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OBERFLÄCHENÜBERSETZUNG: THE POETICS AND CULTURAL POLITICS OF HOMOPHONIC TRANSLATION

Abstract:

This article reassesses the poetics of homophonic translation in order to come to terms with its (culture-)political effects. In a close reading of poems by Ernst Jandl and Oskar Pastior, Dembeck shows that these authors' homophonic translations are by no means homogenous in the methods they apply, but rather make use of various, complex strategies of linguistic transformation simultaneously. This constant shifting between strategies enables these poets to make their texts the medium for (culture-)political movements that are, in very different ways, opposed to the presuppositions of monolingualism. Homophonic translation thus proves to be more than just a mere language game without semantic and political impact.

Keywords:

homophonic translation ⬥ cultural politics ⬥ littérature potentielle ⬥ Oskar Pastior ⬥ Ernst Jandl

The German term 'Oberflächenübersetzung'—literally: "surface translation"—was coined by the Austrian poet Ernst Jandl, who used it as the title of a poem. That text, written in 1957 and published in 1964, quotes an entire poem by William Wordsworth and then transforms it into German words that imitate the sound of the original. This 'method' of transforming a text, which can be found in many other authors as well but has never been thoroughly researched, is usually called "homophonic translation": a translation that is true to the phonetic structure of the original and does not

necessarily attend to its semantic 'content.' Following prevailing notions of sound poetry that associate phonetic experimentation with a negation of meaning, scholars tend to argue that homophonic translations 'sacrifice' meaning altogether.[1] However obvious it may seem, this notion is incorrect; it actually prevents us from understanding the poetic and cultural politics of both sound poetry in general and of homophonic translation in particular. One of the questions I raise in this article is how the poetics of homophonic translation can be more accurately described, and which analytical approaches might be best suited for coming to terms with its poetic and (culture-)political effects.

It is important to highlight the political dimensions of homophonic translation, as one tends to think of it as a mere language game without any social or cultural relevance. But what could be more political than the attempt to challenge and change the way we give significance to the world, linguistically and culturally (cf. Dembeck 2013)? Like other forms of experimental literature, homophonic translation confronts language with 'artificial' constraints that aim at activating linguistic structure as such, thereby subverting our sense of linguistic sovereignty. This is, for example, the aim of the Ouvroire de littérature potentielle (Oulipo), a circle of authors famous for its experiments with writing under arbitrary formal constraints. Homophonic translation pursues this in the context of literary multilingualism; it challenges what Yasemin Yildiz has called the "monolingual paradigm" (Yildiz 2012, 2; cf. Dembeck 2014), the concept that *one* mother tongue is *natural* to any proper speaker—a notion upon which not only a broad range of the linguistics of *langue* is more or less overtly based, but also one that has served as a major factor in culture-political uniformation in recent centuries. Homophonic translation thus even turns, as we will see, against Oulipian arguments concerning the function of the 'mother tongue.' Its various ways of accomplishing this will have to be explored in more detail.

In the following pages, I will first give some initial suggestions concerning the history of the form "homophonic translation," a history which remains to be written. Secondly, I will present the two most prominent homophonic translations into German—prominent, that is, with regard to their scholarly uptake: Jandl's poem "oberflächenübersetzung," and then also a work called *Am Quell der Donau*, a coproduction by the German poet Schuldt and the American Robert Kelly that builds on a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin. Scholarship on both works, as well as the interpretation Schuldt himself provides in his afterword to *Am Quell*, offer some potential inducements toward a new conceptualization of the genre. Thirdly, I will scrutinize some of Oskar Pastior's so-called 'intonations' of poems by

Charles Baudelaire, which make use of homophonic translation and provide material for a thorough description of the form. Finally, I will draw some general conclusions with regard to the formal and culture-political interpretation of homophonic translation and see how the concepts developed with regard to Pastior may also be useful for a better understanding of the texts by Jandl and Schuldt/Kelly.

Homophonic Translation: A Short History

Homophonic translation was not altogether new when Jandl introduced it into lyric poetry. Dirk Weissmann cites a homophonic translation of "Frère Jacques" into English, published in 1956 by Howard L. Chase—its title rendered as "Fryer Jerker" (Weissmann 2014, 297). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Louis and Celia Zukofsky were producing their translation of Catullus' poetry, also drawing on homophonic principles (cf. Venuti 2008, 186–94). Starting from there, homophonic translation emerged continuously in the work of experimental poets, most prominently in the United States (cf. Weissmann 2014, 300), but also in France, in the context of Oulipo (cf. Oulipo 1973, 111; Oulipo 1981, 144 ff.). As for the German-speaking countries, Ralf Rainer Rygulla and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, for example, published a homophonic translation of Appolinaire's "La jolie rousse" under the title "Der joviale Russe" in 1969 (Rygulla and Brinkmann 2004), and Oskar Pastior, before turning to Baudelaire, translated a sound poem by Paul Scheerbart called "Kikakokú" (Pastior 1997, 104 ff.). More recently, Yoko Tawada has made homophonic translation one of the main pillars of her literary philology.

Despite this boom in recent decades, the principle of homophonic translation is much older. The satire-in-verse "Der Einsiedler und das Klingding" (1808) by Clemens Brentano, for example, which he published in the course of a debate with Johann Heinrich Voß concerning the legitimacy of modern as opposed to classical verse, features a Greek sonnet that literally enters the hut of a hermit, addressing him with verses that the hermit, who evidently does not understand Greek, 'translates' to himself, taking the Greek to be German: "Τοῦ παιδὤδους φιλτάτου τ᾽ἀγῶνος / (Er sagt, bei Dich, o thus, viel da)" (Brentano 2013, 95). Such presumed misunderstanding of foreign, mostly classical, languages can also be found in much older texts, for example, in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost,* where a person named Dull habitually takes the schoolmaster's Latin to be plain English.[2] There is certainly much more to be found, for example, in parodistic adaptions of the Bible or of liturgical texts from the Mass, or in the pre-modern tradition of Macaronic poetry. In all these cases, homophonic translation clearly evinces a culture-

political dimension. It plays out popular (vernacular) speech against scholarly or sacred text.

Homophonic translation remains a popular phenomenon even today. A rather recent publication by Axel Hacke and Michael Sowa, which makes fun of popular misunderstandings of English (and other) song lyrics by German-speaking audiences, was a considerable success (Hacke and Sowa 2004; there are two sequels to this book). Leonard Forster, one of the few scholars who worked on multilingual forms of literature before the end of the 20th century, rightfully emphasized in 1968 the potential of homophonic translation to become a mere "parlour game" (Forster 2009, 92). Both Forster's assertion and Hacke's and Sowa's book, however, underestimate or downplay the deeply subversive moment of the method.

In the following sections, I will concentrate on three examples from German literature that attempt to establish homophonic translation as a genre and that have had, to my knowledge, the highest impact so far on this genre's development.

Recent Tendencies in Scholarship

The most probable reason homophonic translation is assumed to sacrifice meaning is that it seems a rather 'mechanical' procedure, not allowing for any meaning-oriented intentions to unfold. One might, however, also think of it the other way around, as does Schuldt in his afterword to *Am Quell der Donau,* in which he describes his and Kelly's coproduction as the result of an artificial separation of the two constitutive dimensions of language, phonetics and semantics. To produce the text, Kelly, who (presumably) does not understand German, listened to a poem by Hölderlin and transformed it into English sounds, literally re-inventing the poem, as Schuldt puts it. In a second step, Schuldt "semanto-pedantically" translated the result back into German (Schuldt 1998, 76). Starting out from this second German text, the procedure was repeated once more. It is interesting to note that Schuldt associates Kelly's homophonic translation with inventiveness and creativity, whereas he considers his own semantic translation as pedantic. But indeed, does not the act of listening 'something' into the phonetic structure of a language we do not know give us more freedom than 'true' semantic translation would?

This reversal of prevailing descriptions of homophonic translation might indeed be alluring at first glance, but it is clear that both modes of translation are subject to

constraints while at the same time opening room for alternatives. In the case of *Am Quell der Donau*, a detailed analysis would show that both translators treat their respective 'original' texts somewhat tendentiously. They are not 'true' to them—rather, they listen to them strategically and aim, as Schuldt puts it in the afterword, at a "coarsening of Hölderlin, at his brutalization" (Schuldt 1998, 78). The awe of the soul, "Staunen der Seele," that Hölderlin's text speaks of, can thus be transformed into a scene of sex and violence:

> Da faßt' ein Staunen die Seele [Hölderlin]
> They faced a stoning, the silly [Kelly]
> Sie sahen einer Steinigung entgegen, dem albernen [Schuldt]
> See, son, I stay near goon, en gay gender all burn. [Kelly]
> Schau, Sohn: ich bleib beim Killer, und Schwulengeschlecht verbennen alle. [Schuldt]
>
> (Schuldt, Kelly and Hölderlin 1998: 12)

It is certainly not imperative to transform the German prefix "ge" into "gay," as Kelly regularly does, and "gay," in turn, must certainly not always mean "schwul." At the same time, both translations are definitively possible. One might therefore say that both the homophonic and the semantic translation of *Am Quell der Donau* ostentatiously subject themselves to constraints imposed by their fealty to the original and by the techniques employed. In this sense they evoke, so to speak, the autonomous dynamics of linguistic structure itself that then occupy the place otherwise reserved for the sovereign author. On the other hand, however, both translation approaches subtly but strategically manipulate these linguistic mechanisms and deliberately add something to the seemingly mechanical translation process.[3]

It is important to note how the semantic surplus that even the homophonic translations seem to add to the original remains, at least to some degree, still determined by it: In listening something into the original text, one remains however loosely bound to the spectrum of sound the original allows itself to be associated with. This makes it possible to consider the translation as a reading of the original, which uncovers hitherto unnoticed semantic undercurrents within it. While listening in a certain way, one may 'find' something in the original text that might 'make sense' for a semantic reading as well. Michael Hammerschmid has shown that Jandl's "oberflächenübersetzung"—which certainly could have elicited something different from "i shall grow old" than "ärschel

grollt"—develops a new "Mischidiom […] aus […] Versatzstücken einer deutschen Natur- bzw. Kriegswelt" (Hammerschmid 2005, 48):

oberflächenübersetzung

my heart leaps up when i behold
a rainbow in the sky
so was it when my life began
so is it now i am a man
so be it when i shall grow old
or let me die!
the child is father of the man
and i could wish my days to be
bound each to each by natural piety

(william wordsworth)

mai hart lieb zapfen eibe hold
er renn bohr in sees kai
so was sieht wenn mai läuft begehen
so es sieht nahe emma mähen
so biet wenn ärschel grollt
ohr leck mit ei!
seht steil dies fader rosse mähen
in teig kurt wisch mai desto bier
baum deutsche deutsch bajonett schur alp eiertier

(Jandl 1997, 51)[4]

Wordsworth's poem evokes the connectivity of human life and nature, modeling the various stages of individual development. In its sound, Jandl at first also perceives natural harmony, but then tones of a more vulgar and violent sort begin to surface, which the last verse finally unmasks as being essentially German. Hammerschmid claims that Jandl thereby hints at a supressed side of Wordsworth's aesthetics: "Es wird nicht das Offensichtliche übersetzt, sondern das unsichtbar Gemachte, verdrängtes Assoziationsmaterial zur Ästhetik des Ewigen und Schönen. […] Jandl hört 'mit' einem bestimmten, historischen Kontext." (Hammerschmidt 2005, 48 ff.)[5] One might claim that Jandl's translation thus performs a rather radical form of domestication—which, according to Lawrence Venuti, no translation can ever avoid (Venuti 1998, 5).

Nonetheless, the culture-political move that Jandl's poem performs can in turn neither be separated from the 'original,' nor from its cultural value in the original or target language. Any philological reading of a homophonic translation must therefore specifically focus both on the values attached to the original as well as on the poetic and/or culture-political strategies that are at work in it—which, in turn, may also be immediately related to these values. Monika Schmitz-Emans, in her article on *Am Quell der Donau*, has extended the analytical scope in this direction by reconstructing in detail the manifold poetic program of the original: in this case, that of the late Hölderlin's *Vaterländische Gesänge*. She shows that Schuldt's und Kelly's method actually extends impulses that already inhabit Hölderlin's poetics (Schmitz-Emans 2002).

In describing the strategic drive behind the respective translation projects, neither Hammerschmid nor Schmitz-Emans have however paid much attention to how *individual* English or German phrases have been rendered in German or English respectively. And indeed, this level of literary analysis certainly poses many more challenges because it urges us toward linguistic detail. Being literary scholars, we are not always used to employing the categories necessary to this end. What would one have to look at? If we agree that our goal should be to uncover poetic and/or culture-political strategies at work in the translation, then our analysis must eventually aim at describing how the translation makes use of—or even enlarges—the various degrees of freedom that the original confers upon what one might still call a somewhat true homophonic and/or semantic translation. Any decision in the translation process must be described against the backdrop of the alternatives not selected.

Questions one could ask might include the following: What does it mean that Jandl makes use of names—"emma," "kurt"—instead of simple nouns, and that he somewhat stretches English phrasing in the last line of his poem?[6] Does the translation transform English phonemes somewhat systematically into German counterparts, or do we find, for example, more than one phoneme in German where in English we have only one? This is, actually, what the question concerning the stretching of the last verse of Wordsworth's poem eventually boils down to, because in the preceding verses the translation omits many more details from the English phrasing—thereby paradoxically coming much closer to how they would likely be pronounced. Beyond the level of phonemic equivalence, one might also ask how other formal details of the original text are treated: Does the homophonic translation, for example, preserve rhyme and meter? More principally: How does it deal with differences in prosody that might pose major

challenges if one were to attempt equivalents for metrical figurations in the target language?

Pastior's *Speckturm*—a Close Reading

Oskar Pastior, the only German member of Oulipo, has often resorted to methods somewhat related to homophonic translation, most visibly in his 43 intonations of one of the most famous poems by Charles Baudelaire, "Harmonie du soir" (Pastior 2002). A second work, published posthumously in 2007 under the title *Speckturm*, also starts out from this poem, but then systematically treats other famous poems from Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (Pastior 2007).[7] This second work is composed of twelve sections, each starting with a poem by Baudelaire that is followed, first, by a collection of anagrams of its title; second, by a homophonic translation of the poem; third, by a prose piece, mostly dealing with semantic components of both the anagrams and the homophonic translation; fourth, by a poem continuing these semantic strains apparently without following any particular constraints; and last, by a so called "gewichtetes Gedicht." (Ramm 2007, 113)[8] I will focus on the two first sections, paying attention mostly to the respective homophonic translations. Section one starts with the poem "Harmonie du soir," section two with "L'albatros." The first poem is famous for its somewhat decadent description of a sunset, culminating in the line "Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige," or, "The sun has drowned in its blood which is congealing."

Harmonie du soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige…
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir!

(Baudelaire 2011, 98 f.)

karbon knie sud ovar

wo saß sie wenn ihr gang & viehbrands ur attische
schlackenflöhe aus poren des einsickernden zensors
(lektion eins) barfuß turnten – dann lehrt uns sogar
das falsche mehl kolchis auf langohr musverzicht und

schlackenflöhe aus poren – ein sickernder zensor
schlüpft kimono porphyr mit anker keiner fliege
das falsche mehl auf kolchis langustös verzichtend
wie hesekiel ist grammophon ein epos randfossil

schlüpft kimono porphyr mit anker keiner fliege
ein chor tanker quitte lineal fast ethno-haar
wie hesekiel ist grammophon ein epos randfossil
lass o leise es je neue tangolange küsse feigen

ein chor tanker quitte lineal fast ethno-haar
du hast eh mini-ulmen reh-keulen puffer-stiege
lassoleise neue schlangolange kissen schweigen
tonspur: venus ihr e-moll blüht summt ofenrohr

(Pastior 2007, 12)

The second poem is an allegory of the poet's life. The poet is compared to the albatross, which is a majestic, if not sublime, creature as long as he is flying, but becomes humble and helpless when captured and held on earth among common creatures. (One must add, I believe, that this reading of the poem is superficial to the extent that it ignores how the 'common' creatures who capture the albatross are themselves described as potentially leading a sublime existence.)

L'Albatros

Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage
Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.

À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule!
Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!
L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,
L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait!

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

(Baudelaire 2011, 18–21)

altrosa vom Kalb

kuh wankt pur samtgemüse – beklommne pagen
brennendes altros fast oasen oder schmer-
quitten süffig wie in solchen karambolagen
genasführten missouris in koffern am meer

ab einem leghorn tilder sprossen sir planschen
kesser räude lasuren mal auf treu & hondas lei-
sem pitbull – mal säumen heul zum awalanchen
koma sie des a-virus trainerle auf quote zwei

dem efeu auktionärer e-kamille gaucht es fäule
fluide nagen sieb – o comics kiloweisen leids
der mond gackert sein bka weg – brülle gäule
austern mimen angstbeutel – die vier im wollkleid

> ein letheproteus semmelbabel im prinzip des nu
> ein kuhhandel & attempest die ritze der lacher
> exile da im koffer eines oszillierenden huhns
> bisweilen dann degen lampenschoner die macker
>
> (Pastior 2007, 22)

In both translations, Pastior employs a rather complex mix of techniques. It is obvious already in the typeface that borders between words and morphemes are shifted; the same holds for syntactical delimitations. In the first poem, Pastior does not try to imitate the rhyme; in the second, he does indeed. There is no uniform pattern for the transformation of French phonemes into German ones—this becomes most obvious in the identical verses of the first Baudelaire poem that are rendered differently in Pastior's version.

Furthermore, Pastior at some points permutates sounds or adds material, as can be demonstrated in the first poem: Pastior transforms "Valse mélancholique" into "*das* falsche mehl kolchis," adding the definite article in the German version. He performs anagrammatic permutations, for example, in rendering "Le c*iel* est triste" as "wie hesek*iel* ist," moving the syllable "iel"; or in transforming "noyé" into "je neue." Anagrams also occur by making use not only of the phonemes but also of the original letters. This is the case when "et beau c*omm*e un *gra*nd r*epos*oir" becomes "*grammo*phon ein *epos* randfossil," or when "lumineux" becomes "mini-ulmen." In other cases, Pastior makes use of Baudelaire's letters, ignoring French pronunciation: "Du passé" is transformed into "Du hast eh," "vestige" into "stiege," "Ton" into "ton." In one instance, Pastior makes use of the fact that in French poetry, the so called 'e-muet,' the silent E, is counted as a separate syllable, and transforms it into a word of its own: "vertige" becomes "verzicht und." In the second translation, all these techniques are also applied— most visibly in the title, which adds the words "vom Kalb" (perhaps inspired by the fact that Pastior hears the word "kuh" in the first verse that follows). In this poem, one also finds clear omissions, as for example when "les hommes d'equipage" is reduced to "beklommne pagen", dropping two syllables—whereas in most other parts of the poems the number of syllables is increased by the translation.

What is somewhat paradoxical in Pastior's translation from French into German is the fact that the resulting German text also relies in part on French pronunciation. This is the case in the title of the first poem, which contains the French word "sud"—at least if one wishes to hear a homophonic correspondence to the word "du" in "harmonie du soir."

The same holds for the words "pagen," "karambolagen," and maybe also "e-kamille," all examples from the second poem. Moreover, English words such as "pitbull," "comics," maybe "atempest," and "missouris" appear—although this last word might also count as French—, as well as "trainerle," which is domesticated by the use of a German dialectical diminutive. Finally there is at least one occasion where Pastior takes a French word, 'avalanche,' and spells it in German orthography: "awalanschen." In short: Pastior's homophonic translations are neither coherent in the techniques they apply for transforming French into German phonemes, nor are they coherent in the standards of pronunciation that are likely to be employed in order to read the 'German' text. Not only does Pastior shift the delimitations between words and phrases—which alongside the anagram is a core principle of poetic speech (see Stewart 1990)[9]; he also shifts back and forth between the various principles of transformation he applies while performing these shifts. Pastior's poems thus perform multiple shifts of linguistic standards at one and the same time. This is significant because the meaning of what Pastior hears in Baudelaire's poem is, at least to some degree, also oriented towards problems of linguistic standardization and their consequences for poetic speech.

As is the case with Jandl's and with Schuldt's and Kelly's translation, one can find a certain tendency toward what Pastior prefers to hear. In his series of texts, including those I have not reproduced here, one can see how some semantic fields are preferred and explored in more detail at the expense of others. The translation of "Harmonie du soir," for instance, already hints at the theme of sea and ships that is essential to "L'Albatros," by mentioning both an "anker" and a "tanker." It frequently refers to acoustics and music—in the words "langohr," "grammophon," "chor," "leise," "tango", "tonspur," "e-moll," and "summt." It transforms the "ostensoir," the 'monstrance' designed to display the Eucharist in Catholic liturgy, into an "ofenrohr." Immediately afterwards, in the prose piece not quoted here, the "ofenrohr" is associated with a "Ziehharmonika," an instrument which leads us back to the word "harmonie" in Baudelaire's title. The transformation of "L'Albatros" into "altrosa vom kalb" in turn refers back to the first Baudelaire poem in that it connotes "Abendrot," which is then explicitly noted in the prose piece following the homophonic translation. Eventually, Pastior picks up the poetological allegory of Baudelaire's poem by translating "Le Poète est semblable" as "ein letheproteus semmelbabel," thereby providing the theme for the following prose piece, which links the learning of foreign languages and multilingualism to the mental exploration of the oceans, evidently under circumstances where their exploration is indeed impossible.

Against *langue*

It is at this point, then, that Pastior's poetic, self-referential experiment with Baudelaire's text turns political. At first sight, there are only few indications that support such a reading, as for example the fact that the first poem mentions a "zensur." Furthermore, the prose text following "altrosa vom kalb" alludes to the fact that the speaker has first seen the sea in 1957—some years after the deportation of the author to a Soviet forced labor camp. But the main reason why a culture-political reading of the translations is plausible is that Pastior's translations *performatively* lead us to the question of how to relate the singularity of the individual to any form of standard, systemic foreclosure. They do so by employing a method that has been at the core of Oulipian activity from the very beginning: by deliberately compounding the constraints that linguistic standards always encompass and thereby, paradoxically, demonstrating the possibilities of creative language use.

Quite obviously, linguistic standards are the necessary condition of any communication. The notion of *langue*, of a *system* of paradigmatic rules structuring speech, is, in de Saussure's original thinking, one reaction—but not *the* answer—to the question how individual expression can engage in 'shared' structures of meaning (Jäger 2010). Pastior's homophonic translations provoke language as system, by subjecting it to deliberate alternative structuring principles that, even though they seem stricter than those in use in everyday speech, prove to have a liberating effect. By leaving a lot to chance, that is, to the mechanisms of the manipulated language system, they provoke unforeseeable effects—and thus demonstrate that language offers space for literary and cultural singularity.[10]

This is, of course, an effect that any poetic use of language might have, and especially any Oulipian constraint. The Oulipo member Harry Mathews has argued that constraint provides the literary author with a "home ground" very similar to the home ground the safety of the mother tongue provides to the translator who needs to adapt a foreign original (Mathews 1998, 74 ff.). In tracing that constraint, the author creates a sense of stability which then allows for singular expression. Mathews' argument certainly follows a concept of native language that recent studies into literary multilingualism would rightfully still consider part of the 'monolingual paradigm' (Yildiz 2012). But Mathews' comparison of constraint and mother tongue can also be read against the grain, with a subversive twist: It not only shows how Oulipian constraints are 'naturalized' in literary

production,[11] but it also implicitly de-naturalizes the notion of native language—which is, after all, assumed to be equivalent to obviously contingent poetic rules.

Homophonic translation potentiates this effect in that it applies a constraint that de-naturalizes the commonplace relation between two *langues*, and thereby not only the notion of *langue* as such, but also prevailing notions of multilingualism. It is culture-political, not only in that it proves the semantic relevance of seemingly pure sound[12] and subverts notions concerning the relation between linguistic constraints and freedom of expression. The specific culture-political impact of homophonic translation rather lies in the fact that it aims to highlight continuity where the 'monolingual paradigm' presupposes rupture. It opens a semantic space between *langues* and makes them communicate in a way that seems to be systematically ruled out.

The culture-political impact of homophonic translation can and must, however, be specifically analyzed with regard to each single text. Pastior's translations of Baudelaire have shown the variety of technical devices that will have to be examined. Indeed, they are such rich examples, because they employ all of the techniques I have found in other authors. One must look, firstly, at the varying orthographical standards used in the translation—standards which may stem from both the original and the target language, or even from languages farther afield or altogether new; secondly, one must consider the treatment of the morphological and syntactical structure, which may depart in many ways from that of the original; and, finally, one must investigate the metrical and other aesthetic features that may differ between the original and the translation.

All these techniques of homophonic translation may, as we have seen, be employed strategically, and any careful interpretation will have to take this possibility into account. As we have seen in the case of Jandl and Schuldt / Kelly, it seems advisable to read their translations for a deconstruction of romantic aesthetics against the backdrop of the German present and/or recent past, or for a 'brutalization' of the original, respectively. Taking into account the specific techniques the authors apply, we can now be more precise in our interpretation. The paradoxical feature of Jandl's translation is that it makes its 'Germanizing' dimension explicit only in the last verse—a verse which, as we have seen, slows down the translation in relation to its original, as if to accentuate every single nuance of English pronunciation. Is Jandl suggesting a connection between German accuracy and German bayonets? In Schuldt / Kelly, one might ask to what extent the implicit debasement of Hölderlin's patriotism, which indeed resonates with his own

poetic program, can be put into meaningful relation with the strategic attribution of homosexuality. Finally, I suggest a reading of the constant shifting of translation principles performed by Pastior's text, against the tension between political oppression and singular expression. By evoking the realities of totalitarian regimes, Pastior modestly tranforms Baudelaire's aestheticization of everyday ugliness—an aestheticization that can only very tamely subvert the strict standards of French (poetic) monolingualism on its own—into a multilingual setting that strives for singularity beyond the borders of any linguistic system.

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Notes

[1] The *Atlas de littérature potentielle* by Oulipo describes homophonic translation as follows: "*on ne conserve que la strucutre phonique*" (Oulipo 1988, 143). Hans-Jost Frey writes in a short text published in an issue of the journal *Zwischen den Zeilen* devoted to a series of phonetic translations: "Während die Übersetzung im üblichen Verstand auf die Erhaltung des Sinns ausgerichtet ist und die Sprachmaterie ersetzt, opfert die Oberflächenübersetzung umgekehrt den

Sinn und ist bemüht, die Lautgestalt des Textes auf eine andere Bedeutung hin auszulegen." (Frey 1996, 255 cf., with regard to surface translations by Oskar Pastior, Strässle 2010, 87)

[2] I thank Irina Dumitrescu for pointing this example out to me.

[3] Cf. Wickham's and Weissmann's accounts of Jandl's "oberflächenübersetzung." Wickham shows that "die Wörter ergeben sich nicht *zwangsläufig* aus der Mechanik des Projekts" (Wickham 2007, 369, my emphasis). Weissmann comes to the conclusion that the mere fact that Jandl preferred certain words over other possible ones, "[remet] en cause le principe même d'une réduction de la traduction à de purs effets sonores. Les aspects sémantiques semblent jouer malgré tout un rôle important dans la démarche de Jandl; sens et son ne semblent nullement antinomiques." (Weissmann 2014, 302)

[4] The poem was first published in 1964 in an anthology of nonsense poetry (Weissmann 2014, 291). I quote the version published in the volume *Sprechblasen* in 1968.

[5] Not much research has been undertaken on Jandl's poem. Apart from Hammerschmidt (2005), the most comprehensive study is Wickham (2007). Wickham's reading is more devoted to formal questions, but it eventually also emphasizes the subversive effect of Jandl's tendentious translation with regard to Wordsworth's romanticism. See also Forster (2009, 91–93), Stanzel (198, 47 ff.), Müller-Zettelmann (2000, 250–52), Mahler (2010).

[6] Wickham comes to the conclusion that the degree of phonetic correspondence between Wordsworth's and Jandl's text declines in relation to the advancing syntactic structuring in the German text (Wickham 2007, 368 ff.).

[7] To my knowledge, virtually no research exists on these two projects. See only the rather superficial account in Strässle (2010). Mathews (1998) highlights the significance of translation for Oulipo, but he draws on translation primarily as a metaphor for the Oulipian work with constraints.

[8] The "gewichtetes Gedicht" is the most constrained form used in the work; it consists of verses that are composed of letters adding up to one and the same number, according to a pattern that gives every letter of the alphabet a specific numeric value.

[9] In current scholarship, only Weissmann highlights the fact that homophonic translation, at least as used in Jandl's poem, not only detaches the translation from the original's semantics, but also shuffles its morphological and syntactical structures (Weissmann 2014, 300).

[10] The members of Oulipo have always claimed that there is but a difference in degree between the constraints they propose for literary production and the constraints of everyday language. Against this claim, a widely read article by Andrews argues that there is a categorical difference

between (Oulipian) constraint and (generic and/or linguistic) convention, claiming, among other things, that conventions are recognized a posteriori whereas constraints are set a priori (Andrews 2003). This distinction, however, does not matter with regard to the poetic text itself. One might even say that the poetic text proves it to be superficial: The mixture of techniques applied in a text like "altrosa vom Kalb" makes it impossible to decide which ones stem from a priori constraints and which are a posteriori effects. Furthermore, one might claim that Andrews' distinction unnecessarily naturalizes the rules that govern language and genre. I therefore follow the Oulipian argument and hold the difference between constraint and convention to be gradational in its effects.

[11] For this process see De la Durantaye (2005). De la Durantaye bases his argument on the work of the Oulipian Jacques Jouet. De la Durantaye's article also offers a very concise, though implicit refutation of Andrews' argument on the difference between constraint and convention.

[12] Cf. Weissmann who argues that Jandl's poem has as its aim a "prise de position polémique," namely to prove "à ceux qui prendraient la matérialité du poème pour un effet de surface […] la puissance que cette matérialité peut acquérir, en réintroduisant en contrebande un contenu explicite." (Weissmann 2014, 305)