19th Biennale of Sydney Exhibition Report: http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2014/12/19th-biennale-of-sydney-2014-exhibition-report-online-on-issuu (accessed 30 May 2016).

entrepreneurship. By situating itself at the threshold between the local and the global, the biennial model has been compared to a trader of goods in an international marketplace of contemporary cultures, inserting "cultural experiments into the global economy" (Groys 2009, 64).[13]

At the same time, with its desire to create transnational cultural encounters, the biennial model raises some fundamental problems: whom do these large exhibition events really address themselves to?[14] And in what terms do these exhibitions stage and frame these encounters? To appeal to the transnational audience they hope to reach, biennial curators often use themes and conceptual devices that construct a sense of community and inclusiveness: the Venice Biennial's main exhibition of 2015 for example, titled *All The World's Futures* and curated by Okwui Enwezor and including 136 artists from 53 countries, promised a global "parliament of forms" working together "like an orchestra [that] will occupy the spaces of the La Biennale and pre-occupy the time and thinking of the public" (Enwezor 2015). A glance at the various accompanying texts reveals that the curator's ambition was not only to display a diversity of human experiences and creative expressions globally (including from the lesser-represented global South and East) but, more crucially, to provide a conceptual framework through which these heterogeneous voices and expressions could be understood in a "democratic" manner. The Biennale's president, Paolo Baratta (2015), underlined the necessity of this idea:

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[13]   Thierry de Duve (2009) has argued that the success of the biennial model is largely due the fact that "culture sells, attracts tourists, generates economic activity and is an integral part of the entertainment industry" (46). At biennials, the visitor experience often integrates seamlessly with a tourist experience, and for cultural funding bodies, the biennial model of a temporary and largely immaterial cultural institution is convenient insofar as it offers greater economic returns and attention value at lower permanent costs than conventional art institutions and museums that maintain expensive collections and long-term programmes for local audiences (Gielen 2009).

[14]   Hans Haacke's "World Poll" at the 2015 Venice Biennale offered some interesting insights into the identity of the biennial's audience. According to his findings, which remain unpublished at present but which were on display at the Biennale, the audience is heterogeneous by nationality and language, yet comparably homogenous in terms of social class, geographic origin, economic privilege, and ideological views. At the present moment, only 36% of the Biennial's visitors stated that they had no professional interest in art; revealing that nearly two out of three visitors tend to be either artists, art historians, critics, journalists, dealers, advisors, investors, or other art professionals. Not surprisingly, Haacke's survey also revealed that the vast majority of visitors to the Biennial were from Western Europe or North America.

The world before us today exhibits deep divisions and wounds, pronounced inequalities and uncertainties as to the future. … The Biennale observes the relationship between art and the development of the human, social, and political world, as external forces and phenomena loom large over it.

With respect to Enwezor's curatorial framework, Baratta (ibid.) remarked:

[His] wish is to bring together arts and artists from throughout the world and from different disciplines … a global exhibition where we may question or at least listen to artists coming from 53 countries, many of them from geographical areas that we paradoxically insist on defining as peripheral.

Indeed, Baratta seems to insist on the very centre-periphery model he calls "paradoxical": artists from around the world come to Venice to "speak" in the "parliament of forms" in which "we," the audience, are listeners. Before "us" then lies a world of "pronounced inequalities and uncertainties" that ought to be investigated and questioned through art, with the exhibition acting as a medium. At the same time, the audience is implicitly presumed to inhabit a different space from those whose lives are subject to "pronounced inequalities and uncertainties," and from where artists inform "us" on the tensions and "external forces" unfolding there. Besides the Eurocentric worldview that underpins this narrative (and that has been part of the Venice Biennial from its outset, and been criticised many times), Baratta's speech appears representative of the inherently ritualistic way in which the exhibition as medium serves to constitute a public.[15] By describing the biennial's mission as showing art that is concerned with the social, political, historical, or political issues of the present, Baratta further outlines a certain societal and political role for artists. First of all, he signals the Biennial's rejection of the modernist paradigm of art's autonomy, or *art for art's sake,* whereby the work of art was to be freed from any social, political, didactic, moral, or otherwise utilitarian purpose (Holt 2001, 81). Instead, he points in the opposite direction: the work of art is not presented as an autonomous unit free

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[15]   Dorothea von Hantelmann and Carolin Meister (2010) have described the "ritualistic" function of art exhibitions as events that fulfil a plethora of societal and political functions, among them: the narration of history and the production of identity narratives that are constitutive of national (or, one might add, supranational or global) communities (8–9); the formation of individuality through the celebration of artists' labour and their highly individualised modes of expression (10); and lastly, art's participation in a capitalist logic of providing consumers with "experiences" of themselves (12–18), with the artists' task being to lead viewers to their own experiences of the self and of the world. What one might add to this analysis with particular respect to the biennial model is that any exhibition that tries to represent a totality of the world always also constructs cultural and political hierarchies.

from social or political utility, or encouraged to exist as a purely aesthetic experience, but as a medium whereby artists "inform" the community of viewers about the social, political, or economic conditions in the sites where they work, and from where they (literally and metaphorically) speak.

As many commentators and reviewers of Enwezor's biennale have observed, many of the works presented within *All The World's Futures* (as well as in many of the collateral exhibitions and events) indeed stood in the service of social and political subject matter, often using narrative means and documentary strategies to do so. Im Heung-soon's film *Factory Complex* (2014) gave a voice to female migrant labourers in Asia, revealing the appalling and inhuman conditions they often work under; John Akomfrah's video installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015) showed the brutality of whaling and mankind's exploitative relation with the sea; or Mykola Ridnyi's *Regular Places* (2014–2015) juxtaposed the tense atmosphere of anti-government protests and their potential for violence with scenes of everyday life in Kharkiv. Outside the main exhibition, Jaanus Samma's archival installation *Not Suitable For Work* (2007–2015) told and re-staged little-known accounts of male homosexuality in Soviet Estonia through translated court records; C. T. Jasper and Joanna Malinowska staged *Halka/Haiti 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W* (2015), a Polish opera set in Haiti among and with the descendants of 19ᵗʰ-century Polish immigrants, and artists of the Armenian pavilion explored cultural identity in the face of geographic dispersion (particularly highlighting the role of language in preserving it). These artistic practices, of course, do not primarily address themselves to the protagonists of the whaling industry, Ukrainian citizens, the few openly homosexual men of Estonia who survived Soviet rule, the Polish Creole diaspora of Haiti, or the Armenian diaspora — even if they do not exclude these constituencies either. Rather, they address themselves to the heterogeneous audience of the international exhibition, forming and informing its social and political consciousness without taking for granted any previous affiliation with these various social, cultural, and geographic zones. The common denominator for this public sphere is, then, not a shared nationality, language, history, or cultural system of reference, but its presumed exteriority to the conditions being addressed. Here, the biennial model risks defining its public not through shared values, ideas or political

stakes, but through simple exteriority, reifying the center-periphery binary between the "heimlich here and the unheimlich there," to quote Tomislav Z. Longinović (2002, 11-12).

Simon Sheikh has suggested that the biennial format should not be regarded merely as a "container of artworks" for a transnational audience, but as a "mass medium in itself" that "must as such establish a social space … a place where meanings, narratives, histories, conversations and encounters are actively produced and set in motion … A place where connections are made and unmade, subjectified and suspended" (Sheikh 2009, 75). To achieve this, international exhibition culture often relies on language to create 'space' and simultaneously bridge the gaps. Nearly every national pavilion distributes its own printed matter; and catalogues, wall texts, guided tours, and public debates are provided to frame the works on display — making the experience of visiting the Biennale as much an experience of *seeing* as one of *listening* and *reading*. As art critic Marcia E. Vetrocq has observed, the Biennial was "largely propelled by the spoken and printed word, from narration and testimonials in films to programmed readings, archive-based installations, explanatory wall texts" (Vetrocq 2015); others even called the biennial "message art."[16] Granted, parallels to the role of mass media had already been drawn before: in 2002, Kim Levin, an art critic for the *Village Voice,* called *Documenta 11* (also headed by Okwui Enwezor) a "CNN Documenta," pointing to a very similar sense of emergency in the exhibition's curatorial narrative, as well as a strong presence of political and social issues and documentary forms (Levin 2002).

The point I would like to make is that in curatorial frameworks oriented towards an ill-defined, heterogeneous international audience, art becomes intertwined with operations of translation, both cultural and lingual: in order to listen to the experience of disenfranchised labourers in Im Heung-soon's *Factory Complex*, the audience depends on translation (here in the form of subtitles) just as much as when reading about the little-known lives of gay men in soviet Estonia in Jaanus Samma's *Not Suitable For Work* (here in the form of translated

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[16]   Myra Robinson, "The Venice Biennale: Away from the Cutting Edge," *Italy Magazine* (9 September 2015), http://www.italymagazine.com/featured-story/venice-biennale-away-cutting-edge (accessed 10 May, 2016).

court records). Moreover, the problem of translation is more than just a practical necessity to take care of *after* the works have already been produced. Many (if not the majority) of artworks shown at the Venice Biennial are commission-based, and hence we can assume that most artists already produce their works with a heterogeneous audience in mind. While curators and institutions create the overarching frameworks that set the stage, artists — whether commissioned by international exhibitions to produce work, or hopeful to do so in the future — are challenged to find ways to relate to, and address themselves to, the very heterogeneous audiences whose identities are too intractable to define. It must be, so I suspect, an aesthetic form that not only anticipates an audience of foreigners, but actively uses and incorporates acts of translation to accommodate the heterogeneity this entails.

Modes of Address

In his book *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism,* Naoki Sakai, a scholar of Japanese literature and history who teaches at the University of Chicago, attempts to come to terms with a consistent problem he has been facing in his academic writing: how to write for multiple readerships (Japanese, American) whose cultural frame of reference is vastly different; how doing so necessitates making certain a priori assumptions about these different readerships, and how such writing for multiple readerships articulates a relation between the different cultural and lingual zones involved and thereby paradoxically defines them (Sakai 1997, 3). To tackle these questions, Sakai first differentiates between the act of addressing and communicating: "To address someone," Sakai writes, "can be distinguished from the term to communicate … because the former precludes the description of what it accomplishes" — and hence, addressing someone "does not guarantee the message's arrival at the destination" (4). The notion of address thus refers less to a specific speech act and more to a certain attitude the speaker or writer takes with respect to his or her addressees. Departing from this idea, Sakai then distinguishes between two general modes of address: the homolingual (2–7) and the heterolingual address

(8–9). In fact, much of Sakai's critical writing constitutes a critique of the former. For Sakai, the homolingual address represents

> a regime of someone relating herself or himself to others in enunciation whereby the addresser adopts the position representative of a putatively homogenous language society and relates to the general addressees, who are also representative of an equally homogenous language community. (4–5)

He clarifies that addressing an audience homolingually does not necessarily imply that both the addresser and the addressee need to speak the same language (5). Rather, in the homolingual address, the addresser makes certain presuppositions about the addressee's a priori knowledge and thus ability to understand, regardless of what language is actually being spoken. For Sakai, this mode of address is associated with a discursive regime of cultural nationalism, characterised by a community of speakers who seek to create a sense of unity and homogeneity among each other, and who mutually reinforce each other's cultural norms and systems of reference. Cultural nationalism, so Sakai argues, adopts a mode of address that emphasises sameness, shared experience, and shared cultural codes while limiting access from the outside (6). As a consequence of homolingually addressing an audience, the addresser reaffirms the homogeneity of the linguistic space, reinforces cultural essentialism, authenticity, and purity, and simultaneously excludes and alienates those whose experience, knowledge, or language differs from how the speaker imagines the community and its social order.[17]

As a contrasting model, Sakai describes the heterolingual address, which simultaneously acts as the main theoretical guiding principle to his own writing. He circumscribes the notion of heterolingually addressing an audience as the process of "speaking with foreigners" (9). Sakai uses that phrase to designate a mode of speech that is aware of, and accepting of, the need for constant negotiation in circumstances where no national, ethnic, or linguistic affiliation can be taken for granted between the addresser and the addressee — even

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[17] While Sakai objects to the homolingual address on ideological grounds, the homolingual address may, paradoxically, constitute a strategy of linguistic resistance as well: by creating closed linguistic and discursive spheres, and deliberately constructing difference towards the outside, the homolingual address may also serve to construct "nationhood" among communities outside of (or opposed to) conventional and hegemonic state nationalisms.

though some addressees may possess such affiliation, such as in the case of a book written in English about Japanese history and literature, which may have a heterogeneous readership with varying degrees of familiarity with the cultural context of the book. As a consequence, this heterogeneous readership is, to various degrees, dependent on cultural and lingual translation, which necessitates the addresser to develop and transform his or her use of language to such an extent as to accommodate these different subject positions:

> The heterolingual address does not abide by the normalcy of reciprocal and transparent communication, but instead assumes that every utterance can fail to communicate because heterogeneity is inherent in any medium, linguistic or otherwise. Every translation calls for a counter-translation, and in this sort of address it is clearly evident that within the framework of communication, translation must be endless. Thus, in the heterolingual address, the addressee must translate any delivery, whether in speech or writing, in order for that delivery to actually be received. (8)

This passage points out an important aspect about the heterolingual address: it suggests a use of language where meaning (or the very possibility of meaning) is uncertain, and hence to be negotiated between addresser and addressee. As Stefan Nowotny and Boris Buden have pointed out (2009, 204), this inevitably leads us away from the homogenous language entities associated with the modern nation state and its institutions towards the various linguistic and cultural contact zones that can be found in postcolonial societies or contemporary migrant communities — or then, conversely, on the global "scenes of translation" of cosmopolitan urban centres. Here, Jon Solomon has argued that the heterolingual address can unfold not just as a necessity of communication, but also as an ethical practice of cross-cultural communication: by acknowledging the gap between addressing and communicating, and by seeking to transform language for the sake of greater inclusivity, the heterolingual address, according to Solomon, represents the idea of a form of discourse "in which all parties … remember the element of distance in every social relation" while simultaneously seeking to overcome that distance (Solomon 2007).

Interestingly, Sakai does not elaborate precisely how the heterolingual address (or, conversely, the homolingual address) can be practiced as a method.

However, he states that writing heterolingually is akin to writing "in search of an address that establishes a 'we' of a community without taking national, ethnic, or linguistic affiliation for granted" (8), hence blurring the line between writing and translating (ibid.). Here we can recognise how Sakai's use of the term translation distinguishes itself substantially from the widely recognised definition provided by Roman Jakobson, who viewed translation as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (Jakobson 1959, 114), and hence as a transfer from one language to another. While the act of heterolingually addressing an audience *does* involve such interlingual acts of translation — such as the translation of a phrase from Japanese into English — Sakai indeed uses a broader notion of translation that does not just encompass the act of carrying over information from one language to another. Rather, in the heterolingual address, translation constitutes a negotiation process that is immanent to speech itself. Sakai regards the position of the speaker who addresses a mixed audience not as that of an invisible mediator (as the translator has often been portrayed within translation studies, as I will show later), but as an active agent who creates community through and with language.

Sakai's take on translation does not occupy itself with the problem of equivalence that has been so prominent throughout debates on translation — whether, and how, translation is able to render the meaning of a text written in one language in another. Sakai turns that question on its head by questioning the very formation of language and cultures as separate units. Rather than conceiving of translation as an operation between two already existing and fully articulated linguistic and cultural units in search of equivalence, Sakai proposes that it is in fact the very gesture of translating that articulates cultures (that might otherwise be experienced as continuous, such as in the case of neighboring languages and cultures) as separate from each other; as incommensurate and hence in need of translation. "Translation articulates languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated languages as if they were autonomous and closed entities," Sakai writes (2). This also helps to clarify that Sakai's theory of address does not directly propagate a specific linguistic form, but rather points towards a way of using language whereby "the otherness of the audience," as Rey Chow (2008, 47)

explains, "is never repressed but acknowledged, and included/inscribed in the very process of information delivery and exchange." The greatest potential of this idea perhaps lies in its ethical and political implications: whereas the homolingual address designates a mode of address that imagines a clearly delineated communicative space (such as, for example, in a community that is relatively homogenous in terms of language, culture, or beliefs), the heterolingual address encapsulates the desire for an address that is appropriate for a heterogeneous public sphere, and working to sustain that diversity. This is precisely why the concept of the address offers insight into the political dimension of transnational cultural production: it allows us to read art in terms of its relations with its publics, examine its capacities to produce spaces and relations, and identify its openings and closures, transparencies and opacities — gestures that, at large, imagine and structure a transnational public sphere.

When at the beginning of this chapter I suggested that the audience of art might be "produced" from within the work and its mode of address, I have drawn precisely from this idea: that a relation — be it between writers and readers, artists and spectators, or between different groups of readers and spectators — does not emerge *after* the work has been created, but at the very moment where the artist has an audience in mind. Who does the work address itself to? How, and to what effect? This line of inquiry guides Sakai's own critical writing (which can, in this sense, be read as a form of transcultural practice), and my proposition is to carry over this notion into the context of international visual art, where it will allow us to outline a translator figure without falling into the conventional dilemmas and limitations of translation. In Sakai's thinking, the translator is no longer just a medium between two different, pre-constituted cultural and linguistic areas, but endowed with cultural and political agency — over the formation of language, and moreover, over the production of transcultural communities — and this is precisely the potential I will be interested in exploring through the figure of the artist as translator.

'International Art English'

Contemporary art in international exhibition contexts does not only "speak" metaphorically by providing accounts of historical events or raising awareness for social, political, cultural or environmental conditions. Often, contemporary art itself includes different forms of language (as mentioned earlier), and at the very least, is itself surrounded by and framed through it. The language that surrounds art — in press releases, catalogue texts, artist talks or visitor guides, and sometimes within artworks themselves — greatly contributes to shaping art's relation to its publics. In what follows, I will use Sakai's theory of the address, as outlined above, to discuss a key phenomenon that has prompted a widespread debate about how contemporary art operates as a medium: "International Art English."

In 2012, artist David Levine and art critic Alix Rule (2012) published a study carrying the above-mentioned title that sent a wave of controversy through the international art world, provoking a number of polemical responses by artists, critics, and the general press (Rosler 2013; Steyerl 2013; Lescaze 2013; Beckett 2013). Echoing a somewhat popular sentiment about contemporary art — that it comes wrapped in a detached, euphemistic, opaque, or even "pompous, overblown prose" (Beckett 2013) spoken and understood only by "insiders" such as gallery owners, curators, and artists — their study set to empirically prove the existence of this presumed sociolect of the art world, which the authors of the study titled "International Art English." Levine and Rule based their study on the observation that the specific language used in the context of international exhibition culture often employs a reoccurring vocabulary of specialist terms and expressions that, as they speculate, serves as a means to unify and simplify transactions within a global field comprised of numerous different protagonists, each of whom hail from different countries as well as linguistic and educational backgrounds.

It is indeed an easily observable fact that the English language has come to play the role of a *lingua franca* of international exhibition culture, and this development has been particularly noticeable in non-native English-speaking

countries: there is hardly any large-, or mid-sized institution, exhibition venue, or cultural organisation today involved in the production, funding, and dissemination of contemporary art that does not (at least in part) use English to communicate and promote its activities, let alone biennials and other large-scale exhibition events.[18] Museum catalogues, gallery press releases, open calls, conferences and workshops, award ceremonies, scholarship and residency programmes, lectures, and even classroom discussions around the world are published or held in English even where no native English speakers are involved or present in the audience. In these instances, Levine and Rule are correct to suggest that English acts as a transactional language to facilitate communication and exchange wherever speakers of different linguistic, cultural, or national contexts meet. In other words, the English language is used by the protagonists of the art world to overcome the condition of heterolinguality that invariably characterises the "scene of translations."[19]

Why English? Levine and Rule suggest that its success may have to do with its simplicity and flexibility. Others have noted that the popularity of English in the art world mirrors its use in business, technology, research, and politics, tracing the predominance of English back to the legacies of British colonialism, American imperialism, and the American cultural hegemony of the post-war era (Robinson 1997b, 33–35; Venuti 1998, 159). There is no doubt that the vast political, economic, and cultural transformations in Europe after 1989, as well as the American-influenced rise of neoliberal capitalism and Western pop culture, have contributed to the success of English as a dominant cultural *lingua franca*. One of the paradoxes of this development has been that, on the one hand, the availability of English as a vehicular language has simplified encounters and

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[18] Usually, English is used alternatively to the local language. However, this bilingualism is often not fully implemented, probably due to the cost of doing so. While communicating in English is 'prestigious' and comes with the promise of reaching a broader audience (speaking English as a *lingua franca*), English use often stands at odds with the demands of local audiences and cultural politics that insist on local languages be used, and the localisation of artworks through translation or subtitling.

[19] The world's largest curated exhibition of contemporary art for example, *Documenta* in Kassel, first began producing multilingual exhibition catalogues in both German and English in 1982, likely contributing to a growth in visitors from 380,000 in 1982, 476,000 in 1987, to 615,000 in 1992. Statistics obtained here: http://www.documenta12.de/805.html?&L=1 (accessed 22 December 2013). The first bilingual catalogue published by *Documenta* appeared at *Documenta* 7 and included a subsection comprising of English translations of artist statements by German-speaking artists in which these artists address readers internationally about their work.

facilitated communication even in the absence of a shared native language — such as on the many public platforms of contemporary art. On the other hand, the very possibility of these encounters has become contingent upon the participants' ability or willingness to speak English. Not surprisingly, critics of this development have been plentiful, and many criticise the English language precisely due to what they perceive as its hegemonic power. Douglas Robinson, for example, has argued that today there is an "almost universal sense that those who speak and write in this language know more and control more than those who don't" (Robinson 1997b, 35), and that language is increasingly becoming a new site of class distinction — particularly so among non-native speakers, where language skills are a requirement for mobility and opportunity — and yet the ability to obtain them simultaneously depends on privileged access to educational, cultural, and economic resources and infrastructure. The Serbian artist Mladen Stilinović has polemically proposed that for artists, this simply means that "an artist who cannot speak English is no artist," as he wrote on a pink banner shown internationally in various exhibition contexts (*An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist*, 1992). According to Stilinović's claim, the non-English-speaking artist is not just invisible to the international community, but wholly unable to be considered a professional artist at all. In a similar vein, Nicolas Bourriaud wrote that "in our increasingly globalised world, all signs must be translated or translatable — if only into the new lingua franca of English — in order to really exist." (Bourriaud 2009, 131)

But does "International Art English" actually exist? The empirical material that Rule and Levine use in order to substantiate their claim about the linguistic distinctiveness of "International Art English" and its "deviancy" from "normal" English is the archive of the newsletters of *e-flux*, a leading American membership-based information service that distributes information about recent developments in the international art world, including the announcement of exhibitions, the appointment of curators and directors, and the acknowledgement of artists' and curators' achievements. Certainly, *e-flux* (both as a journal and a promotional platform) represents a fascinating case study for the formation of a transnational network. There is no doubt that *e-flux* is one of those many instances where the art world not only is "subject" to the forces of

globalisation, but itself produces and advances globalisation, as Pamela M. Lee has written (2012, 4). The vast amount of press releases comprised within its archive testifies to the ambition of art museums, biennials, cultural centres, magazines, publishers, and art fairs around the world to participate in the transnational circuits of cultural production and dissemination, and be seen and known as active sites on the world map of contemporary art. Even though fees and participation criteria have not been made fully available to the public,[20] the desire to participate seems to legitimate such costs, even for smaller institutions physically located outside of cosmopolitan hubs.[21]

An important assumption that Rule and Levine make in their study of *e-flux* is that these short texts represent the "purest form" of "International Art English" due to their specificity as statements addressed nearly exclusively to a specialist audience of professionals working within the field. Their study of these materials leads to certain predictable conclusions: "International Art English has a distinctive lexicon," they write; "aporia, radically, space, proposition, biopolitical, tension, transversal, autonomy. … An artist's work inevitably interrogates, questions, encodes, transforms, subverts, imbricates, displaces — though often it doesn't do these things so much as it serves to, functions to, or seems to (or might seem to) do these things." Furthermore, they state that "International Art English" is "oddly pornographic" — even if hard to define, "we know it when we see it." Bordering on mockery, the researchers' claims here seem to recall the American comedy *Chelsea* (2009) with its farcical portrayal of New York's commercial art world: scene after scene, the protagonists of that film indulge in nonsensical *artspeak* that clearly serves no other purpose than that of a social lubricant, helping narcissistic and flirtatious artists match with rich, love-hungry collectors.

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[20]   *e-flux* director Anton Vidokle indicated that fees "are different for public, corporate and commercial institutions," and added that they are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. See Lyden 2009.

[21]   It is interesting to note that by using English to communicate and announce exhibitions outside the English-speaking world, art institutions often do not seem to want to reach actual potential visitors, but rather to demonstrate their membership within the international field, construct their reputation, and underpin their status as participants of contemporary culture.

Largely disregarding the historical dimension of the English language's hegemonic power, Rule and Levine's criticism focuses on two entirely different but no less interesting aspects. First, they observe that "International Art English" deviates from "standard" English; and secondly, that this difference makes it unnecessarily exclusive, pretentious, and meaningless. Indeed, even though *e-flux* purposefully addresses itself to an international readership, the language used in its mailings (but authored by the issuing art institutions and organisations) points inwards, communicating primarily to a relatively narrow and highly professionalised audience linked by vocational dedication and a desire to participate in the global circuit. As a reading of any given press release published on *e-flux* makes sufficiently clear, art institutions that advertise their exhibitions in this particular distribution channel indeed make certain presuppositions about every addressee's a priori understanding of certain terms and specialised knowledge, which is why the platform is probably of little interest to a general public (not to mention the more than five daily mailings that can tire even seasoned professionals). While the transnational character of *e-flux* as a promotional and discursive platform would seem to point to a condition of heterolinguality, the characteristics that Rule and Levine observe in the actual language used actually suggest a homolingual mode of address.

A key aspect that Rule and Levine fail to heed is the nature and function of the body of material they use to demonstrate the characteristics of "International Art English." As artist and theorist Hito Steyerl has pointed out, *e-flux* mainly distributes press releases, which arguably serve to generate attention but are not truly representative of the wider scope of cultural discourse around international contemporary art (Steyerl 2013). Rather, as Steyerl has argued, press releases must be understood as a form of "cultural copywriting" — that is, as a targeted marketing language that, above all, delivers a certain linguistic virtuosity — as Paolo Virno (2004, 59–63) calls it — to attract attention and appear contemporary, fresh, and desirable. The confusion between language as a discursive device and a promotional tool leads Steyerl to propose a very different reading of "International Art English" — as a phenomenon that represents the distribution of roles within the art world of late capitalism: for Steyerl, "International Art English" in no way reflects the avant-garde of discursive

production in the arts, but rather the opposite: the bottom end, where an underclass of "overworked and underpaid assistants and interns across the world" write catchy-sounding press releases; nothing but simulating the theoretical language nourished by elite universities and art schools and propagated by celebrity curators and critics.

Towards Heterolinguality

One way of understanding the popularity of *e-flux* is through what proponents of institutional theory (like Arthur Danto and Pierre Bourdieu) have claimed about how contemporary art operates as a discursive system that differentiates itself sharply, for example, from notions of "fine art" or "arts and crafts" (Danto 1964 / Bourdieu 1993).[22] Contemporary art has been viewed by those theorists not as a product or activity that could objectively be identified by visual criteria, but as a form of production enabled and legitimated by a system of networked institutions and individuals that form a discursive field that defines contemporary art whilst differentiating it from other discourses.[23] Danto essentially characterised the art world as an abstract field of circulating theories that are acknowledged and practiced by the protagonists of that field, and that determine what comes to be made thinkable, recognizable, and understandable as a work of art (Danto 1964, 581). In short, "the role of artistic theories," Danto suggested, was "to make the art world, and art, possible" (ibid.). This view recalls Michel Foucault, who argued that discourse has the power to define, and thereby create its objects in the sense that it represents "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about … a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall 1992, 291; Foucault 1972, 129). It is therefore conceivable that "International Art English," even though addressing itself to a transnational readership, is so often criticised and mocked precisely because it

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22 Also see: interview with Bassam el Baroni by Hassan Khan (Part I and II), http://www.artterritories.net/?page_id=2063 (accessed 23 October 2015).

23 Pierre Bourdieu defines the term of the "field" as following: "A field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" (Bourdieu 1993, 162–162). In terms of power relations within that field, Bourdieu writes that the field of cultural production is "the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated" (Bourdieu 1993, 78).

paradoxically employs a homolingual mode of address that alienates those who are not already members of the discursive space, at least metaphorically speaking. In this light, *e-flux* might be viewed as an example not just of how globalisation has dramatically expanded the reach of contemporary art, but also precisely for the fact that such an extension does not necessarily produce an opening, a greater diversity of discourses, or a more heterolingual mode of address.

But if art so often depends on language to meet its audience, and if art increasingly offers itself as a medium of cross-cultural communication, could the modes of address used not also serve to democratise international exhibition culture and make it more truly pluralistic? Could the ways that artists and curators address their audiences — and thereby imagine and shape them — be sites where cross-cultural relations could be imagined differently? Could biennials be places where "new public formations that are not bound to the nation-state or the art world" could emerge, as Simon Sheikh (2009, 74) has suggested? Bearing these questions in mind, yet another way of reading "International Art English" emerges: in their study, Rule and Levine describe a "deviation" from "normal" English; a hypothesis they seek to verify by comparing the archive of *e-flux* with the British National corpus, assuming that the latter offers an adequate measure of what constitutes "normal" English. They determined that even though "International Art English" is based on English, its unique vocabulary and forms of expression have been "imported" from other languages. Among others, one major influence they identify is what they call the "belle lettristic" tradition of American art criticism of the *October* era: its writing style, they argue, has been heavily influenced by translations of French poststructuralist theory into English, and hence resulted in an a proliferation of foreignisms. For example, they mention suffixes like "-ion, -ity, -ality, and -isation," or nouns such as "the political," "the global," and "the visible" which, in their view, are not "native" to the English language (Levine and Rule 2012).

On the one hand, for a hybrid language accommodating elements of French and German philosophy to become so widely influential certainly demonstrates the power of dominant institutions — in this case, the American university

system that most *October* writers have been affiliated with — on the formation of discursive norms. On the other hand, the proliferation of these lexical and stylistic "imports" can be viewed precisely as a manifestation of linguistic innovation and renewal (a process I will explore more thoroughly in later chapters): by incorporating the culturally specific features of foreign-language texts into their English translations, the translators of French and German philosophy and cultural theory that inspired the writers of *October* precisely enabled their readers to experience the foreignness of these texts from *within* the English language, which, in order to accommodate the foreign, had to undergo a transformation by itself. But by offering readers this experience, they brought them closer together with German and French readers.

But if translation is already immanent to "International Art English," why should the language that frames art and facilitates its encounters with the public not be capable of accommodating heterolinguality? This is precisely what Hito Steyerl (2013) argues: namely that users of English as a *lingua franca*, including the thousands of visitors that biannually flock to Venice and other biennials, have little reason to speak according to the norms of the British National Corpus, and possibly no desire to do so either. Steyerl hence suggests that the language which frames contemporary art should leave behind the normative rules of the English language entirely if it wants to become truly global: "this is the template for the language I would like to communicate in: a language that is not policed by formerly imperial, newly global corporations, nor by national statistics." A dynamic language (or, rather, a set of languages) that reflects the heterolinguality of the global; grounded in and "accented" by the many different communities that participate in contemporary cultural production, and reflecting the potential of the international exhibition to be a truly polyphonic medium.

I have introduced this chapter by raising the question of whom the work of art addresses itself to in the context of an international exhibition culture with increasingly diverse audiences, where artists — literally and figuratively — face the challenge of "speaking with foreigners," as Naoki Sakai has said. The vision of contemporary art and exhibitions as a medium that underpins this

phenomenon (and the specific acts of address this requires) will be the subject of the following two chapters. What I have argued so far is that a shared discursive space has played a formative role in the emergence of global art and the inclusion of new protagonists and publics into the fold: drawing from Sakai, I have claimed that the way the protagonists and institutions of international exhibition culture use language has an affect on how these new relations are imagined and articulated. In that respect, the observed hybridity of "International Art English" can be a point of departure to move towards a redefinition of these relations, and hence towards a more heterolingual discursive form that would allow for a more pluralistic and polyphonic international exhibition culture beyond traditional centre-periphery models to emerge.

Sakai's views, which I have relied on to build this argument, will reappear throughout this thesis as I will explore the role of the translator within international exhibition culture and, most importantly, their critical and creative agency to contribute to a more heterolingual contemporary art world. Yet, at the same time, the contrast between homolingual and heterolingual modes of address already hints at what is perhaps one of the greatest dilemmas of international exhibition culture (and by extension, of the translator figure): how to negotiate between two seemingly contradictory desires — for an ever-expanding notion of art as a global platform where a shared *lingua franca* facilitates and simplifies encounters and transactions on the one hand (while simultaneously producing new power relations and forms of exclusion), and conversely, the desire to maintain and preserve cultural and linguistic differences and singularities (while dramatically increasing the need for translations).

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The Artist as Translator

It has become a common, perhaps even expected, trope in international exhibition culture to see it highlighted that artists live and work in multiple cities and countries across the globe. When the list of artists participating in the main exhibition of the 2015 Venice Biennial was first announced, it did not provide any further information other than the artists' names, accompanied by details of where (and when) they were born and where they now live and work: "in Beirut and Amsterdam," in "Tunis and Paris," in "Lubumbashi and Brussels." Voluntarily or not, the list told a remarkable story of global migrations. Most remarkably, many of these trajectories follow a clear pattern: for artists born outside the West, their career paths almost invariably lead to, or at least through, the cultural capitals of North America or Europe.

This phenomenon has not gone without attention from art critics. Khaled Ramadan has written of a growing class of "expatriate artists" who have been educated in the West (Ramadan 2007, 27) and who have been promoted in the art world as representatives of their (assumed) non-Western cultural backgrounds and identities. Already in the 1980's and '90's, Rasheed Araeen (1984) and Thomas McEvilley (1994) observed that non-Western artists could apparently achieve success in the West only by highlighting were they were from, and as recently as 2009, Nicolas Bourriaud remarked that it was still rare to find artists "who have succeeded in penetrating the central system of contemporary art while continuing to reside in their countries of origin" (Bourriaud 2009, 162), particularly if that country of origin was located outside the West. Others have spoken of a rise of "art nomads" and mobile "migrant children of the second and third generation" (Bismarck/Below 2005, 8) that have given international exhibition culture a "friendly, colourful and peaceful face" (Babias, 2001). In light of the Venice Biennial's 2015 artist list, these observations still seem accurate.

How do we explain the popularity of this type of artist? What is his or her role within international exhibition culture? In the previous chapter I have argued that biennials and other large-scale international exhibitions act as mediums to imagine and produce transnational publics. In this chapter, I will explore a key figure who appears on the stages of this international exhibition culture: the culturally hybrid artist who lives "here and there," both inside the institutional worlds and discourses of contemporary art and its (many) geographic, linguistic, cultural, and social outsides. I will describe and critique a pattern of globally successful artists who perform the role of cultural translators between these spheres, acting as cross-cultural intellectuals and native informants for transnational publics while simultaneously shifting between exilic displacement, minority status, and late-capitalist mobile cultural entrepreneurship. Where do we locate this figure? How does it relate to the institutional landscape of international exhibition culture? My hope will be to show not only how international exhibition culture raises problems of cross-cultural representation, commodification, identity- and geopolitics as well as, of course, language and translation, but also how the translator figure often tends to reproduce existing cross-cultural power relations and perceptions. In conjunction with the subsequent chapter, which will provide a more in-depth look at an environment where these intersecting problems can all be observed in an exemplary fashion, I will conclude by arguing that the translator role is in need of a critical reframing and that new, critical, and creative strategies of addressing transnational publics are needed — which will be the subject of the second part of this thesis.

The Figure of the Translator

What is a translator? In this section I will briefly map out how cultural theorists have envisioned the role of the mediator between languages and cultures, and explore how the translator figure has been both marginalised (as a "secondary" cultural producer) and championed (as a harbinger of cultural innovation and transformation). All the references made in this brief survey, just as this very paradox itself, will reappear throughout this thesis, and will — in order to avoid

redundancy — be explored in more depth and in different contexts later on.

In the most conventional sense, the translator is an individual who performs what Roman Jakobson calls interlingual translation: "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (Jakobson [1959] 2004, 114). This is the role that translators play in cultural as well as in technical, legal, diplomatic, and other fields (for the purpose of this thesis I will focus on the first). Translation studies scholar Lawrence Venuti, who has published widely on the role of translators in the Anglo-American publishing world, has described a current state of affairs in which translators are largely marginalised, receiving less recognition, attention, and compensation that other creative workers or even administrators (Venuti 2004, 8). Furthermore, according to Venuti, translators are commonly encouraged to produce a certain, "transparent" type of translation: namely one that makes the foreign easily readable and accessible and does not draw attention to itself (1–17). Venuti speaks of a condition of "invisibility" in which translators work, and argues that translators have largely fallen victim to a cultural industry that celebrates originality and author's "authentic expression" above everything else, with the translator relegated to a second-order mediator figure tasked with the mass production of "the illusion of authorial presence whereby the translated text can be taken as the original" (7).

This somewhat daunting — if not "scandalous" status quo, as he suggests in the title of his book, *The Scandals of Translation* (Venuti 1998) — stands in stark contrast to how the role of the translator has been envisioned historically by translation theorists, particularly by 19th-century Romantic translation theorists, who have painted a vastly different, and certainly more idealistic, picture of translators' work. German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose translations of Plato are still widely read today, thought of the translator as a scholar, closely familiar with foreign cultures and languages, and yet firmly rooted within his or her "own" culture (that is, the culture he or she was translating into) (Schleiermacher [1813] 1963, 39). He regarded the translator as an enthusiastic "importer" of texts and cultures whose work sought to benefit, enrich, and transform the linguistic and cultural foundations of his or her own nation (39–40), motivated by a love for the "fatherland" (63). In

Schleiermacher's view, the translator was therefore not really an intermediary between cultures in an equal sense, but rather a highly educated "importer" fluent in foreign languages but working to advance the translating culture's knowledge of the foreign.

In contrast, Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay on the "task of the translator," saw in the translator a kind of a spiritual figure: by carrying words across from one language to another, the translator strove not towards "fidelity" between languages (Benjamin [1923] 2002, 251), but towards "pure language," a term that, for Benjamin, signified an abstract, humanist, and spiritual ideal of linguistic and cultural transformation and complementation (258–261). Essentially, Benjamin rejected the binary model of translation as an operation between two languages only, viewing every language instead as part of a greater totality of possible expressions. He paradoxically argued that translation should *not* serve the reader's interests (nor, even less, the interests of a specific language or nation), and *not* try to communicate the original's assumed meaning in the target language. Instead, the translator should serve language itself (263), enriching and transforming it through cross-pollination, leading to a translation that "lovingly and in detail incorporates the original's *way* of meaning," as opposed to the (assumed) meaning itself (260). Benjamin's hope was that this method would allow the translation a degree of independence from the original, and to illustrate his point, Benjamin famously used the metaphor of the tangent: the translation, so he argued, should only slightly touch the "circle" (the original) in a single point, before gradually distancing itself and running its own course (261). In Benjamin's vision, the translator was a visionary creator, contributing to the continued life, circulation, and transformation of texts and cultural expressions (255), and hence a universal humanist.

While I will return to Schleiermacher's and Benjamin's translation theories later, the basic qualification for a translator, so most translation theorists would likely agree, is an intimate knowledge of at least two languages. And yet, linguistic proficiency might be far from enough: the translator (and in particular, the literary translator) must generally possess a deep understanding of both languages' cultural contexts as well. But how can such knowledge of a foreign

language and cultural context be achieved? For most translators, reaching this degree of linguistic and cultural fluency in a foreign language either "comes close to being a lifetime job," as Mario Pei has stated (1965, 424), or it is the result of migratory biographies and life trajectories. In other words, in order to translate fully, the translator must be intimately familiar with multiple cultures and languages. As a staunch nationalist, Schleiermacher was sceptical of this idea and warned translators to contain their multiple cultural entanglements. Translators who became involved with the foreign to such an extent that they surrendered themselves to its language, ideas, and values were, in Schleiermacher's view, doomed to be "estranged" from their native world and language and "live in a limbo" (Schleiermacher [1813] 1963, 63). The cultural in-between, Schleiermacher was convinced, would be nothing but "a joyless middle ground." Here, Schleiermacher's vision of the translator reveals a hegemonic worldview that ruled out the possibility of true hybridity or multiple belongings in a contemporary sense. However, as both a nationalist and a Romantic, Schleiermacher understood that language represents something far greater than merely a means of communication: a way to express being and belonging; identity and community.

While in the early 19th century, an intimate knowledge of multiple cultures was still largely a privilege of scholars and the educated bourgeoisie, the 20th century — with its incredible acceleration of human mobility and its successive waves of global mass migration (partly due to the very violence of nationalism as a political ideology) made the conditions of exile and diaspora an experience affecting millions of displaced people. Indeed, one could argue that if a profound familiarity with multiple languages and cultures is accepted as the preeminent characteristic of the translator (as opposed to a specific professional education), then the great majority of translators — in the sense of individuals with multiple cultural roots — today hail from the growing class of exiles, work migrants, émigrés, and diaspora citizens.[24] The German language term for translation

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[24] For his video work *Interpreters* (2008), German artist Christoph Keller interviewed professional interpreters about their upbringing and portrayed the figure of the translator with an immanent cultural hybridity. The translators Keller interviews recall growing up in multilingual households and in multiple countries; one mentions his particular ability to "pass" as a person of different origins in different countries. Keller portrays the figure of the translator not just as a profession but also as a kind of multiple identity. For example, Harry Zohn, the translator of Benjamin's famous essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of

captures this condition rather beautifully: *übersetzen*, which is used to describe the activity of translating, literally means "setting across"; yet at the same time, it has traditionally been used to signify the act of crossing the ocean (*übersetzen nach Amerika*, setting over to America*),* linking the notion of translation with the lived experience of migration and exile.[25] Naoki Sakai has shared this view, identifying the translator as "neither [possessing] a professional speciality nor a social status" (Sakai 1997, 14). Taking himself as an expatriate Japanese scholar living in the United States, and writing on Japanese history for multiple readerships as an example, Sakai calls the translator simply "a subject in transit … devoid of a stable positionality" (ibid.).

This line of thought, which recognises the translator as a figure bridging cultures rather than just languages, leads to the great "cultural turn" that has taken place within translation theory over the last decade. A better understanding of cultures of migration, exile, and diaspora has contributed to a renewed appreciation of the translator's role in the context of larger global movements.[26] The figure of the translator has increasingly come to be brought into conjunction with political and social issues of the present, such as postcolonialism, the lived reality of immigrants within the Western nation state, the phenomena of global markets and migrant labour, and the emergence of post-national and hybrid identities (Bassnett and Venuti 1990, 1998; Venuti [1995] 2004, 1998). "The old dualism of translation between one language and another is outdated," Douglas Robinson has proclaimed, pointing instead to a contemporary vision of the translator as a mediator of cultures in a time of ever-

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Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), was a Viennese Jew who, in 1939, emigrated to England and later to the United States. Subsequently, he translated from German into English numerous works by Benjamin, as well as works by Theodor Herzl, Gershom Scholem, and others.

[25] Seeing translation as related to emigration also recalls Benjamin's metaphor of the "afterlife" (Benjamin [1923] 2002, 254) that a translation provides to its original text in a different time or cultural context, which could well be read as an analogy to the "new life" in exile.

[26] Surveying the theoretical literature on this subject one can find that the figure of the translator goes by a multitude of names, all of which are metaphors in their own right for "translational" subjectivities within a global economy of circulation of people, goods, images, and capital: from the nomad, the stranger, the exile, and the emigré to the refugee, the tourist, the smuggler, and the business traveller (Lenz 2011). The expat could be added to this list as much as the artist, the curator, and the itinerant academic, all of which can be understood as embodying the role of the cultural translator in the sense of an individual that has access to two or multiple cultures and languages, and hence possesses the ability to translate — to "transfer," to "carry," to "smuggle," to "write," to "speak" — between them.

greater migration and circulation (Robinson 1997b, 1).

Within cultural studies it has particularly been the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) where the affinities between the conditions of exile, migration, and diaspora and translation have become apparent: hybridity, according to Bhabha, designates a condition of cultural translation that takes place between two or multiple "source" and "target" cultures. Bhabha proposed viewing the cultural experience of the migrant as "a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth" (3). Critiquing essentialist and nationalist notions that maintain culture and language as fixed, homogenous, and historical categories, he pointed to the in-between as a place where identity is formed, a process he argued unfolds in a performative manner through the articulation of mixed, conflicting, and ambivalent forms of cultural expression (1–5). Bhabha also described hybridity as an experience of "liminality": a transitory state of cultural, spiritual, linguistic and geographic disorientation that unfolds when individuals have left behind a certain way of being and belonging but have not yet developed new roots (148). It is precisely here where Bhabha saw the potential for cultural productivity and "newness"; for new forms of expression and new idioms to emerge from outside the traditional spaces and institutions of the nation state or the homogenous ethnic community. These new idioms were inherently impure and marked by displacements, "contaminating" the presumed cultural stability of the nation state (303–330).[27]

This subversive, even "blasphemous" potential simultaneously makes the translator a suspect. "Traduttore, tradittore," the Italian proverb goes: the translator as traitor (Buden 2008). Consider the words of conservative British politician and cultural commentator, Norman Tebbit, who suggested in 1990 that British immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean should face the "cricket test" — the question which cricket team they cheer for — to allow for their cultural loyalties to be determined (Fletcher 2012). If cheering for a cricket team can be considered a form of cultural and ideological position-taking, then we may begin to grasp the complex and often contradictory forces that hybrid

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[27]   Whether this optimistic view of cultural productivity is still tenable in light of transnational terror movements like ISIS, many of whose members hail from migrant families, is of course questionable.

cultural expressions are exposed to and measured against. As Ranajit Guha, Maire Ni Flhathuin, and Sean Burke have shown, the work of postcolonial authors is often subjected to these same questions: "the language in which [the author] writes, the audience he writes for, and the … rewards he expects" all become scrutinised for traces of his or her cultural loyalty (Guha 2011, 8–9; Ni Fhlathuin and Burke 1995, 279–280). The fatwa that was issued against Salman Rushdie is often taken as an example to demonstrate this: the greater the geopolitical and ideological divides an author straddles, the greater the potential accusations of treachery, and the greater the confrontational potential between rivalling demands for cultural and ideological loyalty. Bhabha not unexpectedly advocates "blasphemy," suggesting that the very binary model of translation must be questioned. His vision, not unlike Benjamin's, is a truly heterolingual and polyphonic cultural sphere that can accommodate the many different "liminal" experiences of contemporary migrations and postcolonial displacement (1994, 225–226). Here, Homi Bhabha's work can be read as a predecessor to Naoki Sakai's vision of the translator, with Bhabha and Sakai intersecting in their desire for a "translational" mode of writing that will overcome the binary relationship between separate cultural and linguistic zones, as associated with lingual translation. While Bhabha's interest has been to theorise the interstitial space between the "here" and "there," Sakai, as I have shown in the previous chapter, has suggested that it may be precisely *because* of translation that cultures are perceived as different from each other, and that we may instead imagine a heterolingual mode of address that incorporates translating into the very act of speaking as a way to overcome the separation between the two; creating "community at … [the] point of discontinuity" (Sakai 1997, 14).

While there has been a propensity among cultural studies scholars to situate the figure of the cultural translator at the margins of society — and hence mirroring Venuti's account of the literary translator at the margins of the publishing industry — more recent research on the complex interrelations between Western multiculturalism and neoliberal capitalism has painted a somewhat different picture. In the eyes of the Vietnamese-German Cultural theorist Kien Nghi Ha (2005), changing societal and political attitudes in

Western Europe have made the cultural translator an increasingly desirable individual, with institutions capitalising on the well-integrated and cosmopolitan migrant to represent themselves as colourful, democratic, and diverse (ibid., 59–61); a claim that has also been made by Sara Ahmed (2012). In this context, cultural translators are sought after as long as they deliver the relatable narratives of cultural difference that meet pre-existing expectations, perceptions, and desires (ibid., 79). According to Nghi Ha, these "domesticated" (to use a term from translation theory I will explore later on) others are considered "safe" while the foreign is simultaneously stripped of its subversive and contaminating power. By making this claim, Nghi Ha essentially marks the limits of hybridity as a theoretical term from the 1990s, adding an economic component to the cultural productivity Bhabha saw in translation: here, the cultural translator is in demand because he or she produces a newness that is *marketable*; offering ever-more "advanced cultural grammars and idioms" for a cultural industry that consistently needs "new trends and fashion lines" and craves "efficiency, fascination, newness and appropriation" (Nghi Ha, 2006). Concerning contemporary artists in the role of translators, Nghi Ha (2005) suspects that

> … the representation of artists with a background of migration often serves the purpose to place the [German] nation within a colourful sphere of difference in order to mask its own hegemonic position in the global economy, and to outcompete the competition in a metropolitan media- and culturescape (107, my translation).

Nghi Ha's critique seems to echo research from the social sciences, such as Aihwa Ong's study (1999) of contemporary mobile identities and cosmopolitan lifestyles driven by economic opportunity. Ong has seen cultural hybridity no longer as emerging out of "bottom-up" spaces of social and political disempowerment, but increasingly from the privileged zones of transnational capital and corporate culture (2–6). Proclaiming the rise of the "flexible citizen," Ong has sketched out what she regards as the ideal agent of late capitalism: an uprooted and polyglot multiple-passport holder capable of translating him- or herself into new contexts in order to adapt to the changing conditions of global markets and who, rather than waiting for nation-states to deliver on their promises of greater tolerance and participation, inhabits the world's economic and legal spaces of opportunity. In return, the flexible citizen is rewarded with an

upward social mobility. Ong's figure of the flexible citizen may be seen as an individual that voluntarily chooses to live in an uprooted state to escape the limitations of national economies and politics; conversely, the flexible citizen is also an opportunist whose already privileged political, educational, or class status offers access to the resources of power and capital (6). From the vantage point of a hyper-mobile and often socially privileged art world, Ong's vision is certainly thought-provoking; and in the following sections (as well as in the next chapter), I will observe the figure of the translator — with this immanent ambivalence between marginalised subject and fashionable other — on the stages of international exhibition culture.

The Artist in the 'Diverse' Institution

During the 7th Berlin Biennale in 2012, a strange clash between an artist group and the exhibition's curators was witnessed and recorded by dozens of onlookers.[28] Under the banner of debating the "Politics of the Poor," the curators of the Biennale, Joanna Warsza and Artur Żmijewski, had invited members of the *Pixação* movement from São Paulo to participate in the biennial and lead a workshop with local and international participants.[29] Coming from Brazil's large class of uneducated urban poor, the *pixadores* — as the members of the Pixação movement call themselves — use graffiti in public spaces and buildings, including highly inaccessible and dangerous locations, as an expression of social protest. The Biennale's curators hoped to accommodate the *pixadores'* participation by providing them a space within the historic St. Elisabeth Church, repurposed as an art gallery, where they had prepared a temporary wooden wall that would — so they thought — be tagged by the group in collaboration with invited workshop participants. However, upon arriving on the scene, the *pixadores* — none of whom had ever travelled outside of Brazil, and who were dependent on Portuguese–English translators to communicate with curators and

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[28]   Original Youtube footage, "Intento de Arresto a Graffitero," Juampi Andrade, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VUxz9ioN3A (accessed 19 May 2015). The scene is documented more thoroughly in the film *Pixadores* (2014) by Amir Escandari, including the events that led to the clash.

[29]   "Politics of the Poor," presentation and painting workshop with *Pixadores* in Portuguese with English translation, 9 June 2012, Berlin. See: http://blog.berlinbiennale.de/en/events/politics-of-the-poor-a-workshop-with-pixadores (accessed 10 June 2016).

workshop participants — rejected the wall space provided by the Biennale, and instead sprayed graffiti onto protected parts of the listed historic building. This led to a brawl with curator Artur Żmijewski and a subsequent intervention by the police, all of which was captured by multiple cameras and subsequently included in the documentary film *Pixadores* (2014) by Amir Escandari. After returning to Brazil, the graffiti artists who had participated in the event were held accountable for the expenses and damages incurred in their ill-fated participation in the Biennale, even though most of its members were unemployed and financially incapable of doing so.

In many ways, the fate of the *pixadores* in Berlin makes an interesting case study for a failed attempt at including protagonists from the social, economic, and political margins of a developing nation into the framework of international exhibition culture. At first glimpse, by inviting the Brazilian group, the curators of the Berlin Biennale did what has become enshrined as institutional policy in many art institutions across Western Europe and North America: they hoped to create a platform for a plurality of voices, including those from places of cultural, political, and socio-economic difference as viewed from the vantage point of the Western European art biennial and its audience. Here, the Biennale's curators followed, at least in part, the well-known examples set by globally-minded curatorial practices, such as Kassel's *Documenta* (in its 10th, 11th, and 13th editions), the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin (who views itself as an international "forum for current developments and discourse"), or London's *Institute of International Visual Arts* (before its sudden defunding between 2012 and 2015). Hailing from the most underprivileged parts of society in one of the world's largest metropolises, the members of the Pixação movement were framed as protagonists whose "politics of the poor" deserved a voice on the stages of a politically and socially engaged art biennial.

What went wrong? Certainly, the reasons are complex. But gauging from the actions and statements of the *pixadores* that were caught on film, they were outraged by the curators' attempt to restrict their activities to a gallery wall (and, crucially, a wall that had previously been used by other workshop participants) as a farcical ploy to limit and restrain their agency, particularly in light of their

own self-image as a group defined by a sense of exclusion from, and opposition to, a dominant social and economic order. In other words, the *pixadores* resisted their own assimilation into the symbolic order of the "white cube," which they perceived as a way of colonising or restraining the political, social, and aesthetic agency of their creative expression. Likewise, the biennial's curators failed spectacularly in their effort at accommodating the *pixadores'* "peripheral" position into the discursive system of international exhibition culture: rather than succeeding in creating "community in discontinuity," as Naoki Sakai conceived of the translator's task, the case of the *pixadores* revealed the acute limitations of contemporary art as a framework to cope with the enormous degree of social, economic, and political discontinuity that exists within global neoliberal capitalism — all despite a greater mobility of goods, information, images, and people. The problem of translation poses itself on multiple levels: on the one hand, there is an actual need for lingual translations between the art institution and its audience, and the invited "others" from the social margins of the global South.[30] But the need for translation also poses itself on the cultural level: can (and should) the activity of a group like the *pixadores* be integrated into the spaces and discursive formats of international exhibition culture, and be made to conform to its spatial and aesthetic norms? On what *terms* could this act of inclusion take place?

My point here is, obviously, not to argue for the impossibility of this task. Rather, I would like to claim that it is precisely due to the enormous difficulties this task poses that international exhibition culture and its institutions have come to prefer the translator figure, or the "peripheral insider" (Ramadan 2007) that I have already described at the beginning of this chapter. The "peripheral insider" identifies culturally, ethnically, or politically with the periphery yet simultaneously speaks the language of the cultural centre, drawing his or her cultural legitimation from it.[31] Rather than a marginalised subject, the

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[30] There are various scenes in Amir Escandari's film that show the *Pixadores'* bewilderment as they try to decipher and make sense of the curator's words in their letter of invitation. The film also shows their dependence on interpreters on the scene in Berlin, and the role of interpreters as mediators in the artists' tense encounter with the German police.

[31] While the "peripheral insider," as Ramadan states, challenges "one of the most significant characteristics in Western art, the predomination of art made by Western artists with Western perspectives," this artist figure points to an other that remains translatable and relatable for the Western audience.

"peripheral insider" tends to be a privileged individual in possession of social capital, such as Western education or multiple citizenship, permitting him or her to live an extraordinarily mobile life. This is the pattern that presents itself in large Western art institutions and Western biennials: for example, among the approximately 15 non-Western and non-White artists given solo presentations at the Tate Modern between 2000 and 2015, the vast majority had received their education in a Western country. Similar observations could be made, as I have written previously, at Okwui Enwezor's 2015 Venice Biennale, *All The World's Futures*, among others.

The problem of inclusion has also been discussed with respect to ethnic minority artists in national art contexts. Increasingly, the art institution has been viewed as a scene of social encounter and regeneration (Hooper-Greenhill 1997; Clifford 1997; Sendell 1998), as a place where society should be represented in its heterogeneous complexity, and moreover as a place where existing social and cultural imbalances could be evened out. At the same time, critical voices have questioned the terms under which these acts of inclusion take place (McEvilley 1992; Araeen 2000; Hylton 2007), and how diversity practices affect those who are the subject of these acts of inclusion — i.e. artists of ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as artists of migrant or non-Western origins. Thomas McEvilley has demonstrated that the evolution of inclusionary practices within Western art museums has so far failed to produce a truly pluralistic model free from cultural hierarchies or residual colonial attitudes (McEvilley 1992). Moreover, with respect to art institutions in Britain, Richard Hylton has argued that inclusionary strategies often produce a form of segregation through which the inherent inequalities in the cultural sector continue to live on — through the construction of discursive and aesthetic frameworks that situate these artist's work outside of the mainstream, and that limit the public perception of minority or non-Western artists to their own being-different (Hylton 2007, 131).[32] In this

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[32] An even more explicit critique of diversity policies has come from Sara Ahmed (2012), who — with respect to universities — has argued that diversity policies frequently act to mask the continued fact of inequality in these same institutions. Ahmed has read diversity work as an intervention in the self-image of institutions, achieved through the insertion of bodies that "look different" but act not so much to transform underlying realities and relations of power than perceptions for the sake of raising their credibility and attractiveness within a neoliberal institutional landscape. See also the following chapter for further reflections on this question.

logic, an African artist's work is considered worthy of being included as long as it represents the experience of being African — while simultaneously addressing (and hence translating) itself to a non-African audience. The *pixadores* are worthy of being included as long as they represent their own experience of social marginalisation while simultaneously accepting the protocols and hierarchies of international exhibition culture. Rasheed Araeen (2000) has criticised this phenomenon as a form of "positive stereotype":

> … the 'positive' stereotype is especially put in an advantageous position to be admired and celebrated, which benefits and gives him/her a sense of (false) achievement. 'Positive' stereotyping is based on a fascination for the difference of those who are considered to be outsiders: 'They are not like us; they cannot therefore do what we do. But we must admire and value what they do within their own cultures since they are part of our society' (59).

The problem is that this pattern of inclusion not only "leaves little room … for those who might not wish to be framed in this way," as Richard Hylton rightly put it (Hylton 2007, 132–133); it also recalls Slavoj Žižek's criticism of multiculturalism as

> … a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' — it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position (Žižek 1997, 44).

While the curators of the Berlin Biennale seemingly admired the *Pixadores'* acts of symbolic resistance in Brazil, these same actions were no longer perceived as acceptable and comprehensible within the framework of the biennale, casting a shadow on the presumed inclusivity of international exhibition culture. Likewise, as critics of domestic diversity policies like Hylton and Araeen have argued, the desire for an other that represents itself within the categories provided may be just as limiting and problematic. The "peripheral insider" hence faces a dilemma: to what degree should he or she accept the positive stereotyping associated with inclusionary institutional politics, or else, how could the terms of inclusion be redefined or rejected — but without losing visibility?

Between Auto-Ethnography and Ethnographic Self-Fashioning

An interesting line of work where we can observe these questions being negotiated are autobiographical practices that artists have used to explore their ethnic and cultural identities. Using predominantly narrative video and film, artists like Mona Hatoum, Chantal Akerman, Trinh T. Minh Ha and Zineb Sedira have articulated experiences specific to the conditions of diaspora, exile, and migration, producing narratives that are highly subjective and often very personal. To describe these practices, Catherine Russell and Mary-Louise Pratt have used the term "auto-ethnography" (Russell 1999, 275–314; Pratt 1992). Ethnographic knowledge production, it has been argued, is intimately tied in with processes of translation: David Pocock, for example, has suggested that the basis of anthropology is a complex act of cultural translation whereby one culture's world is interpreted and written for the comprehension of another (Pocock 1961, 88). While in the discipline of ethnography it is the ethnographer who exercises authority and authorship over the production of meaning in the culture he or she studies (Asad 1986), works of creative auto-ethnography, so it has been argued, seek to reverse these relations of power and complicate cross-cultural perceptions (Pratt 1992, 7).[33] In these practices, the cultural other itself assumes the position of the speaker while rejecting any demands for objectivity or authenticity by favouring the personal, the specific and the subjective. Moreover, auto-ethnographic works are often motivated, as Catherine Russell has written, by an understanding that "personal history is implicated in larger social formations and historical processes" (Russell 1999, 176), hence casting into question the very notion that cultures have authentic and objectively measurable traits that distinguish them from others.

For example, in the video *Measures of Distance* (1988), Lebanese-born Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum — who resides in Britain — translates into English a series of letters she has received from her mother who lives in Beirut, expressing her love as well as her great sorrow over their separation (both from

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[33] Mary-Louise Pratt defines auto-ethnography as instances in which "colonised subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the coloniser's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, auto-ethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (Pratt 1992, 7).

their ancestral home in Palestine as much as from each other). In one of her letters, Hatoum's mother recalls a moment of physical closeness she shared with her daughter during a reunion at their family home in Beirut. According to Hatoum's mother, witnessing this intimacy upset her husband who, feeling excluded from the bond between mother and daughter, reacted angrily and dismissively. As the letter is read out to the viewer, intimate photographs Mona Hatoum had taken of her mother are shown superimposed by layers of colour and Arabic writing that create a sense of distance between the "here and now" of the moment of reading, and the distant place of longing where Hatoum's mother speaks from. It is through Hatoum's act of translating and addressing herself to an English-speaking audience that allows for the personal experience of Hatoum's mother to be understood within the larger historical and political frame of the Palestinian diaspora and her inability to return to her ancestral land.[34]

In contrast, *Mother Tongue* (2002), an early work by French-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira (likewise resident in Britain), witnesses the cultural and linguistic ruptures that resulted from her family's successive displacement. While the artist grew up in France, adopting French as her native language, her Algerian parents continued to speak Arabic as immigrants in France. Like Hatoum, Sedira later settled in England, where she received her education as an artist and raised her daughter in an English-speaking environment. In her video installation, Sedira depicts three separate encounters between herself, her daughter, and her mother. As her daughter and her mother no longer have a language in common, Sedira acts as a translator between generations, while simultaneously sharing with her public the sad and awkward inability of both her daughter and her mother to communicate with each other. *Mother Tongue* represents diaspora as an experience of discontinuity and rupture between generations and traditions, but also as a condition of translation: "my mother never learned French properly because she wanted to show her rejection of the French language and behaviour after the war of independence," Sedira says, and points out how her parents have often experienced racism and discrimination in France, where they lived mostly

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[34]   A more comprehensive description and analysis of Hatoum's work can be found in Morra (2007).

for economic reasons: "my parents felt a sense of failure that they had to bring up their children in that culture."[35]

In these works, Hatoum and Sedira act as translators in multiple ways: between generations and cultures, but also between their own experience as migrants and diasporic citizens and a wider — largely Western — audience. While the artist's own identities and biographies act as the works' material, translation is their form. By focusing on the often-overlooked experiences of migrant women, both artists became seminal protagonists of a nascent feminist art history, and their works have become key references within debates around art and postcolonial identity politics.[36] At the same time, as among the first female artists of non-Western origins to be given substantial mainstream institutional recognition in Western Europe, these works at least in part occupied the newly created spaces of cultural diversity, setting a precedent for the future inclusion of other minority and non-Western artists. And yet, it is precisely the experience of being labelled an ethnic minority artist — pigeonholed, as Sedira later critically reflected upon own position in the art world — that may explain why both Hatoum and Sedira eventually moved towards broader historical and political subject matter, hoping that, as Sedira stated, "audiences might read my work as more universal" — and hence not reducible to the autobiographical or the artists' self-representation as a cultural other (McGonagle and Sedira 2006, 626).

However, with the widespread circulation and recognition of their work, artists like Hatoum and Sedira have inspired a new generation of artists of non-western or minority cultural origins to experiment with exploring their own

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[35]   According to a private e-mail exchange with Zineb Sedira in January 2015 in preparation for the screening of *Mother Tongue* within the framework of the exhibition *The Translator's Voice* at the Fonds Régional de L'Art Contemporain de Lorraine (FRAC), Metz, France. Also see: McGonagle & Sedira 2006, 617–619.

[36]   Hatoum's work was featured in a number of prominent museum exhibitions exploring identity politics, such as the touring show *Interrogating Identity* in the U.S. 1991–1993, *Identity and Alterity* at the Venice Biennale 1995, *Inclusion: Exclusion* at the Steirischer Herbst Festival in 1996 and *Shifting Identities* at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 2008. Zineb Sedira's work has been shown widely in Western Europe, including at London's Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva) and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Both Hatoum's and Sedira's works are now part of Tate Modern's collection.

cultural identities and trajectories.[37] As any visitor to the 2015 Venice Biennial would confirm, the use of translation devices like captions and voice-overs, and links between an artist's identity and their work have become a "formula" recognised and sought-after both in institutional and commercial art worlds. In a series of ironic video commentaries titled *Notes From My Mobile* (2014), the Istanbul-based artist Burak Delier commented on this phenomenon: musing on how to increase his international visibility as an artist, Delier suggests that "people want to see a particular subjectivity," especially from artists residing in or coming from non-Western countries (Delier 2014, transcript).[38] Speaking directly to his viewers, Delier reasons that as a young artist from Turkey,

> … my concerns should be about identity, or to do with historical background. … This [lack of cultural references in my work] creates a lot of problems in the recognition of my work in the world. Middle Eastern, Pakistani, Indian, or Chinese, Japanese artists are expected to use traditional forms in dealing with contemporary issues. Because these mediums are thought of as their identity, as their reality. […] This formula stands strong in the field of contemporary art, I have to do something fitting this formula. Using traditional mediums … Miniatures, carpets … whatever it is that determines Turkey, whatever is traditional or is about modernisation … I need to do something about them. (ibid.)

Here, Delier ironically contemplates what could be called a strategy of ethnographic self-fashioning (Clifford 1988; Greenblatt 1980, 2) as a way to attract the attention of the international art world. At the same time, he implicitly criticises auto-ethnography as a form of creative self-exploitation that the non-Western and cultural minority artist, de facto still excluded from the aesthetic universalism of the West, must embark on in order to achieve international recognition. Delier is conscious of the dynamics of the international art market as a place where the self-representations of translated hybrid cultural identities obtain commodity value, once again echoing Žižek's sharp criticism of multiculturalism as a form of racism where the cultural other, while invited to participate, maintains a marginalised status by accepting to limit its own participation by speaking about itself (Žižek 1997, 44).

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[37]   This line of work remains popular, such as in international art schools, as I will show in the next chapter. For a thorough exploration of diasporic aesthetics and authorship see Mercer 2008; Naficy 1999 / 2001; Bartoloni 2008.

[38]   Source: transcript of the video installation, *Notes From My Mobile*, courtesy by Burak Delier.

Nomadic Artists and Cultural Ambassadors

Non-Western or ethnic minority artists are not the only ones affected by the challenges of translation. In recent decades, international residency and cultural exchange programs have sprung up across the world, and currently form a booming part of international exhibition culture — with a great demand for residency and travel opportunities coming particularly from the "emerging" artists of the younger generation. Institutionalised forms of mobility, as Andrea Glauser (2009) and Peter Schneemann (2010) have argued, have become instrumental for artists regardless of their background to situate themselves in the world and develop their artistic persona with a corresponding cultural narrative that can prevail in the global marketplace of cultural production. Glauser and Schneemann, who have studied in particular the effect of mobility on the biographies of Western artists (largely ignoring the limited mobilities of many non-Western artists),[39] have observed a gradual decline in the importance of an artist's local cultural situatedness in favour of the nomadic and temporary domesticity of the residency studio, be it in New York, Paris, Tokyo, Warsaw, or Johannesburg. In a globalised art world, displacement, cosmopolitanism, and the embrace of situational and site-specific encounters have come to be taken as proof of an artist's originality and authenticity, Schneemann has argued, at least among Western artists (Schneemann 2010, 279–280). Schneemann quotes Miwon Kwon (2000), who saw an inherent link between mobility and social validation:

> Among many of my art and academic friends, the success and viability of one's work is now measured in proportion to the accumulation of frequent flyer miles. The more we travel for work, the more we are called upon to provide institutions in other parts of the country and the world with our presence and services; the more we give into the logic of nomadism, one could say, as pressured by a mobilised capitalist economy, the more we are made to feel wanted, needed, validated, and relevant. (33)

Hito Steyerl (2008) has noted how easily the nomadic lifestyle — "hopping" from

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[39] Unfortunately, most research on artist mobility (Foster 1995; Schneemann 2006; Glauser 2009; Kravagna 2006; Rodriguez 2011) focuses on the mobility of Western artists and their encounters with cultural others, frequently critiquing the relations of power in this encounter as well as pointing to their colonial histories. I am not aware of any research addressing specifically the (limited) mobilities of non-Western artists.

one residency to the next — can be identified as one of the instances in which the artist approximates and emulates what Aihwa Ong has called the "flexible" citizen," the late-capitalist self-entrepreneur and travelling salesman (Steyerl 2008, 295).[40] Living in temporary accommodations and frequently changing social environments and communities,[41] and perpetually looking for new projects and commissions, life and work blur into an on-going series of temporary cross-cultural encounters, driven by a narrative of opportunity, staged in financially and socially precarious circumstances, and held together by acts of translation (for most residencies today, fluency in English as the art world's *lingua franca* is required). Likewise, the experience acquired while working abroad has been conceptualised in economic terms: artists discover the symbolic capital of new "stories to tell" (Glauser 2009, 264); they perform the necessary "relationship work" (237) to develop their careers; and they sharpen their cross-cultural skills by facing challenging cross-cultural encounters (261). They might even, as Hal Foster has suggested in his famous essay on "The Artist as Ethnographer," discover and engage an "authentic" cultural other — or simply rediscover themselves in the role of the other. [42]

Drawing from this reading of institutionalised mobility as a form of capital accumulation and production, Schneemann and Glauser pointed out that large international residency programmes often operate along the lines of what they call the "shop window principle" (Schneemann 2006, 279; Glauser 2009, 267). What they mean is that studio programs like the International Studio and

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[40]   For the notion of the artist as self-entrepreneur, see Gielen 2009 and 2010.

[41]   It is interesting to note how the term "community" has frequently come to be used in the context of residency programmes in the sense of a local social body that artists are encouraged to interact with. In contrast to the artists' nomadic lives, the "community" tends to be construed as static, locally rooted, and culturally pre-determined, while at the same time constituting a resource and a site of artistic discovery and inspiration.

[42]   Foster observed that for Western artists, the encounter with the foreign other produces "values like authenticity, originality, and singularity, banished under critical taboo from postmodernist art, return as properties of the site, neighborhood, or community engaged by the artist" (306). But as artists draw from the foreign site or community, their relationship often becomes exploitative: "despite the best intentions of the artist, only limited engagement of the sited other is effected. Almost naturally, the focus wanders from collaborative investigation to 'ethnographic self-fashioning,' in which the artist is not decentred as much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise" (306). While this critique chiefly concerns Western artists in search of the cultural other, his critique could be inversed to conceptualise the position of non-Western artists in international institutions: their practice is presumed to be authentic, original, and singular as long as the artist stays "faithful" to their presumed ethnic identity and cultural contexts.

Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York or the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris — both large facilities that accommodate dozens of international artists simultaneously — act like international shopping malls where each artist offers a "window" into a different culture. "Along with the name of the artist," Schneemann has noted, "the name of the dispatching country is to be found on each door plate" (Schneemann 2006, 278). The architectural layout of the residency studio hence represents a kind of global cultural geography where each artist represents their own home country as a cultural "ambassador" of sorts; an institutionalised cultural translator-in-residence. And in the accompanying events programmes that seek to introduce visiting artists to local publics, artists are routinely asked to elaborate on their country of origin and how their origin informs what they do.[43]

An interesting case to observe the "shop window principle" at work might be the South Korean artist Kimsooja, whose career took off after a 1992 residency at MoMA PS1, unfolding almost exclusively outside her native South Korea.[44] In simple terms, Kimsooja's practice could be described as the work of carrying over traditional Koran everyday objects into the gallery space while simultaneously charging them with a discourse that mainly addresses itself to foreign, i.e. non-Korean audiences.[45] Her most well-known series, *To Breathe: Bottari* (dates variable) includes ready-made "bundles" of traditional Korean bedsheets that Kimsooja frames as references to female domesticity and Korean patriarchal society; as materialisations of women's displacement and societal marginalisation; or as spiritual or ceremonial objects containing "buried

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[43]   Taking into account the unequal presence of countries in international residency programs like the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, where France operates 140 studios, Germany 20, Switzerland 19, and Turkey 1, these institutions could also be reframed in the context of a global cultural economy, similar to the situation at the Venice Biennial, where participation is largely dependent upon the economic capability and political will of each participating country.

[44]   According to the biography available on the artist's website.

[45]   Kim Sooja has stated in an interview with Esther Eunsil Kho that "Unike Korean audiences, some audiences in Western countires read my work more significantly and profoundly … most people in Korea see, for example, Bottari, as one of the many bottaris, being found in our daily lives around the country, so it cannot be distinguished from their daily life … the Western people as Westerners seem to read well the formalistic and conceptual structures in the context of art history. Westerners look at certain meanings in a comprehensive way of understanding, including issues such as globalisation, migration, feminism or identity." See Esther Eunsil Kho, "Korean Border-Crossing Artists in the New York Artworld: An Examination of the Artistic, Personal, and Social Identities of Do-Ho Suh, Kimsooja, and Ik-Joong Kang." Ph.D thesis, 2006, 223.

memories" of love, fertility, and domestic life of the past (Haenel 2005, 96–100; Sun Jung Kim 2001). As Birgit Haenel has speculated, Kimsooja's success on the international art market may not only be due to her use of colourful fabrics that tacitly encourage "exotic fantasies about oriental femininity" among Western viewers (100), but also due to the artists' constructed public persona as a self-identified cultural other whose work is based chiefly on translated cultural references (100–102) that are unfamiliar, and unverifiable, to her Western audience. Not surprisingly, Birgit Haenel draws the analogy of the artist as a merchant of exotic goods on a global marketplace of identities: like any merchant, he or she must not only accommodate the buyer's desires, but speak the buyer's language to sell.

There is, then, a lingering suspicion that the mobility of artists is not only closely integrated into a global neoliberal economy of circulation and value production, but also tied in with existing centre-periphery power relations. Obviously, due to numerous reasons — political, financial, circumstantial — not all artists have equal access to international mobility, and hence to an international exhibition culture where artists and artworks are constantly on the move. An artist whose work reflects, among other things, on these politics of mobility and the ensuing need for translations, is Emily Jacir. In a project titled *Where We Come From* (2001–2003), Jacir addressed herself to Palestinians living in exile and asked: "if I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" This question acted as the point of departure for a series of actions that took place on the territories of Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. Jacir, who had grown up in Saudi Arabia, Italy, and the U.S., and who holds U.S. citizenship, recognised the fact that her U.S. passport offered her a privileged mobility that permitted her access to specific places that many other fellow members of the Palestinian diaspora no longer have access to, left without a possibility to visit Israel, or many of the sites from which Palestinians were expelled in 1948. The yearnings of her collaborators were simple — to visit family; to put flowers on a grave; to play football with a Palestinian boy; to water a tree; to take a family portrait, or to spend a free day in Jerusalem. Osama, born in Beit Jalla, but living in Delaware, wished to: "Spend a day enjoying Jerusalem freely. I always wanted to go there without any fear, without feeling that I might

be stopped and asked for my I.D. … I need special permission to go to Jerusalem and if I go without permission I will be fined and imprisoned."[46]

Each request — translated both into Arabic and English to, crucially, address both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers alike, regardless of their relation to Palestine — is then accompanied by evidence, such as a map or a photograph, that the artist has actually been there and fulfilled it. As T.J. Demos (2003) has written, the artist becomes a travelling "service provider" and nomadic translator for the potentially never-ending task of "reassembling the splinters of diaspora into a single place, into some form of narrative community" (70), or, as Naoki Sakai has put it, create "continuity … at the point of discontinuity" (Sakai 1997, 14). But *Where We Come From* also makes us aware how border regimes and the containment of mobility have a profound impact on who is able to join international exhibition culture and who isn't. As opposed to European or North American artists, artists residing in Africa, the Middle East, Russia, China, or Asia are often unable to travel to the largest centres of global art like New York, London, Basel, or Venice because they are unable to secure funding for their trips, don't speak the language, or are simply denied visas.

The work of Western-based residency programs that focus on hosting non-Western artists would make an interesting case for further study; such as, for example, the London-based *Magic of Persia* foundation.[47] Working in collaboration with the likewise London-based Delfina Foundation, Magic of Persia's stated goal is the international promotion of young artists from Iran. In pursuing that aim, the foundation does more than merely invite selected Iranian artists to London and manage their residencies. Rather, their institutional mission could be conceived of as a form of translation — as the complex task of making visible, legible and, ultimately, commercially available the work of artists from a geopolitical and geographic "outside" to the Western audience and art market.[48] It's a complex task that ranges from obtaining visitor visas to

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[46]   Work details obtained from:
       http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/emily_jacir (accessed 12 January 2016). Also see Demos 2003, 69–78.
[47]   Website: http://www.magicofpersia.com (accessed 30 June, 2016).
[48]   Information based on *Magic of Persia*'s mission statement and program description, found online under: http://www.magicofpersia.com/index.php?rel=about_us, as well as

transcribing, subtitling, dubbing, documenting, and contextualising the selected artists' work for the London audience, and mentoring artists in the process. The benefit artists enjoy in such a programme is, one could argue, preeminently that of being translated; and hence made visible, accessible and relatable for the global art world, its publics and markets.

Artists and the Geopolitics of Translation

The case of Iranian contemporary artists in the West is particularly interesting to consider in light of the ongoing geopolitical antagonisms between Iran and the West. A similar situation presents itself with artists from China: in an essay titled "Entropy; Chinese Artists, Western Art Institutions, A New Internationalism," Hou Hanru (1994), a Chinese-born and U.S.-based art critic and curator, traced how the Western art world first took interest in China despite a widespread lack of knowledge about Chinese culture, history, or language. Hanru notes that curiosity in Chinese artistic avant-gardes grew exponentially in the early 1990s, triggered by the end of the cold war and the 1989 Tiananmen Square event. "The event … exposed the reality of a political violence and a totalitarian ideology in the country," Hanru explains, speculating that the media representation of this event "awakened the humanist conscience of Westerners" (56). Later, the "miracle" of China's economic growth since the late 1990s and its integration into a global neoliberal economy as a production hub for Western consumers created new cultural, societal, and academic ties between China and the West that were, at the same time, shaped by the larger economic and geopolitical forces between the two. Hanru criticises that in this context, exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art in Western institutions frequently reinforced a sense of "ideological superiority" (56, 57): instead of focusing on the artistic achievements of China's artistic avant-garde, the Western art market privileged the opportunism of the *Political Pop* and *Cynical Realism* movements (76) that catered for the Western art market with the very same (visually interpreted) clichés about China that already made the news.

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http://mopcap.com/about/. I have received further complementary information in an e-mail exchange with *Magic of Persia* artistic director Fereshte Moosavi, London, June 2015.

Hanru has pointed out how the circulation of culture tends to be directed by ideological, cultural, and economic affinities and fault lines: artists whose work addresses itself to foreign audiences by acknowledging or responding to existing narratives and stereotypes, and hence artists that produce cultural translations that confirm pre-existing cross-cultural perceptions, tend to receive greater visibility than those who reject or ignore them. The same phenomenon has been observed in the international marketplace for literature and translation: as Lawrence Venuti has pointed out, most writers from non-Western countries either already write directly for foreign audiences, or their success tends to be circumstantial, affected by how seamlessly the foreign "voice" integrates into already existing views (Venuti 1998, 125).[49]

In regards to China, one artist probably exemplifies this phenomenon better than any other: Ai Weiwei. Well-known for spectacular and costly installations and performances in art institutions and biennials around the world, Ai — who lived in New York for twelve years and holds a degree from Parsons' School of Design — frequently uses his position as a native Chinese with exposure to the global art world to speak publicly about China's human rights abuses, and to criticize China's lack of freedom of speech and democracy. In return, he is consistently framed by curators, art institutions, and the Western media as a fearless dissident artist that has "never been afraid to shatter the most potent symbols of Chinese culture and politics," as well-known journalist Christiane Amanpour put it.[50] The large Western following he has earned by cultivating this image led to substantial pressure on the Chinese government when Ai was detained in 2013 for assumed tax evasion: almost immediately after his

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[49] With respect to what makes a bestselling translation, Venuti writes that "the success of translations is perhaps most tangible and easy to explain where fiction addresses real social issues of the domestic reader while providing a universe of discourse that is easily identifiable with" (Venuti 1998, 125). Venuti cites Reza Dudovitz (1990, 47–48), who writes that "the narrative strategy is twofold: on the one hand, if the text is to speak to current issues, the novelist must create a world the reader recognises. On the other, the escapist nature of the fiction demands a certain degree of fantasy. Simplicity of language, reliance on stereotypical and trite images, the absence of psychological subtlety, and readily identifiable characters permit the reader easy access to the imaginative world because the values these characters represent are obvious and well known to the reader."

[50] Christiane Amanpour, "The Power of Art and the Internet for Chinese Dissident," (CNN, 16 March 2010, transcript), http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1003/16/ampr.01.html (accessed 30 May 2016).

detention, prominent figures and institutions from the Western art world raised their voices to uphold Ai's presumed innocence. London's Tate Modern wrote "Release Ai Weiwei" on its façade; *e-flux* mobilised its global readership, and even the U.S. department of state issued a statement, calling for his release and noting that "the detention of artist and activist Ai Weiwei is inconsistent with the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all Chinese citizens."[51] Upon his release, Ai turned the experience of his detention into a series of dioramas, titled *S.A.C.R.E.D.,* and showed them during his 2015 solo show at the Royal Academy of Art in London.

Who does Ai Weiwei address as an artist, activist, and media personality? On the one hand, he runs a Chinese blog and Twitter feed that, even though banned in China, can be accessed by Chinese living abroad as well as through proxy servers in China itself, and as such addresses itself to a Chinese audience.[52] On the other hand, his international activity as an artist provides him with what is almost certainly one of the highest incomes of any living artist,[53] permitting the maintenance of enormous artistic production facilities and support staff.[54] In his hybrid role as an artist-activist, Ai hence appears to perform a bold balancing act between China and the West: while his outspoken personality, his critical stance of the Chinese government and his pompous exhibitions earned him celebrity status in Europe and North America, with art institutions often offering themselves as platforms, the level of support and attention earned simultaneously appears to provide him with a considerable level of critical autonomy, producing a speaker position from which he may sustain his activism.

A particularly interesting — and paradoxical — aspect to explore concerning Ai's role as a cultural translator might however be his role in

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[51]   Mark C. Toner (U.S. Department of State), "Daily Press Briefing" (April 4, 2011), http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/04/255484.htm (accessed 30 May 2016).

[52]   Ai Weiwei's blog is written in Chinese, but is also being translated into English: see http://aiwwenglish.tumblr.com; twitter feed: https://twitter.com/aiww?lang=en

[53]   According to auction database website askart.com, Ai Weiwei's sales volume of 2015 reached nearly 18 million dollars.

[54]   See Perl 2013 as well as: "The New Orientalism: An Interview with Dan Vukovich" (Parts I + II), *The North Star*, 2013, http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=10436, http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=10427 (accessed 30 May 2016).

government-sanctioned construction megaprojects, such as the showcase "Bird's Nest" stadium in Beijing, built on the occasion of the 2008 Summer Olympics; it may be here precisely where Ai's shifting position may be recognised more clearly. In a film titled *Bird's Nest — Herzog & De Meuron in China* (2008), the Swiss filmmakers Christoph Schaub and Michael Schindhelm documented Ai's role in the construction of the stadium: commissioned by the Chinese government but lacking experience with large-scale construction projects in China, Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron hired Ai as a local collaborator, tasked with assisting them in designing and implementing a building project in a manner that would please both their commissioners from the Chinese government as well as the Chinese public.[55] In the film, Ai is portrayed not only as a designer, but also as an all-round cultural translator and negotiator between the various parties involved, helping Herzog and De Meuron succeed with their project and deliver it on time under the most complex of circumstances. Here, the artist's role is reminiscent of a key figure in colonial governance. In order for the colonial power to manage their local affairs, conduct trade, and acquire and disseminate information, they depended on a class of bilingual native "compradors" and "informants" to act as collaborators, translators, and facilitators (Robinson 1997b, 10; Dabashi 2011, 40–41).[56] Beyond being a speaker of both the foreigners' and the locals' language, this individual tended to be somewhat of a societal outsider who was capable of observing his or her native culture from a certain distance; perhaps even an "analytic" intellectual or commentator (Clifford 1983, 139; Dabashi 2011, 15–16). In other words, he or she was one who collaborated with the colonial power and was willing to trade in

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[55]   Ironically, despite his own participation, Ai Weiwei denounced the very same Olympics "as a feel-good whitewash on China's repressive, market-hungry government" (Cotter 2011). He also publicly regretted participating in the designing of the stadium. See "China artist Ai Weiwei says he regrets designing Beijing Olympics Bird's Nest," *The Telegraph* (March 5, 2012), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/9123705/ China-artist-Ai-Weiwei-says-he-regrets-designing-Beijing-Olympics-Birds-Nest.html (accessed 30 May 2016).

[56]   According to Dabashi (2011, 40–41), "the Portuguese word *comprador* dates from 1840 and refers to a Chinese agent engaged by a European business interest in China to oversee its native employees and to act as an intermediary in its business affairs. Later, it was extended to refer to any native servant in the service of a colonial commercial interest." For a contemporary comparison also see Emily Apter's book chapter titled "Translation after 9/11: Mistranslating the Art of War" (Apter 2006, 12–22), where she explores the precarious role of native Iraqi translators in the service of the U.S military during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

their capabilities as cultural translators in return for money and status.[57]

In his highly polemical book titled *Brown Skin, White Mask,* Hamid Dabashi, a U.S.-based scholar of comparative literature, argued that some of the best-selling authors of world literature have been such native informants: focusing on a number of highly successful authors of Middle Eastern origin yet resident in Europe or North America whose works have risen to prominence before America's military involvements in Iraq — Azar Nafisi, Ayan Hirsi Ali, and Salman Rushdie — Dabashi makes the criticism that these writers have produced neo-orientalist literary narratives that, beyond just addressing themselves to Western readers, have provided legitimation to Western ideological superiority vis-à-vis the Muslim world, indirectly soliciting military action (84–108).[58] Dabashi is outspoken in his view of the comprador intellectual as a morally bankrupt attention-seeker, serving neo-colonial interests while simply advancing their own self-gain (41). Not unexpectedly, his writing has been disputed, including by the accused authors themselves, but if anything, his critique demonstrates the tensions that surround the cultural translator figure, especially in a set of antagonistic geopolitical relations. This is precisely when the intermediary is inevitably accused as a "traitor," once again recalling the proverbial notion of the "translator traitor" (Buden 2008). Visual artists working across geopolitical divides are likely to be exposed to these same tensions, particularly so when working at the interstices between art, politics, and the media.

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[57]   Native informants also play a substantial role within (colonial) anthropology. Regarding the ethics of collaboration between the anthropologist and the native informant see Metcalf 1998, 327.

[58]   Dabashi (2011, 18) draws a parallel to the European orientalism of the 19th century, arguing that it is now representatives from the "Orient" themselves who enable the continuation of these narrations: "What we are witnessing, as a result, is a whole new mode of knowledge production about the Orient (basically, the entire world beyond Western Europe and North America). … The native informers have digested and internalised this language [of knowledge production] and now speak it with the authority of natives. There is no longer any need for 'expert knowledge' when you can hear the facts from the horse's mouth."

Documentary Transmissions

This leads me to yet another "scene of translations." Observing the growing popularity of documentary practices in international exhibition culture during roughly the last twenty years, writers, academics, and curators like Mark Nash and Okwui Enwezor have declared a "documentary turn" (Nash 2005; Enwezor 2010), read as a response to an increasing shortage of support for documentary film within mainstream media, cinema, and television (especially for more experimental and less profitable forms of filmmaking), and hence a greater desire for documentarists to look for new audiences in new places (Lind/Steyerl 2008, 14; Ellis 2007, 57–60). At the same time, the documentary turn — which has also been associated with large-scale exhibitions like Catherine David's *Documenta X* and Enwezor's *Documenta 11* — coincided with a growing interest among artists in the narrative form. Claire Gilman, Margaret Sundell, and T.J. Demos have written of a desire among artists to "tell stories," which they interpret as a response to the fundamental increase in complexities and uncertainties of a globalising society, with storytelling re-emerging as a way of making sense (Gilman et al. 2010, 67; Demos 2010, 84–86). Demos attributes the desire to engage with stories to what he calls "a widespread failure of political inclusivity" — the perceived fracturing of society into separate spheres and "parallel societies," some of which possess neither political representation nor official institutions and organisations (Demos 2010, 86).

Working out of these conditions, artists act as "voice-givers" dedicated to those whose social and political voice is absent from mainstream representations and discourses. In this reading, the growing popularity of documentary and narrative work reflects a changing role of art within society: the work of art acts as a form of knowledge production in the name of various others. It *documents*, *explores*, *investigates*, *gives a voice*, and therefore *transmits* and *translates,* acting, as Maria Hlavajova put it, as "a site of the political imagination" where we may understand, reflect on, and re-imagine the conditions in which we live,[59] notably by listening to the voice of those whose lived experience remains outside of our

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[59]   Maria Hlavajova, opening remarks, 3rd *Former West* Research Congress, 2013. Online video: https://vimeo.com/50750585 (accessed 28 January 2016).

own field of perception. At the same time, by means of their virtuality, documentary transmissions are less burdened by the limitations that "material" artworks are subject to: not only do they travel easily; they can be shown in multiple locations simultaneously and cheaply (though some installation-based documentary work does come with very high production costs). While documentaries tend to have a difficult stand in the art market, their social and political relevance as well as their ability to travel seamlessly, makes them inherently valuable for non-commercial art and educational contexts such as museums, universities, biennials, and non-profit art spaces.

By "representing one's life world on film," Mark Westmoreland has written, documentaries inevitably "entail acts of translation" (Westmoreland 2009, 43). In a similar vein, Nicolas Bourriaud has noted that the documentary image tends to "speak" from an "elsewhere," offering a perception of an other that is otherwise invisible, unknown, or inaccessible to the target audience (Bourriaud 2009, 31–32). That "elsewhere" can, of course, take many forms: it may be a geographic other, such as in Ursula Biemann's *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–2007), where Biemann explores the complex logistics of transnational trade and migration from and through the southern Sahara; it may be a political other such as in Walid Raad's and Jayce Salloum's *Up to The South* (1993), where the artists give voice to the residents of South Lebanon and document their strategies of resistance against Israeli occupation; or it may be a social other, such as in Artur Żmijewski's *Selected Works* (2007–2012), where the artist documented the day-to-day lives of uneducated labourers and the working class. In all these instances, the document "speaks" from a certain social, cultural, political zone while simultaneously addressing itself to an audience situated outside of that same zone. This is not to claim that the documentary is purely mimetic of reality, directly "making available" what the audience would otherwise have no access to: along with Bourriaud and Westmoreland, I would argue, rather, that documentary practice can be framed as a complex form of cultural translation, with the documentarist acting in the role of the translator.

An interesting case study to observe how documentary and narrative strategies intersect with processes of cultural translation is the above-mentioned

film, *Up To the South* (1993), an experimental documentary by Jayce Salloum and Walid Raad. Salloum, a Canadian filmmaker of Lebanese origin, and Raad, an artist who migrated from Lebanon to the United States in the 1980s, shared a desire to bear witness to the resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon from 1985 to 2000. Motivated by their perception that the predominant Western understanding of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict ignored the experience of the inhabitants of Southern Lebanon, and that their voices "should be made available" (Raad 2007) to audiences that otherwise had no access to them, the filmmakers focused particularly on narratives of captivity and torture by former detainees of the Khiam prison — an infamous former detention and torture facility run by the South Lebanon Army, an Israeli proxy militia. On the basis of several dozen interviews, they gathered a large set of voices, of which some recount their experiences as detainees; some defend and argue for armed struggle with Israel, and some highlight the necessity of social and intellectual resistance. *Up To The South* is an exceptional documentary in many ways: by allowing their interviewees to speak freely, without authorial commentary or editorial intervention, the filmmakers refrained from moulding the plurality of voices into the kind of coherent, straightforward narrative that documentary films typically present. Not only do they refuse to identify their protagonists, their political affiliations, or roles in the events; Raad and Salloum also provide their viewers with little political and historical context (with the exception of the brief appearance of a voice-over in the middle of the film). Their protagonists' testimonies hence come to form a disjointed narrative where the story is consistently broken, presented without clear beginning or end.

One of the film's most interesting aspects, however, is how some of its protagonists critique and question the filmmakers' very intentions in making the film as well as the spectators' position as onlookers. *Up To the South* was made with the stated desire to translate — both literally and metaphorically — narrations of a conflict that were absent from the media coverage the conflict received in North America, where both Raad and Salloum were living at the time. As members of the Lebanese diaspora, Raad and Salloum not only enjoyed access to the conflict-ridden territories of the Lebanese South (where they spent over a year gathering footage), but were able to draw from existing relations with

locals. Funded by Canadian and American grants, their work was a priori intended for a North American audience,[60] as is also evidenced by the presence of English-language credits and subtitles.[61] Some of Raad's and Salloum's interviewees seem acutely aware of this translation process, and appear to articulate their stance vis-à-vis their foreign audience through language. One witness portrayed in the film, for example, makes an active effort to speak in "American language" — as he puts it — presumably to more effectively convey his objection to Israel's occupation of South Lebanon to American viewers. Another witness, speaking in Arabic, expresses her disinterest in helping Western audiences gain access to the history of her struggle, refusing to be judged by them and thereby resisting the filmmakers' basic premise of translation. Yet others speak in French in what appears to be a middle ground; a diplomatic *lingua franca* of political and social commentary. While the filmmakers' embrace of multilingualism certainly reflects the multilingual nature of Lebanon itself (as well as its diaspora), it also recalls Naoki Sakai's question of how language articulates the relation between addressers and addressees, especially given the geopolitical imbalances between the North America and South Lebanon: what purpose and whose interests does it serve when voices from a community are translated for an audience elsewhere? In what terms, in what language does that translation take place, and to what effect?

After completing the film, Raad and Salloum continued to be confronted with the problem of address: as they were invited to various academic and cultural contexts to screen their film, they were consistently asked to introduce

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[60] One might speculate that their funding (from the Canada Council and Ohio State University) required them to abstain from overt political and ideological position-taking. Whatever the reasons, by doing so, Raad and Salloum also avoided some of the traps that anthropologists like Talal Assad have described with respect to anthropological work — namely to impose a generalising authorial voice over the individuality of the portrayed subjects; to make the ethnic, cultural, and political community portrayed in the film appear homogenous, or to reduce the often contradictory complexity of the lived experience of their protagonists (Asad 1986, 142).

[61] Subtitles are a subject worthy of further discussion and research. The presence of subtitles in film generally reflects the assumption that there is a distance between the spectator and the speaking subject that needs to be bridged, and that the speaking subject requires translation in order to communicate. This may become problematic in instances where non-normative or vernacular languages or dialects are being spoken, as this is often the case in documentary films. What degree of linguistic and cultural displacement is expected from the spectator? If subtitles are deemed necessary, should they paraphrase, or transcribe the speaking subject word by word? The paradox is that subtitling may aid comprehension, yet simultaneously cast the speaking subject into a position of alterity and thereby reproduce a normative, ethnocentric or classist gaze.

the kind of cultural, linguistic, geopolitical, and historical context that the film itself had avoided providing (Raad 2007). In fact, this common format of encounter, where documentary filmmakers are asked to contextualise and explain their work, became a key experience towards the development of Raad's subsequent body of work, *The Atlas Group,* which I will discuss elsewhere in this thesis. As I will show later, the dynamics of this encounter with the foreign audience might be one of the key instances in international exhibition culture where non-Western or ethnic minority artists are encouraged to take the position of cultural translators. Wherever an artists' or a filmmakers' work is perceived to engage with a cultural, social, or political "elsewhere," it is regarded as the filmmakers' task to bridge the gap with the audience, particularly so if the audience is situated at a social, geographic, or cultural distance to the film's place of enunciation. While my later chapter on Raad's work will allow me to elaborate more closely on the specific dynamics inherent to this specific type of encounter, the unidentified female protagonist whose voice introduces and ends *Up To the South* already identifies the core ethical problem: addressing herself directly to the viewer, she states that "I reject considering the Lebanese people or people from the third world as a research laboratory, for the West to analyse … Why should I become like a specimen? … As if the legitimacy of our struggle is a matter for the West or you to decide."

4

Case Study: Art School, a Scene of Translations

A key "scene of translations" that has so far gone unmentioned is art school. Like other institutions participating in and shaping the field of contemporary art, art schools are places where language and translation play an increasingly important role which has so far received little theoretical reflection — even as student bodies are rapidly diversifying in many places, reflecting the accelerating forces of globalisation within the art world at large. In what follows, I will take the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (subsequently referred to as SAIC) as a case study to explore how cultural diversity and international student recruitment within an educational environment produces problems of address and translation. This case study will show how the artistic and intellectual environment of an international art school like SAIC acts as a formative site, a "womb" (Bourriaud 2016) for the emergence of a global artist subject engaged in acts of translation; a microcosm where the larger dynamics of cultural globalisation play out.[62] Having myself been a student at SAIC between 2011 and 2012, my return to the school to undertake this exploratory field study in April 2015 has been motivated by my own observations during my time of study at the school, as well as a desire to substantiate and expand on these experiences in order to open up a more systematic discussion on the place of language and translation processes in international art schools.[63] While continuing the line of inquiry of the previous chapter, this chapter hence departs from the rest of this thesis in terms of methodology in so far as it was written on the basis of the above-mentioned studio visits and conversations. Thee lack of literature specifically addressing diversity issues in art school contexts (as well as how problems of language and translation affect artists in training) has motivated this methodological choice.

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[62]   Nicolas Bourriaud has written on art school as a decisive place that shapes and influences the art scene: "it sets the theoretical tone, valorises practices and know-how, and organises the foundations of primary information from which young artists take their cue" (Bourriaud 2016).

[63]   While having been a student at SAIC has provided me with privileged access to the school, none of the students interviewed for this purpose were previously familiar with my research, and I did not previously know any of them.

Founded in 1866 as a hybrid institution comprised of a museum (the Art Institute) and a school (the School of the Art Institute), SAIC operates as one of the United States' last operating museum schools today and teaches a diverse range of specialised Master of Arts (M.A.) and Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) programmes based on an interdisciplinary program structure whereby students are encouraged to cross the boundaries between artistic specialisations, and work both practically and theoretically. Not only do artists at SAIC regularly sit in class with artists of other specialisations, breaking down conventional categories such as sculpture, painting, or performance; they are also trained by and alongside art historians, theorists, and curators, making intellectual debate and exchange an integral part of the academic program. David Getsy, a professor at SAIC, has described the artist trained in his institution as one with a "conceptual, political and ethical understanding of artistic practice" whose work is "conceptually rigorous" and hence acquainted with, and responsive to, the gaze of diverse art publics and critics (Cappetta/Foumberg 2015). Intellectual and critical labour is a key aspect of SAIC's educational model: as Jason Foumberg has observed, "a student is ready for the world when they can justify the reason of their artworks' existence," adding that SAIC's culture of criticism is so pervasive that it is not rare that, after completing their practical education, artists add a year of theoretical study to develop their critical thinking, speaking, and writing abilities. But the acquisition of language in order to situate one's artistic work theoretically, defend it against criticism, or conceive of it as a form of knowledge, is not only a cornerstone of artistic education at SAIC; it also represents an essential component of the M.F.A. model of artists' education in America: as Jason Foumberg has noted, "what few art students entering graduate school may realise is that they will not only be tasked with developing the techniques of their practice but also refining how they talk about that practice" (ibid.).

At the same time, SAIC is a highly international institution that has steadily promoted foreign student enrolment and thereby gradually increased the diversity of its student population, effectively turning its classrooms, corridors, gallery spaces, screening rooms, cafeterias, and offices into zones of cross-

cultural encounter. At present, 30% of the school's graduate students are from abroad, with particularly large student groups hailing from China and South Korea — but the school also accommodates a sizeable number students from European, Iranian, Turkish, Mexican, Brazilian, Caribbean, Japanese, South African and Indian backgrounds. According to the SAIC's website, students from 54 countries are currently enrolled.[64] Studying at a school like SAIC is a privilege for many: as American student loans are generally not available to foreigners, many pay full tuition fees. The most competitive foreign students fund their degrees with grants from their home countries, or they receive merit-based funding packages from the school itself, or through international exchange programs such as the Fulbright programme. Simultaneously, foreign students in the U.S. study under a relatively strict visa regime where work is usually not permitted, and where the academic environment acts as a relatively closed social system, offering all essential services and support during the duration of the academic program — while simultaneously keeping the everyday economic, political, and social realities of life in the U.S. at a certain distance.

In this setting, where the self-imposed educational "exile" of international students meets an educational paradigm that celebrates creative self-expression and critical intellectual skills, art school becomes a veritable laboratory for cultural translation, and the questions that have guided this exploratory case study have been: how are cultural differences experienced and negotiated in the art school context? What happens when young artists coming from foreign or minority cultural contexts find themselves addressing peers and professors at the school that are unfamiliar with the ethnic, cultural, or social context that they come from? On what basis is criticism — as one of the most important activities art students participate in — possible when no shared cultural norms or knowledge can be taken for granted? If SAIC supports art practices that, as Jason Foumberg writes, engage with politics and realities outside of art or Western canonical art history, how can students share — or translate — the contexts, references, and experiences that inform their work? What types of norms do

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[64] Unfortunately, the school has not provided me with official foreign student enrolment figures for the purpose of this study. Some basic statistics, quoted here, are available on the school's website: http://www.saic.edu/about/historyandquickfacts/enrolment (accessed 30 May 2016).

these students face? To what degree do aspiring artists experience distance and the ensuing need for translations as a creative opportunity?[65]

The Artist Speaks

Historically, the idea that the artists should master language and obtain theoretical and intellectual training as part of their trade is a relatively recent phenomenon. In his book *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University,* art historian Howard Singerman (1999) has traced how artist's education in America gradually became incorporated into the university system throughout the post-war era, as the centre of modern art shifted from Europe towards the United States. Embedded into the university, art (and, by extension, the teaching of artists) underwent a gradual transformation: art was less and less concerned to the production of singular and sellable objects and instead evolved into a method for the production of knowledge, embracing the medium that is native to the university: language (155–156, 210). According to Singerman, a struggle between two paradigms of artist's education could be observed throughout the post-war era: on the one hand between a modern model of artistic education that privileged vision, perception, and nonverbal expression and which conceived of the artist as a "silent genius" — and, on the other hand, a postmodern model that shifted attention from the object toward its frames; from the product to its maker; from *l'art pour l'art* to art as intellectual, cultural, and political discourse, from the *artist* to *the artist as …* (Singerman 1999, 155;

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[65] In 2015, two Swiss art schools (ZHdK Zurich University of the Arts and HEAD Geneva University of Art and Design) launched an international collaborative research project titled *Art.School.Differences* whose purpose is to "research inequalities and normativities in the field of Higher Art Education." (See: http://blog.zhdk.ch/artschooldifferences/en/prelimi nary-study/) Based on a preliminary study by Seefranz & Saner (2012), the project asks questions similar to some of those in this chapter and aims to produce a set of recommendations to art schools to improve inclusiveness and counter racism (at the time of writing, these have however not yet been published). This chapter differs from the above-mentioned research project insofar as it does not make problems of discrimination and exclusion its main focus, but rather explores in what terms inclusion takes place, and the artistic challenges that even a successfully implemented diversity policy produces for those who are the subject of these acts of inclusion. I believe that exploring linguistic operations and processes of translation offers an alternative, complementary approach to theorising difference within international settings.

Michalka 2007).[66] The postmodern artist was not only an avid reader of the writings of Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, or Craig Owens, and accordingly understood the power of language to frame art objects, but essentially became his or her own most ardent critic and advocate (155). As Allan Kaprow ([1964] 1994) writes:

> Essentially, the task [of the artist] is an educational one. Artists are faced with an involved public, willy-nilly. It is not bent on hating them, and it is better to be loved well than loved to death. The duties of instruction in love fall primarily to the artists themselves. Their job is to place at the disposal of a receptive audience those new thoughts, new words, new stances even, that will enable their work to be better understood. … Traditionally, such responsibility has belonged to critics and, to some extent, dealers. But … today's artists are sharing this job at the urging of their own representatives. Indeed, they have done so well at it that the public, still afraid of being foolish in its newfound culture, will have its doubts allayed only by a reassuring word from the horse's mouth. Such artists no longer merely represent authority-as-creator; they are going to be urged more and more to become creator-as-authority.

For Singerman, a phenomenon that epitomises the evolution of artistic education and its absorption into institutions of knowledge production is the figure of the visiting artist: unlike full-time faculty members, the visiting artist enters the academic environment from the outside and speaks and teaches as "a journeyman … whose work must be made on site, whose presence is demanded, and who travels from installation to lecture, supported by a network of grants, alternative spaces and universities" (Singerman 1999, 159). Like traveling salesmen, visiting artists travel from one university to another, giving lectures, presenting current and past work, screening films, conducting question-and-answer-sessions — and hence devoting a significant part of their time and effort to speaking about their artistic practice as a means of making a living. For Singerman, this figure not only illustrates the growing importance for artists to address different audiences to make ends meet and disseminate their work, but also epitomises a process of professionalisation that has taken place within

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[66] Regarding the trope of *the artist as*, see Michalka 2007, 25. Concerning the adoption of knowledge-based and discursive strategies in art, Michalka highlights American conceptual artists like Vito Acconci, Judy Chicago, Dan Graham, Mary Kelly, Christine Kozlov, Adrian Piper, Yvonne Rainer, Faith Ringgold, Martha RosIer, Carolee Schneemann, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Faith Wilding. He also notes their particular "interest in lectures, seminars, publishing, magazines and research-driven curatorial activities," observing that all of these constitute "self-mediating" artistic strategies (25, translation own).

higher education in the arts. Because visiting artists are not employed as teachers but rather regard themselves as professional artists, they participate in and contribute to the professionalisation of artists' education by presenting themselves as role models, demonstrating how to successfully perform and inhabit the role of the artist both within the institutions of the art world, and thereby society at large.[67]

Since the publishing of Singerman's book in 1999, further changes have come to artists' education in the U.S. and internationally. Most notably, these include an ever-closer alignment between the university and corporate ideals, reframing, to some degree, the student-university relation as one between client and service provider, and leading universities to actively recruit and compete for fee-paying students worldwide, or even expand internationally by building campuses abroad.[68] While SAIC has not (yet) made that last step, the economics of artists' higher education are nevertheless important to consider as a factor that affects the outlook and prospects young artists have when joining the field. After years of tuition fee rises, an M.F.A. at a school like SAIC today costs students not blessed with financial aid more than $100,000, including tuition, board, and living expenses.[69] Such staggering price tags, and the fact that many talented students seem to remain able and keen to make such expenditures, certainly hints at a speculative view of education as a form of capital investment where a better school is not only more expensive, but where debt is compensated by a promise of future symbolic and financial returns.[70] In consequence, the pressure

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[67] Howard Singerman writes from his own experience as an art student: "In one assignment we were asked to invent an artist … and then to produce an oeuvre, to make slides and do the talk, to model a speech or slouch. We learned to run our own careers as well, to produce cards and catalogues and slides, and to attend openings, which were staged like rehearsals" (4).

[68] In this regard, it is interesting to note the recent incident of an entire class of MFA students voluntarily dropping out of University of Southern California Roski over what they perceived as the university's betrayal of their "time, focus, and investment," citing changes the university made to their program that were opposed to what was promised to them when they committed to the program. See Andrew R. Chow, "U.S.C. Fine Arts Students Drop Out in Protest," *The New York Times* (18 May 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/18/ arts/design/usc-fine-arts-studentsdrop-out-in-protest.html (accessed 30 May 2016).

[69] SAIC estimates the typical undergraduate student budget, including tuition, room, and board, at $57,130 per year, which sets the cost for a three-year BFA program at roughly $165,000. The MFA student budget is slightly lower, at $45,810 annually.
See: http://www.saic.edu/tuition/figureyourcosts/graduatestudentbudget/

[70] Regarding the daunting process of weighing risk against return in the context of MFA programs in America, see Fusco 2013.

on students to work towards these "returns" in their future careers as professional artists and creative practitioners is strong, and so does the need to understand and develop success strategies already during the academic course, such as how to manage the reception, dissemination, and discourse around one's own work; how to write successful grant and project proposals; and how to understand and respond to the demands of the market. The pressure to emerge from the M.F.A. program as an artist able to eventually make a living pushes students to identify whatever symbolic or cultural capital they have at their disposal to distinguish themselves within an incredibly competitive global marketplace of contemporary art. Mastering language also works towards that end: as Allan Kaprow put it as early as 1964, in order to survive, artists must be able to communicate in an eloquent and convincing manner that creates and sustains interest and attention.[71]

These developments and observations form the background of this explorative case study of the art school as a "scene of translations." Approaching a concrete institutional setting like SAIC in order to conduct such research naturally raises a number of methodological problems that need to be addressed first. At the outset, finding and approaching students to participate and share their experience necessitates defining a target group. As my experience has shown, it would be simplistic to assume that only foreign or non-native English-speaking students are familiar with problems of cultural translation, just as it would be an oversimplification to assume that all those coming from linguistically or culturally foreign or minority backgrounds necessarily experience translation as a challenge. I have hence addressed my call for artists to participate in this study to all those with "a strong awareness of cultural differences" (own quotation), and those who view the experience of "being included" — as Sarah Ahmed (2012) has put it — as potentially problematic, and are keen on reflecting on the terms under which these acts of inclusion take

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[71]   Language, of course, is not everything — the American MFA program also teaches young artists professional self-confidence. For example, by a priori calling all students "artists" or "colleagues," art schools like SAIC not only boost students' professional self esteem from day one, they also instil in them a sense of achievement that their creative pursuits are automatically interesting and worthwhile. Several foreign students I spoke with at SAIC pointed out how strange it was for them to be called "artists" as soon as they arrived at the school, coming from conservative environments where calling oneself an "artist" required a certain level of demonstrable achievement and societal recognition.

place. Communicating my research interests to the school and to prospective participants, I also expressed my desire to interview students whose work makes strong references to specific cultural contexts that their peers — such as faculty or students — are unlikely to be familiar with. Nearly all of those who responded to my call were ethnic minority or foreign students, and among the latter category, most were from non-Western countries. The interview process was student-centred and based on a qualitative model whereby the conversation followed a basic roster of questions that provided the participants ample space to recount their experiences in their own words, encouraging them to evaluate their own trajectory of artistic and intellectual growth at SAIC. I introduced each conversation, which lasted about two hours each, by asking about students' current work and/or their experiences during critique week,[72] and used their responses to gradually direct the conversation towards the research questions at hand.[73] The large majority of the 20 students I interviewed were enrolled within MFA programs; some of them had just completed their course of study and were able to look back to two years of experience at the school.[74] As this chapter does not fully adhere to the methodological protocols of social research, this chapter hence also cannot lay claim to conveying empirical truth. Rather, it should be read as an initial and subjective survey of some of the issues regarding language, translation and diversity that arise in the microcosm of the global art school classroom as far as I was able to detect them in my conversations with students.

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[72] Critique week is a presentation format at SAIC where students temporarily exhibit their work and take questions and criticism from a panel of faculty members and visiting external artists, art critics, and curators.

[73] The questions that guided by meetings with students were as follows: 1. How do you introduce yourself? 2. Who are you interested in reaching/addressing through your work? 3. In what way does your work depend on a specific context? 4. How do you cope with showing your work to an audience that is not familiar with that context? 5. Do you think it is possible to make work that speaks to different audiences differently? 6. How was the artistic education you received abroad (before coming to SAIC) different? 7. How does the SAIC community encourage or discourage you to explore the cultural context you grew up in or identify with? 8. How has your work changed since coming to the U.S.? 9. How has your way of thinking and speaking about your work changed since coming to the U.S.? 10. How has your sense of being an artist and situating yourself in a community changed since coming to the U.S.?" I did not ask students these questions in a set order or using the same phrasing, but brought them into the conversation "organically", concluding each conversation once I felt that all questions had been covered and students had been able to develop their responses to these questions, many of whom they had never been asked before.

[74] Following the notion prevalent within the American university to a priori treat students as "scholars" and "artists" I will consciously adopt that terminology within the footing of this chapter, echoing the fact that my encounter with them has taken place on an equal level as a conversation between colleagues. Accordingly, these conversations were led as much by my own research interests as by the students' experiences.

'Others' in School

It's fair to say that all artists who came forward to share their experiences were not only considerably talented, but equally ambitious (some of them could already take pride in international exhibition track records), and they generally viewed the experience of studying at SAIC as an important step towards "becoming serious" about their artist careers. However, despite a general sense of satisfaction with their M.F.A. programs and a ubiquitous spirit of gratitude, a sentiment many of them shared was — besides an expected sense of cultural alienation — a certain disillusionment with regard to their position as ethnic, cultural, and linguistic others within the diverse educational environment. For many, this experience influenced their work over the course of their academic programs and had an effect on how they came to view their role as artists within an international context. Beginnings were sometimes tough. One artist said that arriving in Chicago with only mediocre English skills felt like "being handicapped," adding that it was not merely a lack of fluency that affected her initial ability to integrate meaningfully into the classroom discussion, but a lack of understanding of broader contexts: "I felt completely left out of the conversation. I didn't understand what they talked about, the references they made."

These may be commonplace experiences affecting all international students. However, it was not only language itself — or a lack of it — that made these artists feel "different," but also a lack of familiarity with the conversational norms of the classroom and the concepts and cultural references that were expected and taken for granted within that setting. Artists from non-Western countries who already joined SAIC with native fluency in English (who did not struggle with the language barrier at first) accordingly described their sense of alienation primarily as a loss of context: "American artists are the main references here," one artist said, saying that course syllabi at the school were largely underpinned by an American-centric canon of theoretical literature and knowledge that largely ignored non-Western histories and knowledge. For an outsider, there was hence a tangible "schism between what I know about them and what they know about me," as one artist reflected on the differences between

her and her American cohort. We might call these initial observations naïve, uninformed, or even hypocritical — assuming that foreign students were most certainly attracted by SAIC's prestige nevertheless — and yet, they make clear that the classroom functions as more than just a neutral, functional site of pedagogy where knowledge is passed on from instructor to student. Rather, the classroom is a complex and heterogeneous communicative space where certain forms of address produce certain social effects, strongly depending on how this inherent heterogeneity is acknowledged and practiced. As artists are required to respond to, converse, and critique texts and presentations in class, and as they compete among each other for attention and participation, they articulate a position within this complex space.

But difference is, of course, not only constructed linguistically, but visually, and, according to Sara Ahmed, it is just as much in the field of vision where the stranger is recognised "as not belonging, as being out of place" (Ahmed 2000, 21–24). The appearance of difference by means of visually perceptible categories such as race, ethnicity, or gender was brought up by many artists I interviewed — with many reflecting critically on how the experience of being recognised and treated as an other affected their position within the school and their way of making art. Some artists pointed to critical scholars like Sara Ahmed, who argued that diversity policies can act as a form of "intervention" that makes an institution look heterogeneous from the outside but which masks a more fundamental lack of diversity, such as on the level of faculty or management (Ahmed 2012, 23–33).[75] Ahmed has warned that diversity policies may often not work to promote ideals of social and racial equality, but rather to produce quantifiable economic value through the staging of colourful images of diversity that principally serve to raise the institution's credibility and desirability (52–53).

Many artists I spoke with linked their sense of alienation to a certain burden they felt that was placed on artists within the institution to "declare themselves," to act as representatives or members of certain categories of identity, and to

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[75] Sara Ahmed writes that "if diversity becomes something that is added to organisations, like colour, then it confirms the whiteness of what is already in place. To diversify an institution becomes an institutional action insofar as the necessity of the action reveals the absence or failure of diversity" (Ahmed 2012, 33).

speak up about their experience as members of an underrepresented minority. As one artist suggested, this question is often framed not so much as a "who are you?" — in the sense of a genuine curiosity in an artist's personal journey and place in the world — but as a "what are you?," suggesting a demand for artists to subscribe to certain existing and recognisable categories of identity — black, feminist, Iranian, Korean, queer, working class, et cetera.[76] I was often told that when artists' being-different was recognised or identified — such as in student critiques, in-class discussions or film screenings or lectures — they were generally encouraged to embrace it as position from which to speak, and from which to develop their work as artists. They described this encouragement in different ways: one spoke of "being pushed to use art as a means to explore my racial, sexual, or cultural identity," while another stated that he was "being encouraged to search for an authentic expression of my specific identity." One artist said that "I think they really like it when you're from far away and make work about that place," suggesting that there was a demand for cultural translations that encouraged everyone who was perceived as different to make that difference visible, while simultaneously addressing themselves to their peers in a way they could understand.

These demands are usually made with good intentions. For example, SAIC's Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, Lisa Wainwright, has argued that one of the central objectives for artists in society should be the production of empathy: "we depict so that others might enter into our vision, a new vision, and in so doing expand their own thinking. An international student body, like the global art world, is essential to poetically building a peaceful understanding between those of different cultures, genders, races, nations, and beliefs."[77] At first, this policy appears to simply inject the diversity principle into the existing pedagogy of the M.F.A. system, with its goal of educating an artist capable of producing communicable knowledge to contribute to society with. The task non-Western and minority artists are presented with, then, is nothing

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[76]   My observation has been that while many undergraduate students actively study and embrace identity politics and participate in identity-focused student groups, graduate M.F.A. students — including most of those I have spoken with — reach a more critical understanding of how categories of identity affect, and potentially limit, the reading and discursive framing of their work.

[77]   Lisa Wainwright, "Postcard From Venice." *F Newsmagazine*, August 2015, http://fnewsmagazine.com/2015/08/ postcard-from-venice (accessed 16 May 2016).

less than that of making their (assumed) position comprehensible and embraceable, and thereby contributing to a more peaceful multicultural coexistence.

However, as I have already argued previously, there are a number of problems with this multicultural vision of contemporary art, and throughout my conversations with artists at SAIC, these problems began to surface. As one might expect, artists who come from more traditional, object-oriented and skill-based artistic value systems experience these discursive and promotional tasks as particularly challenging, and for some, becoming a "talking artist" and everything this entails — the need to look "professional," to speak and perform in public, and to come to terms with how their identities are read — poses a challenge they would prefer to avoid.[78] Several artists I spoke with argued that embracing their ethnic or racial minority identity through their work could be both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand, it creates a discursive "safe zone" and produces certain kinds of favourable attention and respect, while on the other, it limits their creative choices and modes of working to a form of self-exploitation. Several artists argued that being different tended to create an initial spark of attention and interest that often faded quickly if they failed to satisfy the unstated expectations associated with the position of the other, or if they rejected catering to existing stereotypes. A Thai artist, for example, told me about suggestions he received to use authentic "native" elements in his art work, such as a tuk-tuk or Thai massage; a Turkish artist reported being advised to work with tiles; an Iranian artist acknowledged having received advice to experiment with performing while wearing a Chador.[79]

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[78] Some artists pointed out that the need to speak and verbally reflect on work in progess might alter or interrupt the creative process: "I have to think before doing something … everything needs to make sense while doing it." One particular student pointed out that he preferred embarking on a creative process where the result was not yet predetermined; whose meaning was not yet known and therefore impossible to articulate. Other students, conversely, recognised speaking — and their ability to speak — as a significant skill to survive within the art world's attention economy: "Here at this school, they really need the artist's speech. If you explain more, your work gets more attention and more feedback and more positive feedback," one student commented critically, and added: "If your work is loud, if you are loud, everything is different for you."

[79] One artist from Iran told me that since her first semester at SAIC, she kept a record of all the suggestions she received from peers and faculty to look into the work of Shirin Neshat — a highly popular U.S.-based Iranian artist strongly associated with neo-orientalist imagery, such as veils, weapons and Islamic calligraphy — with the purpose of one day turning her collection of notes into an installation that might reflect on ethnic stereotyping in contemporary art.

Artists routinely complained about such orientalist, exoticist, or "tropicalist" suggestions they received from peers and supervisors. At the same time, these suggestions clearly echo the economics of cross-cultural representation that can be observed in the art world at large as well as in other global cultural industries, such as literature. As Richard Jacquemond, a professor and translator of Arabic Literature, has written, translations between unequal zones of power frequently suffer from a fundamental imbalance: the hegemonic culture will encourage, produce, support, and fund translations of authors whose work fits into already existing imaginations of the culture in translation (Jacquemond 1992, 139—158; Robinson 1997b, 31). Authors from the foreign culture who would like to be recognised by a wider international audience must often actively take that audience's lack of knowledge into account, producing work that displays a certain "degree of compliance with stereotypes" because stereotypes, clichés, and a lack of knowledge are what often drives foreign readers' curiosity in the first place.

Yet another problem with the vision of artists as producers of empathy is the very notion of empathy itself. Simultaneously emotionally charged and vague, empathy is term that is unclear in terms of what kind of relation to the other it suggests or proposes. Particularly problematic is how the call for the production of empathy places the burden primarily on those who are already outsiders, assuming that providing cultural translation is, in some way, in their best interest. Unfortunately, such a system may actually reproduce existing norms and hence relations of power, and lead to a double standard as to who is allowed to speak about what, and how the work of artists is evaluated: while the work of non-Western or minority artists is assigned a social and political purpose (the production of empathy), the work of American, white, and middle class artists is exempt from these demands.[80] This is the challenge of being a foreign or minority student within an international M.F.A. program: how to inhabit the position of the other in a way that is meaningful without resorting to clichés; that is conscious of existing relations of power without reinforcing them? "Being

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[80] One artist, for example, recalled an instance where he received a comment from his advisor suggesting that if he were a Western artist, he would be "30 years late" in doing what he was doing, but coming from a non-Western country, his work was entirely acceptable as long as he kept striving towards making it more "authentic."

outside you need to question everything you say about your home country," one artist told me, "because, on the one hand, you don't want to confirm the stereotypes that are out there, but on the other hand, … you are in charge of the terms of mutual representation."

Global Artists, Global Audiences

If the M.F.A. system, as Howard Singerman has suggested, teaches young artists to professionally perform the role of the artist, then an important element of that education must be to raise awareness of what kind of audience artists address through their work, and what intellectual, political, and aesthetic system of reference that audience inhabits. Arguably, one of the most attractive features of an international art school like SAIC is how it offers young artists exposure to what could be called a simulated global audience: the diversity the school seeks to create and the various everyday artistic and discursive activities staged at the school (talks, film screenings, presentations, exhibitions, critiques, panel discussions, etc.) all mirror the formats of international exhibition culture. Another reason why M.F.A. programmes make for such a fascinating case study of cultural globalisation: because they allow one to observe not only how artists cope with the challenge of addressing foreigners, but how being surrounded by difference itself shapes and affects their practice and their way of situating themselves in the world.[81]

An experience that many international artists told me about was how they made friends mainly with other foreign or ethnic-minority students. As the living arrangements and study workloads of artists at SAIC often don't offer time and space for a broader exposure to American society, and as many foreign artists experience the Midwest and American popular culture as somewhat alienating, they tend to confine themselves to a relatively hermetic bubble of art-related social venues and circuits, building their community within the extended

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[81] The title a young Iranian adjunct professor has chosen for a course on global artistic practices seems emblematic: "I don't like anything local, unless it is food or beer." The class asked "How do artists perform and animate a global cultural context with our diverse personal and political experience?"

perimeter of the school. Even though none of these artists had a negative attitude towards the general public, many conceded that, in reality, the people who responded most positively to their work were other educational "exiles" who inhabited a similar position to their own — the position of the "peripheral insider," to use Khaled Ramadan's term once again. "My audience are people with a consciousness for understanding things outside of themselves," one artist said, stating that lack — such as, for example, a lack of access to language, or a lack of familiarity with norms and conventions — may at times act as a stronger common denominator to bond with others than positive similarities and proximities between cultures or geographies. Another artist said that after spending two years in the M.F.A., her work has found its audience among "a community of migrants and immigrants and global nomads, … people who share my experience of being displaced, being out of my home country."

This community of the displaced provides them with more than just companionship: artists viewed this peer group as particularly valuable as providers of critical feedback in instances where their academic peers were unable to provide feedback or criticism because they were unfamiliar with the very cultural contexts they encouraged foreign or minority artists to engage with. "It was extremely important for me to have a community of artists of my own origin here," one artist said, adding that he "needed someone who knew what I was talking about, someone who understood the references I was making. They are much more critical than my American viewers." Another artist pointed out that the comments he received from members of his own ethnic community at SAIC were valuable precisely because his position of power over an otherwise distant foreign audience was suspended; that within his "native" community he could no longer "exoticise himself," that is, perform the identity of an exotic other. These experiences reveal another interesting paradox that some artists mentioned: that performing the role of the minority artist, the "peripheral insider," the cultural translator actually endowed them with a certain level of authority and visbility.

In other words, when an artist situates his or her work within a cultural context that lies outside the established canon of knowledge — which is precisely

what the school encourages — then the work of that artist is, to some degree, immune to criticism because the specificity of the cultural context is largely unknown. As Nicolas Bourriaud (2009) has asked, can a white, heterosexual, male, middle-class American judge the work of a female Mexican artist from a Chicano working-class background, for example? Can an Israeli criticise the work of a Palestinian, and under what conditions? Speaking to young artists at SAIC I had the impression that while many understood and appreciated the idea of protecting and safeguarding the cultural expression of minorities, frustration remained over the perception that the "peripheral insider" or the translator is so rarely challenged precisely because he or she is assumed to be vulnerable (if not oppressed), and hence deserving of encouragement, support, and empathy, not criticism. Some students even speculated that the nature of the school as a private, for-profit enterprise may contribute to a certain uncritical celebration of cultural difference, going hand-in-hand with a client-focused teaching culture in which "every creative or intellectual pursuit is perceived as worthwhile or interesting," as one artist characterised it.

Another interesting aspect of the student experience is the obvious need for a language that permits everyone to communicate, regardless of differences. In my chapter, "The Problem of Address," I discussed the notion of *International Art English*, concluding that in order to avoid using meaningless and exclusive jargon, the language artists and curators use while participating in international exhibition culture should be open to the impact of local cultural and social contexts. At an art school like SAIC, mastering English is naturally vital for students to participate and make themselves understood. Consider this incident: during my research visit to SAIC, I participated in an M.F.A. critique panel where a Korean student — whose degree work, so all members of the panel agreed, was extraordinary — was barely able to speak a full sentence in English. Not only did her poor performance undermine the success of her presentation and distracted panelists from the conceptual and aesthetic qualities of her work; she also lost sympathies due to her failure to communicate the intentions, motivations, and contexts behind it. It wouldn't have been difficult to avoid this kind of situation, even in the absence of better English skills: if the artist had refused to speak English, for example, and instead spoke confidently in her

native language — with one of her Korean colleagues interpreting — she would have projected a much greater level of competence. She would have permitted art critics to dwell on the work itself rather than on translation failures — and coincidentally, she might even have rendered visible how the emphasis on self-performance and linguistic fluency within the American M.F.A. system produces a new form of social distinction.

At the same time, with its diverse student body, an institution like SAIC also operates as a kind of a 'language laboratory' where the linguistic norms of artistic debate are constantly evolving. An artist from Thailand who initially struggled intensely with his language skills told me an anecdote of how he would frequently ask his American classmates to explain certain theoretical terms he didn't understand — terms like *agency* or *aesthetics*; *relational* or *the political*. Surprisingly, his colleagues could often not properly explain these terms to him — despite using them. This particular artist concluded that there was "a blurring going on about the meaning of words — students, including Americans, just take certain terminology for granted and start using them without context without knowing what it means exactly." Here, the art school appears like a hotbed of what David Levine and Alix Rule (2012) have criticised in their essay on *International Art English* – a promiscuous use of "uprooted" philosophical terms at odds with the assumed "norms" of the English language. The paradox is that while speaking *International Art English* (or, one could also say, *International Art School Classroom English*) as a sort of transnational intellectual Creole may genuinely reflect how young artists verbalise their work, it may end up sounding like impenetrable jargon to school outsiders. Only a few artists that I spoke with realised that as their ability to communicate with their peers by means of a shared intellectual language increased, the challenge to "translate" their work back to outside audiences likewise became greater.[82]

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[82] Some artists pointed out how translating back their artist statements from English into their native language — such as Thai or Spanish — was a challenge. As they developed their artistic practice within an English-speaking environment (reading English-language theoretical texts) they experienced the problem of returning to their native languages as a crisis of translatability. Also note that in the subsequent chapter, the complexities of language formation on the "scenes of translation" will be explored in greater detail.

Translation Strategies

How has studying in this international environment affected the way these young artists work? A general theme I encountered among the artists I spoke with was their search for ways to experiment with, speak back to, or reject the demands they faced to identify and locate themselves within existing cultural, ethnic, social, geopolitical, or discursive categories, even if that strategy often disappoints well-intentioned peers and tutors. "My work tries to frustrate stereotypes and complicate perceptions," one artist said, and another went further: "I started to be concerned with hiding identity. I don't want to deal with all these questions and comments anymore." An Iranian artist mentioned that over time, she has begun introducing her work by stating pre-emptively that she was not interested in criticising the Iranian regime — something she felt pressured and encouraged to do as a female artist within the American liberal arts environment supposedly keen on framing Iranian women as oppressed others. The paradox with these attempts to escape being 'pigeonholed' into the role of the other is that they may backfire, re-politicising the conversation instead of depoliticising it: why would a female Iranian artist in the United States not want to speak out against the oppression of women in Iran?

When it comes to their artwork itself, students have pointed out different strategies of responding to these challenges. One strategy that emerged was to actively reflect on their own position as outsiders from within their work itself. One artist, for example, said that his work had gradually shifted towards exploring and revealing his own vulnerability within American society, tracing his lack of knowledge and his dependency on others' help and knowledge, and prompting him to develop a performance practice in which he consistently asks for strangers' help to navigate different urban environments while rendering visible his vulnerability. Another strategy was to make visible cultural and linguistic differences: for example, an artist from Puerto Rico explained his practice to consistently give his works Spanish titles and only later translate them into English in a literal fashion, creating an estranging effect for the English-speaking audience.[83] Artists working with moving images spoke about how they

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[83]   This approach is reminiscent of Lawrence Venuti's concept of foreignising translation, which is linked to a more literal style of translation. Even though the student in question

recognised subtitling as a challenge that comes with its own rewards — mentioning for example the possibility of making subtitles that differ from a film's audio track in order to add a certain dissonance in translation — and hence add a separate layer of meaning that could be observed only by a bilingual public.[84] Yet another strategy I have encountered was to carry bilingualism into the artwork as well as into the writing that accompanies it as a means of acknowledging the impossibility to fully bridge cultural and linguistic divides between the different communities these artists inhabit. At times, these experiments would take on performative forms. For example, an artist from Mexico asked a native English-speaking colleague to perform a text-based performance lecture she had written in English. She speculated that if an American would deliver her lecture, it would be taken "more seriously" because the speaker would not automatically be identified as an other by means of her way of speaking. At the same time, her text still included mannerisms from her native Spanish that one would not expect from a native English-speaker, creating a dissonant listening experience. Another artist argued that, for him, it was precisely the possibility of speaking in class or critiquing sessions where foreign and minority artists like him could find agency to dodge stereotypes or essentialist ways of framing the other: "It's precisely through speaking about the work," he said, "where I have the power to frame and, crucially, to reframe my work." Lastly, one artist proposed that, in his view, the only strategy to really escape the role of the "peripheral insider" and defy the demand for translations was to embrace abstraction and radical non-representation. For him, abstraction was a means of "being comfortable with not making sense," and for showing that within any normative system, there will always be voices "that are not coherent, that are not recognised."

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was not aware of Venuti's translation ethics, he chose this methodology simply out of an interest in the difference between languages and hence the different readings in his work that would emerge from the different communities he is a member of.

[84] An Iranian filmmaker at SAIC told me about a narrative-driven film she produced where both English and Farsi are spoken. The main protagonist of her film is the son of an Iranian emigré in North America who, like the vast majority of her U.S.-based audience, does not speak Farsi. There is a scene in the film where the boy travels in a car with his bilingual father, who is both English- and Farsi-speaking. Stopping at a gas station, the father encounters another Iranian and speaks with him in Farsi. While the conversation is subtitled for a non-Farsi-speaking audience, the camera focuses on the boy, who is unable to understand the conversation. The main protagonist is doubly excluded: both from the actual conversation taking place, as well as the gaze of the audience, who can access what he himself cannot.

While those who embrace the translator role may receive greater attention than those who reject it, the former are nevertheless faced with challenges. One of the essential paradoxes of an art school that prides itself in supporting cross-cultural practices is that while the distance of translation may be aesthetically and critically empowering, it may simultaneously diminish artists' political and social agency with respect to the cultures and communities they come from. The experience of a young artist whose work actively referenced Greece and its current politics perfectly illustrates this paradox. On the one hand, she stated that "my work is created as a response to distance, as the consequence of a lack of communication — the further away I am from this place, the more keen I am to represent it, to speak from it." On the other hand, she conceded that without that distance, her work might not exist at all: "if I was at home, I would be concerned much more with direct, political action. It would almost be an offense to make such art in a place where there is crisis." In other words, where artists decide to take on the role of translators, the most challenging and alienating step might not actually be to "go international," but rather to return to the very communities they draw from. As a filmmaker from Iran put it: "I'm insecure about what people in my home country think about what I am saying here." At worst, it might be contested as a misrepresentation; at best, it might be awkward because the work never addressed itself to that community in the first place. In other words, returning poses the problem of address all over again.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion from these complex and varied observations. Despite the fact that a lot of these artists' experiences casts a critical light on current diversity practices in the international educational setting, I would argue that, paradoxically, these students' sense of alienation with the terms under which cross-cultural encounters take place in art school prepares them for careers in an international exhibition culture where they will most likely continue to encounter foreign audiences as much as a demand for cultural translations. In their self-imposed educational "exile," as I have previously called it, these artists have experienced — albeit in a milder, and likely more privileged fashion — the cultural condition of displacement as a state of productivity, not unlike theorists such as Bhabha (1994) and Said (2001) have described it. The experience of working in constant confrontation with cultural difference, I

would argue, allows them to understand that the reception of art is not universal; and that the way they address their public articulates not only a relation, but their place in the world as artists. I would speculate that artists who understand these complexities (and have experienced them first-hand) might not only be capable of inhabiting the uncertainties of cultural globalisation more efficiently and critically in the long run than artists who have not left their 'native' cultural contexts; they might also be more capable of producing work that speaks to different audiences differently.[85]

Interim Conclusion: How To Translate Differently?

In what follows I would like to move away from the specificity of this case study and bring the observations from this as well as the preceding chapter to a temporary conclusion that will then lead into the second part of this thesis. As we have seen, translation in the context of international exhibition culture is a complex phenomenon whereby identity politics and institutional policy, geopolitics and a capitalist cultural economy as well as the changing role of art in society all intersect. Not surprisingly, the translator remains an ambivalent figure, called by a number of names — from the "peripheral insider" to the "native informant," from the "diverse" artist to the "cultural ambassador" in residency programs, each identifying a different phenomenon yet producing similar problems of address. While artists who perform cultural translations that integrate seamlessly into existing discursive frameworks tend to satisfy the needs of art institutions and the art market, doing so does little to make international exhibition culture more pluralist on a structural level. To the contrary: artists as translators who respond positively to the demand for simplified and easily consumable narratives and images of cultural otherness often only reinforce the double standard that distinguishes between Western artists and the presumed aesthetic universalism they enjoy, and the "limited membership" offered to non-

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[85] Some international artists at SAIC produce work that cannot be shown in their home countries at all. For example, an artist originally from Indonesia and well-known within the SAIC community for his provocative work on sexuality, gender, and interpersonal power relations recalled how he was first invited to exhibit work in his native Indonesia. Aware that there was no real space in Indonesia for the kind of explicit and provocative work he could do in the U.S., he dug into his photographic archive and found a series of photographs of flowers, which he sent to Indonesia — to the delight of his audience there.

Western or minority artists whose inclusion is contingent upon their continued self-fashioning as cultural others.

What alternatives can we imagine at this point? How do we equip the figure of the translator with greater agency? For artists there is, of course, the possibility of rejecting the position of the translator altogether. This option may appear attractive, even radical at first — and yet rejection alone, in my view, does little to dislodge the normative frameworks of international exhibition culture. If we are to believe Mladen Stilinović, the "artist who cannot speak English" is not celebrated or better off for not speaking the *lingua franca* but rather condemned to invisibility or even non-existence. There must, then, be a way to perform the role of the translator *differently* — in the sense of translating against the grain of existing power relations; with an awareness of how translation affects how we imagine "community … at the point of discontinuity" (Sakai 1997, 14). This is where Naoki Sakai offers a key to thinking translation anew: whereas translation has conventionally been thought of as a relation between a source and a target culture, between an original and a derivative, with the translator as a mediator between these separate spheres, Sakai does not conceive of translation as a binary activity between a pre-determined language or culture and another. Instead, he frames translation as a process that is constitutive and transformative of what makes languages and cultures appear as separate and different from each other, blurring the lines between original and translation, source and target culture, Us and Them. Sakai argues that it is precisely in the gesture of addressing a heterolingual audience where a possibility for cultural and linguistic transformation emerges.

Throughout the last ten years or so, the field of translation studies has seen a growing interest in rethinking the role of the translator in this manner. Inspired by Lawrence Venuti's prominent criticism of the "scandals" of translation within the Anglo-American cultural industry,[86] literary translators and theorists have

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[86] According to Venuti, the translator's work in the literary industry is widely subordinated by a predominantly "individualistic notion of authorship … where the author expresses him/herself 'authentically' in the text." In this translation culture, translators are subject to a "discourse of transparency" in which translated speech is not desired to produce novelty, but rather the "illusion" of another author's presence within the target language (Venuti 2012, 6–8)

asked how the cultural role of translators might receive greater credit. Translation theorists have proposed moving away from an understanding of translation as secondary, and mimetic, to reframing translation as a creative activity and a form of authorship in its own right, despite — or precisely because of — the unfavourable conditions translators face within the hierarchies of the cultural industry (Buffagni et al. 2011).[87] Even if Sakai's construct of a translator-as-author may not apply directly to the work of "ordinary" translators, his focus on the agency of the translator as a producer of cross-cultural relations appears to answer precisely to these calls for an emancipation of the translator. Moreover, Sakai's model is immensely useful for further developing the notion of authorship in translation, which, according to Sakai, lies precisely in translation's forward motion; in search of an address that "establishes the 'we' of a community without taking national, ethnic, or linguistic affiliation for granted" (Sakai 2007, 8–9). Here, authorial speech and translation can no longer be meaningfully distinguished from one another; moreover, the activity of addressing becomes intertwined with the production of relations.[88]

We could now reframe what Sarat Maharaj has called the "scene of translations" and declare it a "laboratory of translations" instead: but how could an experimental translation practice in visual art look like? What could it achieve? While these questions will guide me through the second part of this thesis, I would like to outline the key lines of thought that have informed my

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[87]   In these debates, the role translators play as mediators between cultures is frequently emphasised, and the translator framed as an individual that helps a text reach a wider audience and new interpretations, thereby making it "grow" (Buffagni/Garzelli/Zanotti 2011) and working on — in a very Benjaminian sense — a text's "afterlife." Despite a widespread sympathy within the literary field towards the desire for the greater recognition of a translator's achievements, it has also been noted that translators usually face lesser public accountability and ethical responsibility than the authors they translate; and that translations do not constitute speech acts but rather mediated forms of speech (Pym 2011). Regarding the conditions of translation in the publishing industry, see Venuti 2004, 1–15.

[88]   In his well-known treatise the "Death of the Author," Roland Barthes ([1967] 1995) argued against a literary criticism centred on authors' biographies and identities (126), claiming that meaning is situated within language itself, not in the one who produces it (126), as well as in the reader, who plays an instrumental role in the production of meaning (127). Likewise, Barthes deconstructed the notion of originality, arguing that texts were primarily webs of quotations; "multi-dimensional space[s] in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (127). As a consequence, Barthes famously declared the "death" of the author, while celebrating the "birth" of the reader (128). Conversely, with respect to the artist as translator, one could speak of a certain "return" of author in the guise of a cross-cultural artist who is usually invited to be present alongside his or her work as a cross-cultural public intellectual, speaker, and informant — whose demonstrated and performed hybridity quite literally "authorises" the translation.

selection of the case studies that follow, each of which will develop, in dialogue with translation theory, a way of practicing translation creatively and critically as an artistic practice.

Firstly, as Naoki Sakai and many other translation theorists have pointed out, translation articulates relationships between cultures, and the degree to which they are perceived as similar or different, as continuous or discontinuous, as translatable or untranslatable (Sakai 1997, 2). It is conceivable that by experimenting with strategies of address, artists working on the stages of international exhibition culture could act to develop visions for heterogeneous communities that transcend national, cultural, social, or lingual borders. In this scenario, we might envision the role of the artist as translator as someone who breaks through the inward-looking politics of the homolingual address associated with cultural nationalism while simultaneously remaining critical of how new, "global" languages like English invisibly create new systems of social distinction.

Secondly, we can think of scenarios where artists as translators capitalise on the gap between languages and cultures by blurring the lines between translation, narration, and invention. If globalisation has led to a fundamental destabilisation of "truth," an erosion of certainties, a decentring of canonical knowledge and the emergence of new hierarchies, then the artist as translator might reflect on those changing circumstances by working precisely out of an unstable position where meaning is and remains negotiable. In this sense, the role of the translator might lead us to what Carrie Lambert-Beatty has called *parafiction* — evoking a mediator figure who produces and manages plausibility in light of what audiences know and what is comprehensible to them (Lambert-Beatty 2009).

Thirdly, as a mediating figure, the translator could participate in the transmission of counter-narratives that may otherwise be unavailable, if not censored. In this scenario, the artist as translator might use their familiarity with (and intimate access to) multiple cultures to transfer knowledge and information across, and by doing so, make existing discourses more pluralistic, more

complex, and more democratic. In this role, the translator might also work to disrupt established systems of circulation, reversing existing directions of economic and cultural flows, subverting dominant international asymmetries and relations of power, or even circumventing censorship or state control. Here, the translator might be construed as a "knowledge activist" of sorts; a "smuggler" (Harvey 2005/Rogoff 2006), or even just a foreign correspondent, a critical anthropologist, or a media critic, choosing art as a medium to share knowledge that would otherwise receive little exposure or attention from more mainstream platforms.

And lastly, there are most likely no better critics of translation than translators themselves. What better position from which to study the dynamics of transnational cultural flows and encounters than from the vantage point of an intermediary who can observe how texts, images, objects, and ideas are made and remade, interpreted and reinterpreted, as they travel from one context to another? What better place to reflect on the possibilities and impossibilities of translation than from the "Translator's Preface," as Gayatri Spivak did in her translation of Jacque Derrida's *On Grammatology* (Spivak 1997)? As translators, artists could not only speak out on the problematic politics of inclusion that still prevail in international exhibition culture; they could also — so I am convinced — provide critical accounts of how globalisation processes transform cultures; of what is lost and what is found.

PART II

Translating Differently

Creolisations: Nicoline van Harskamp's
A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes

On a grey October evening in 2014 in London, several dozen people congregated at *Kunstraum,* a small non-profit art space in the city's diverse and multicultural east end. The host, Nicoline van Harskamp, had invited non-native English speakers living in London to join in for a collaborative reading of George Bernard Shaw's classic play, *Pygmalion*. Preparing for the event, Van Harskamp brought together various foreign-language translations, ranging from Turkish to Japanese and from Farsi to Czech, making them available to participants during the reading. The idea behind the event was simple: on the basis of translations of *Pygmalion* in their native languages, participants — most of whom had only just recently arrived to the U.K. — would interpret the part of their chosen character back into English, in a collaborative effort with other participants. Essentially, the event would constitute an English-language reading of Shaw's play, but in the absence of an English-language script. After the reading, which was recorded and videotaped, van Harskamp transcribed the newly "back-translated" oral version of the play and, several months later, published a new version of *Pygmalion*, titled *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* — with the notion of "Englishes" referring precisely to the accented forms of English used by the numerous non-native speakers who had participated in the reading, and their varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds.[89]

That van Harskamp decided to stage this event in London is hardly a coincidence: with its position as a hub of global trade and finance, its tourist appeal, its attractiveness for foreign workers and professionals and hence its large, foreign-born population, London is one of Europe's most linguistically diverse cities by languages spoken, alongside Manchester and Paris (Lansley

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[89] Altogether, native speakers of Spanish, Arabic, Italian, Persian, Hebrew, Czech, Japanese, German, Bulgarian, Korean, Croatian, Danish, Swedish, Turkish, Hungarian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Polish, French, Norwegian and Russian participated in the reading event (Van Harskamp 2015, 109).

2013).[90] Moreover, it is a place from where the English language is exposed to a plethora of globalising forces, adding complexity to an already complex linguistic landscape in the United Kingdom itself, where the English language is not only spoken in numerous regional varieties, but where language historically also represents an important marker of social class. Van Harskamp's choice of *Pygmalion* for the purpose of her work is not coincidental either. *Pygmalion* is a play that revolves around the relation between language and power; between performance and social class; between oppression and self-empowerment through language. Its main protagonist, Eliza Doolittle, is introduced as a poor, uneducated, Cockney-speaking street flower vendor from the working classes. After a theatre performance, she has an encounter with linguistics professor Henry Higgins, who takes an avid interest in classifying the social and regional varieties of the English language, and in particular, Eliza's English which, as he believes, "will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days" (Shaw [1916] 2008, 20). Higgins places a bet with a fellow gentleman, Colonel Pickering, that he would be capable of passing Eliza off as a member of the upper class by teaching her how to rid herself of her lower-class phonetics and instead speak "like a lady in a florist shop" (Shaw [1916] 2008, 40). The play then derives much of its humour and suspense from this somewhat precarious act of social performance aimed at transgressing the rigid class divisions of Victorian England. While Eliza proves a fast learner and eventually adopts the accent of the upper class, her manners and vocabulary continue to threaten to jeopardise her act — but, ultimately, she succeeds (making Higgins win his bet) while simultaneously recognising and resisting the role of a "live doll" (Shaw [1916] 2008, 78) she feels has been imposed on her. Ultimately, she understands that her newly acquired linguistic abilities can help her live a self-sufficient life, free from the narcissistic patronage of professor Higgins.

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[90]   According to Mehmedbegović et al. (2015), "almost three million Londoners were born outside the UK, and that nearly half of these migrants arrived in the capital during the last decade" (11).

(Back-)Translation as a Means of Transformation

As a school classic, *Pygmalion* has been widely translated, even though translating a play whose main protagonist arguably is language itself comes with considerable challenges. The vast problem that poses itself is that the links between language and socio-cultural identity — such as in Victorian England of the late 19ᵗʰ century — are often culturally specific and hence do not have exact equivalents in foreign languages. In such cases, the work of translators is complex, insofar as they are required to identify comparable socio-cultural registers within the language they are translating into in order to approximate the play's original modes of signification, even if the target language and its socio-cultural context bear little resemblance to the linguistic landscape and class structure of Victorian England. When people without experience or professional training in literary translation or live interpreting perform such a challenging translation task, such as in van Harskamp's experiment, the results of the translation process will therefore likely lead to a substantial dissonance in meaning between original and translation — not only because participants lack the linguistic repertoire to accurately render the meaning of their native-language text in English, but also because translating speech with complex socio-cultural connotations under intense time pressure would be an enormous challenge even for native English speakers or professional interpreters.

But the main challenge here is not even translation from English into a foreign language, but from a translation — with all its linguistic and semantic differences from the original — back into English. While this gesture of back-translating a text from an existing translation back into the language of its original generally has little use within translation culture, some authors have previously made creative use of it to explore the effects of translation itself. Mark Twain (1903) for example back-translated an unsolicited French version of his story, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,* back into English and then published all three versions — that is, English, French, and back-translated English — alongside each other in a volume titled *The Jumping Frog: in English, then in French, and then Clawed Back into a Civilised Language Once More by Patient, Unremunerated Toil.* A similar technique that is sometimes used within

the publishing industry, however, are so-called relay translations — translations that do not depart from the original but from another translation, such as when no translator can be found between a specific pair of languages (Bartlett 2013, 60–61). Due to their presumed unreliability, these translations are — as Bartlett has shown — the subject of controversy and debate among translators, and there is a scholarly consensus that translations that do not depart from the original are associated with artistic and literary experimentation rather than "serious" translation work.

Initially, such inherently experimental translation strategies recall Walter Benjamin's well-known and much-cited 1913 essay, "The Task of the Translator." In it, Benjamin radically questioned the authority of the original, arguing that the translator's task should not be to convey the original's meaning itself (or what translators thought the meaning was), but rather to "incorporate the original's *way* of meaning," while refraining from "trying to communicate something" (Benjamin [1923] 2002, 260). Meaning, Benjamin reasoned, was never to be found within individual languages, but only in processes of translation, "until it [meaning] is able to emerge as the pure language from the harmony of all the various ways of meaning." The role of translation then was to overcome the world's fragmentation into an infinite number of languages; acting as a tool to reach for and move toward a greater totality of possible expressions. Even though more of a metaphysical than an empirical construct, Benjamin used the notion of "pure language" to describe this imagined totality of trans-lingual human expression. "Pure language" acted as the conceptual basis for a utopian translation ethics whose aim was no longer to preserve meaning over linguistic difference, but rather to transform languages themselves in such a manner so as to bring them closer to each other and thereby to "pure language." According to Benjamin, this utopian pure language was "achievable not by any single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another" (257).

Translators, so Benjamin argued, could theoretically approach "pure language" by cross-fertilising different languages, such as by importing grammatical and lexical forms and vocabulary from the foreign into the target language. While professional translators have long been debating the practical

ramifications and consequences of this theoretical proposition (which I will explore in the following chapter), it is obvious that the amount of linguistic transformation Benjamin encourages collides with established practices and norms within the mainstream translation industry.[91] Experimental translation practices like Nicoline van Harskamp's could, however, well be read as a Benjaminian exercise of translation, whereby translators are given the freedom to transform the English language by means of their own bi- or multicultural imagination. Comparing the original *Pygmalion* with *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* hence makes for a fascinating read, allowing us to observe not only how certain aspects of Shaw's play have been lost through subsequent acts of translation, but also how they have been replaced by new, speculative, and often surprising shades of meaning. One of the instances where these transformations are perhaps most striking is where Shaw uses idiomatic language that, due to its figurative nature, does not translate easily:

Pygmalion	*A Romance in Five Acts …*
THE DAUGHTER. Well, haven't you got a cab?	THE DAUGHTER. Did you find that taxi for us?
FREDDY. There's not one to be had for love or money. (Shaw [1916] 2008, 10)	FREDDY. No. You can't get it even if you cut yourself in pieces. (Van Harskamp 2015, 12)

Just as in Mark Twain's *The Jumping Frog*, many of the participants in Nicoline van Harskamp's reading event chose to translate idiomatic expressions they found within editions of *Pygmalion* in their native languages back into English in a literal fashion, creating an estranging effect. While it may be difficult to trace the metaphor of "cutting oneself into pieces" back to a specific language of origin, the lack of its use by English-speaking authors (according to the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms) suggests that the expression exists neither within the inner nor the outer circle of the English language.[92] However, idiomatic

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[91]   In contrast, see Lawrence Venuti's (2012) critical description of Anglo-American translation culture (2), characterised in Venuti's view by "fluency," "eloquence," and easy accessibility, requiring only a minor, or no, cultural adjustment on behalf of the reader and permitting readers to experience sameness in cultural difference. "They [translations] are given the appearance … that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'" (1)

[92]   The notion of the linguistic circle is a reference to Braj Kachru's theory of world Englishes (1992), where he suggests that the global diffusion of the English language may be visualised by three concentric circles. The inner circle refers to uses of English in countries where it is historically and socio-culturally rooted, such as in the United Kingdom, the United States,

language is, of course, linked to a consensus among a community of speakers over their meaning; a matter of social convention, as Ferdinand de Saussure has argued.[93] It would therefore not be inconceivable, if the expression "cut yourself into pieces" were actually in use within a community of speakers, that it *could* communicate meaning.[94] Possibly referring to something between desperation and self-sacrifice, the expression possesses a certain visual quality that may let non-native speakers guess and interpret their meaning without regard to whether this expression is actually used by native speakers, and how. I would argue that this suspension and renegotiation of linguistic meanings is in fact a key attribute of all "scenes of translation" where different individuals use a shared language they are not natives of in order to converse with one another, and at least partly helps explain the emergence of phenomena like *International Art English*.

The fact that Van Harskamp's *Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* is more difficult and challenging to read than Shaw's *Pygmalion* is certainly linked to the fact that what one reads is not just English, but different *Englishes*, informed by different mother tongues and foreign cultural influences. Together, they cannot but produce a profoundly confusing and unsettling experience. Moreover, while oral communication permits speakers and listeners to give feedback to each other in situations of uncertainty, so as to clarify misunderstandings, the rigid form of a book does not allow for these negotiations of meaning. Reading *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes,* the confused reader hence becomes acutely aware that communication within a heterolingual space can always fail, and moreover, that within heterolingual regimes of address, the burden of meaning is placed not only on

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Australia, and Ireland. The outer circle, on the other hand, includes areas and countries that became English-speaking through colonialism — countries where the English language often continues to act as a legal or official language to this day, such as India, Bangladesh, Kenya, or Pakistan. Lastly, the expanding circle refers to areas of the world where English is used exclusively by non-native speakers and without historical context for transactional purposes.

[93]   According to Ferdinand de Saussure ([1916] 2011, 10), "language is a convention, and the nature of the sign that is agreed upon does not matter."

[94]   As the contemporary equivalent of "gutter speech" one might note urbandictionary.com, an online platform that lists an enormous number of slang terms and idioms whereby different contributors offer different interpretations. The more interpretations are offered, the more popular a term may be assumed to be. Many of the terms and metaphors listed however are obscure and used merely — if at all — by a very small number of people, judging by the number of contributions they receive.

the addresser, but on the addressees as well. As Sakai has argued, the heterolingual address always involves a process of negotiation in which both the addresser and the addressee gradually learn about each other and adjust their way(s) of speaking: "every translation calls for a counter-translation, and in this sort of address it is clearly evident that within the framework of communication, translation must be endless" (Sakai 1997, 8–9). In order to make oneself an addressee of this language, the reader must hence be willing to accept uncertainty and ambiguity; a challenge that concerns native English readers in particular, as they are the least likely to accept the linguistic uncertainty (and the resulting flexibility) that is commonplace among non-native speakers or English learners.

In that sense, one could read *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* as an experiment with heterolinguality: by gathering a group of non-native speakers of English from diverse cultural contexts, van Harskamp constructed a shared communicative and linguistic space that can be maintained only through constant translation activity. When Sakai writes about translation as "the practice of creating continuity at the point of discontinuity" (14), this is precisely what the participants in van Harskamp's reading event do as they sit down to read *Pygmalion* in English without an English script at their disposal. As a result of this exchange, *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* does of course not possess the same level of textual authority as Shaw's original *Pygmalion*: instead, we might read it as a fragment of a still-on-going process of communication and language formation; as one among an infinite number of renderings of *Pygmalion*.

From *Lingua Franca* to New Creole

When speaking about her work, Nicoline van Harskamp frequently emphasises her interest in linguistic processes of decentring and the diffusion of the English language into contexts and communities where it is neither socially nor historically rooted.[95] Kachru (1992) has referred to this zone as the "expanding

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[95] According to the leaflet that was published in the context of the reading event led by Van Harskamp at Kunstraum in London (Kunstraum, "Nicoline van Harskamp" [Exhibition, 25

circle" of the English language, where non-native speakers use the language to communicate with each other. On the basis of that notion, linguists like Jennifer Jenkins (2007) and Barbara Seidlhofer (2011) have developed the concept of *Lingua Franca English*, which has become the subject of substantial research attention in recent years.[96] According to Seidlhofer, the function of the *lingua franca* is to "achieve the fullest communication possible" between the members of a heterolingual group, as it happens continuously every day in different settings around the globe (17–18), such as in the context of trade, international institutions, interactions on the internet, or educational settings. Because this language primarily serves to facilitate communication between non-native speakers and its norms are "established during the interaction" (18), Seidlhofer argues that it would be absurd and counter-productive for these communities to adhere to the same rules that native speakers follow (18). Instead, Seidlhofer and Jenkins argue that *Lingua Franca English*, with its many regional and cultural varieties, should be recognised as a legitimate form of speaking English (Jenkins 2007, 2; Seidlhofer 2011, 24), suggesting that the teaching of the English language should be adjusted globally to meet the needs of international speakers whose number is consistently on the rise (Jenkins 2007, 237–255; Seidlhofer 2011, 175–210).

Van Harskamp's earlier video performance work, *English Forecast,* already explored non-native Englishes. Conceived as a live streaming performance for online audiences, *English Forecast* brought together a group of four voice actors with different mother tongues to perform a collage of statements that van Harskamp had collected by interviewing numerous non-native English speakers (as well as scientists and language experts) about their views about the English language and their predictions for its future. During the performance, which took place in a studio at Tate Modern, the four voice actors listened to the voice samples on headphones and repeated what they heard, forming a dissonant and frequently contradictory narrative delivered in a multitude of changing

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October – 6 December 2014], http://kunstraum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Nicoline -van-Harskamp-Kunstraum-exhibition-text.pdf (accessed 20 May 2016).

[96]   This is demonstrated by an increasing number of book publications and journals on the subject, such as *World Englishes*, published by Wiley & Sons, or *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, published by De Gruyter.

phonemes, grammars, and attitudes.[97] The different narratives that emerge suggest a Creole future for the world; with some of the protagonists speculating that monolingualism might eventually become the exception; that people might be switching between different "Englishes" depending on the different communities they locate themselves in; and that the hegemony of standard English — as well as the political and economic system that promotes it — would eventually be overcome in favour of a more multifaceted, heterolingual world.[98]

These ideas bring to mind the Creolité movement of the late 1980s, which sought to overcome the stigma that was associated with Antillean Creole as merely a *lingua franca* among peoples (or even as "bad French"). The movement's aim was to inspire a Creole literature that was free from the dogma of linguistic purity associated with the ideology of the European nation state (associated particularly with France and the linguistic norms commanded by the Académie Française), and thus lay the cultural foundations for an inherently heterolingual society. In a 1989 manifesto titled *In Praise of Creoleness* (Bernabé et al. 1990, 901), a group of Martiniquean intellectuals comprised of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant theorised Creoleness as an "interactional or transactional" form of identity, characterised by multilingualism, cultural hybridity, and intertwined histories of migration and colonisation that brought together people from vastly different backgrounds — indigenous peoples, French settlers, slaves they had brought from Africa, as well as post-colonial immigrants from India, Lebanon, and China (891).[99] In order to resist the cultural hegemony of France and its language, they saw it as imperative to create and establish a new mode of cultural and literary expression that reflected the experience shared by a linguistically, ethnically, and racially heterogeneous population whose history they saw as one of "survival, resistance, compromise, and synthesis" (896).[100] They argued that, historically, the

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[97] A phonetic transcription hinted at the totality of possible sounds in human communication, as if to provide another reference to Benjamin's idea of 'pure language.'

[98] A transcript of van Harskamp's video was kindly provided by the artist for the purpose of writing this chapter.

[99] The majority of Martinique's population descends from African slaves brought to the Caribbean to work on sugar plantations.

[100] This resistance against the normative language of the nation state also manifests itself to some degree in European societies like England, France, or Germany, where certain marginalised groups have developed informal, colloquial languages like "Kiezdeutsch" in Germany or "Argot" in France, with some scholars defying mainstream political opinion by

population of the French Caribbean had a different relation to the French language than native French speakers from the mainland because in the Caribbean, French was not a chosen language, but one imposed as a tool of colonisation. For them, emancipation was possible only if the hierarchies within language — between purity and contamination, between high and low — were redefined; when the French language was made to serve the purposes of the colonised peoples as opposed to their colonisers. "We made the French language ours," they proclaimed proudly (900), arguing for a broader politics of cultural (re-)appropriation as a central pillar of an emergent Creole culture:

> We did conquer it, this French language. … We extended the meaning of some of its words, deviated others. And changed many. We enriched the French language, its vocabulary as well as its syntax. We preserved many of its words which were no longer used. In short, we inhabited it. … In it we built our own language. (900)

The claim that language does not just belong to its native speakers and their institutions but to all those who live with it in their everyday lives is the basis of Creole linguistics. It is important at this point to recall the difference between *lingua franca, pidgin*, and *Creole*: while *lingua franca* refers to uses of existing languages by non-native speakers to communicate with each other, a *pidgin* represents a *lingua franca* without native speakers whatsoever. Creole languages, conversely, are *pidgins* or *lingua francas* that have acquired native speakers over time and hence provide its speakers a sense of social and cultural identity and belonging (Gumperz 1983, 157, 179–182). It is precisely here — where the *lingua franca* becomes a source of belonging — where *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* departs from van Harskamp's previous work, *English Forecast*. By producing a *Lingua Franca English* version of *Pygmalion* and publishing it in book form, van Harskamp points to the role of literature as a source of identity, just as the authors of the Creole manifesto have highlighted the need for a Creole literature in order to emancipate Martinique culture from French colonial history. While literature has, throughout history, played an instrumental role in creating and constructing national communities, van Harskamp suggests that by turning spoken *Lingua Franca English* into written

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arguing that these linguistic variations are in fact legitimate and hybrid cultural forms of expression (see Mennel/Nowotny 2013).

form, non-normative Englishes could become the cultural basis for contemporary transnational and heterolingual communities. While perhaps no generation has yet grown up on *Lingua Franca English*, this may well become the case if global migration continues to accelerate. Bernabé and Chamoiseau write that

> A new humanity will gradually emerge which will have the same characteristics as our Creole humanity: all the complexity of Creoleness. The son or daughter of a German and a Haitian, born and living in Peking, will be torn between several languages, several histories, caught in the torrential ambiguity of a mosaic identity. … Expressing Creoleness will be expressing the very beings of the world. (Bernabé et al. 1990, 902)

Creole literature has appeared in English-speaking contexts as well. In her book *Weird English,* Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch`ien (2005) observed linguistic phenomena of creoleness among contemporary Asian diasporic writers who frequently use non-standard forms of English inspired by their native tongues. In her view, the literary use of non-normative English — or what she sums up as "barely intelligible and sometimes unrecognizable English created through the blending of one or more languages with English" (3–4) — serves a cultural as well as political function that resonates with what the intellectuals behind the Créolité movement had called for — namely to build a heterolingual community that expresses itself not just orally, but in writing. Furthermore, she points out that, by incorporating non-normative forms of English, these writers shift between heterolingual and homolingual modes of address, acting to some degree as gatekeepers to their own communities by offering different levels of "access" to different readerships who may or may not be familiar with certain registers of the language used (23). Furthermore, Nien-Ming Ch'ien detects a desire for resistance: "in immigrant communities where *weird English* is exclusively an oral phenomenon, pidgins and misspellings may have meant a lack of education or fluency," she writes, "but for weird-English writers, the composition of weird English is an active way of taking the community back" (5). Essentially, non-normative or contaminated English is viewed as the most authentic means of expression to reflect the reality of diasporic, hybrid, and multilingual communities (23).

Shifting Hierarchies

One of the hallmarks of *Lingua Franca English*, particularly in written form, and when thought of as a legitimate variety of English, is resistance against the normative power of language, and a desire to reverse the relations of power that are experienced and practiced through language. One of the most interesting aspects about *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* then is how the relation between language, power, and social status is articulated anew through the act of back-translating *Pygmalion* into the English language. The process has almost entirely erased the socio-linguistic attributes and mannerisms that originally made Eliza so clearly recognizable to the reader as a lower class "gutter girl," and Higgins and Pickering as members of the educated upper class. Instead, they now all speak *Lingua Franca English,* whose inherent hierarchies are much harder to detect. Consider this example: in the third act, Eliza is introduced to a certain Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her children, Clara and Freddy. Mrs. Eynsford Hill introduces herself as a woman of conservative Victorian morals and sensibilities, who is outraged at her children's "horrible" way of expressing themselves:

Pygmalion	*A Romance in Five Acts …*
FREDDY [opening the door for her] Are you walking across the Park, Miss Doolittle? If so—	FREDDY [opening the door for her] If you're walking through the park, Miss Doolittle, I would love to —
LIZA. Walk! Not bloody likely. [Sensation]. I am going in a taxi. [She goes out].	LIZA [with perfect accent] Walk? Fuck no! I take a car! [she leaves]
…	…
MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I daresay I am very old-fashioned; but I do hope you won't begin using that expression, Clara. I have got accustomed to hear you talking about men as rotters, and calling everything filthy and beastly; though I do think it horrible and unladylike. But this last is really too much. (Shaw [1916] 2008, 74)	MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I'm an old fashioned woman. What can I do? I get used to you talking about men like thieves and of women as being whores. This is enough.

(van Harskamp 2014, 66) |

In *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes,* the English *not bloody likely* becomes a rather straightforward *fuck no*. But more interestingly, the use

of these terms becomes naturalised: while in the original *Pygmalion,* the conservative Mrs. Eynsford Hill takes issue with daughter Clara "talking about men as rotters, and calling everything filthy and beastly," in *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes,* Mrs. Eynsford Hill appears to have gotten "used to you talking about men like thieves and of women as being whores." Likewise, in the moment when Eliza rejects Freddy's romantic approach (asking her out for a walk through the park) with a *fuck no*, the careful act of performance that Eliza embarks on to make the Eynsford Hill family believe that she is herself a fellow member of the upper class makes way for a new English situated almost entirely outside the conventional English sociocultural ladder. When Mrs. Eynsford Hill disciplines her children about their language, she might just as well do so with a Czech accent, while Clara or Freddy might respond with an Italian, French, or Polish phoneme.[101]

As a consequence, the basic premise of Shaw's *Pygmalion* — the "act" of transgressing social class boundaries through performance, and the suspense over whether this act of social performance will succeed — collapses. In *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes*, the protagonists seem less preoccupied with class and more with understanding each other on a very basic level, consistently risking failure and miscommunication. One question, however, remains: has the English language really been freed from its class associations simply by replacing the rigid social codes embedded within the English language with the diversity and multiplicity of *Lingua Franca English*? If the question raised by Shaw's original play was how class boundaries could be transgressed by means of language (and how language could act as a key for transcending societal boundaries and empowering the individual in return), then we might read *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* as a play that asks whether *Lingua Franca English* can perhaps be more effective in overcoming class structures within the English language globally.

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[101] While the protagonists' foreign accents are of course not represented within the written version of *Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes,* these accents were actually an important listening experience for those who attended the event itself, and further debased the Victorian-era class markers in the English language.

Taking into account the growing body of literature about international Englishes and the innumerable uses of *Lingua Franca English* today, there is no doubt that English is not just spreading geographically, but also thriving in ever-more diverse communities, regardless of class or socioeconomic status. But although fluency in English is widely associated with aspiring socio-economic mobility throughout Europe or Asia, for example, linguist John P. O'Regan (2014) has expressed doubts whether *Lingua Franca English* can truly deliver on its promise of levelling out social divisions. O'Regan points to how the spread of neoliberal capitalism has not only perpetuated and exacerbated class hierarchies internationally, but fashioned English as a near-universally recognised form of symbolic capital; an asset worth investing in for those who can afford to do so, and have access to appropriate higher education (540). The notion of language as capital is, of course, not new: in *Pygmalion* itself, Eliza, subdued by professor Higgins' possessive and manipulative actions towards her, eventually realises the economic and emancipatory potential that comes with her new ability to speak English "properly":

Pygmalion	*A Romance in Five Acts …*
LIZA [desperate] I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as I'm able to support him.	LIZA: I will marry Freddy. Yes, I will. As soon as I can sustain him.
HIGGINS [thunderstruck] Freddy!!! That young fool! That poor devil who couldn't get a job as an errand boy even if he had the guts to try it! Woman: do you not understand that I have made you a consort for a king?	HIGGINS [completely insane] With Freddy! That stupid? … Even if you would have the energy to try it, woman, you don't understand what I've made of you: an ideal company for a king.
LIZA. Freddy loves me: that makes him king enough for me. I don't want him to work: he wasn't brought up to it as I was. I'll go and be a teacher.	LIZA. Freddy isn't an asshole. He's a king. Freddy loves me and he will be my king. I'll not send him to work. He doesn't fit for work. And as for me, I'm going to teach.
HIGGINS. What'll you teach, in heaven's name?	HIGGINS. Teach what? For heaven sake!
LIZA. What you taught me. I'll teach phonetics.	LIZA. The thing that I learned from you: phonetics.
(Shaw [1916] 2008, 126)	(Van Harskamp 2014, 103)

In an interesting twist, Liza, recognising that she can use her knowledge of upper-class English to make a living and claim her independence from professor Higgins, insists on using this same skill as a means to sustain Freddy, who she is happy to relieve from his burden to work due to his presumed upper-class status. In other words, Eliza's newfound independence goes hand-in-hand with a feminisation of labour. But in a wider sense, the main problem associated with *Lingua Franca English* is that as a form of symbolic capital, access to it is once again linked to new socio-economic inequalities, as Galloway and Rose have argued (2015, 61). Furthermore, conflict remains between non-native and native speakers of English. Despite the fact that different communities can claim their own *Englishes* as genuine and legitimate forms of cultural expression, they generally do not hold the same level of political and economic power as native English-speaking cultures. In fact, Seidlhofer argues that, so far, *Lingua Franca English* as a cultural phenomenon has largely failed to destabilise the hegemonic power of native English speakers and the socioeconomic prestige of normative highbrow English, putting non-native speakers into a position where they "just cannot win":

> Either they [the non-native speakers] subject themselves to native-speaker authority and obediently strive to meet the norms of the hegemonic language, or they try to assert themselves against the hegemony, only to then be told that they got it wrong because they have the misfortune not to be native speakers. So the primacy accorded to native speaker norms puts the non-native speaker user of English in an inescapable double bind. (Seidlhofer 2011, 34)

In light of these new inequalities and conflicts, *A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-One Englishes* — and the fact this project was staged in London itself, addressing itself to non-native English speakers first and foremost — makes at least a symbolic attempt at such decentring from *within* the centre, as well as toward acknowledging the heterolinguality that has become increasingly commonplace in cities like London, anticipating that not too long into the future, a new generation might emerge for whom the *lingua franca* might actually become the *mother tongue.*

6

Performing Foreignisation:
The Tongues of Guillermo Gómez-Peña

The fetish objects are arranged around the altar table: burning candles, *mariachi* marionettes, tribal masks, a shampoo bottle, a shaman wig, a toy revolver, voodoo dolls, drawings of severed body parts, a megaphone, a ghetto blaster. Behind them, a sombre figure in the dark wears a border patrolman's jacket, a sombrero, feather earrings, a batman pin (among others), a bullet belt and a banana necklace. He slowly turns toward the audience, and speaks with a thick Mexican accent:

> *I speak Spanish therefore you hate me*
> *I speak English therefore they hate me*
> *I speak Spanglish therefore she speaks Ingleñol*
> *I speak in tongues therefore you desire me*
> *I speak to you therefore you kill me*
> *I speak therefore you change*
> *I speak in English therefore you listen*
> *I speak in English therefore I hate you*
> *Pero cuando hablo en español te adoro*
> *But when I speak Spanish I adore you.*
> (Gómez-Peña 1991b, 52)

This is a short extract from Guillermo Gómez-Peña's one-hour performance piece *Border Brujo — A Performance Poem* (Gómez-Peña 1991b), written in San Diego and Tijuana in 1989 and subsequently performed widely across North America and Europe. The *brujo,* literally translated as a magician, is one of Gómez-Peña's flamboyant performance personae: a loving, angry, desiring, theorising, exorcising, conjuring, accusing, praying, babbling, barking, poem-reciting, shape-shifting polyglot hybrid creature; an absurd exaggeration of pseudo-ethnographic imaginations gone awry. The *brujo*, the "I" that speaks, addresses his audience in an auditorium in North America, but self-consciously from the position of the cultural and linguistic other. He does not speak with a

single voice: instead, he morphs into and out of a whole set of impersonations of real and imagined strangers.

Above all, Gómez-Peña — speaking as the *brujo* — addresses the tensions and contradictions surrounding language and identity politics from the vantage point of Latino/a communities in the United States: language as a basis to justify the racial profiling and the exclusion of people(s) from cultural and political life (*I speak Spanish therefore you hate me)*; language and the dilemma of cultural loyalty (*I speak in English therefore I hate you / But when I speak Spanish I adore you)*; the language barrier as a discursive frontier (*I speak in English therefore you listen*); and the ambivalent perception of the other (*I speak in tongues therefore you desire me*). Speaking sometimes by megaphone, sometimes whispering; sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in Spanglish or *Ingleñol* or "in tongues," the *brujo* primarily addresses himself to a white, middle-class Anglo-American audience. In the *brujo*'s (arguably exaggerated) vision, it is an audience that "hates" yet "desires"; that speaks English and rejects Spanish, and that feels entitled not to listen, not to care, to "hate" or even "kill." As a folk magician of sorts, the *brujo* is able to escape from harm, and cross the frontiers that separate English- and Spanish-speaking worlds. Yet at the same time, the *brujo* is an unreliable cultural translator: he does not deliver faithful translations but rather uses the opportunity of addressing his audience to accuse it of racism and injustice.

In this chapter, I will argue that Gómez-Peña's artistic, academic, and educational work as a performancec artist and interdisciplinary intellectual (as he describes himself)[102] can be read as a performative exploration of the concept of *foreignising* translation that is key to the critical translation theory of Lawrence Venuti, and that has been debated widely by translation theorists as a

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[102]   "I am an interdisciplinary intellectual," Gómez-Peña writes, adding that "every idea demands a different artistic language to express it" (Gómez-Peña 2005, xvii). This becomes evident in the diversity of his creative and intellectual output: besides performing (and touring with his performances), he has also made significant scholarly contributions to performance discourse. His books, including *Dangerous Border Crossers, Exercises for Rebel Artists* (Gómez-Peña 2000), and *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, & Loqueras for the End of the Century* (Gómez-Peña 1996a) have been greatly influential in North American performance art circles, and in *Ethno-Techno* (Gómez-Peña 2005)*,* he has gathered the essentials of his performance aesthetic as a method for a cross-cultural and hybrid performance education.

strategy to reverse some of the hierarchies and power relations inherent in cross-cultural relations. In the same vein, Gómez-Peña's work can be read as a critique of *domesticating* translation, a concept that has been used to describe translations that assimilate and commodify the foreign. Focusing on moments in Gómez-Peña's work where translation is withheld or actively refused; where new, hybrid idioms are created; and where his audience is confronted with the limits of language and the possibility to understand, I will argue that his performances can be understood as a form of counter-hegemonic resistance at the level of language. By departing from the existing reception of Gómez-Peña's work, which has mainly focused on the performance of the racialized body of colour and which has, to a substantial degree, been guided by the artists' own theoretical writing,[103] my reading here focuses on the lesser-explored uses of language as well as the various gestures of address throughout his work.[104]

Challenging the Monolingual Mindset

Guillermo Gómez-Peña's biography is in many ways exemplary for the rise of the translator figure within international exhibition culture. His growth as an artist coincided with the need to relate to an unfamiliar audience in a foreign cultural setting, and there is no doubt that the dynamic of this encounter has profoundly influenced his work. Having left his native Mexico City in 1979 with a stipend to study at Los Angeles' CalArts school, he enrolled in the *Post Studio Art* program led by the American conceptual artist John Baldessari. Janet Sarbanes (2014) has described CalArts (and the *Post-Studio Art* program where

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[103]   As a Chicano public intellectual, Gómez-Peña has been highly involved in the production of discourse around his work, and he has frequently worked in dialogical and collaborative formats with theorists to advance the theoretical understanding of his performance work and its wider implications. Notably, he has frequently encouraged artists to take theory seriously as a way to underpin their performance work (Gómez-Peña 2000, 209). As with Walid Raad, the question emerges to what degree an exteriority to the work is still possible, desirable, or necessary. Due to the vast amount of material available, and the felt need to establish a critical distance from his authoritative, theoretical self-reflection, I have written this chapter on the basis of existing texts and documentary material, with the aim of providing a new reading of an otherwise already well-documented performance art practice.

[104]   I build on the notable work of Martha Cutter (2005), who has previously explored the linguistic aspects of Gómez-Peña's work, without however employing the notion of the foreignising translation, or the conceptual framework of Sakai's theory of translation as address.

Gómez-Peña studied in particular) as an innovative and interdisciplinary alternative to the conventional model of art schools at the time that educated artists according to categories like painting, sculpture, or performance art. Rather, the *Post-Studio Art* program encouraged conceptually-driven work by offering equipment, space, and infrastructure, and, most importantly, encounters with other artists. "If you had enough good artists around from all over the world," Baldessari was certain, "the students would come and they would teach each other" (Sarbanes 2014). Meanwhile, Gómez-Peña was fed up with the cultural milieu in Mexico at the time: it was "conservative and impenetrable for a twenty-two-year old interstitial rebel, writer and artist," he wrote; it was a place where "art and literary cartels were structured in an ecclesiastical fashion," with Octavio Paz as the "archbishop and final arbiter of what was acceptable as 'high culture' and 'Mexicanness'" (Gómez-Peña 2005, 5). Mexico's identity politics were similarly conservative, Gómez-Peña has suggested, with territorial and nationalist policies at work that all but erased the traumas of colonialism, denigrated native communities to "folkloric specimens," and regarded migrants *al otro lado* disdainfully as *pochos* — cultural traitors.[105]

As a student at CalArts, Gómez-Peña soon found himself affected by the political, social, and cultural tensions between a white, Anglo-American mainstream on the one hand, and migrant communities, particularly from Latin America, on the other. One of the defining moments he describes in his book, *New World Border* (1996a), is the experience of being repeatedly confronted with racist stereotypes and, moreover, with the impossibility of escaping from them.[106] In the California of the 1980s, "we [Latino migrants] were perceived as a bunch of transnational criminals, gang members, drug lords, Hollywood-style greaser

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[105] Gómez-Peña's performance troupe, *La Pocha Nostra,* borrows its name from this act of cultural treason. "Pocho," Gómez-Peña explains, "means cultural traitor, or a cultural bastard. It's a term coined by Mexicans who never left Mexico to articulate the post-national Mexican experience. It's lightly derogative, but we have expropriated it as an act of empowerment. And 'Nostra' comes from La Cosa Nostra, the Italian Mafia. So you can translate it loosely as the cartel of the cultural traitors, or there is another more poetic translation that essentially means 'our impurities'" (Thackera/Gómez-Peña 2011, first paragraph).

[106] In his writings and interviews, Gómez-Peña frequently describes the experience of being racially profiled as a Latino living in the U.S. For example, he writes how he was thought to be a criminal because he apparently had "the same name and address" and supposedly looked "exactly like a drug dealer they were after" (Gómez-Peña 1991c). In another instance, he was accused of kidnapping his own son (Rotella 1993).

bandits, and job thieves" (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 7) — stereotypes that, as the success of a political figure like Donald Trump demonstrates, continue to resonate with certain segments of the American public even nearly forty years later. Even though the milieu around CalArts was liberal and inclusive, its specialised audience was small, mostly monolingual and, according to Gómez-Peña, still largely ignorant about histories and cultures of the South, making the task of engaging his peers on cross-cultural issues in a way that was intelligible and relatable all the more difficult (Gómez-Peña 1996b, 122).

Gómez-Peña responded to these experiences by gradually developing a complex performance methodology that tried to find ways to counter the racist fears prevalent in American society. Crucially, Gómez-Peña hoped to achieve that not by verbally rebuking biased perceptions but by turning his body from a passive "projection screen" into an active "agent" by collecting, appropriating, performing, exaggerating, and escalating tropes of the racist imagination, performing them on stage and thus reinserting them back into the public sphere. The underlying desire was not only to destabilise racist stereotypes, but to escape from them by (paradoxically) confronting them head-on (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 84; 2011, 322). Rather than following a conventional activist agenda, Gómez-Peña's work sought to develop tools, concepts and ways of acting and "speaking back" creatively and critically — in other words, he hoped to build a performance repertoire that could be used to positively impact ethnic and race relations in America. The artist who would be capable of achieving this was, ideally, a cultural translator:

> The artist … can be at the same time an insider and an outsider, an expert in border crossings, a temporary member of multiple communities, a citizen of two or more nations. S/he performs multiple roles in multiple contexts. At times s/he assumes the role of nomadic chronicler, intercultural translator, or political trickster. S/he speaks from more than one perspective, to more than one community, about more than one reality. His/her job is to trespass, bridge, interconnect, reinterpret, remap, and redefine; to find the outer limits of his/her culture and cross them. (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 12)

Essentially, Gómez-Peña envisioned an artistic practice that was not only highly politicised and responsive to the experience of those situated at the social,

cultural, and political margins, but highly mobile, both geographically and culturally, perpetually shifting between different languages, contexts, and audiences. Perhaps in allusion to Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise,* Gómez-Peña stated that his ideal was to make art that he could travel with, "with the entire production fitting into a suitcase" (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 84). He also noted that beyond being just geographically mobile, the work should embrace the widest possible public. For this purpose, the work itself would have to be flexible, adaptable to a wide range of possible venues, and indeed "translatable" enough to prevail "in the various contexts of art, theater, literature, education and radio" (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 84).

An important field of struggle for Chicano intellectuals has been (and continues to be) language policy and the status of minority languages in the U.S., especially Spanish. Despite widespread belief, the United States constitution does not designate an official language, and according to the most recent census of 2011, more than 60 million people (of the U.S.' nearly 300-million population) currently speak languages other than English in their homes (U.S. Census Bureau/Ryan 2013, 3). As researchers from the Pew Research Center have pointed out, the number of Spanish speakers has more than tripled since 1980 from approximately 10 million speakers to 35 million, and this figure is expected to rise further to 40 million speakers by 2020 (López/González-Barrera 2013). Despite the rising presence of Spanish throughout the U.S., the English language largely continues to be viewed as the language of the "melting pot" through which immigrants are "Americanised" and culturally assimilated into the economy (Rosler 2013). At the same time, since the U.S. culture wars of the 1980s, conservative "English Only" legislation has appeared in dozens of states, and support for a monolingual, English-language public sphere continues to be on the Republican agenda.[107] Many scholars have argued against these policies, criticising how the discourse of "English Only" dismisses the cultural losses

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[107] One could argue that the legislative attempts to establish English as the official language are intended to preserve and institutionalise English monolingualism as a form of privilege. It is also interesting to note, however, that with the 2016 Republican Presidential Primaries, two Hispanic Republican candidates — Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz — have appeared on the national political scene, defying the traditionally white, Anglo-Saxon, and English-speaking constituency of the Republican Party, and potentially signalling a growing political visibility of multilingualism (not unexpectedly, both candidates were criticised by other politicians — such as Donald Trump — for speaking Spanish.)

associated with forced English learning. Moreover, scholars have widely refuted the surprisingly persistent claims that bilingualism is linked to intellectual deficiencies, educational failure, and excess bureaucratic spending (Schmidt 2002; Cutter 2005, 222–225; Lawton 2008).[108] Instead, these scholars have pointed to the socio-economic benefits of multilingualism, and argued that national unity and social justice were under threat not from bilingual or multilingual individuals, but precisely from political campaigns seeking to marginalise minority languages, alienating entire sections of American society. But despite U.S. academics generally embracing more multilingual views, there remains little critical debate within American academia of how language acts as a site of social distinction, with the American humanities largely locked in on the critical studies "trinity" of race, class, and gender.

Meanwhile, for those members of American society who speak English as a mother tongue, there are few incentives to learn to speak another language. The cultural environment for language learning in the U.S. remains weak, and the rising role of English as a global *lingua franca* has likely added to the widespread sentiment that English is the only language needed to get by. Today, as the Pew Research Center (2015) has shown, schools in America generally have very low rates of offering foreign-language classes to their students, and pupils across the country hardly receive much encouragement from their peers or educators either to believe that speaking a foreign language might be useful or desirable. In American political discourse, the benefit of fluency in foreign languages is often reduced to economic and national security benefits, while cultural aspects are ignored: Arne Duncan, the current U.S. Secretary of Education, for example stated in 2010 that language skills should be improved nation-wide primarily in order to "prosper economically and to improve relations with other countries."[109] In 2012, two Forbes commentators (Altschuler/Skorton 2012) even

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[108]   Martha Cutter points out that "Language loss in the United States has occurred within all ethnic groups" (224). However, "language death does not happen in privileged communities" but rather "to the disposed and disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive" (225). She also notes that European immigrants are linguistically privileged in the sense that they are granted greater freedom "over the preservation of the mother tongue, while the bilingualism or multilingualism of immigrant groups who are racialised is perceived as more problematic, more disruptive of the social fabric of the United States" (222).

[109]   Arne Duncan/U.S. Ministry of Education, "Education and the Language Gap: Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the Foreign Language Summit." Speech, December 8, 2010.

went so far as to claim that America's language deficit was turning into "a threat to our national security," given the need to "communicate with friends and foes in other countries." Indeed, Martha Cutter has noted how in the post 9-11 hysteria around national security, foreign language skills have increasingly become associated with warfare, altering the government's strategy of promoting language studies. While languages like Arabic were considered in "demand" in order for the government to conduct surveillance and mass data analysis and provide translation services in conflict regions, Spanish was considered "non-essential" in terms of national security importance (Cutter 2005, 20).

It comes as little susprise, then, that translation practice within the American publishing industry also largely reflects this monolingual mindset. While according to UNESCO's *Index Translationum* (2016), the English language is by far the greatest source language of translations in the world, it only ranks fourth as a target language, trailing far behind German, French, and Spanish in terms of its "receptiveness" of foreign writing. For four books translated out of English, only one book is translated back into it. This imbalance reveals the great epistemological power the English-speaking world — including Great Britain and the United States — yield as a result of British colonial rule and American imperialism of the 20th century, influencing writing and cultural production globally. Translation theorists like Lawrence Venuti and Douglas Robinson have subjected America's translation culture to intense criticism, with Venuti arguing that the English-speaking world has produced a translation culture "that [is] aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to the foreign, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognising their own culture in a cultural other" (Venuti 2012, 15; Robinson 1997b, 33–53). Venuti uses the concept of *domestication* — a term that I will elaborate later on — to describe this translation paradigm that approaches the foreign in such manner as to make it easily readable and consumable for a readership that is unaccustomed to dealing with cultural difference. In simple terms, domesticating translations value fluency and marketability above other

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http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/education-and-language-gap-secretary-arne-dunca ns-remarks-foreign-language-summit (accessed 30 May, 2016).

considerations, severely limiting the amount of linguistic and cultural particularities that are incompatible with the demands for legibility (Venuti 2012, 124–125, 159–160).

'Translation Please!'

Even though the Spanish language has seen a growing presence in the American public realm in recent years, Gómez-Peña's performances continue to stand in contrast to America's largely monolingual majority. His performances employ a bewildering, fascinating multitude of languages and tongues, real and fake, mainstream and marginal; mixed up, contaminated and accented. Consider this fragment from the *Border Brujo* performance:

> Ay México
> Rrrrrooommantic Mexico
> "Amigou Country" …
> rrrrooommantic México
> paraiso en fragmentación
> mariachis desempleados
> concheros desnutridos
> bandidous alegris
> beautiful señoritas
> mafioso politicians
> federalis que bailan el mambou …
> transcorporate breeze sponsored by Turismo
> maquiladora power for the business macho
> crunchy nachous to appease the hunger
> Tostadas Supreme para aliviar las Peñas
> Enchiladas y MacFa-ji-tas
> mmmnn . . . peso little-eat so grandi!
> Where else but in México?

Here, Gómez-Peña explores the cultural ambivalence of the border city of Tijuana with its colourful and often self-exoticising entertainment industry, catering primarily to *gringo* tourists. Tijuana is characterised as a place where ethnic stereotypes of *mariachis, señoritas,* and *enchiladas* are actively reproduced to attract cross-border tourism, and where a landscape of cheap entertainment, ethnic food and souvenirs is embroiled with corruption, crime, and economic

precarity. But the above passage also exemplifies Gómez-Peña's use of language: borrowing tropes from Mexican slang and American marketing language alike, the *brujo* speaks in a manner that is wildly exaggerated to the degree of parody, mixing languages and tongues so frivolously that any notion of authenticity in linguistic expression inevitably collapses.

An interesting effect of this hybrid use of language is that it is fully accessible only to those who are themselves "border-crossers," a term Gómez-Peña frequently uses to designate those who are bicultural and bilingual. Speaking about the figure of the *brujo,* Gómez-Peña notes that "only the perfectly bicultural can be in complicity with him" (Gómez-Peña 1996a, 49). If we regard performance as a social experience whereby the audience experiences itself as a (temporary) community, then one could argue that the bi- or multilingualism performed on stage acts to divide that audience into different segments that understand different parts of the performance differently: Spanish-speaking members of the audience may, for example, laugh at a joke that English speakers can't understand, or vice versa. In that sense, the polyglot *brujo* who "speaks in Spanish to Mexicans, in *Spanglish* to Chicanos, in English to Anglo-Americans, and in tongues to other *brujos* and border crossers" (Gómez-Peña 1991a, 49) also acts as a gatekeeper to what Gómez-Peña calls the "forbidden zones" of language (Gómez-Peña 2005, 253) — the intersectional registers of meaning that are accessible only to a bicultural audience. One could also argue that Gómez-Peña and his performance collaborators adopt an approach that switches between *homolingual* and *heterolingual* modes of address, using different ways of speaking to engage different parts of the audience differently, and switching between "exclusive" and "inclusive" modes of address; between Chicano slang and *lingua franca* English. If we understand social relations to be a product of certain modes of address, as Naoki Sakai has proposed, then by constantly switching codes, Gómez-Peña makes his audience aware of how different uses of language can variably produce a sense of togetherness and/or separation in a heterogenous society.[110]

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[110]   Gómez-Peña's description of the *brujo*'s way of addressing different audiences differently corresponds to his own desire to engage different audiences in a different manner. As he writes in his book *Ethno Techno* (2005, 255)*,* when performing in Mexico, he often hopes to "challenge Mexican ethnocentrism" by presenting himself as a Chicano; while when performing in the U.S., he embraces his American identity and a respective mode of

At times, this strategy comes into play even before the onset of the actual performance. "My performance colleagues and I would often invite all immigrants and people of colour to enter the theater or the museum first," he recalls, "then all bilingual people and interracial couples, and finally all monolingual Anglos. … We began to treat our audiences as exotic minorities and temporary foreigners in 'our' America" (Gómez-Peña 2005, 10). While such an intervention might certainly be seen as divisive and controversial, Gómez-Peña considers it a legitimate strategy for performance art to render visible existing cultural and social hierarchies within American society. He hopes that by making "audience members or readers experience how it feels to be partially excluded, to be minorities in their own city, foreigners in their own country" (Gómez-Peña 2005, 10), performance art might not just make a contribution to flattening existing power relations within American society, but recast the experience of exclusion as a "quintessential American experience" that concerns all. Occasionally, this play with inclusion and exclusion — and the subsequent tensions this generates — is also dealt with from within the performance itself, such as in this passage from his collection of performance poems titled *New World Border* (written collaboratively with Roberto Sifuentes and Coco Fusco):

GP: [Gómez-Peña]: *Estoy perdido . . .*
CF: [Coco Fusco]: [interrupting] Translation please!
GP: … *al norte de un sur inexistente. Me captas cavernícola, ¿mex-plico?*
CF: Translation please!
GP *[makes Neanderthal sounds]*
CF: [outraged] Translation please!!
GP: Okay, okay. *Lección de español número cinco* for advanced English speakers. . . ¿Falsa democracia?*
CF: Translation please! [*someone from the audience translates*] …
GP: [says something in tongues]
CF: Translation please!
GP [didactic]: Repeat with me. *Los norteamericanos que no aprendieron a hablar español sufrieron una marginación total. No podían encontrar trabajo y en las escueles multiraciales se les consideraba retrasados mentales. Acqui con nosotros en el estudio 4 tenemos a varios ejemplos …*" (Gómez-Peña 1994, 132–133)

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speaking in order "to fuck with their narrowminded notions of Americanness." When performing in Europe, he introduces himself as a "diasporic artist" to "avoid exoticisation" and connect with diasporic communities, such as British Pakistanis, French Algerians, and/or German Turks.

In the passage above, multilingual members of the audience are privileged once again by being embedded into the performance as translators, casting their role as participants of a heterolingual community. However, if Coco Fusco's repeated calls for translation are read as commentary on the demand for Spanish speakers to assimilate into an English-speaking norm and thereby "translate themselves," Gómez-Peña's refusal to deliver anything intelligible in response can be read as the very moment of resistance: by refusing to grant monolingual English speakers access, Gómez-Peña champions what Edouard Glissant has called "the right to opacity" (Glissant 1997, 189–194), that is, the right for a minority *not* to be understood; the right to resist cultural assimilation.[111]

But Gómez-Peña's hybrid use of language does not exhaust itself by performatively deconstructing both the English and the Spanish language, or by addressing different sections of the audience differently. As a writer and cultural theorist, Gómez-Peña has continuously created and employed a multitude of concepts, tropes, and terms that interrupt and undermine the linguistic habits of the reader. Citing freely from his self-published *Glossary of Borderismos* (2000, 80–91), his writing consistently comes across as a strange, bizarre and irresistibly funny border world inhabited by *locos*, *vatos,* and *aliens* (a term he embraces for its ambiguity between U.S.-American legal jargon for foreign persons and pop-cultural fantasy) *penetrading* with each other through the *Free Taco Agreement* (according to Gómez-Peña "the act of 'trading' with a smaller and weaker country" — "An innovative economic initiative designed by The Chicano Secret Service"). It's a world where *Jalapeno Pushers* ("A petty criminal who sells chilies on the streets to intoxicate innocent American children") fight for *Gringostroika* (described as "a continental grassroots movement that advocates the complete economic and cultural reform of U.S. Anarcho-capitalism"). Gómez-Peña's performance troupe calls itself *La Pocha Nostra* (a double reference to the *Pocho*, the Mexican cultural traitor, and *La Cosa Nostra*, the nickname of the Sicilian Mafia). And a performance anecdote has it that in prison, Gómez-Peña likes to

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[111]   Glissant's call for a right to *opacity* constitutes a defiant response to what he perceives to be a demand for *transparency* that is imposed on the cultural other within a given society. Glissant writes that "if we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with groups to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements" (Glissant 1997, 189–190).

teach *Chiconics* (presumably a wordplay between "Chicano" and "aesthetics"), while at university, he prefers to lecture in *Anthropolocura (*which might be read both as the "anthropology of madness" or the "madness of anthropology"). *Entiendes, carnal?*

Foreignising the Dominant Language

In the mid-1990s, around the time when Gómez-Peña was on tour with some of his most well-known performance works such as the *Border Brujo,* Homi Bhabha became a key figure in cultural studies discourse for his critique of cultural essentialism and nationalism that, as he saw it, maintained culture and language as fixed, homogenous, and historical categories that failed to live up to the complexities of the postcolonial world (Bhabha 1994, 1–5).[112] Instead, Bhabha pointed to the in-between as a place of identity formation; a process he argued unfolds in a performative manner through the articulation of mixed, conflicting, and ambivalent forms of cultural expression. In this place, he identified the potential for cultural "newness"; and hybrid forms of cultural expression that do not conform to the categories and discourses of the nation state or the self-contained ethnic community; forms of expression that are "impure" and that contaminate those categories (Bhabha 1994, 303–330). Bhabha used the term "cultural translation" as a metaphor to describe these cultural expressions of the in-between. Linguistically "impure" languages like *Spanglish* are "blasphemous" (Bhabha 1994, 225–226) — to use another one of Bhabha's terms — in that they contaminate the cultural and linguistic integrity of both English *and* Spanish.[113]

Blasphemy, iconoclasm and the betrayal of what is seen as culturally original, pure and authentic is a hallmark of Gómez-Peña's aesthetic strategy.

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[112]   In the introduction to *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha (1994) writes that "the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities — *as the grounds of cultural comparativism —* are in a profound process of redefinition … " (5).

[113]   On blasphemy, Bhabha writes that it "goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription. … Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation" (Bhabha 1994, 225–226).

Gómez-Peña consistently dismantles the iconic and linguistic repertoire of supposedly "authentic" culture: symbols and icons are radically taken out of their context, mixed, destroyed, remade and repurposed, regardless of their provenience from North or South of the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, in a short video titled *The Smithsonian of the Barrio* (2004), Gómez-Peña introduces his favourite performance props, which include "white trash folk art puppets," Mexican toys that imitate U.S. cultural icons, racist memorabilia, lowrider airbrushed "barrio art," *mariachi* costumes, heavy metal jewellery, and witchcraft artefacts — the list is endless.[114] For Gómez-Peña, these objects are props in an imagined theatre of "fetishized identities"; products of the pop-cultural imagination where real and fake, truth and performance, desire and disgust complement each other. In this bizarre spectacle of otherness, the stranger wears a *mariachi* hat and speaks Spanish (or other "unintelligible tongues"), but he is also a *bandito*, a criminal, a shaman, a *freak*, a gangster and an uncivilised primitive.

In two well-known performance pieces, *Two Amerindians in a Cage* (1992–1993) and *The Temple of Confessions* (1996), Gómez-Peña and performance partner Coco Fusco presented themselves precisely in this fashion: as caged ethnographic specimens in a "human zoo," inviting their mainly white American audience in places such as the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History or the Whitney Biennial to feed and "explore" them, with most viewers neither objecting to the human display, nor questioning the absurd spectacle of fictionalised and exaggerated otherness. In *The Temple of Confessions*, Gómez-Peña posed as an imaginary native-American "holy creature" or shaman, sitting inside a plexiglass box "with live crickets, taxidermied animals, tribal musical instruments, and a small table filled with witchcraft artefacts" inviting his audience to share their fears and desires with him.[115] For Gómez-Peña, these performances served a similar purpose — namely to "heighten features of fear and desire in the dominant imagination" (Gómez-Peña 2005, 63). In other words, the impersonation of such roles precisely served not to reject and destroy them directly, but paradoxically to exaggerate and "inhabit" them performatively

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[114]   See Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra 2004, "The Smithsonian of the Barrio."
[115]   For documentation of these performances, see Fusco 1994 and Gómez-Peña 1997.

in order to hold up a mirror for the stigmatisation and racialization of brown and black bodies;[116] and to perform the racist imagination to therapeutic effect.[117]

Through his performance personae, Gómez-Peña hence embraces the idea of embodying, and thereby perhaps defusing the tensions that arise in the encounter with a racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic other. However, Gómez-Peña's practice also draws from a desire to, quite literally, *speak back* (to use a term he uses himself) in a way that is critical and transformative of how the medium of language is entangled with the exercise of power over others. This is why I regard Gómez-Peña's work as a form of counter-translation: by creating a fictional speaking other that is present and vocal, and yet consistently refuses to make itself fully understood or to deliver a narrative that is reliable and intelligible. But what kind of translation is at work here? As I have already stated previously, I would argue that Gómez-Peña's work can be understood as an experimental exploration of the paradigm of *foreignising* translation, inviting his audience into a heterolingual space of cultural hybridity.

Foreignising is a term with inherent tensions and contradictions. It goes back to the peak of German romanticism and emerging nationalism in the early 19th century, when Friedrich Schleiermacher published his theory *About the Different Methods of Translating* (Schleiermacher [1813] 1963). In his treatise, Schleiermacher described two paradigmatic approaches that can be used transfer a text from one language to another: paraphrase ["Paraphrase"] and reconstruction ["Nachbildung"]. He metaphorically described the difference between them as, on the one hand, the translator "moving" the author "toward the foreign reader" (making the original text appear as if it had originally been written in the target language); or, on the other hand, the translator moving the reader "toward the foreign author" by preserving the cultural and linguistic marks of the foreign within the target language (and hence forcing the reader to

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[116] According to Omi and Winant (1986), racialization refers to a social process whereby people are categorised by others according to racial criteria (53–77).

[117] The case for "inhabiting" the very cultural constructs that serve as means of oppression as a form of liberation recalls once again the Créolité movement I introduced in the previous chapter, and the idea of building a new hybrid language that expresses an "interactional or transactional" form of identity. In order to build that language, it was necessary to appropriate and make "the French language ours," and on that basis to "extend," "deviate," "change" and "enrich" its vocabulary and syntax, as the authors of *In Praise of Creoleness* wrote (Bernabé et al. 1990, 900).

adjust to foreign vocabularies and forms of expression).[118] Schleiermacher had a clear preference for the latter approach, believing that, in the former, "lively speech is irretrievably killed" ["die lebendige Rede ist unwiederbringlich getötet"] (45–46, my translation). Conversely, Schleiermacher saw the virtue and beauty of bringing the reader closer to the foreign author not only in acknowledging and preserving linguistic and cultural differences, but in surrendering to "the irrationality of language" ["beugt sich unter der Irrationalität der Sprachen"] that the gesture of decentring the reader entails (46–47, my translation).

With regard to practice, Schleiermacher remained rather vague on how exactly this task could be performed. His main focus was not, in fact, how to produce a successful translation, but what that translation could achieve in terms of cultural value among its readership. Praising reconstruction, he called for translations that recreated the "spirit" of the original language ["der Geist der Ursprache"] (46) and thus permitted readers to experience how the source text was grammatically, stylistically, and lexically foreign, and how it offered them an unsettling and transformative experience of cultural difference. This embrace of the foreign in translation is echoed in Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay, *The Task of The Translator,* where Benjamin — as I mentioned previously — articulated a theory of translation based on the idea that languages, despite being different, supplemented each other in what they wanted to express, with all languages being fragments of a mystical greater language he called "pure language."[119] For Benjamin, meaning was a category that was never fully found in any given individual language, or its specific modes of signification, but in an encounter of languages that would permit meaning to emerge from a totality of voices; "from the harmony of all the various modes of intention" (Benjamin [1923] 2002, 257). Translation was a tool for Benjamin to experience that thought universal kinship

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[118] Schleiermacher remarks that "either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer," or alternatively, "he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader." My translation. See Schleiermacher [1813] 1963, 47.

[119] The English translator of *The Task of the Translator*, Harry Zohn, translated Benjamin's metaphor of "reine Sprache" as "pure language." While this translation is certainly correct, in order to avoid confusion, it must be pointed out that "pure language" in the Benjaminian sense does not refer to the "purity" of any single language in the nationalist and essentialist sense. Rather, Benjamin's notion of "pure language" might be translated alternatively as *mere language* or even *total language*, hinting at a totality of language.

between languages, and as such, it was a profoundly humanist act. "Pure language" is of course more of an abstract *Denkfigur* rather than an actual linguistic or cultural category; and yet, it serves to outline the fundamental task of the translator in a fragmented world, as Benjamin imagined it: rather than mediating between isolated and stable linguistic units, translation should break down the barriers between them and move them closer together, towards the utopian idea of "pure language."[120]

In order to achieve this, Benjamin suggested that the translator must "break through the decayed barriers of his own language" (261) and "expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language" (262). In other words, a good translation was, again, one that followed the wording of the original; not necessarily the one that best and most eloquently communicated with readers or represented the original's supposed meaning, but one that longed for "linguistic complementation" by "lovingly and in detail incorporat[ing] the original's mode of signification" (260). Benjamin made it clear that translations should not attempt to communicate the sense of the original text or read as if the text had originally been written in the target language, but instead aspire to literalness ["Wörtlichkeit"]: a great translation "is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully" (260). Hence, if all languages were translated into each other, each of them would partake in the other's growth, and in the process of translation, "pure language" would "shine through" and enrich languages in such manner that they would approach each other by means of transversal shifts in vocabulary, ideas, and cultural knowledge. Again, Benjamin saw meaning not as a fixed category within a specific language or culture, but as something in constant flux that would emerge and grow through translation and the renewal of language. By virtue of confronting readers with the unknown and the (yet) unintelligible, such translations would, of course, inevitably place a great burden on readers. But this is precisely where both Benjamin and Schleiermacher saw the potential of *Bildung* — both in the sense of cultural *education* as well the *formation* of language. Citing Rudolf

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[120]   As such, Benjamin's theory of translation can also be read as a critique of originality and textual authority, and is thereby related to and presages Barthes' notion of the death of the author.

Pannwitz, Benjamin suggested that instead of turning "Hindi, Greek, English into German," translations into German should turn "German into Hindi, Greek, English" (Pannwitz 1917, 250, quoted in Benjamin [1923] 2002, 162).[121]

In his much-cited book *The Scandals of Translation*, Lawrence Venuti drew, among others, from Schleiermacher's and Benjamin's ideas and coined the term of "foreignising" translation, implicating translation methodology with an ethics of cross-cultural exchange (Venuti [1995] 2004, 20).[122] As Venuti explains,

> the "foreign" in foreignising translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current target-language situation. Foreignising translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language. In its effort to do right abroad, this translation method must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience — choosing to translate a foreign text excluded by domestic literary canons, for instance, or using a marginal discourse to translate it. (Venuti [1995] 2004, 20)

Critiquing the frequent asymmetry of cultural encounters and the persistence of unequal power relations internationally (Venuti [1995] 2004, 5–17), Venuti saw

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[121] Pannwitz writes [my translation]: "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise: they want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. They have a substantially greater respect for our own uses of language than for the spirit of the foreign work. Basically, they eye the reader as opposed to focusing on the matter itself. At all cost something wants to be made comprehensible and perceptible" (Pannwitz 1917, 240). Compare that statement to the much more recent writing of Venuti (1998, 125) who argues that translations, in order to be successful, must possess "immediately comprehensible" language that fixes "precise meanings in simple, continuous syntax and the most familiar lexicon." In his view, bestselling translations usually "produce the illusory effect of transparency, of seeming untranslated. Fluent strategies pursue linear syntax, univocal meaning, current usage, lexical consistency; they eschew unidiomatic constructions, polysemy, archaism, jargon, any linguistic effect that calls attention to the words as words and therefore preempts or interrupts the reader's identification" (125).

[122] Schleiermacher initially thought of the foreignising strategy as a tool of empire, rather than as a tool against it. For him, the primary stakeholder in translation was the (German) nation. He saw the translator as a kind of cultural worker indebted to the nation, required to elevate the status of German culture not from "within," but through translation and contact with the foreign — and hence, to some degree, its appropriation. Schleiermacher made it clear that, in his view, the translator's respect and understanding for foreign languages and cultures always had to be eclipsed by his "love for the fatherland" (Schleiermacher [1813] 1963, 63). For Schleiermacher, translators who got involved with the foreign to such a degree that they completely alienated themselves from their native culture and became, simply, "citizens of the world" (ibid.) only served themselves and produced translations that were useless to the nation. Those translators stand, Schleiermacher wrote, "in a place where the value of translation approaches zero" (51).

it as necessary to address these inequalities from *within* translation by adopting a strategy that, as Schleiermacher and Benjamin had suggested, would reject easy access to the foreign by forcing it to conform to the aesthetic tastes and cultural values of the translating culture and its readership. Instead, foreignising translations would embrace elements of the foreign language wherever possible, and preserve the grammatical and lexical structures as well as the stylistic peculiarities of the original (30). Furthermore, foreignising translations might borrow expressions and concepts from the foreign text and "import" them into the target language without translation, especially in instances where no equivalent expression was available in the target language (thereby creating it).[123] In Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performances, such as in the following excerpt from his series of performance poems *Warrior for Gringostroika* (1993), we can observe this technique in use:

> Form a coalition, *carnal*!
> *No te duermas*, *Samurai*!
> Get a computer, *pirata*!
> But *buzo*, if your umbilical cord creaks
> there's nothing we can do.
> You're gone, lost
> in the all-encompassing fog of the United States of America
> & then, you *es-tass jou-didou, com-pre-hen-di*?
> (Gómez-Peña 1993, 83)

Here, Spanish-language loanwords seamlessly integrate into a predominantly English-language poem. Especially notable is how the Spanish loanwords are situated in the affective register of language: by calling his English-speaking audience names like *carnales, vatos, piratas,* or *buzos*, Gómez-Peña implicates the members of his audience directly and personally with the foreign element in a highly emotional, personal, and culturally-specific way, while simultaneously integrating them into a hybrid cultural discourse. The foreignising technique is also at play in the last line when he warns in Spanish with an American accent, "you es-tass jou-didou, com-pre-hen-di?" ["estas jodido" — "you're fucked"], mimicking the aggressive language of a U.S. police officer approaching an

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[123]   For a comprehensive description of foreignising translation techniques and their limitations, including borrowing, calque, and literalism, see Darbelnet and Vinay [1958] 2004, 84–92.

assumed Latino immigrant and casting his audience in the role of the victim. What is furthermore characteristic for the foreignising method is the interplay between English and Spanish-language segments within the text: the presence of foreign expressions within the passage is not so strong as to entirely exclude an English-only reader or spectator, but strong enough to affect his or her level of comprehension. As Venuti puts it, by confronting the reader or spectator with foreign concepts and linguistic constructs, "the reader's participation will be disrupted … momentarily" (Venuti 1998, 12). As the reader is drawn into the text, he or she is simultaneously confronted with their inability to access it fully. While in actual translation practice, the foreignising strategy is limited by a plethora of factors — Douglas Robinson, for example, warned that it might produce illegible, nonsensical, or even comical texts that might actually undermine the very ambitions the approach is based on, risking to make the foreign culture "appear immature, stupid, backward, and childish (Robinson 1997a, 161–162) — as a performance artist, Gómez-Peña does not shy away from these effects. To the opposite: he embraces them. For Gómez-Peña, the rich spectrum between understanding and misunderstanding, translation and mistranslation, intelligibility and unintelligibility is more productive than either of these polar opposites by themselves.

The Rejection of 'Domesticated' Otherness

Gómez-Peña's performative exploration of the foreignising method can also be read as a tacit critique of how translation is conventionally practiced. Consider the following excerpt from *Border Brujo*, where Gómez-Peña once again addresses his American audience:

> *[He grabs the microphone, speaks with overdone Mexican accent]*
> hellou, hellou
> alo Jack
> can you hearr me?
> can you rreally hear me?
> I am finally speakin' English
> … no, no, you are not blame for the invasion of Grenada …
> the air-raid to Libya wasn't your fault …
> the Iran-Contra aid wasn't really your initiative

nor were the last economic sanctions to Mexico
[Pause]
Jack, you have delusions of grandeur
you were merely receiving instructions
… & please forgive my bad English
I came too old to this country
& I haven't been domesticated yet.
(Gómez-Peña 1991b, 55)

Explaining why his accent is still strong and his English "bad," and that his age has made it difficult to assimilate into the linguistic and cultural norms of America, Gómez-Peña's performance character states (somewhat proudly) that he has not "been domesticated yet," and perhaps might never be. While the notion of "domestication" can be read as a metaphor for cultural assimilation, in translation theory, the term also designates the counterthesis to the foreignising method that I have described above. As opposed to bringing the reader to the foreign author, as the foreignising strategy stipulates, domesticating translations bring the foreign author to the reader. More precisely, domestication in the translation context designates what Schleiermacher called "paraphrase": the method of adapting, or even re-writing a foreign text according to the cultural norms and values of the target culture, producing an easily accessible text whose status as a translation is invisible — it might just as well have been written in the language it was translated into. As Venuti writes, in the practice of domesticating translation,

> the fact of translation is erased by suppressing the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, assimilating it to dominant values in the target language culture, making it recognizable and therefore seemingly untranslated. (Venuti 1998, 31)

Both of Venuti's most widely read books, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998), constitute a critique of the domesticating method that he views as dominant within Anglo-American publishing and translation culture. At the core of Venuti's critique lies the idea that domestication represents a hegemonic form of translation that provides effortless access to the foreign without displacing readers from their privileged position in any way. Moreover, for Venuti, domesticating translation feeds the narcissistic desire to be presented

with the foreign in terms that are a priori comprehensible and accessible from within our own language (Venuti [1995] 2004, 21; Venuti 1998, 124) — making it impossible for the foreign to truly affect and transform our cultural imagination. Moreover, Venuti has linked domestication to the demands and vicissitudes of the marketplace: by accommodating existing perceptions about the foreign, domesticating translations tend to be more profitable than foreignising ones (Venuti 1998, 125). Bestselling translations, Venuti writes, are almost always domesticating ones (ibid.).

We could read Gómez-Peña's rejection of domestication as an expression of a counter-hegemonic and counter-colonial stance that objects to any form of cultural appropriation or commodification that serves to perpetuate societal inequality. This stance also becomes clear in Gómez-Peña's writing. He frequently points to what he sees as the art world's appetite for easily comprehensible, catchy and exotic narratives and images of cultural difference that do little to expand the imagination or dislodge existing stereotypes. "The modus operandi of the self-proclaimed 'international' art world," he writes, "is no longer any different from that of corporate multiculturalism," with a lucky few ethnic minority artists "becoming commodities and trendy neoprimitives" (Gómez-Peña 2005, 60). Here, Gómez-Peña's view echoes the points I have already made previously, and coincides with the writing of German cultural theorist Kien Nghi Ha, who has argued that

> in the process of domesticating and conserving hybridity, taking place within the cultural industry, a significant transformation takes place: a formerly unsafe discourse, full of spontaneous, badly fitting, uncontrollable, disturbing and monstrous elements, is, after its disinfection, used to affirmatively accelerate the existing cultural order. This domestication robs hybridity precisely of the unpredictable, living, and dangerous moments of transgression that permit an escape — albeit temporary — from the existing order. (Nghi Ha 2005, 61. My translation).

Today, in light of a seemingly ever-greater polarisation in U.S. politics, a growing populist backlash against progressive cultural politics and unabating police violence and economic precarity, the question remains — are Gómez-Peña's staged confrontations with the other, thought to be a tool to achieve a greater

integration of minorities into the cultural life of the nation *in their own terms,* still effective? As foreignising translations inherently challenge their audience to face precisely what is yet incomprehensible and foreign, their success depends greatly on the audiences' willingness and desire to learn and expand their imagination. In a *Philosophical Tantrum* (2011), a performative lecture Gómez-Peña held nearly two decades after *Border Brujo* was first performed on stage, the artist — looking back on a lifetime of performance work — humbly shares his doubts (Gómez-Peña 2012, 7): "what to do when all the master discourses and epic narratives of hope are bankrupt? Where does one find the spiritual energy to continue?" In the audience itself, he suggests, wherever it may be. "My hope is always located on the other side of the border …   [but] in this very moment, my hope is located in your arms" (8).

7

Translations without Original:
Re-reading Walid Raad's *The Atlas Group*

At Kassel's *Documenta 13* in 2012, a curious miniature object was on display in one of the Fridericianum's satellite spaces. A scaled-down version of a gallery space, it resembled the kind of models museum curators commonly use to plan exhibitions. Produced with minute attention to detail, the object included numerous extremely intricate miniature reproductions of artworks installed in their proper place, complete with frames, and video installations reconstructed using tiny LCD screens and embedded speakers.[124] Created by the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad and titled *Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 139: The Atlas Group [1989–2004]*, this object was embedded in a rather peculiar story: according to the artist, his Beirut-based gallery, Sfeir-Semler, had invited him to install his first solo exhibition of his well-known body of work, *The Atlas Group*, in Lebanon. Raad, who has lived in New York since 1983 and regularly shuttles back and forth between New York and Beirut, had (supposedly) been invited year after year since 2005, but had repeatedly turned down the invitation:

> *The Atlas Group* is a project about the wars in Lebanon, but it is also a project I have never shown in Lebanon. For some reason, I could never do it. I always feared that something might happen to the works. It's not that I thought it would be censored or anything like that. I just felt that the works would somehow be affected, though I could not say exactly how. (Raad 2014)

In 2008, when he finally agreed and sent the series of works *The Atlas Group* encompasses to Beirut, the artist discovered — or so the story goes — that his entire series had miraculously and dramatically been transformed upon arrival, resulting in the object on display. "I was forced to face the fact," Raad states laconically, "that, in 2008, in Beirut, all my artworks shrank" (ibid.). Visitors who participated in guided tours to the exhibition could learn about this story from

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[124]   For a full description and visual documentation of this piece, see Raad 2014.

the artist himself. Given the doubtful nature of this claim, his sincere, charming, and authoritative voice did not fail to amuse, if not slightly bewilder his audience. But the story also featured in the exhibition's press release and was published two years later in prosaic form in the journal *e-flux*, revealing what those familiar with Raad's work had already suspected — that these guided tours were actually a scripted performance, with the model serving as a performance prop and autonomous art object alike.

The miniature artworks installed inside it indeed constitute a replica of Raad's largest single body of work to date: *The Atlas Group*.[125] Mimicking the form of an archive, *The Atlas Group* consists of a series of works that include video installations as well as photographs, collages, and objects that each narrate fictionalised and speculative personal histories of the Lebanese civil war, interspersed with meta-layers of political commentary, artistic self-reflection, and cultural criticism.[126] Even though *The Atlas Group* maintains the semblance of a research organisation, it always located itself clearly within the wider contexts of contemporary art — such as museums, non-profit art spaces and galleries, university auditoriums and classrooms, and experimental and independent film theatres. Despite being situated in an art context and its highly stylised aesthetic, the project long shied away from overtly displaying its status as an artwork, characterising itself instead as an interdisciplinary research practice that only used art-related spaces to gain visibility.

The Atlas Group has received very wide exposure throughout the last ten years. Identifying himself as the founder or even "spokesman" of *The Atlas Group*, Raad's artistic and scholarly narrative — embedding presentations of *The Atlas Group* in a discourse on Lebanese history and the politics of representation

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[125] In the following I consciously refrain from providing dates for individual works from *The Atlas Group* as Raad has himself always shied away from dating his works. Because he has frequently used contradictory information on the dating of his works, numerous different dates on each work are in circulation. The project's greatest activity took place between approximately 1999 and 2005.

[126] On the website for the work, http://www.theatlasgroup.org, *The Atlas Group* is described as follows: "*The Atlas Group* is a project established in 1999 to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon. One of our aims with this project is to locate, preserve, study, and produce audio, visual, literary and other artifacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon." Since *The Atlas Group* is largely a product of fiction, this self-description largely serves to introduce and frame its narrative contents.

— has generally been echoed by curators, critics, and academics alike, yielding a large body of writing that has linked Raad's work with the cultural, political, social, and psychological condition of the Lebanese post-war period on the one hand (Al-Kassim 2002; Cooke 2002; Lepecki 2005, 2006; Enwezor 2008; Farhat 2009), and with a discourse on experimental documentary and speculative fiction on the other (Kaplan 2004; Lambert-Beatty 2009; Labouris 2014; Wilson-Goldie 2015). Throughout the project's long international trajectory of exhibitions, Raad actively remained involved in the work's reception and discourse through his own publications and public appearances, maintaining a position of authority with respect to his work that makes the task of writing and speaking about *The Atlas Group* without to some degree replicating the artist's own discourse a challenging task. His work "presents something of a nightmare for the earnest fact-checker," art critic Brian Boucher (2010) noted quite accurately, and, throughout the last five years, as I have myself studied and spoken on *The Atlas Group*, I felt a growing necessity to search for a way of approaching Raad's work without merely reproducing the Raad's narrative, as well-founded and seductive as it may be.

In this chapter I propose to reframe *The Atlas Group* as a diasporic art practice that revolves around (and reflects on) moments and gestures of translation. The purpose of this reading will not be to invalidate existing readings of *The Atlas Group*, but rather to show how the need to address foreign audiences can open potentials for experimental and critical forms of documentary storytelling. I will argue that *The Atlas Group,* besides reflecting on the historiography of the Lebanese conflict, explores the potentialities of exilic and diasporic artistic creation, producing and simultaneously capitalising on the tensions around originality, authority, and authorship that arise in the heterolingual address. While drawing from theoretical debates around the role of the exilic and diasporic artist and translator, I will explore how Raad's mode of working and role in the international art world can be understood through the lens of translation.

Among academics and art critics, *The Atlas Group* has generally been received and discussed as a speculative commentary on Lebanon's lacking public

account of (as well as justice for) the violent events of its recent past, linking a critique of memory and representation to a Foucauldian deconstruction of historiography's inherent relationship to power. "Where does one look for the evidence that becomes history?" Janet A. Kaplan (2004, 134) asks, and adds: "Which stories are told, and who gets to tell them? What authority do photographs and archives carry?" In one of the most substantial scholarly explorations of *The Atlas Group*, the German art historian Regina Göckede (2006, 190–191) linked Raad's work to a Lebanese post-war amnesia, arguing that in the absence of "real" historical, sociological, and anthropological research, it is artists and artist collectives who fill the gap of knowledge production while addressing the need to make sense of the traumatic past. While these are accurate assessments, I believe they fail to address how Raad's mode of working relies on certain gestures of address that create fictional "maneuvering spaces" from which *The Atlas Group's* speculative histories can be told in the first place. The story of *The Atlas Group's* mysterious "shrinking incident" provides an important lead in this respect: what "really" happened to the artist's work as it encountered, for the first time, a "native" Lebanese audience? What does this episode reveal about *The Atlas Group's* gains and losses in translation?

Despite the well-known fact that Raad has been living in the U.S. since 1983 and received his entire higher education there, art writers and academics have frequently attributed *The Atlas Group* to the geographical, cultural, and political context of post-civil war Beirut. Sarah Rogers (2007, 11–12) has noted how the protagonists of this relatively small scene have embraced similar conceptual and aesthetic strategies, and indeed, Raad has frequently been shown internationally alongside a number of fellow Lebanese artists such as Walid Sadek, Akram Zaatari, Joana Hadjithomas, Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige, and Paola Yacoub. Many of these artists share similar thematic interests and conceptual methods, exploring the Lebanese post-civil war condition, investigating collective and private histories of this conflict, and exploring collective memory and trauma. What has received somewhat lesser scholarly attention is how the work of these artists and their widespread international reception tends to be linked to a certain, specifically Lebanese cosmopolitanism and condition of diaspora. Given its small size, Lebanon has an enormous

diaspora, and while the possibility of leaving and escaping conflict at home certainly remains a feature of societal privilege, it is fair to say that experiences of migration and "flexible citizenship," to use Aihwa Ong's term (1999), are deeply embedded in contemporary Lebanese society.[127] It is extremely common for Lebanese artists to live between Beirut and New York, Paris, Berlin, and Amsterdam; and to be familiar with the problems of address and translation that arise within international exhibition culture.[128]

Signs of Translation

The heart of *The Atlas Group* and its primary mode of presentation is actually not the museum display, but the format of an artist talk or lecture performance whereby Raad takes on the role of the mediator, addressing his audience by enacting the shifting role of the Lebanese historian, archivist, investigator, collector, and storyteller, and presenting his *documents* on screen along the lines of a more or less scripted narrative. In these performative presentations and lectures, the artist does not merely speak *about* his work in front of his audience; his address becomes the work itself (Raad 2007; Peters 2011, 179; Wilson-Goldie 2015, 50–57). Taking into account that Raad has largely developed his artistic career outside Lebanon and the Arab world, and that audiences in the United States or Europe are likely unfamiliar with Lebanon's specific histories of war, this address necessarily involves acts of translation — both linguistic and cultural. The perhaps most obvious sign of these acts of translation is *The Atlas Group's* inherent multilingualism: most of its documents contain translated annotations in French and English, and those translations do not just appear on the work's sidelines, but constitute an integral part of the work.

A good example for this practice is *Missing Lebanese Wars* (Raad, Abdallah and Awada 1999); a series of digital collages attributed to a certain Dr. Fakhouri

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[127]   Lebanon permits dual citizenship, and during the period of the civil war, Western nations offered visas to Lebanese citizens, particularly those belonging to the Christian minority, including Walid Raad (Salamey 2014, 103–104).

[128]   An informative panel discussion between Lebanese artists Tony Chakar, Rabih Mroué, Khalil Joreige, Walid Sadek, Joana Hadjithomas, Bilal Khbeiz and others on the subjects of travel, translation, and the reception of their work abroad was held in 2006 at the Maison Française at the University of Oxford, with a transcript published in Cotter et al. 2006.

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who is described as a famous oddball historian of the Lebanese civil war. Through this persona, *Missing Lebanese Wars* recounts an unlikely story of how cynical Lebanese historians supposedly attended horse races during the Lebanese civil war to place their bets: "Each historian wagered on precisely when, how many fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line, the [race track] photographer would expose his frame" (II–III). This story, and the series of documents it frames, is generally read as a metaphor for the impossibility of representing historical events. For example, Regina Göckede has argued that the act of betting points at the gap between signifier (the official photograph in the press) and signified (the actual crossing of the finishing line) as the site at which historical meaning emerges; where the actual meaning of the event remains "differential" to its representation (Göckede 2006, 196–197). The documents themselves (which appear as digital reproductions only; the originals have never been shown) contain newspaper cut-outs of the race track photographs alongside various calculations and scribbles in Arabic, English, and French, such as a description of the winning historian, or calculations on the distance between the horse and the finish line. All of these notes are translated and annotated digitally in English, with the English translations visually framing and surrounding the original document, and arrows connecting the handwritten notes and their respective digital English-language translations. Embedded into the image itself, these arrows illustrate the directionality of the audience address that takes place through *The Atlas Group*: from Arabic to English; from original to reproduction; from text to translation; from Lebanon and its archives to the stages of global art institutions and their heterolingual publics.

Another hallmark of *The Atlas Group*'s use of translation is the status of the work as a perpetual reproduction of itself. For example, in the series *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair* (Raad 2005), Raad explores the history of car bombs in the Lebanese civil war. Each plate displays a scanned photograph from the archives of the Lebanese daily newspaper *Annahar*, taken shortly after the bomb's explosion. An uncanny visual pattern emerges from this collection of images depicting the every-day reality of war: while the photographers tended to focus on the car's burnt-out remnants, onlookers can be seen standing helplessly among the wreckage, gathering around torn fragments of what appear to be car

engines that have at times been catapulted dozens, if not hundreds of metres, away from the actual site of the explosion — so the introduction to the work reports (3). Each plate contains archival markings, such as the date of the incident, the photographer's name, and a partial English translation of the handwritten notes found at the back of each original photograph. As in every other series of *The Atlas Group,* the original materials remain absent (according to the artist, they are located in the Annahar Research Centre and the Arab Documentation Centre). The original's absence is systematic: throughout *The Atlas Group's* publications and presentations, Raad consistently embraces a digital aesthetics of reproduction whereby what is made available to viewers always points back at its own status as a reproduction. One of Raad's publications for example, titled *Let's Be Honest, The Weather Helped* (2008), presents itself as a scanned copy of itself, with page bleeds visible on each page as if the printers had forgotten to cut them off. Raad so consistently denies his audience access to the originals while simultaneously highlighting the status of his works as reproductions that the very possibility of an original becomes questionable. One may read the withholding of the original as a commentary on the present-day neoliberal economy of circulating images and a virtualised, deterritorialised mode of production, as Hito Steyerl (2008, 294–295) has described it. However, one may also read it as signaling a shift away from the "truth" embodied by the materiality of the archival object toward the virtuality and immateriality of fiction; from Beirut to the stages of cultural institutions around the world; and from homolingual to heterolingual modes of address. I would argue that in works like *Let's Be Honest, The Weather Helped*, the cultural original and its reproductions and translations visibly drift away from each other, perhaps to such an extent that the original becomes unreachable — or that the categories of original and reproduction lose their meaning altogether.[129]

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[129] The notion of the translation as drifting away from the original to the degree that both categories eventually collapse is a hallmark of Benjaminian thinking on translation. In *The Task of the Translator* (Benjamin [1923] 2002, 261) Benjamin used the metaphor of the tangent to illustrate the task of translation: to touch the original only in a diminishingly small point and then depart from it. Benjamin further argued that with each act of translation, the text would grow, living an "afterlife" and thereby approximating the state of "pure language." Such translation, as Benjamin makes clear, no longer serves the original text, but rather the interest of language itself and its renewal and enrichment through acts of translation.

Another sign of translation can be identified in the miniature model I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Doesn't the very idea of the miniature borrow from an iconography of travel, migration, and exile? In this vein, the scale model and its miraculous "shrinking" could be read (once again) as a reference to Duchamp's *Boîte en Valise* (1935–1941), the portable miniature monograph including sixty-nine small reproductions of the artist's most important works. T.J. Demos (2002, 10) has read Duchamp's famous piece as a manifestation of exilic homelessness: by miniaturising his own work, Demos argued, Duchamp made it fit for travel in anticipation of a prolonged state of exile. Demos points to the function of the miniature as a useful, portable, self-contained museum-in-exile, while simultaneously highlighting the utility of photography as a substitute for the original in its absence, leading to a blurring the lines between the artwork and its reproduction (14–15). With its global dissemination and its blurring between artistic, scholarly, and curatorial forms of expression, *The Atlas Group* could be read in the same manner — and yet there remains a subtle difference between Duchamp's *Boîte en Valise* and Raad's miniature *The Atlas Group*: in the *Boîte en Valise*, Duchamp's work was miniaturised according to the artist's will, whereas *The Atlas Group* — if we are to believe Walid Raad's own story — shrank against the artist's consent. How to explain that difference?

'A New World to Rule'

In order to understand this difference it is necessary to examine more closely how the relation between artistic creation and the condition of exile has been understood. Cultural theorists have viewed exile as a paradoxical experience, linked both to profound alienation and great creativity. In his essay, *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said — a Palestinian who grew up in Egypt and lived most of his life in the United States — noted that, on the one hand, exile is "terrible to experience," while admitting that, as a condition, it is "strangely compelling to think about" (Said [1984] 2001, 137). For Said, exile was characterised by an irreversible disruption of belonging: "true exile is a condition of terminal loss," Said wrote; a state of "crippling sorrow of estrangement" and a permanent state

of sadness over "something left behind forever" (Said [1984] 2001, 137). Said underscored the political and social marginalisation of exiles and émigrés, who "generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them" and thus live in a perpetual quest to "reconstitute their broken lives" (Said [1984] 2001, 140–141). U.S.-based Vietnamese filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha has likened the experience of exile to one of profound rejection, pointing to the impossibility of having a real home — the exiled is "unwanted" in his home and thus effectively a stranger everywhere; traumatised and mutilated by the shifts of events that have expelled him or her from their homelands" (Minh-Ha 1994, 10–11).

Simultaneously, writers have viewed exile as a condition of creative freedom. Salman Rushdie famously wrote that exile was "a dream of a glorious return," like "a ball hurled high into the air" (Rushdie [1988] 2011, 205). Instead of focusing on the inevitable loss, he insisted on the emancipatory potential of life in exile, arguing that in exile "something can also be gained" (Rushdie 1992, 17). Similarly, reflecting upon his own exile in Brazil and France, the Czech-born writer and journalist Vilém Flusser cherished his state of uprootedness as the very condition that permitted him to work and write. Flusser believed that his detachedness from home allowed him to "judge, decide and act" more freely (Flusser 2003, 5). He believed that the bonds, values, and social norms associated with the "home" had not been actively chosen by him in the first place but imposed by others (5). For him, exile brought about the possibility for new bonds, ones chosen more consciously and freely, and at the same time forced him to use creative strategies to reflect on, come to terms with, and make sense of things if he was not to be "swamped and consumed by the waves … breaking over him" (81). Because the exiled must make sense of his new environment, "the expellee must be creative" in order "not to perish" (81). Even though Flusser acknowledged that having some sort of home was a deeply rooted need, he radically questioned how that need figured within the ideological construction of the nation-state; which he — after the vast tragedy and destruction of World War II — regarded with profound suspicion. Flusser preferred a polyglot and nomadic life, creating continuity between otherwise discontinuous spheres: "I

feel at home in at least four languages," he declared, "and I feel challenged and even forced to translate and then back-translate everything that I write" (2).

Raad's biography as an artist is likewise marked by the experience of migration and exile. Born in Lebanon in 1967 to a Christian family from East Beirut, Raad was fortunate to leave Lebanon shortly after the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon 1983 on a ferry bound for Cyprus, from where he travelled onwards to the U.S. to stay with his brother and attend high school and college. He later studied medicine at Boston University before transferring to the Rochester Institute of Technology to complete an undergraduate degree in photography, and subsequently enrolled in the University of Rochester's Ph.D. program in visual and cultural studies, completing both M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in 1993 and 1996 respectively and shaping his hybrid role as both an artist and an academic (Whitechapel Gallery 2010, 2). While studying in Rochester, Raad collaborated with the Lebanese-born, Canada-based artist Jayce Salloum to produce a one-hour experimental documentary on the resistance against Israeli occupation in South Lebanon, titled *Up To The South* (a film that I briefly discussed in chapter two). Shot in the tradition of critical and self-reflective essay films such as Godard's *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976), *Up To The South* not only translated voices from the Lebanese resistance to the outside world, but also questioned how Lebanon and its conflict were represented internationally. Their project was led by a strong desire to, as Raad explains, "make available" certain histories that were unknown in the West, or that, in the artists' view, were misrepresented in mainstream American discourses (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).[130]

Raad has pointed out how their desire to translate those politically, culturally, and geographically marginalised histories (from an American point of view) was welcomed by the academic environment they were working in at the time. The visual studies program where he obtained his academic training, while aimed at artists, encouraged a theoretical reflection on historical, social, and

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[130] Due to the fact that Raad's artist talk at United Nations Plaza has been published only as video (transcriptions are my own), all the citations taken from that source throughout this chapter are provided as footnotes in full. Raad stated that he and Salloum were "very much guided by this idea that someone is not familiar with the history of Lebanon, there is a history of this resistance that needs to be made available, there are people whose story is not available, we need to bring these stories back" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).

political issues. It was a program, as Raad put it, for "artists who wanted to read, talk, and be engaged discursively" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007). The artists' presence was consistently encouraged alongside the work, and it became a habit for both Raad and Salloum to introduce their work personally, attending screenings and answering questions. At the same time, this environment created problems of translation: after all, audiences in the United States generally had little to no knowledge of the historical, cultural, and political context of Lebanon, requiring Raad and Salloum to contextualise and explain their own work time and again. Raad has described this demand for translations as a formative experience, noting not only how often they were asked similar questions, but how over time, they began to recognise certain recurring patterns: "you go to the next venue and sometimes the questions are the same." Recognising these patterns, "one is surprised by the language one develops to speak" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).

In the thinking of Flusser, Rushdie, Said, and Minh-Ha on exile, the activity of writing and story-telling plays a key role in enabling disjointed worlds to come together. Language (and especially the language of fiction) is viewed metaphorically as a place where the exiled can transform "an ocean of chaotic information" into sentences, and the "uninhabitable" into an "hospitable" place, as Flusser put it (2003, 34; 81); where a life-affirming "to-and-fro motion between the source and the activity of life" are possible (Minh-Ha 2012, 18) and where "other worlds may exist" (Said [1984] 2001, 144). Much of the exiled's life, Said believed, was consumed by the desire to overcome the disorientation and loss endured, by inventing ways of making sense of the strange, foreign, and incomprehensible world he or she was surrounded by, and thereby build new relations. The exiled's desire was to create "a new world to rule" (Said [1984] 2001, 144) — a world that invites rather than expels; that opens its doors rather than closing them. While Said particularly highlighted writing, storytelling, and poetry as such "new worlds to rule," he also mentions political activism, and even chess, as viable exilic occupations. All these activities have in common that they require "minimal investment in objects," and place "a great premium on mobility or skill," making them ideal for people forced to live a mobile or nomadic life. There is, then, also a certain painful privilege to such a life: the

exiled "has not just one set of eyes but half a dozen" (Minh-Ha 2012, 16–17) and is hence able to shift between different points of view, accessing alternatives that are unavailable to others.

Translation as Reinvention

Paolo Bartoloni, an Italian theorist and scholar of comparative literature, has specifically proposed that exile can be understood as a form of translated culture, or perhaps more appropriately, as culture in translation:[131]

> The exile (the translator among them) is first of all one who transfers. The task of transferring is not that of substituting one language with another language, one culture with another culture or one identity with another identity, but that of transferring one language into another language, one culture into another culture, and one identity into another identity. There is no sense in replacing because nothing can be replaced. Everything will remain, yet will be changed in its relation with the other. (Bartoloni 2008, 89)

For Bartoloni, writing and storytelling are ways to rearticulate the past while simultaneously actualising its meaning in a different present (Bartoloni 2008, 24; 41). He proposes that in the context of exile, it is not only texts that require translation, but memories: speaking "the foreign language of the past," the exiled's task is to renew that language and make it relatable and comprehensible in a different time and place (38–41). As a result, the exiled experiences self-translation as a perpetual state of being. Furthermore, Bartoloni argues that the translation of memory is governed by an entirely different set of rules than

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[131] Paolo Bartoloni (2008) uses a very wide notion of translation, both as mediation and as transfer through space and time. He writes that "imagination and translation build something new from something old, erecting the unknown on the solid foundation of the known" (24). He uses Benjamin's *Arcades Project* as an example for translation (27), writing that "memory is the quintessential temporal translation, the spatialisation of time. It is the mediating historical and psychological mode, the mode of connection. But what is it that memory wants to translate? … Memory translates the foreign language of the past into the comprehensible language of the present." Bartoloni also compares translation to a journey, writing in Benjaminian terms that "translation is a journey in time as well as in space" (24). "The journey I am writing about … must be understood as the sum of the journey forward, from pure language to language, and the journey backward, from language to pure language, and must be seen as the result of a lengthy process of relation, of exchanges, and of borrowing" (87).

translation in the conventional sense: being fundamentally subjective, the translation of memory should precisely not need to be concerned with making sense. Instead, he distinguishes between two modes of remembering through writing: "passive" and "active" recollection. While the former refers to a mode of writing that looks towards the past as a source of authenticity and truth, the latter re-makes, re-writes, and re-invents the past through the experiences of the present in dialogue with the cultural other (38–41). This is where Bartoloni identifies potentiality in translation: active recollection can be productive because it "manipulates the past in a process of making that resembles an on-going, dynamic, and ever transforming production" (38). In other words, while Bartoloni refers to passive recollection simply as "memory," he views active recollection as the very "making of memory" (41), a process in which translation plays an essential part.

Throughout *The Atlas Group,* such "forward-looking" acts of translating memory can be observed in abundance, such as, for instance, in *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (2001). In this video, a fictional former hostage addresses viewers with a yet-untold narrative of captivity from the time of the Lebanese hostage crisis in the 1980s, when nearly a hundred foreigners were kidnapped in Beirut. Identifying himself as Souheil Bachar,[132] the role of the hostage — played by the well-known Lebanese actor Fadi Abi Samra — is modeled after an unknown Arab hostage allegedly held alongside the Westerners during the hostage crisis.[133] In *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*, this previously unknown figure speaks up and, providing his own account of the horrors of captivity, directs attention toward the homoerotic tensions — real or imagined — that unfolded between him and the Western hostages; revealing an aspect of their "shared" history that the Americans supposedly failed to recollect in their own testimonies. As Bachar says:

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[132] The name of the Hostage, Souheil Bachar, is clearly a reference to Souha Bachara, a woman responsible for an assassination attempt on General Antoine Lahad of the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army in 1988. Following her failed attempt, she was immediately arrested and held and tortured at the infamous Khiam prison in Southern Lebanon.

[133] Raad states that "In these books [the witness accounts written and published by American hostages held in Beirut] at one point they say that an Arab hostage was brought in and placed in the same room with them. And each hostage describes this episode with this man that was brought in. … who is he? At one point I thought that I should try to find him. I didn't end up finding him but this is the work that came out of this" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).

I'm not sure how, or why, but the Americans wanted me and our captors to fuck them. And that they feared that we would rape them. I must say that at times I wished that the Americans would gang up on me, and fuck me. You see? … They were convinced that they were fucking in the next room every afternoon. They even said that they would hear them. Whatever it was they heard always sounded to me like the fan next door. In the beginning the Americans did not touch each other. David would get very angry if Terry touched him while they slept. They would come up with the strangest ideas to make sure that their bodies did not touch. After a few weeks all this changed. No one seemed to care anymore. But they had a very different relationship to me from the beginning. They were clearly disgusted with my body, but they touched me all the time. (My transcription.)

While fictional, the figure of Souheil Bachar stems from Raad's own findings in his doctoral research into constructions of gender within first-person witness accounts from the Lebanese hostage crisis (Raad 1996, 204–257). Based on a comparative study of the published accounts of Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Robert McFarlane, Benjamin Jenco, and Martin Weir, Raad argued that these former hostages actively erased the very possibility of homoerotic transgressions from their own witness accounts, constructing their story in such manner as to reaffirm their heterosexuality in the face of their American readership. *The Bachar Tapes* subverts this narrative through the voice of a marginal and speculative figure who shares an experience of how in the close physical presence of Western men, the Arab male body becomes a projection screen for both the Westerners' desire and disgust for the other.

This process of racialization is, however, not the only issue Souheil Bachar speaks about. He also displays a surprising awareness of the politics of representation and translation. Already while introducing himself to the viewer, Bachar states:

My name is Souheil Bachar. I am 35 years old. I was kidnapped in 1983. I was released in 1993. I am from the village of Houla, in South Lebanon. Please translate what I say in Arabic in the following video segments into the official language of the country where the tapes are screening. English for the US and UK, French for France, and Arabic for the Arab world, and so on. I also ask that you dub my voice with a neutral-toned female voice. Subtitle what I am currently saying. Let the subtitles appear on a black

background, or if you prefer, use a blue background, … blue like the Mediterranean. (My transcription.)

Here, Bachar's concern with how his account will be translated mirrors Raad's own awareness of the problem of address: by incorporating the call for translations into Bachar's own testimony, Raad creates a character whose very existence can be read as a commentary on Western representations of Lebanese history that identified with American victims of war crimes yet remained indifferent towards Arab experiences. At the same time, Raad points to international exhibition culture and the notion that, in order to be heard, it is imperative to speak the dominant language, with English above all others. As Nicolas Bourriaud wrote, "in our increasingly globalised world, all signs must be translated or translatable … in order to really exist" (Bourriaud 2009, 131). Ironically, despite Bachar's wish to be translated and subtitled relative to where the tape is shown, there has never actually been an Arabic or French-subtitled version of *The Bachar Tapes* — the tape exists in English only. Raad laconically states that "no money was found" for such purposes (Raad 2002). However, such translations were most likely never intended anyway. In fact, Lebanese audiences are easily able to recognise Fadi Abi Samra (the actor Raad worked with) and thus understand the staged nature of the tape. For an unfamiliar audience that depends on translation, however, Souheil Bachar's story cannot immediately be verified and identified as the piece of speculative fiction that it is. Instead, it is precisely in the creation of a subject position that can exist in translation only where criticism of the Western hostages' narratives becomes possible and plausible. As Walid Raad has argued, "you can do a cultural critique of the books written by the hostages and present it as such, but in a public forum you will always be accused that this is just your reading of it" — however, "if it were a hostage doing the same thing, those same challenges can't be made on the same terms. You can't tell them that they are reading too much into it. That subject-position has a right to speak" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).

The Translator's Authority

As I have suggested above, in *The Atlas Group,* the idea of creating a fictional subject position from which to speak (and challenge a dominant reading of history) is intimately linked to the act of translating. By creating a fictional other that addresses the Western audience directly, Walid Raad "reduces" his own role before the public to that of the spokesperson and translator of a third party; a role that in fact entails not so much an actual reduction as an expansion of his narrative authority. As Sakai reminds us,

> translation is done for those who do not know the language to be translated from. Therefore, because they do not know the language from which the message is translated, they are unable to tell whether or not the translation done for them is correct. Furthermore, so long as the translator believes he or she is translating correctly, there is no other means but the translation by which to judge whether or not it's correct. … (Sakai 1997, 15)

Lacking access to the foreign language, the American audience hence has no other option but to trust the translator's transmission of the original. This kind of authority is, of course, not strictly limited to the figure of the translator: it is immanent to the role of the cultural intermediary in a wider sense — the wider the cultural and linguistic gap between different communities, and the greater the need for translation, the more visible the translator (or the journalist, the documentarist, the ethnographer) becomes as a figure of authority and the less contested their translation will be. This authority rests to a good degree on the impossibility of the audience to assess whether the translation provided is accurate or not. Instead, questions about the translator may appear: can he or she be trusted to get it right? How solid is their understanding of the foreign language or culture? Are they just pretending?[134] In a homolingual setting where no other translators are available, the public has no choice but to accept the

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[134]   An interesting example to note is the case of Thamsanqa Jantjie, the fake sign language interpreter at Nelson Mandela's funeral ceremony on December 10, 2013 in Johannesburg. Standing next to world leaders and in front of a public of nearly 100,000 (as well as millions of spectators on television), Jantije, wearing a suit and tie, made empty and meaningless gestures that had nothing to do with sign language. Throughout the ceremony, the hearing public as well as the organisers of the event failed to recognise that Jantije was an impostor. Lacking an understanding of sign language, they were unable to recognise the fraud. Jantije later claimed to have had a schizophrenic attack. See John Elgion, "Interpreter at Memorial Service Said to Have Been an Impostor." *The New York Times* (December 12, 2013) (accessed 30 May 2016).

translation provided. While they have no means to assess whether the translation *is* genuine, they can assess whether the translation *sounds* and *feels* genuine — in other words, attention shifts away from the translation itself to its performance.

As a performance artist in part, Raad has certainly been invested in producing the impression of authority and credibility. As André Lepecki has noted, in his presentations Raad tends to use "every single mechanism and mannerism that informs the staging of a successful, scholarly lecture — the austere desk, the glass of water, the stack of paper, the Powerbook computer, the little lamp, the wire-rimmed glasses, the discreet suit — all necessary accessories for the respectable lecturer" (Lepecki 2006, 94). Lepecki has further identified a desire to "consciously stage" his audience encounters in "high-profile institutions — such as the Whitney in New York City, or the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin," where the "theatrics of knowledge [are] always embedded in scholarly presentations" (94). As an effect, Raad's performances produce a very particular sense of enchantment among the audience; perhaps even "a sort of magic realism, a Borgean atmosphere filled with … an overarching blurring of the relationship between imaginary and reality" (96). Lepecki even suggested that Raad sometimes speaks with a pronounced Arabic accent during lectures, observing that his Arabic accent further acts to authenticate his narrative and his authority as a translator figure as the hallmark of a migrant identity that has access to multiple linguistic and cultural zones and is capable of transferring between them (90). But Sakai also points out another important aspect about the translator's authority:

> Because the readers who need translation do not know the original language, they cannot identify that language; that is, those who cannot but be dependent on translation not only do not know that language, but they do not know whether or not it exists either. (Sakai 1997, 15)

In other words, without the translator's work, the foreign discourse remains absent, unavailable and de facto "non-existent" because it has no voice to establish a presence by itself. Through operating at the threshold of languages (and cultures), the translator chooses what passes through, and in what terms, that threshold; giving and shaping its existence. Here it is worth recalling

Foucault's view on authorship (Foucault [1977] 1995, 235), which he defined not in the conventional sense as original expression, but as a form of intervention within a discursive field, describing the author as someone who "characterises the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within society" (235). Furthermore, Foucault portrayed the author — in simplified terms — as an originator and metaphorical "owner" of a specific discourse among the public (236), as a projection screen (237), a key to the work's meaning (238), and a creator of possibilities for certain conversations to be held (240). Here, the figure of the artist as translator resonates strongly with Foucault's definition of the author: by speaking from one of the art world's peripheries to its discursive centres, Raad characterises the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses that would otherwise remain absent and non-existent from that sphere. In the process of addressing a foreign audience, Raad opens up not only the possibility to (re-)make, (re-)write and re-invent texts, images, objects, and memories but to experiment with the need for translation that comes with it. With regard to the status of *The Atlas Group*'s documents one could therefore speak of translations without an original — bearing in mind the consistent withholding of the original already pointed out earlier — or even of pseudo-translations, a term used by translation theorist Anthony Pym[135] — two synonymous terms that indicate an authorial strategy whereby writers present original writing as translations precisely in order to produce a discourse that would otherwise be marginalised or even censored, or simply lack the authority and prestige of looking "translation-worthy".[136]

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[135] Focusing on literary pseudo-translations, Anthony Pym (2011, 36) writes that "pseudotranslations [are] texts presented as translations but which have no corresponding source text — there are indeed authors who choose to write as translators." He outlines three potential effects authors can achieve by presenting their work as translation: they could "limit their own public responsibility and thus liability to persecution," "present the knowledge as being operational in other culture, and thus of a threatening or rival status," and "give the knowledge the authority of age, if not of associated auctorial prestige."

[136] This interesting juncture between translation and authorship is echoed by recent debates in translation studies, where, often with reference to theorists like Lawrence Venuti, scholars have sought to emancipate translation from the notion of the derivative, highlight its authorial functions, and endow the translator with greater visibility and recognition. On 28–29 May 2009, a conference titled "The Translator as Author: Perspectives on Literary Translation" was held at the University of Siena (Italy), with contributions from well-known luminaries from the field, like Susan Bassnett and Anthony Pym. In the introduction to the conference's proceedings, Claudia Buffagni, Beatrice Garzelli, and Serenella Zanotti write that their hope is to draw attention "to the figure of the translator as both a mediator in the encounter between languages and cultures, and as an author in his or her own right," emphasising "the creative role of translators and to affirm the view of translation as work of interpretation and re-creation or, in other words, as artistic and intellectual endeavour" (Buffagni et al. 2011, 7). In these debates, proponents of viewing

Walid Raad is certainly familiar with these tensions around translation, authority, and authorship, and it is fascinating to trace how, as an artist, he evolved into the role of the cultural translator during his years as a young artist and scholar in the United States. When speaking of these formative years, Raad has pointed out how the need for contextualisation and translation faced by foreign documentary filmmakers within the U.S. academic context collided with a whole set of other imperatives, such as the need to develop a discourse around his work, write grant and funding applications, draft project descriptions and biographies, lead student workshops, and conduct visiting artist talks.[137] According to Raad, it was precisely this perceived imperative for a foreign artist to speak and mediate his own work (and the inherent performativity of that encounter with the audience) that gradually attracted his interest as an artist. "The very idea of speaking about the work," he says, "became important in the sense that I started developing lectures as work itself" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007). Not to deceive the audience but to enable stories to be told as real possibilities. The format of the lecture performance then becomes a playful and self-conscious exploration of the role of the translator as one who constantly negotiates the threshold of what is plausible and comprehensible to the foreign audience. The power-point presentation, the authoritative voice of the professor, and the institutional aesthetic all act as tools (or props) that permit a blurring of the lines between mediation, narration, and invention, letting the translation pass as faithful — even despite the perpetual and demonstrated absence of an original, of material sources, of "proof." Carrie Lambert-Beatty has called this

translators as authors in their own right have argued that translations enable a work's circulation with a greater audience and thus contribute to its "afterlife," and that they enrich the target language and culture by giving texts from elsewhere a meaning in the here and now (Nord 2011, Zanotti 2011, Buffagni et al. 2011). Opponents, on the other hand, have refuted these arguments by claiming that literary translators do not hold the same amount of public accountability and ethical responsibility for their work (Pym 2011, 32–36).

[137] Raad states that all that supplementary work "suddenly became at the centre of what an artist does. So the very idea of speaking about the work, presenting it became important in the sense that I started developing lectures as work itself. … This idea of the lecture performance, this idea of the presentation of work … somewhat started to make sense. That I could have the image do some things, and can be here doing other things, or that I could have the image do some things incompletely which might subsequently raise a particular questions in the Q & A, and then I would somewhat be prepared to answer. In the beginning I started scripting pretty much everything. Certain questions kept coming; and in cases when I did not have the presence of mind to answer that moment, I would take a note, … formulate a kind of answer that might be suitable, memorise it as a script … and the next time the question came up it would become some kind of performance without us knowing what was actually happening" (Raad/United Nations Plaza 2007).

type of experience *parafiction* — that is, fiction that is experienced by viewers as a possible (but unstable and questionable) reality (Lambert-Beatty 2009).[138] By inhabiting the role of the translator, Walid Raad essentially "produce[s] and manage[s] plausibility" (72) — as Lambert-Beatty puts it — in light of what the audiences knows and what is comprehensible to them.

Back to Beirut?

It thus no longer comes as a surprise that Raad's perhaps most critical audience is not located in the heterolingual spaces of New York, London, Berlin, and *Documenta* or the Venice Biennial, but in Beirut itself, where most of *The Atlas Group*'s materials originate. My conversations with artists of the younger generation from Beirut have repeatedly confirmed my impression that Raad, despite producing work that references Lebanese history, tends to be viewed as a "Western" or "international" artist due to his heterolingual mode of address, which is directed largely towards foreigners.[139] A fact that, by itself, is hardly surprising — the public for contemporary art in Beirut is small, and Lebanon remains caught in a perpetual state of crisis that has only intensified with the escalation of war in neighbouring Syria and the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees. The Lebanese public response to works that deal with conflict-related subject matter is often highly emotional, and making art about Lebanon's violent history still at times raises tensions over the question of who has the right to speak about these events, especially between expatriate Lebanese and those who remained home.[140] According to artist Rana Hamadeh, the activity of turning traumatic histories of the recent past into art (and art-world careers) and thereby engaging in a whole set of operations that include the collecting, processing, translating, subtitling, distributing and making-available of collective memories to outside audiences, remains an undertaking destined to raise strong

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[138]   Carrie Lambert-Beatty defines "parafiction" as instances in contemporary art where "real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived." (Lambert-Beatty 2009, 54).

[139]   According to various conversations with Ziad Bitar, Nayla Dabaji, Rana Hamadeh, Hiba Farhat, and Sabine de Maussion, all of whom are artists and curators of the younger generation currently or formerly based in Beirut.

[140]   According to a Skype conversation with Rabih Mroué in December 2014.

and critical reactions.[141] This, then, is the context that may help solve the mystery of *The Atlas Group*'s miraculous shrinking: as *The Atlas Group* returns to to Lebanon, the work loses, quite literally, the creative potentialities that come with translation. Instead, in Lebanon, Raad's work encounters a complex landscape of collective memory and trauma where wounds from past wars and current conflicts still cause tremendous tension. It is therefore plausible that what returns "home" to Lebanon on the occasion of *The Atlas Group*'s first solo presentation in Beirut could not have the same life as a work of speculative fiction that it has from the distance of translation. Instead, what returns to Lebanon presents itself as a purely aesthetic object, echoing the fact that, by 2005, *The Atlas Group* and its speculative historiographies have been fully absorbed by the international art world, its museums and markets. As *The Atlas Group* arrives in Beirut, it reappears as a sort of *boîte-en-valise*, almost a caricature of itself, with everything already in its proper place, ready to move to the next venue after the show is over.

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[141] According to a conversation with Rana Hamadeh in the context of the Curatorial/Knowledge Ph.D. seminar in 2013 at Goldsmiths.

The People Demand to be Translated:
Rabih Mroué's *The Pixelated Revolution* in Context

Three years after a wave of uprisings began to sweep across the Arab world, a curious headline was run in the popular American online magazine, *VICE*. It made the sensational claim that "the Arab Spring was just a translation mistake" (Sharro/VICE 2014). Pointing to a study supposedly "funded by the government of Saudi Arabia" and "committed to truth and accuracy in reporting," the article purported that Western journalists not versed in Arabic had consistently misunderstood and therefore misrepresented the protests taking place in the Arab world. Specifically, the article claimed that the much-cited popular slogan, "*al sha'ab yurid isqat al nizam*" (translated by the *VICE* editors as "the people want the fall of the regime") had actually been a misunderstanding made by Western observers, "predisposed to see Arabs as angry mobs." According to the article, the people had in fact been chanting "*al sha'ab yurid ithbat al nizam*" (translated as: "the people want the stability of the regime"). Overall, the events that led to the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia had been nothing but a "passionate and raucous … surprise birthday party that people … had planned for their leader."

The story was, of course, satire. How events unfolded across the Arab world is well documented and has been the subject of extensive media coverage and scholarly attention. In some ways, however, *VICE*'s satire has drawn from a critique that intellectuals from across the Arab world had been making since 2011: that from the very beginning, the Western view of the Arab uprisings had been superficial, lacking a deeper understanding of the region, as well as the social and political landscape that set the stage for these events. According to these critics, this bias manifested itself, for example, in the terminology used in the Western media to refer to the situation — above all, the notion of the "Arab Spring." As Rami G. Khouri (2011) pointed out in the Lebanese daily newspaper, *Daily Star,* this very popular term was actually rarely used by protesters and

activists in the Arab world itself, who preferred to simply speak of the "revolution(s)". In Khouri's opinion, this terminological discrepancy reflected a patronising, essentialising, and orientalising gaze of the Arab world, gazing at it as "a single mass of people who all think and behave the same way" and suggesting that political change "just happens to people," instead of acknowledging the bravery and sacrifice of its citizens. In the journal *Jadaliyya*, Middle Eastern studies scholar Bassam Haddad (2012) put it even more explicitly: for him, the term "Arab Spring" — a reference to the Prague Spring (1968) and the Spring of Nations (1848) — stands for "a spectacle in which we, the democrats and developed world, watch the others trying to catch up, despite so many efforts to support their oppressors." In other words, critics of the term "Arab Spring" argued that the West *mistranslated* the revolutionary narrative, "domesticating" a complex and foreign series of events into a familiar narrative that could be explained with existing terms and concepts.

In the first part of this chapter, I will use the concept of translation to discuss the international representation of the Syrian civil war, where a revolution that began in early 2011 tragically turned into a brutal, protracted, and devastating civil war with hundreds of thousands killed and wounded, and more than ten million people displaced at the time of writing, with no resolution in sight.[142] I will show how translation has been an important field of struggle for activists and supporters of the uprising, and that translation efforts have, at least initially, been essential in making the cause of the Syrian uprising intelligible to the outside world, securing moral and material support, and affecting how both Syrian and international media operate. This first part will provide the context for the second part, where I will discuss the work of Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, whose lecture performance *The Pixelated Revolution* has offered an analytical view of how protagonists of the Syrian revolution have attempted to address themselves to the international public. By discussing Mroué's work in the context of what is undoubtedly one of the greatest geopolitical and humanitarian catastrophes of the present, as well as a major international media phenomenon, I intend to show how international artists whose work addresses

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[142] All statistics and numbers regarding the Syrian conflict are taken from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: http://www.syriahr.com/en.

contemporary political issues operate within what Sarah Hawas (2012, 283) has called a global "politics of the intelligible" — a struggle over what and how certain causes, conflicts, and interests are rendered comprehensible, legible, and relatable for outsiders through media representation, narration, and translation.[143] How does Mroué's work differ from what the public can learn from various media channels reporting on Syria, including social media? How does he, as an artist based in the wider region of conflict, acknowledge, serve, or resist the international demand for certain representations and translations? What creative and critical agency do artists whose work speaks across linguistic, cultural, and geographic divides have to address audiences differently?

Narrations of War and the 'Politics of the Intelligible'

Without a doubt, the flood of images that has emerged from Syria since 2011 represents an unprecedented phenomenon in global visual culture. Due to the war's brutality, complexity, and the dangers faced by journalists on all sides, conventional media rapidly disappeared from the scene of the conflict: in early 2013, more than 150 reporters have already been killed.[144] The more the conflict escalated, the less journalists were welcomed by the different fractions involved. Early on, wealthy pro-government individuals announced bounties on the capture of foreign journalists (Dettmer 2013), and Western media outlets began to decline dispatches from freelance journalists, refusing to be held accountable for journalistic risk-taking. In this void, some Syrians took it upon themselves to convey information about the uprising to the outside world: using mobile phones, innumerable videos were recorded and uploaded to Youtube and other online platforms by protesters and activists, civilians, and militants since the uprising began, contributing to the emergence of a new media landscape linking Syria to the outside world. New channels for the circulation of images and

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[143]   Sarah Hawas uses the term "politics of the intelligible" in a critical manner, referring to how the revolution in Egypt in particular has been represented by the Western media. Hawas argues that the media has been "translating into a pre-existing imaginary of what constitutes the politics or actual, rather than allowing for the translation process to open up new potentialities" (283). For Hawas, the "politics of the intelligible" is hence particularly associated with domesticating translation.

[144]   See: "Number of Journalists killed in Syria passes the 150 mark," *The Middle East Monitor* (15 February 2014), http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/5655-number-of-journalists-killed-in-syria-passes-the-150-mark (accessed 8 January 2015).

information permitted viewers outside the actual zone of conflict an unprecedented level of "insight" — establishing a new way of representing conflict whose ramifications are still being discussed.

In his study *Good Media, Bad Politics? New Media and the Syrian Conflict*, James Harkin (2013) has described how, after the onset of protests and the government's subsequent violent crackdown in 2011, many young people — often educated and with access to digital technology, yet without previous filmmaking experience or the ambition to make films — started secretly recording and uploading clips from protests, capturing the government's bloody campaign against the opposition from a personal point of view using smartphone cameras and other "low-tech" recording equipment, often putting themselves — with their cameras — in the line of fire. Different types of images appeared online: demonstrations, celebrations, and processions, militia formations and declarations of resistance, shootings and the aftermath of bomb explosions, scenes of people coming to the rescue of the wounded or the dead, "guided tours" through Syria's devastated urban landscapes, gun battles with snipers, horrific injuries and tortured bodies, as well as poetic or comic episodes of everyday life in opposition-held territories, among many others. Activists have often filmed events of violence in graphic detail, at times even offering multiple perspectives on one and the same incident.

Naturally, the images that have been created stand in harsh contrast to the aesthetic norms of war photography. Often, they are blurry, shaky, low-resolution, and extremely fragmentary. Hito Steyerl (2008, 162) has described the paradoxical status of these images: on the one hand, they have little documentary value, usually remaining unverifiable and revealing little about the complex situation they supposedly depict. Alternatively, they appear extremely real, and are surrounded by an aura of authenticity and urgency — most of them being neither visibly edited, nor digitally altered — creating a sense of urgency among those who view them. Their aesthetic, Steyerl has argued, "evokes a sense of permanent exception and enduring crisis; a state of heightened tension and alertness" (Ibid., my translation). Their status, however, is problematic insofar as they often don't speak for themselves; particularly not to outsiders: they

generally lack context and they generally require captions, subtitles, and explanations to compensate for their otherwise highly fragmentary nature — devices that can shape viewers' perceptions just as much as the actual images themselves.

Perhaps in response to these uncertainties, it has become a common practice for international television channels to construct narratives out of unverifiable and often inconsistent visual evidence. In this process, video footage almost inevitably became politicised — particularly so in the early years of the uprising, when the conflict was not yet considered a civil war, and verifiable information was frequently lacking. Western television channels as well as international satellite media like *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, or *Russia Today* responded by constructing and broadcasting narratives of the conflict by selectively airing video footage from activist media networks, often arriving at vastly different conclusions. While some channels credibly depicted the opposition as gaining the upper hand in clashes with government troops, hosting pundits declaring the fall of the regime to be just "a matter of time," others reported that the government was decisively closing in on the "terrorists" who "destabilised" Syria. As sociologist Philip N. Howard (2015) pointed out, the way the Syrian conflict was represented in international media gradually revealed the nature of Syria's conflict as a global proxy war — with contradictory media coverage echoing the profound, cold war-like geopolitical divisions and tensions playing out in Syria. In practice, media outlets from the gulf, Russia, Iran, or China have closely followed the narrative of Syria's government, labelling protesters or opposition groups as "terrorists" threatening Syria's secular order, while Western and gulf-area satellite channels like *Al Jazeera* have tended to portray the conflict as the uprising of an oppressed people against an authoritarian and violent regime. Given the vast amount of footage available online — including from forces loyal to the Syrian government — these arguably oversimplified interpretations could easily be illustrated by means of a different selection of found footage. As a result, despite the vast amount of available material, the conflict's representation, and its intelligibility for the international public, was arguably produced not so much on the battleground itself as in the editing room.[145] As the global public

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[145] A useful theoretical concept to describe the media outlets' way of working is Nicolas Bourriaud's "postproduction culture" (Bourriaud 2005), referring to a media practice that

watched Syria's war, the old aphorism that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" became visually evident.

A notable mainstream media-initiated project that sought to depart from these politically constructed narrations of the conflict has been "Watching Syria's War," a curated online platform by New York Times journalist Liam Stack, hosted on the New York Times' website.[146] Stack recognised that the vast amount of audiovisual footage emerging from Syria posed an enormous challenge for journalism, and launched *Watching Syria's War* with the intention of building a media platform that would not seek to assemble fragmentary documents into any single master narrative, but rather place the moving image itself at the centre of attention by tracing its sources, investigating the contexts of its making, and translating its contents and contexts from Arabic into English to make them accessible to an international public. Framing each video with categories like "what we know" and "what we don't know," Stack highlighted the fact that there was simply too much left unclear as to provide any kind of final certainty over the meaning of events on the ground. Instead, *Watching Syria's War* presented the conflict in Syria as a series of image-events: fragments of information (video footage, photographs, social media posts, media reports) brought together in such a manner as to cover the everyday occurrences of war, such as a rebel attack on a government convoy, the storming of a police station, or the reunion of a freed prisoner with family members.

One could argue that *Watching Syria's War* directly accounted for Hito Steyerl's criticism of the raw documentary image (2008, 162–166): by insisting on aggregating as much information about each single event as possible, the journalists behind the platform precisely questioned the authority of the

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operates, figuratively speaking, from the editing room: rather than occupying itself with the creation of images and information at the site of the actual event, postproduction culture capitalises on the power of the editing room as a site of "making sense" of the flood of images. As such, the term moves away from traditional notions of narrative authorship toward secondary activities like translation, framing, and curating, "blurring the boundaries between creation and copy, readymade and original" (6). The argument made is that the global media has essentially been "curating" the Syrian uprising, constructing one narrative or another out of existing visual fragments.

[146] The project can be found at this address: http://projects.nytimes.com/watching-syrias-war (accessed 8 January 2015). It has been most active between 2011, with activity decreasing and eventually coming to a standstill around mid-2014, reflecting the rise and fall of Western interest in the Syrian conflict.

individual image, preferring multiplicity over singularity. By focusing on image-events, *Watching Syria's War* could also be read more broadly as a critique of how audio-visual media narrates conflict: instead of reducing conflicts to one narrative or another, *Watching Syria's War* explored the possibilities and limits of the emerging visual evidence. What *Watching Syria's War* lacked, however, was not only a substantial reflection on spectatorship and the motivations behind the making of these images in the first place — it also failed to address the underlying politics of intelligibility that demand certain images and experiences of conflict to be made available, legible, and comprehensible to spectators abroad while others are left unseen and untranslated.[147]

Indeed, *Watching Syria's War* could be framed as one of the many attempts at translating events in Syria, closing — or at least narrowing — the epistemological gap between the actual site of the event, accessible only to a few, and the virtual space of the internet which is accessible to (nearly) everyone. Since 2011, Syrians as well as Arabic-speaking sympathisers of the uprising have been involved in a systematic translation effort with the aim of facilitating the dissemination of the revolutionary narrative to outsiders. Activist pages on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube proliferated shortly after the uprising's onset, with anonymous individuals collecting, translating, subtitling, and annotating documentary material from Syria for non-Arabic-speaking audiences. A number of volunteer translation groups were created to focus specifically on such translations (Rahme 2012). Various models for activist- or community-driven translation communities already exist: *Translators without Borders,*[148] *Babels,*[149] or *Words Without Borders*[150] are perhaps the most well-known examples, with the first two focusing on volunteer translation services for social causes, while the latter commissions translations of literature, poetry, and cultural commentary from cultures and languages with little translation output.[151]

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147   During a public conversation I conducted with Liam Stack at Apexart in New York in September 2012, an audience member asked him why footage from Syria was featured and translated prominently for American audiences while similar footage from Palestine was not. Stack did not have an answer to the question.

148   http://translatorswithoutborders.org.

149   http://www.babels.org.

150   http://www.wordswithoutborders.org.

151   A detailed study of such translation communities can be found in Baker 2006a, 462–484.

In the Syrian context, platforms with titles such as *The Syrian Interpreter,*[152] *Syrian Solidarity,*[153] or *Translated Videos of the Syrian Revolution,*[154] were set up on their own websites or directly on social media to provide translations, subtitles, and captions of audio-visual material and information. The now closed group *Syrian Solidarity*, for example — translating videos from Arabic into English — stated their mission as making "our voice heard and understandable around the world," writing that due to the language barrier, "many of the people around the world are unaware of the situation in Syria."[155] In contrast, a group titled the *Free Syrian Translators*[156] — a reference to the Free Syrian Army of the opposition — developed a more multi-directional model, translating both audio-visual footage and information out of the Arabic language while simultaneously translating international Western news coverage and political commentary back into Arabic, presumably for readers inside Syria. Introducing themselves as a "group of young, free Syrians, who have chosen to be part of their people's struggle in their pursuit to achieve freedom, justice and dignity," they stated as their hope to use translation in order to make a contribution to "a society based on citizenship and a civic democratic institutional state through translating a lot of world press materials, both written and viewable."[157] While most of these platforms have translated between Arabic into English only, treating English as a de facto global *lingua franca*, others have experimented with more multilingual approaches: *The Syrian Revolution in the Languages of the World*,[158] for example, has published audio-visual materials with captions in German, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Greek, and even Japanese.[159]

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[152]   http://www.youtube.com/user/thesyrianinterpreter.

[153]   http://www.facebook.com/pages/Syrian-Revolution-Videos-English-Subtitles.

[154]   http://www.facebook.com/Translated-Videos-of-the-Syrian-Revolution.

[155]   According to the community's self-description on their Facebook page (accessed 8 January 2015).

[156]   http://freesyriantranslators.net

[157]   Retrieved from the *About Us* section on the *Free Syrian Translators* website (see footnote above), accessed 8 January 2015.

[158]   https://ar-ar.facebook.com/LanguegesOfTheWorlds.

[159]   One activist involved in the page *La Revolution Syrienne en Français* for example said that the goals of their online effort were to mobilise, by means of translation, the entire "Francophone community, the Syrian diaspora, and [all] those who are interested in our revolution." They describe themselves as being "disillusioned, deceived, even desperate by the inanity of the international community who just watches and allows the extermination of a population" (Rahme 2012). In a similar vein, Amsterdam-based translator Canan Marasligil has described her desire to become involved as a translator after the Gezi protests took place in her native Istanbul: "I tried to use my skills as a translator as much as possible and become a vehicle transporting other people's words, therefore being part of a resistance movement to which I might otherwise have remained foreign" (Marasligil 2013, 78–79).

Activities like translating and subtitling videos not only require little technological knowledge; they can be carried out from anywhere, far from actual zones of conflict, by anyone with access to both languages. According to Kari-Anden Papadopoulos (2013, 2185–2206), members of the Syrian diaspora particularly embraced the role of the translator as a way to act, capitalising on their access to multiple languages and media circuits that residents of Syria themselves may not have to the same degree. By means of this effort, Papadopoulos argued, the Syrian diaspora has been instrumental in making the plight of the Syrian opposition intelligible in the wider world.[160] Other scholars have supported this view, with Mona Baker (2006b, 30) describing the role of translation in the revolutionary context as a "discursive intervention at a global level," arguing that translation allows for local narratives and experiences from the conflict zone to be injected into globally circulating discourses — a task that multilingual individuals, such as those living in diaspora, "are uniquely placed to initiate" (ibid.). As Sarah Hawas (2012, 277) has argued, the power and appeal of translation may be linked precisely to its ability to build a heterolingual political support base beyond national, cultural, ethnic, or religious affiliations who, through translation, can participate in and experience a shared revolutionary consciousness.

While the various Syrian translation platforms mentioned did not address the question of translation methodology, academics and professional translators sympathising with their efforts have debated what an appropriate mode of translation for this purpose could be. Most notably, Sarah Hawas (2012) has proposed the notion of "revolutionary translation" (278), calling for translations with an immanent consciousness of their role within the global politics of the intelligible. Hawas references Lawrence Venuti's translation ethics for this

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[160] The role of translation in the context of revolutionary movements recently became the subject of major research attention. Maria Tymoczko (2010, 3) published an anthology on texts addressing the role of translation within different global political and ideological struggles, suggesting that translation has acted "as a means of fighting censorship, cultural repression, political dominance, and physical coercion." Tymoczko proposes that translations should therefore be understood as "records of cultural contestations and struggle rather than as simple linguistic transpositions or creative literary endeavours" (ibid.). In her book addressing particularly the role of translation in the context of the Egyptian revolution, Mehrez (2012, 3) argued that translation has come to be a key methodology for shaping the revolution's "global relations and communications," carrying over knowledge and context about ongoing events into foreign media and thereby shaping global narratives.

purpose, making the case for translators involved in political struggles to follow the foreignising paradigm, with the hope of preserving the cultural and political specificity of the circumstances in which a revolutionary movement takes place (283). What should be avoided are translations that confine a revolutionary narrative "into a preexisting imaginary" — as the domesticating strategy would suggest — instead, activist translators should try to convey the revolution in its own terms. This means that revolutionary translation should ideally transform language as radically as the revolution re-imagines politics and society (277–283). As such, the ultimate goal of revolutionary translation would be to act as a transnational agent for change, producing not just empathy and solidarity between different publics, but transforming how others, elsewhere, think political change. Whether honouring the revolution's cultural specificity can, or should, be reconciled with the desire for its broadest possible dissemination remains an open question.

In practice, the Syrian translation movements were little concerned with these theoretical issues — and moreover, numerous additional problems surfaced. Perhaps predictably, many social media activists — including translators — sought to maximise attention by focusing on the most shocking and explicit content, and filtering out materials that did not help to support a given point of view or agenda. The danger exists that in the context of political struggle, fidelity to the original quickly becomes a lesser priority than fidelity to the political and ideological goals of the revolution (Rahme 2012). Here, activist translation efforts fell into the same trap as the various efforts by the international media to construct various narratives out of disjointed visual evidence — to use their power to frame the original in such manner to direct its interpretation.[161] This is, of course, a danger that is inherent to all translation. André Lefevère has shown that translation efforts of any kind — professional or otherwise — are rarely immune to ideological patronage; rather, the many

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[161]   Mona Baker (2010, 34–35) has raised a set of critical questions to be posed to translation communities: "What type of texts do members of such activist communities select for translation? Do they embellish certain narratives in order to give those whose voices are suppressed and marginalised a better chance of being heard? Do they frame narratives with which they disagree strongly, … in specific ways in order to undermine and expose their underlying assumptions? Do they omit or add material within the body of the text or do they rely on paratexts to guide the reader's interpretation of each narrative? Do interpreters in the social fora reveal their own narrative location through such factors as tone of voice, pitch, or loudness?"

editorial decisions associated with translation provide ample opportunity for politically- or ideologically-driven manipulations, shifts in meaning, or even rewritings (Lefevère 1992, VII).[162] In this light, the greatest challenge in translating revolution may not even be the question of methodology, but — as Canan Marasligil has argued — the much more fundamental problem "to differentiate truth from fiction," and to be "vigilant when trying to act as a bearer and sharer of news" given the "many lies that [are] circulating" (Marasligil 2013, 79).

The Art World Watches the Syrian Revolution

The events occurring across the Arab world also raised widespread interest in the European and American art worlds. "Arab artists [are] flourishing as uprisings embolden a generation," ran a headline from *The Guardian* in early 2012 (Betty 2012), and, according to London-based gallerist Reeda El-Saie, there was a noticeable "appetite to understand the context of the uprisings" among art world audiences as much as a desire — if not an expectation — for artists from the region to convey revolutionary experiences and narratives for the international public. Supported by intense and favourable media attention across Europe and the United States, various curatorial and artistic initiatives were launched that sought to make available, visible, and intelligible images, narratives, and documents emerging from the uprising that was, at the time, still generally expected (or hoped) to lead to the fall of the Assad government.

In 2011, less than six months after Cairo's Tahrir Square saw enduring mass protests that led to the fall of the Mubarak government, the Venice Biennale opened the first "Pan-Arab Exhibition of Contemporary Art" titled "Promise,"

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[162]   André Lefevère (1992, VII) has argued that "translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live."

presenting artists whose work was said to reflect on the "horizon of future possibilities, be they aesthetic, political, historical, social or indeed, critical" in the Arab world.[163] The international art world, shocked by the tragic death of Egyptian artist Ahmed Basiony at the hands of a sniper on Tahrir Square, flocked to the Egyptian pavilion to see the protests where Basiony was killed through the lens of his own camera. Images from the Egyptian revolution also prominently featured in London's *Shubbak* festival 2011, aiming to present "a window through which to see contemporary Arab culture in a time of urgent political change,"[164] and in 2012, the House of World Cultures in Berlin devoted its "Meeting Points" festival to the subject of the Arab uprisings, juxtaposing a retrospective of Syrian filmmaker Omar Amiralay with curated screenings of amateur video footage and other "documentaries of the revolutionary events."[165] As a curator, I have myself contributed to the art world's reception of the events in Syria when the New York non-profit art space *Apexart* and its global, crowd-sourced jury chose my curatorial proposal, *Death of a Cameraman,* as its winning project for 2012, testifying to a widespread interest in an engagement with the unprecedented stream of images and information coming out of Syria.[166]

Parallel to the art world, film festivals in Berlin, Cannes, and Venice also turned towards Syria. "In 2011, festival programmers from virtually all of the A-list festivals (and quite a few of the Bs and Cs as well) seemed to be calling everyone they ever knew in Tunisia and Egypt, soliciting virtually anything that could be cobbled together in the few short intervening months between the toppling of a dictator and their opening night," (2014, 62–63) Alisa Lebow wrote, adding that "stories have emerged of phone calls to known producers in

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[163] According to the statement from the curator of the exhibition. A transcript is available here: http://www.thefutureofapromise.com/index.php/about/view/curators_statement (accessed 15 January 2015).

[164] According to Shubbak's 2011 festival guide, a copy of which can be found here: http://www.shubbak.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Shubbak-Festival-2011-Guide.pdf (accessed 15 January 2015).

[165] According to an *e-flux* announcement of the event, accessible here: http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/meeting-points-6-–-haus-der-kulturen-der-welt-berlin/ (accessed 15 January 2015).

[166] *Death of a Cameraman* was a group exhibition consisting of contributions by five international artists who explored the "weaponisation" of images in conflict. More information is available here: http://apexart.org/exhibitions/waldmeier.php (accessed 15 January 2015).

Tunis and Cairo literally asking for anything they've got" and that "there was a rush to represent events that are deserving of some explanation, or at least further consideration" (63). This demand for artists and filmmakers to inform on the revolution for international publics puts into question how artists and filmmakers who live and work in the region (and who may themselves be affected by the events) can respond to this push that presents itself both as a window of opportunity while simultaneously risking unwanted ideological patronage. "Based on the Western media's stereotypical views of the social, cultural, and political situation in Egypt, most Western curators find themselves fascinated only by Egyptian artwork that deals specifically with socio-political issues," Egyptian artist Basim Magdy complained as early as 2003, and as a result of this narrow interest, artists or filmmakers from the region are left "wedged in between institutional accusations of being influenced by Western trends and Western accusations of neglecting their local identity issues" (Magdy 2003). If anything, the Arab uprisings intensified this pressure on artists from the region to provide cultural translations — and ideally those that fit comfortably into pre-existing categories and perceptions abroad.

The artist who has repeatedly straddled this dilemma and whose work has been widely shown internationally after the onset of the Arab uprisings has been Rabih Mroué, whose series *The Pixelated Revolution* toured across numerous art venues and performance spaces in Europe and the United States. Originally commissioned by the U.S.-based Spalding Gray Award and a consortium of four American art institutions, and subsequently presented to a broad international audience as part of Kassel's *Documenta* in 2012,[167] *The Pixelated Revolution* encompasses a number of works — including performance, photographs, and installation — where Mroué explores the video footage that emerged out of Syria during the early stages of the uprising, when international media attention was intense and the uprising had not yet turned into a full-fledged civil war. A (non-academic) lecture forms the centrepiece of Mroué's work, with the artist

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[167]   In their public statement, the Spalding Gray Award jury explained that they chose Mroué because his work produces "controversial work that reflects his country's political climate," particularly taking note of the fact that Mroué's 2007 performance *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fools' Joke* was banned by the Lebanese Ministry of the Interior. The public statement can be accessed here: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/29/theater/29arts-LEBANESEARTI_BRF.html (accessed 10 November 2015).

addressing his audience directly on the subject of Syria while viewing and scrutinising found YouTube videos.[168]

Appearing friendly and casual, Mroué — who received his actor training in Beirut, and who continues to view theatre as the main domain of his creative work while consistently transgressing the boundaries between film, theatre, performance, visual art, and research — tends to act in settings that are simple yet technologically refined, interweaving scripted narrative with audio-visual material specifically edited and prepared for presentation purposes. Seated behind a small table with a lectern and a glass of water, a computer and a video projection, Mroué shows his work in theatres, lecture halls, seminar rooms, cinemas, or art galleries — and as such uses a style of performance that is reminiscent of Walid Raad's and other Lebanese artists, blending the authoritative theatrics of academia and knowledge production with an exploratory narrative that shifts between the rigorously analytical, the personal and anecdotal. Throughout the performance, Mroué's speech remains astonishingly simple and accessible: theatre studies scholar Carol Martin has described the experience of attending Mroué's performance as being witness to intellectually "stunning ideas" that are "casually explicated with unassuming modesty" (Martin 2012, 20).

Mroué's performance revolves around a remarkable piece of video footage that emerged in mid-2011 on a Youtube channel linked to the Syrian opposition — footage that Mroué describes as the catalyst for the making of his work (Mroué 2012).[169] It is difficult to describe the contents of this video and its effects

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[168] Mroué studied theatre at the Lebanese University of Beirut in a department that specialised in acting rather than in academic theatre studies. After working in Lebanese television in a role that required him to direct, edit, and film, he developed an avid interest in the media: in his words, the experience "showed me how the media manipulates images to construct a particular image of reality," and led him to conceive of a theatre practice that would include a critique of images and their ideological functions (Elias 2015). One of the defining features of Mroué's artistic and intellectual practice is that he frequently bridges the gap between acting and speaking on stage, between the production and deconstruction of images, and between art and knowledge production. At the time of writing, Mroué is an artistic research fellow at the *Interweaving Performance Cultures* Research Center at the Freie Universität Berlin.

[169] The video the artist refers to was originally accessed here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUEGK28QWVs (accessed 2 August 2013).
However, due to the graphic nature of the video, it has since been removed from YouTube. The original source has not been indentified.

on the viewer, and its source and precise context are most likely impossible to verify, but metadata points to the fact that it was recorded in the opposition-held neighbourhood of Karam Al Shami in the city of Homs in July 2011. The video appears to have been taken by a young man standing on the rooftop of a building, filming his surroundings with his cell phone camera with the goal of documenting gunfire on the streets below. Halfway through the video, the young man catches sight of an unidentified gunman in uniform on an adjacent balcony. For a brief instant, the cameraman and the gunman directly appear to face each other, with the lens of the camera zooming in on the militiaman, before a shot is heard and the camera falls to the ground. Seconds later, terrified voices can be heard off-screen, crying out in Arabic: "He was shot in the head!"[170]

"How could the Syrians be documenting their own deaths when they are struggling for a better future, when they are revolting against death itself — both moral and physical death — when they are fighting for life itself?" (Mroué 2012) This is the question Mroué poses at the beginning of his lecture. The answer might lie, so Mroué speculates, in the Syrian protesters' hope that images might work in their favour; that they might act to symbolically "shoot back." In his reading, the video described above represents a clear instance of a weaponised use of images, a "double shooting" whereby two weapons of different orders meet: the militiaman's rifle on the one side, and the activists' camera on the other. Syrians wouldn't place themselves in the line of fire, so Mroué reasons, if they wouldn't believe in the power of images to support their cause and shape people's understanding and imagination of the conflict. By documenting acts of violence and their own resistance, distributing images thereof, they respond by letting fellow Syrians, Arabs, and people all over the world see what they experience first-hand. At the same time, death occurs — so Mroué suggests — because a slippage occurs between reality and mediatisation:

> By watching what is going on through a mediator — the little screen of a mobile phone — the event is isolated from reality and it will appear to belong to a fiction. So, the Syrian cameraman will be watching the sniper directing his rifle towards him as if it were happening inside a film and as if he were only a spectator. This is why he does not feel the danger of the gun and does not run away; because, as we know, in films the bullet will

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170   Translation according to the subtitles as they appear in the uploaded YouTube video.

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not lose its way and goes out of the film. I mean it will not make a hole in the screen and hit one of the spectators. No way. It will always remain there, inside the film, in the virtual world, the fictional world. This is why the Syrian cameraman believes that he will not be killed because his death is happening outside the image. (Mroué 2012)

In Mroué's bold and highly speculative interpretation, the mediatisation of the Syrian conflict has reached such an extent that, like in a hyper-real video game, fiction and reality are no longer distinguishable — and more dangerously, that the desire to create and disseminate powerful and shocking images may have lead activists, including amateur filmmakers, to feel invincible and dangerously overestimate the strength of their own cause. In a similar vein, media studies scholar James Harkin has argued that one of the greatest problems with Syrian activist media has been how activists created a highly selective, highly edited media-sphere where the real relations of power on the battlefield were obscured by the fantastic lure of images and the narrative bubble of social media (Harkin 2013, 21).[171] "If new media was an early weapon in the hands of Syria's opposition, it wasn't a very effective one," Harkin concluded his own analysis of Syria's video activists, adding that the virtuality of social media and the resulting discrepancy between strong ties online and weak coordination in reality "might also have distracted a clever, promising young opposition movement from the hard work of forging alliances across Syria's complex ethnic and sectarian mosaic and building their organisation" (23). The tragic result is not only the death of activists, but a social media echo chamber that is, in Harkin's words, "powerless to do anything but fan the flames of hate and despair" (24). Harkin pessimistically adds that "the crutch of media activism might have diminished activism itself, crowding out a space for political discussion and replacing it with a fuzzy, hysterical hall of mirrors" (24).[172]

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[171]   In one section of *The Pixelated Revolution*, Mroué makes an interesting comparison between the visual styles that set activist and government-sanctioned media production apart: while activist documentary is shot using unstable, low-resolution handheld cameras, government-sanctioned media uses high-resolution cameras on tripods, projecting an image that is coherent with the government's own narrative as a provider of "stability."

[172]   In his analysis of the Syrian revolutionary media landscape, Harkin (2013) makes four major points: he argues that the foreign media has tended to oversimplify ongoing events (13), that Syrian activists tended towards an unrealistic assessment of their own strength (21), that revolutionary media was, at large, ineffective in ways other than generating solidarity (23–24), and that the hype of social media was detrimental to activism itself and its political goals (ibid.), including enabling a sustained political debate and laying the groundwork for the creation of new political institutions.

The Artist as Media Critic

By sharing this speculative analysis of the role of images in the Syrian conflict with his audience, Mroué departs from the demand to simply give a voice to the activists' cause by retelling their story. Instead, he acts as a meta-translator of sorts who directs his attention to the image itself — and its role in a global politics of the intelligible, literally slowing down the nearly endless stream of documented violence to a frame-by-frame analysis to allow the frames to be examined and questioned in greater detail. As opposed to translating, explaining, and recontextualising, Mroué injects a critical voice into an embattled scene of representations, deconstructing the function of circulating images and narratives within a global economy of attention. The question of the artist's political agency is consciously avoided: art, so Mroué argues, is "not a place to make a revolution" (Bither 2012). Rather, he views himself as someone to provide "a platform for discussing, for questioning, for doubts, for ideas." While Mroué is based in Syria's neighbouring Lebanon, is a native Arabic speaker, and has consistently made work that has been critical of political imagery, endowing him with a certain level of clout as a speaker on the subject that other artists (especially those from outside the Arab world) might lack, Mroué is careful to avoid being pinned down to any specific role or position.[173] On the one hand, he frames his own role vis-à-vis the image as that of a fellow spectator of sorts, and as such, situates himself rather within his audience as opposed to separate and removed from it. Throughout his performance, Mroué frequently speaks in the "we" as opposed to the "I," and his narration retraces the easily relatable experience of spectatorship while simultaneously reflecting on it. On the other hand, he is acutely aware of his own proximity to the material, insisting that he has no interest in being seen as an authority in any way over the material

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[173] Mroué has had a long-standing interest in artistic research into the function of images in conflict — and in this sense, *The Pixelated Revolution* can be read as a continuation of previous works like *Three Posters* (a theatre piece that presented and analysed unseen video footage from a Jamal Sati, a Lebanese left-wing Marxist resistance fighter of the 1980s turned suicide bomber against the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon). In fact, *Three Posters*, and the follow-up non-academic lecture, *On Three Posters* (which reflected on the misreading of *Three Posters* work in the post-9/11 context where the act of suicide bombing became firmly associated with Islamism, "terrorism," and violence against innocent people) offer an interesting precedent through which to understand the artist's sensibility for translation as well as the problem of how work by non-Western artists enters the global politics of the intelligible, with the artist losing control over how his own work is framed discursively.

presented, underlining his presentation as purely speculative and investigative —
even though the theatrics of his performance work may tell otherwise. "We don't
need to teach the audience," he says with respect to his role as an artist, "or be in
a position where we have the knowledge or the power to say what is true or
untrue. We need to not give answers" (Downey 2012).

While avoiding any overt political, ideological, or geographic position-
taking, Mroué is not a stranger to using translation as a creative device.[174] For
example, just as the uprising in Syria broke out, Mroué was about to install a solo
exhibition titled *I, The Undersigned* (originally produced for BAK Utrecht) at
London's *Iniva*. Following the events form afar, Mroué renamed the entire
exhibition at the last minute to *The People Are Demanding,* withdrawing his
main piece of work (*I, The Undersigned)* from the exhibition and instead
developing a new installation that referred directly to the situation in Syria.[175]
Somewhat reminiscent of Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation: Actions to
Relate to Oneself* (1967–1968), Mroué's installation, *The People Are Demanding*
(2011), consisted of a list of hundred verbs written onto *Iniva*'s glass façade,
ranging from the banal to the complex — "*to change,*" "*to love,*" "*to eat,*" "*to
celebrate,*" "*to facebook,*" "*to fuck,*" "*to fight,*" "*to laugh,*" "*to communicate,*"
among many others. With this list, Mroué took creative license to communicate
what he saw as the essentially humanist dimension of the Arab world's popular
uprisings at this very early moment.[176] Even though Mroué views his work as not
responding to events directly, the gesture of re-framing his exhibition in the
context of the Arab uprisings and symbolically translating the demands of the

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[174] Mroué has stated that for him, the language of the work is secondary, and he embraces as
many translations of it as there can be. "I write almost everything in Arabic, and then I have
it translated into another language," he states, "and when it's possible — when I speak a
foreign language — then there's no reason not to do it." Mroué speaks in favour of
heterolinguality, stating that "facilitating communication is very important. It's not like I
need to insist on my national language. … I would prefer to choose a practical way to
communicate with others. It's not about insisting on one's identity" (Rabih Mroué, Skype
interview with the artist, 2014).

[175] Mroué describes this process in the wall text for *I, The Undersigned — The People Are
Demanding*: "I decided not to show this work today due to the radical changes, struggles,
conflicts, revolutions and turmoil of a geopolitical and sociopolitical nature that are going
on in my region. These changes pushed me to change the title of this exhibition from *I, the
Undersigned* to *The people are demanding.*"

[176] Two weeks before Mroué's opening in London, fifteen teenagers were arrested and tortured
in the southern Syrian city of Daraa for writing "the people demand the downfall of the
regime" on walls across the city, setting into motion the tragic events that plunged Syria
into civil war (Abouzeid 2011).

revolution into the language of the art world audience stems from a desire to engage European audiences in events taking place in the region where he lives and works.

The public reception of *The Pixelated Revolution* also makes clear how the work of artists who work across cultural divides tends to be scrutinised by different publics, especially so when the subject matter is ideologically, politically or historically charged, as is the case with Syria. According to Mroué, *The Pixelated Revolution* has indeed provoked some rather adverse reactions, particularly — and perhaps not surprisingly — after the work's presentation in Beirut, as well as from members of the Syrian diaspora. He has, for example, been accused of furthering his art-world career by using materials testifying to human suffering, as well as of intellectualising catastrophe and thereby "creating a distance" between his audience and the everyday suffering of Syrians — instead of reducing that distance.[177] Moreover, Mroué has been accused of misrepresenting the situation, not knowing Syria well enough, or not being Syrian, and therefore having no "right" to speak about the Syrian uprising.[178] What all these criticisms have in common is that they question Mroué's position as a translator figure between cultures, challenging both his motives for addressing audiences internationally on the subject of Syria, as well as his faithfulness to the supposed message and the meaning(s) of the revolution.

The contested reception of *The Pixelated Revolution* shows that the greater the geopolitical and ideological divisions, the more contested the translator's position becomes, as access to the foreign audience and its attention becomes not only a privilege, but a precious political good — hence the desire for activist translations, and the call for individuals with access to the foreign audience to reduce that distance, as opposed to creating it. At the same time, with global

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[177] Mroué: "They accuse me of being too cold, too distant, talking in a very calm and intellectual way about a very hot situation where people are suffering, where people are killed" (Rabih Mroué, Skype interview with the artist, 2014).

[178] Mroué notes that a similar conflict over the "right to speak" about certain events exists in Lebanon between local residents and members of the diaspora: "I noticed that some citizens who stayed the whole period of the civil war in Lebanon were aggressive towards other citizens who did not stay in Lebanon or who left the country during the war and by consequence were not allowed to talk about ‚our war' since they did not experience it or since they fled the city (Gizem Sözen & Eylül İşcen, Interview with Rabih Mroué, *Grunt Magazine*, http://grunt.ca/interview-with-rabih-mroue, accessed 10 December 2015)

media outlets and channels proliferating and working to do precisely that, the role of art may rather be — as Mroué suggests — to act as a sphere of experimental-, counter-, and meta-translations, as well as to provide an observatory space from where the international mediasphere and the representations and translations that circulate within it can be scrutinised. This is also where the potential of the lecture performance as a critical format of artistic expression comes into play — as a "flexible" medium that may question itself from within; that may be adjusted for different audiences and made to incorporate different levels of contextual information; that may rewrite itself as events and knowledge develop; and that may counter the demands from the art market or institutions that make it difficult for non-Western artists to emerge from the confines of representing themselves as cultural others and native informants.

Meanwhile, the Syrian media landscape has developed dramatically. More than five years into the conflict, the strategy of using new media as a revolutionary tool appears to have exhausted itself insofar as groups like Daesh have discovered and perfected the use of the very same media strategies that were once attributed with a liberal and democratic opposition. Repeatedly, Daesh has used foreign fighters — including from the UK, France, and/or Germany — to target its propaganda at specific audiences, translating its threats into the languages of its enemies. In fact, Daesh has been so successful with its online propaganda that the authors of a Brookings Institution Study concluded that, so far, "no effort … has matched the tailored nature, the scope, nor the electrifying content of the Islamic State's material."[179] At the same time, in territories held by secular opposition groups, a new infrastructure of independent media has developed (Harkin 2014; Badran et al. 2014). While these new media outlets, often receiving funding from donors' foreign governments, still tend to suffer from "fragmentation, lack of professionalism, unskilled labor, poor transparency over funding and partisanship" (Badran et al. 2014), the same authors also point out that these media outlets have been instrumental in

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[179] Alberto M. Fernandez, "Here to Stay and Growing: Combating ISIS Propaganda networks." (The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Forum Papers). October 2015. http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez (accessed 30 May 2016).

training and employing a new generation of activists-turned-journalists: "forced by the circumstances," they note, "Syrians have … learned the basics of newsmaking" and, in the process, "realise[d] the differences between this 'militant' reporting and professional journalism" (ibid.).

One of the consequences of this development has been that these new media organisations have defined their public in more limited geographic terms, focusing on delivering information primarily to Syrians as well as to the Arabic-speaking public of the wider region. From an artistic point of view, one of Syria's perhaps most remarkable new media platforms has been the *Abounaddara* film collective: comprised of an anonymous group of amateur filmmakers based largely in opposition-held areas, *Abounaddara* has been producing short documentaries since the very beginning of Syria's revolution, sharing new films on a weekly basis on social media. Focusing on mundane and everyday scenes, *Abounaddara* has passionately rejected the weaponisation of images in the Syrian conflict, centring their documentary practice instead on humanist values of dignity, authenticity, and objectivity. As they describe their own films — which vary in style and are generally shot using simple techniques and without much editing — they give voice "to various camps, rebels as well as supporters of the regime, and first and foremost to ordinary citizens, placing emphasis on their shared humanity."[180] Beyond English or French subtitling, little is provided in terms of context, explanation or translation, moving their films away from mainstream and activist media practice and towards cinematic storytelling that creates compassion not by means of ideological, but emotional proximity. In that sense, *Abounaddara's* work has been to "critically question the very representation of the Syrian revolution and to sensitise its audience to the increasingly desperate situation in Syria," as it has been described.[181] Even though *Abounaddara* films are accessible to (and welcoming) foreign viewers, including those from the art world, it may be here, at the interstices between art and media, where a space exists to make visible, and intelligible, the human dimension of conflict.

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[180] Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, "Abounaddara's Take on Images in the Syrian Revolution: A Conversation between Charif Kiwan and Akram Zaatari (Part Two)," Jadaliyya, 2 September 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19080 (accessed 10 July 2016).

[181] Ibid.

9

The Fact of Illegibility:

Dilek Winchester's *Alphabets* and *On Reading and Writing*

As if nothing has ever been said before us*:* this was the enigmatic title of an exhibition in early 2015 by Turkish artist Dilek Winchester at SALT Beyoğlu, one of Istanbul's non-profit cultural institutions, located in the city's cosmopolitan European-side district. Upon entering the exhibition, visitors faced, among others, an installation consisting of three large blackboards with short texts written in white chalk, each in a different alphabet: Armenian, Ottoman, and Greek. Next to the blackboards, whose form and careful handwriting recalled the scene of a school, headphones were available, offering viewers an opportunity to listen to these short texts phonetically. Each of them represented what appeared to be experiences from childhood, with the first one, in Armenian letters, stating:

> Their neighbor's daughter was the first friend he ever remembered having. She was a few years older than him. When she was at school, he was bored because he couldn't find anyone to play with. When he started school, he realised that he wasn't taught the same letters. He still remembers how disappointed he felt then.[182]

On the second blackboard, a text written in the Ottoman (Perso-Arabic) alphabet recalled a similar experience of tension around language:

> The letters that her mother wrote to her father were unreadable because they were written with a different alphabet. All the mischief they got up to was recorded with indecipherable writing in those letters. But surely, not only the mischief, there must have been other things mentioned as well. This indecipherable writing was annoying.

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[182]   In the exhibition, the texts were written in Turkish. The English translation was provided by the artist.

And lastly, a third text written in Greek letters evoked a linguistic barrier between the interior space of the family and the outside world:

> On his first days to school, he assumed everyone spoke a different language at home. He was surprised to find out that not all families had a special and secret language of their own, which they only spoke within the family.

As viewed through the lens of a young person growing up and into language, these brief texts evoke the elementary role of language within society — not just as a means of communication, but also as a source of community, identification, and belonging. At the same time, these three anecdotes introduce us to language's relationship to power: in all three, the narrator is conscious of language's ability to unite or separate; to accommodate as well as to exclude — effects that are met with disappointment, frustration, and the feeling of being alienated. While we don't know the origin of these anecdotes, they can certainly be read as formative experiences in the process of developing a consciousness for the possibilities and limits of language as an ordering principle that structures society into distinct units, such as the family, the community, or the nation.

With the three blackboards installed prominently in the cosmopolitan heart of contemporary Istanbul, visitors to the exhibition were set to have an unsettling experience. What they could hear through headphones were not three short stories in Greek, Arabic, and Armenian, but in Turkish, written using three different alphabets and writing systems. In this written form, they are illegible to a general Turkish audience accustomed to reading the Turkish language in the Latin alphabet, as has been the Turkish Republic's official policy since 1929. During the Ottoman Empire, however, these other alphabets that Winchester uses in her installation — including Armenian and Greek — were in active use by certain parts of the empire's population of the time. The events of the 20th century led to the disappearance of most of these peoples from the modern nation state of Turkey, and with them the hybrid writing systems and literary traditions of the Ottoman era disappeared. By revisiting these historic alphabets, *On Reading and Writing* (2007) as Dilek Winchester's installation is called, evokes and imagines a heterolingual and hybrid public that nearly entirely belongs to the past, for reasons both historical and political.

In this concluding chapter of a series of case studies, I will argue that a solution to the problems that have been identified with global art might lie precisely in artistic gestures that reject the imperative of global circulation and frustrate the demand for translations and translatability. As opposed to using translation and heterolinguality as strategies to address the greatest possible public, I am interested in Dilek Winchester's study and use of historical writing systems as a critical response to these imperatives. I will read the gesture of using a hybrid writing system from the past as a critical, if not utopian vision for contemporary Turkey, and moreover, I will argue that the artists' insistence on a cultural, historical, and geographic context points towards a decentred notion of global art that responds and contributes to regional political and critical discourses.

Alphabet Revolution and Cultural Nationalism

Dilek Winchester's work is set against the backdrop of Turkey's complex history of language politics, and it is fair to say that, without a basic understanding of that context, it is difficult to experience the work fully. The use of Turkish as the sole language of the Turkish state, and the adoption of the Latin alphabet as its official writing system, are the direct effect of a political and ideological transformation process driven by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the subsequent emergence of its successor state, the Turkish Republic, on a much smaller part of the Ottoman Empire's former territory in 1923 (Yilmaz 2013, 144). During the Ottoman era, numerous languages were in use in the Empire's vast territory, which occupied an area stretching from the Balkans across Anatolia into the Levant, as well as around the Mediterranean into North Africa, including present-day Libya and Egypt. While Ottoman Turkish was the primary administrative language used throughout the empire,[183] different Arabic dialects — as well as Persian — were also in use, in addition to countless smaller and vernacular languages, such as Albanian, Greek, Judeo-Spanish, or Berber (Aslan 2007, 245–250). As part of a multi-ethnic state, the

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[183]   Ottoman Turkish differed from the vernacular Turkish spoken by the inhabitants of Anatolia by means of its numerous loanwords from Arabic and Persian, among others.

many minorities within the Ottoman Empire were relatively free to use their own language within their own communities. In the so-called *Millet* system of governance, ethnic communities were granted a significant degree of legal, political, and cultural autonomy (Abu Jaber 1967, 212). Literacy levels among the population were generally low, and in the absence of a systematic language policy, different alphabets were in use not only to write minority languages, but Turkish as well (Bayraktarli 2008, 99). Wheras literate ethnic Turks living in the area of present-day Syria and Lebanon commonly used the Arabic (Ottoman) Alphabet to write Turkish, as was the official practice, the Turkish-speaking populations of North Cyprus and Jugoslavia used the Latin alphabet. Karamanli Turks of ethnic Greek origin residing in Anatolia and speaking Turkish natively used the Greek alphabet to write in Turkish, and likewise, Armenians used their own alphabet to do so. At the same time, as Ihsan Bayraktarli has pointed out, Ottoman Turkish — the main *lingua franca* of the Ottoman Empire — was a highly accommodating language that was greatly shaped by various religious and cultural influence from throughout the Empire (and particularly its Arabic- and Persian-speaking parts), absorbing some of these languages' vocabulary. In terms of translation, one could argue that, through the impact of the Empire's sheer geographic expanse and cultural pluralism, its *lingua franca* — Ottoman Turkish — was naturally exposed to perpetual foreignisation (94).

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, and its subsequent partition and occupation by the Allied powers through the Treaty of Sèvres, helped the Turkish national movement become a driving political force: under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the nationalists organised a series of congresses across Anatolia that built both the discursive foundations as well as the political forces that eventually led to the establishment of a Turkish nation state-centred in Anatolia, and the abandonment of what had remained of the Ottoman sultanate. After leading a war against the Allied powers who had remained in Anatolia after World War I and reclaiming territories to the West, South, and East (including those with large Greek, Kurdish, and Armenian populations), the Turkish Republic substantially expanded its territory before obtaining international recognition in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, shaping the Republic in its current form. Language was instrumental in creating the

notion of Turkish nationhood, and the newly created Republic used language to swiftly and radically depart from the Ottoman-era paradigm of cultural decentralism, as it had been enshrined in the *Millet* system (Bayar 2014, 37). The perhaps most significant step towards this end was the abrupt abandonment of the Arabic (Ottoman) script. "In order to save the nation from illiteracy and ignorance," the congress of the Republic agreed in 1929, "there is no solution other than to abandon the Arab letters that do not suit her language and to adopt Turkish letters taken from the Latin alphabet" in order to "meet all the needs of the Turkish nation" (cited in Yilmaz 2013, 144). Mustafa Kemal himself toured through the Turkish countryside to promote the Latin alphabet, whose use was swiftly mandated by law from all publishers, newspapers, government officials, and institutions operating within the territory of the Republic (Yilmaz 2013, 144–146). Not only was the Latin alphabet seen as easier to learn than the Ottoman script; it was also argued to be more suitable to render the Turkish language, facilitate more cost-effective publishing, allow for a greater circulation of information, and hence enable more effective governance (141). Moreover, alphabet reform was accompanied by language reforms that sought to bring Ottoman Turkish closer to vernacular (Anatolian) Turkish, replacing the former's many Arabic and Persian loanwords (and hence inherently hybrid nature) with native terms.[184] With these reforms, the modern ideals of mass education, industrialisation, and social progress went hand in hand with ideological imperatives — "the needs of the Turkish nation" — whose ultimate goal was to form and educate a new citizenry that was loyal to the new state (Aslan 2007, 251).

As a consequence of these new language politics, the young Turkish Republic and its institutions linked citizens' ability to speak Turkish and use the Latin alphabet directly their inclusion in, and protection from, the state. Even though the Lausanne Treaty from 1923 upheld the rights of certain national minorities that found themselves within the borders of the young Turkish Republic — notably non-Muslim Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, but not Kurds — members of these minorities were often portrayed as suspect within the

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[184]   For this purpose, the Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu) was founded in 1932, running an extensive campaign to replace foreign loanwords with indigenous ones.

nationalist discourse, particularly after the events of World War I, the Armenian genocide and the 1923 Greek-Turkish population exchange that displaced almost two million people (Aslan 2007, 255–257).[185] In fact, as Senem Aslan has argued, the push towards Turkification and the ensuing marginalisation of non-Turkish-speaking subjects was pursued not only by the state itself but was also assisted by a diverse array of enthusiastic civil collaborators, including intellectuals, teachers, writers, and general public, who often privately reprimanded individuals whose everyday use of language departed from official state doctrine. This led to numerous violent incidents and pogroms directed against minorities in the years after the language reform adoption (Aslan 2007, 246, 253). While Ottoman multi-ethnic statehood had granted the members of these ethnic and religious groups substantial cultural, linguistic religious freedoms, the new Turkish Republic, which drew its legitimation from Anatolia's occupation and partition among the Allied Powers after World War I, as well as from a narrative of cultural and (de facto) religious homogeneity, not only eroded these freedoms, but did little to prevent conflict with the remaining sections of society whose linguistic, cultural, or religious identities did not fit into the frame of Turkish nationalism.

In this context, Dilek Winchester's work not only recalls the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century and the historical events that led to its disappearance, but also the little-known history of a linguistically and culturally hybrid literary production that no longer had a readership, neither in the modern Turkish nation state, nor with its neighbours. This is the story Winchester tells through the voice of literary scholars and ancient book experts in her diptych of video works, *Alphabets (Interviews)* (2012). Through a collage of voices from literary scholars and ancient book experts, both films explore the role of language within both the Karamanli (Anatolian orthodox Christian) and Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire, mapping out the similarities between their respective hybrid literary and cultural heritages, among many other interesting insights. It is revealed, for

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[185]   According to Aslan (2007, 250), the Republic's first census of 1927 registered a remaining minority of two million people for whom Turkish was not the native language. Istanbul, which at the time counted 794,000 inhabitants, remained home to 92,000 Greek speakers, 45,000 Armenian speakers, and 39,000 Judeo-Spanish speakers (Ladino).

example, that while most members of Ottoman-era Armenian and Greek (Karamanli) communities in Anatolia spoke Turkish as their mother tongue, they were simultaneously familiar with the Armenian or Greek alphabet from church, which naturally educated its congregation in the liturgical language. With the industrialisation of book printing, members of these communities began to use the writing system they were familiar with from their respective religious communities for increasingly profane purposes and in everyday life, where vernacular Turkish remained the dominant language. As the Ottoman Empire did not mandate any specific alphabet to be used to write Turkish, some Karamanli or ethnic Armenian writers chose to use their familiar alphabets to address their own cultural and religious communities. An interesting fact that Johann Strauss, a well-known scholar of Ottoman history, has pointed out is that the rise in Turkish-language publications using these alphabets largely coincided with the arrival of American protestant missionaries in Anatolia: one of the key promises of Protestantism, he argues, was that religion should be practiced in the congregations' mother tongue (as opposed to the churches' historical liturgical language), and, according to Strauss, the missionaries spread that message by promoting a greater volume of written publications that addressed itself to the members of these Turkish-speaking Christian communities in Turkish, but using their native alphabets (Strauss 2010, 171).

'As If Nothing Had Been Said Before Us'

As the various literary scholars who make their voices heard in Winchester's *Alphabets* point out, the history of these minor literatures has only just recently become the object of academic study. As Johann Strauss (2003, 39) has argued, the literary production of non-Muslim communities within the Ottoman Empire has tended to be overlooked or ignored by scholars of Turkish literary history:

> Modern historians have tended to create a separate literary identity for each of them [religious, ethnic and linguistic communities within the Ottoman empire] according to the Western European concept of "national" literature. Literature is restricted to the production of one "nation" in one single language; the established canon consists, of course, of original works, emphasising specimens of the different genres which had developed in the

West. The literary activity in the Ottoman Empire with its very specific features does not fit this pattern and is therefore not taken into account.

In other words, the formation of the Turkish national literary canon has ignored, among others, the literary production of the Karamanli Greeks and Armenians, whose alphabets Winchester specifically uses in her work. And because these texts were written in Turkish, they were likewise excluded from the Greek and Armenian literary canons.

One of the effects of the Turkish Republic's alphabet and language reform was that the cultural archives of the Ottoman past became virtually illegible to the Turkish public, with the exception of a now rapidly dying generation and a highly educated few. In these new circumstances, the alphabet and language reforms became a barrier, or a "filter" as Sakai (2010) has called it, limiting access to the past and profoundly politicising the task of translation and transliteration. The alphabet reform permitted the founders of the Turkish Republic to establish a selective approach to the past, with translations determining which historical documents could be accommodated within the ideological, cultural, and political framework of the new present, and which ones could not (Mignon 2011, 111–112).[186] With a new generation in the Turkish Republic educated in the Latin script only, access to Ottoman cultural history gradually eroded, and as a consequence, the culturally hybrid expressions of the Ottoman era — marginal already at their time — were pushed even further to the margins. The title of Dilek Winchester's exhibition, *As If Nothing Had Been Said Before Us,* then precisely evokes this historical and epistemological void that the alphabet and language reform left behind: how the formation of a new, homolingual public sphere separated the modern citizen of the Turkish Republic from the complex cultural and social realities of the past.[187] On Winchester's blackboards, the fact of illegibility serves as a stark reminder of this history.

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[186] This ideological aspect of translation has also been pointed out by translation studies scholars such as André Lefevère (1992), who has argued that translations often take place within frameworks of ideological patronage that affect translation in different ways: ideology informs the selection of texts for translation as well as the methods used, and influences what changes (such as omissions or additions) translators make in the process of translating. Lefevère has compared translation to a form of "manipulation, undertaken in the service of power" that "in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society," but may also "repress innovation, distort and contain" (Lefevère 1992, VII).

[187] "As if nothing had been said before us" also acts as the title for another work by Winchester. Derived from Oğuz Atay's novel *Tutunamayanlar*, this title refers to a sentence

At this point we may recall Sakai, who has defined cultural nationalism not in the conventional sense — as a movement that seeks to glorify the national culture of a community for the purpose of its moral revitalisation — but discursively, as "a regime of someone relating herself or himself to others" in such manner that the respective addresser speaks in assumption of cultural and linguistic homogeneity (Sakai 2007, 4–5). In other words, Sakai has viewed cultural nationalism as a discursive system whose participants consistently address themselves to a public they assume to inhabit the same linguistic, cultural, and ideological position as they themselves. This very principle is at work in the formation of national cultural histories: in a discursive regime whose purpose is to maintain the nation as a homogenous cultural space, "the mingling and cohabitation of plural language heritage," as it was the case in the Ottoman Empire, naturally becomes a marginal, if not impossible undertaking (Sakai 2007, 6). In these circumstances, translation — by virtue of relating to the nation's various linguistic and cultural outsides — finds itself an exception to the norm, legitimate only as long as it serves what is conceived to be in the interest of the nation. Recalling Foucault, Sakai argues that "it is not because the objects of knowledge are preparatorily given that certain disciplines are formed to investigate them," but to the opposite, "the objects are engendered because the disciplines are in place" (Sakai 2007, 40–41). The hybrid literary heritages of the late Ottoman Empire are unknown today not only because they no longer have a public, but because no disciplines of knowledge exist in which they can circulate freely, and the latter are lacking because they are ideologically incompatible with the cultural and political nationalisms that have succeeded the Ottoman Empire and the different peoples that have inhabited it.

For most ordinary Turkish-speakers who visited *As If Nothing Had Been Said Before Us* at SALT Beyoğlu in Istanbul, *On Reading and Writing* remained inaccessible if Winchester had not provided the possibility to listen to these texts in spoken-word form. For Turkish readers, Winchester explains, the purely

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in Atay's book stating: "We are knocking on your doors with an emotion and arrogance unparalleled in world history and without fear of seeming like those who are conceited and behave as if nothing has ever been said before us." In *As if nothing had been said before us*, Winchester writes this sentence using letters from the Armenian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Arabic alphabets.

visual experience of being confronted with a text in Turkish but written in an alphabet belonging to an ethnic or cultural other, is an estranging experience. On listening to these short texts in Turkish, a sense of exclusion sets in that is perhaps best described in the very texts themselves: *He still remembers how disappointed he felt then*, or even *This indecipherable writing was annoying.* But perhaps Winchester's work does not address itself to the typical Turkish reader at all: rather, it might speak to those remaining members of Turkish society that are of Greek descent, or part of Turkey's Armenian minority, even though the number of people able to decipher Ottoman Turkish written in Armanian, Ottoman or Greek letters is now diminishingly small.[188]

Unfortunately, under the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the political climate around minority groups in Turkey has sharply deteriorated after several years of mutual rapprochement.[189] In the wake of a civil war in neighbouring Syria, an international refugee crisis, and a renewed violent campaign against the Kurds, Turkey remains in a precarious state of internal tension; run by a government that hopes to project strength by acting in increasingly authoritarian ways, lashing out against all dissent, external and internal. In this context, as well as within the context of an alarming resurgence of populist nationalist movements in Europe, Winchester's gesture of evoking the hybrid identities and language politics of the past may be read as a reminder as much as a courageous, nostalgic or even utopic gesture, suggesting that the cultural and linguistic pluralisms of the past might offer guidance for how to establish a more peaceful co-existence with the various ethnic and cultural minorities in modern Turkey in the present. As Lawrence Venuti has argued, translation fundamentally possesses a utopian component: it familiarises readers with what lies beyond their language; beyond their imagination. Translation produces new cross-cultural relations that are "potential," "signalled in the text,

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[188] According to Minority Rights international, Greeks are practically nonexistent in present-day Turkey and only a few thousand remain, most of whom are elderly. In contrast, around 60,000 Armenians remain in Turkey, mostly centred in Istanbul. See Minority Rights Group International 2007, "A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey," 12. http://minority rights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-739-A-Quest-for-Equality-Minorities-in-Turkey.pdf (accessed 12 May 2016).

[189] European Commission, "Turkey 2015 Report" (November 2015), http://ec.europa.eu/enlarge ment/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf (accessed 30 May 2016).

in the discursive strategy deployed by the translator, but not yet possessing a social existence. They depend for their realisation on the ensemble of domestic cultural constituencies among which the translation will circulate" (Venuti 2000, 484). Likewise, Sakai's vision of the translator as one who creates "community … at the point of discontinuity" (Sakai 1997, 14) has been no less of a utopian project.

Consistent with her interest in linguistic and cultural crossovers, Winchester incorporates translation into her own working methodology. She collaborates closely with protagonists both from the art world and academia, and for the production of *On Reading and Writing* and *Alphabets*, she relied on the help of collaborators coming both from Greek and Armenian backgrounds — helping her, as a native Turkish speaker, access these hybrid literary heritages in the first place, and assisting in the production of *On Reading and Writing* as gallery pieces. But Winchester's work is also hybrid on a methodological level, shifting between art and research practice, bridging the exhibition space of art institutions with academic discourse and facilitating a convergence between art, research, and cultural criticism. In this respect, Winchester's work can certainly be regarded as a role model for the potential of artistic research: as a research-led artistic practice, works like *On Reading and Writing* and *Alphabets* neither just theorise a visual practice, nor do they simply visualise or illustrate a theoretical proposition. The visual manifestation of the work — what is shown in the gallery space — draws an audience into an experience of how their own ability to understand the other is politically determined through language — and henceforth stipulates a critical reflection on the cultural, linguistic, and identity politics of Turkey that might otherwise remain confined to a theoretical debate among academics.

A Critical Regionalism

I would argue that Winchester's gesture of drawing from literary history to address a public that has almost all but ceased to exist could also be read as a form of scepticism towards global art and the notion that art should seek to

accommodate ever-broader publics by means of making itself translatable. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that global art can be understood not so much as a new form of artistic universalism spreading across the globe, but as a discursive phenomenon in which cultural producers — artists, curators, and institutions — choose to participate in the global market by means of how they implicitly write heterolinguality and translatability into their practice. Alongside the creative potentials this opens, this practice paradoxically also risks advancing a movement of aesthetic, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual homogenisation that may efface cultural differences, commodify and exoticise minor or hybrid cultures and identities, and contribute to the on-going cultural hegemony of the West as opposed to decentring it.

The meaning of *On Reading and Writing* and *Alphabets,* I would argue, lies in their contextual consciousness: at the time of writing, the works have been shown (among other locations) in Istanbul, Sarajevo, and Athens, as well as in Berlin and New York. The former three sites are located within the wider historical and geographic region that were once part of the Ottoman Empire, indicating places that, in their own right, have experienced dramatic and often violent processes of ethnic and cultural nation-building. As such, their publics share a historical and collective understanding of political and cultural paradigm shifts, including alphabet and language changes.[190] Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, where Winchester's work is part of the Ars Aevi collection at the Museum of Modern Art, is a country that still maintains two alphabets — Cyrillic and Latin — to write its language.[191] In contrast, the latter two locations — Berlin and New York — are places with large Turkish diaspora populations for whom the question of language poses itself anew by means of their own

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[190] According to Amila Ramović, director of the Ars Aevi collection of contemporary art in Sarajevo, alphabet change is "a very common topic here." The public reaction to Winchester's work in Sarajevo has generally been "an understanding — we have two alphabets and three languages here, and this is an everyday issue" (E-mail exchange with Ramović, 20 April 2016).

[191] In 2015, a group of artists and designers from Bosnia has turned Bosančica, an extinct variant of the Cyrillic script used on the territory of modern Bosnia, into a computer-writable font, launching a project titled *I write to you in Bosančica.* In a similar fashion, a coalition of artists from south-eastern Europe have attempted to revive the Glagolitic alphabet, the oldest known Slavic script dating back to the Middle Ages. See Rodolfo Toe, "Bosnian Arts Save Vanished Script from Oblivion," in: *Balkan Insight,* 10 December 2015.

displacement and a multi-cultural upbringing.[192] Despite choosing sites of display where her public is most likely implicated in the specific history the work refers to, Winchester does not entirely exclude speakers of other languages from her work: after all, she does provide translations and subtitles for international viewers, as do most artists who participate in international exhibition culture. However, the greater her viewers' distance from the historical geography in which her work is situated, the greater the effort needed for them to access the work and learn about the complex circumstances from which it arises. I myself faced this challenge in the process of writing this chapter, and to some degree, this very challenge empitomises the experience of reading foreignising translations. In Winchester's work, the burden of translation lies not only on the artist herself, but also on the viewer to undergo a process of displacement towards the history of a cultural and linguistic other. In this gradual openness paired with contextual specificity, one might then identify a kind of critical regionalism (as opposed to provincialism) at work — recalling what theorist Ranjit Hoskote (2014, 191) proposed as a way out of the impasses of global art:

> Can we, therefore, imagine the possibility of recovering a conceptual space between a superseded and limiting local, and an overwhelming and generic global? Could we invoke the trope of the retrieval of unfinished projects, alternative temporalities, unattained utopias, to suggest the historical outlines and possible cartography of this conceptual space?

While Winchester's work does not directly critique contemporary-era language politics and cultural nationalism in Turkey, it does so indirectly by symbolically addressing itself to a readership that belongs as much to a linguistically and culturally hybrid past as it may belong to a possible future. In her work, the notion of the artist as translator comes to a sort of inverted conclusion: as opposed to translating from periphery to centre, from minor to major, from local to global, Winchester largely rejects that translational move, and by doing so, highlights the conflicting relationship between translation and cultural nationalism. As opposed to translating for the wider world, she imagines a public

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[192]   It may not be surprising that the Turkish government has recently advocated for Turkish schools and universities to be set up in Germany, hoping to extend the reach of the Turkish education system to include its large diaspora: http://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-in-favor-of-turkish-schools-universities-in-germany/a-3116456 (accessed 10 December 2015).

of translators in the heart of Istanbul and elsewhere, translating between Greek, Armenian, and Turkish, between past and present.

Concluding Thoughts:
The Translator is Present

International exhibition culture, as we understand it today, remains closely tied to the art market and the structures of late capitalism. Globalisation has expanded the publics of contemporary art as much as it has put into place new relations of power that shape relations with those who have been newly included. Today, as I have demonstrated in my chapter on art school, artists hoping for international recognition — and particularly those coming from minority backgrounds or the non-Western world — are encouraged to look towards their own ethnic or cultural identities as symbolic capital to produce the translated images and narrations of otherness that a "colourful" global cultural industry demands. But as opposed to outright rejecting translation, or the act of addressing the other, I have contended that translation can be the very place from where these power relations can be shifted. Translation, I have argued, can serve artists (as well as curators) as a creative and critical method to transgress the confinements of cultural nationalism and monolingualism; unsettle cultural and political asymmetries and centre-periphery dynamics, encourage learning, and build heterolingual communities out of the many zones of cultural and lingual encounter in today's world. In this way, artists can contribute — so I believe — to a more genuinely pluralistic and heterolingual contemporary art practice.

In discussing Dilek Winchester's work I have suggested that a way to highlight translation's critical potential might be to reorient it away from the predominant vectors of circulation that characterise international exhibition culture. As opposed to translating local narratives for global publics, from periphery to centre, artists might consciously seek to reverse these flows by turning towards the geographic, social, political, and cultural others that have been excluded from the institutions and representations of the nation state, and make work that is not *about* the other but that speaks *with* it — inviting the

world to listen, learn, and join the conversation. Where, if not in the arena of culture, is such a reversal conceivable? Winchester's work not only uses language and storytelling to make an implicit critique of nationalist politics in Turkey, but also presents itself as a practice that actively performs language's potential to imagine a different future.

In contrast to what I have called "critical regionalism" with respect to Winchester's work, the well-travelled works of Rabih Mroué and Walid Raad have adopted a broadly heterolingual mode of address that has made their works compatible with the frameworks of international exhibition culture. At the same time, I have taken interest in their works for their awareness of how the act of addressing foreign audiences comes with its own limits and rewards. Walid Raad not only shows us the potential of a diasporic mode of production to carve out a creative space in the act of addressing foreigners — he also explores the very possibilities and limits of making the foreign relatable without simultaneously lapsing into orientalist or exoticist tropes. In a similar fashion, Rabih Mroué has embraced international exhibition culture as a scene from which to reflect critically on a global media phenomenon that has turned translation into an ideological and political battleground for attention, solidarity, and support. Oscillating between (fellow) spectator, cultural commentator, translator, activist and analyst, Mroué has responded to the geopolitical demand for translations by redefining his artist role as an observer of circulating narratives and representations, acknowledging that what art can do in a time of geopolitical and ideological uncertainties is to cast a light on where we stand, how we relate to others, how we are ourselves implicated in these events. In short, art has the potential to be an agent for the formation of a transnational, critical public.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña's remarkable body of performance work stands out not just by means of its innovative, provocative, and perhaps even therapeutic exploration of cross-cultural relations, but as practice that consistently destabilises existing relations of power within contemporary multiculturalism. Rejecting the notion of "domesticated" otherness and embracing playful foreignisation, Gómez-Peña's oeuvre, with its numerous characters, voices, and discourses, reads as a passionate exploration of transformative translation

strategies to the degree of entirely doing away with the binary thinking that separates between us and them, here and there, and between "our" language and theirs. Speaking an ever-changing set of languages, slangs, and 'tongues', no one is ever fully included in — or, conversely — excluded from these performances, making them truly heterolingual experiences where the negotiations immanent to the heterolingual mode of address are playfully, and sometimes provocatively, acted out on stage. And lastly, twenty years after Gómez-Peña began experimenting with linguistic hybridity in performance art in the U.S., Nicoline van Harskamp took the exploration of non-normative languages a step further by staging an elaborate experiment of linguistic cross-fertilisation in the heart of present-day London, giving voice to members of London's migrant community, and impacting how English is spoken and written. By translating *Pygmalion* into *lingua franca English,* van Harskamp renews Gómez-Peña's claim that speaking outside the norm can be a source of cultural identity for an ever-growing number of migrants, diasporic citizens, refugees, and expatriates everywhere. By publishing *Pygmalion* anew, van Harskamp's goal has neither been to produce an authoritative new version of that text, nor one that is more "contemporary," let alone one that is more easily readable. Rather, in collaboration with her participants, she has produced a speculative new text that is strange to read precisely because it inhabits the tensions and contradictions of a globalising world where addressing each other does not automatically mean that we understand each other; where to *communicate* means to *translate.*

Even though all these artists deal with linguistic and cultural encounters, and hence to some degree with the condition of heterolinguality, it would be premature to conclude that the homolingual address — which Sakai has so strongly associated with cultural nationalism — no longer has legitimation as a cultural practice. In developing the concept of the heterolingual address, Sakai's intention has been to reflect on how we, as writers (and, by extension, as speakers, artists, or curators) can accommodate the heterogeneity of languages and knowledge we find ourselves with. However, homolingual modes of address will continue to play a role wherever a more closed or protected discursive space is desired. Language remains one of the most powerful ways of how people express cultural identity, community, and belonging; and this holds true in an

era of mass displacement. The paradox of the homolingual address is that, by means of being inward-looking and assuming (and constructing) sameness, it can also serve as a means of resistance against cultural hegemony or a normative politics of assimilation as much as it can preserve culture precisely in the absence of nation states and institutions. The proliferation of urban slangs, the emergence of non-normative Englishes, the publication of queer dictionaries, the desire to breathe life into vernacular languages and alphabets, and the pop-cultural embrace of vernacular languages and dialects as "untranslatables" can be read precisely as a response to the homogenising forces of cultural globalisation that are at work in art as well.

The challenge for us as critics, curators, and artists, I believe, is hence not to simply embrace either homolingual or heterolingual modes of address, but to understand how we use language is instrumental to the formation of communities, and teach ourselves how to shift between different modes of speaking and situating ourselves through language. Recognising this challenge, Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term *radicant* to sum up what he proposes as the model for a new, cosmopolitan artist identity in the global present. Originally a biological term, the notion of the radicant refers to an organism that "grows roots and adds new ones as it advances" (Bourriaud 2009, 22). The radicant is an organism capable of developing a supporting structure without depending on a single root, expanding and growing into various directions (51). For Bourriaud, being radicant means "setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviours, exchanging rather than imposing" (21). In order to take root in different soils, Bourriaud suggests, radicants must be polyglot and perpetually readjust their mode of address to the different communities they call home. As we have seen in the work of Nicoline van Harskamp, Walid Raad, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Rabih Mroué and Dilek Winchester, the languages that such "radicants" speak will be marked by these journeys into the foreign, and they will mirror the challenges that come with linguistic and cultural acts of border-crossing. Bourriaud's concept stems from a deep scepticism towards the global art world's "logic of membership" (13) that so often frames ("pigeonholes," as

the students of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago put it) non-Western and minority artists as subjects in need of translation (21). As a solution, Bourriaud calls upon us (the protagonists of the art world) to shift away from our focus on the source: instead, we should look for trajectories taken, for layers of experience accumulated, for languages learned. In other words, rather than asking where a translation comes from and how faithful it is to the original, we should call into question both the ideas of the 'source' and the 'original,' and read the translation as what it can be — a witness to movement, the renegotiation of meaning, the creation of new relations, and the possible emergence of a new language.

In light of today's seismic political shifts it appears that, as the world has undergone processes of globalisation, and as we — voluntarily or involuntarily — have "set ourselves into motion" (or observed others setting themselves into motion), the louder the calls have become for a return "home," to the mother tongue(s), to a world of cultural transparencies and political certainties. If this thesis offers any conclusions in that respect, then it might be that what is needed is not a return to a "multicultural" art that simply teaches "us" about "them", simply rebranding the very same divisions imagined by nationalist politics. What we need is an art that permits us to overcome division and recognise the "Other" in ourselves, and ourselves as "Other." Here, translation can play an instrumental role precisely because it challenges us to inhabit worlds outside our own, regardless of where we stand, with all the uncertainties and misunderstandings that come with this act. Good translations force us to leave our comfort zones and confront difference not as threat, but as wonder. As George Steiner (1975, 233) has written, the fact of cultural difference in the world — and hence the never-ending need for translation — has not been mankind's cultural nemesis but precisely what has kept us culturally "vital and creative." Where actual translators may be limited in their agency by the protocol of publishing houses or the demands of the market, artists in the role of translators are free to experiment with cross-cultural encounters in ways that professional translators and interpreters can't. They are free to push the boundaries of translation to imagine cross-cultural relations differently. By adopting translation as a method, visual artists can practice diversity as a lived

experience, push back against nationalism and the cultural essentialism that comes with it, and intervene in the global flows of culture and the geopolitics that underpin them. As we have entered an "era of universal subtitling" and "generalised dubbing," (Bourriaud 2009, 44), translation can no longer be thought of as just a means to an end: it is time for translation to be lifted out of obscurity, and recognised as a place from which to work.

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