

Production and R'production:

The Game of Translation and the
Enigmatic Elision of the 'E'

Reflection Statement

English Extension 2: Major Work

“The translation in fact becomes a moment in its own evolution, and the original is fulfilled even as it grows within the translation.”³⁰

— Jacques Derrida

My desire to explore ‘cultural translation’ was ignited in observing the recent metamorphosis of the #MeToo movement, building momentum in the United States, to its French ‘equivalent’: #BalanceTonPorc or #CallOutYourPig in modern France. I watched how the language we were using skewed society’s ‘goals’ as the movement became inflamed through this process of cultural *mistranslation*, veering away from empowerment of the victim in English speaking contexts to defamation of the perpetrator in French speaking ones. Is it because there is no word for ‘empowerment’ in French? ‘Lost in translation’ seemed the consensus. This observation became the starting point of my ficto-critical essay, *Production and R’production*, determined to locate where translations are in fact *found*, or better, explore how they are never *lost* in the first place.

Through engaging with Baudrillard’s Postmodern treatise, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), I utilise the ‘simulacrum’ as a key analysing tool to expose the obscuration, subsequent displacement and ultimate replacement of an original foreign-language text by its English translation. Studying only languages for my HSC—English, French, Chinese, and Latin—I am all too familiar with this reality and was motivated to offer a fresh look at modern translation and reception theory. As such, my essay proposes an alternate model, a reframing of this translation-replacing-original dynamic, asserting their nature as “autonomous yet palimpsestic, self-referential representations of each other”, as both evolve in tandem, aligning with Derrida’s affirmation above.³¹ Two core texts, Georges Perec’s French crime lipogram, *La Disparition* (1969), and Gilbert Adair’s lipogrammatic English translation, *A Void* (1995), comprise the centre-piece of my argument whose unique form redefines the orientation of original and translation.³² This alternate model finds its basis in Australian critic Andrew Reimer’s essay *Translation, Imitation and Parody* (2010) which designates translations as ‘creations’ not ‘imitations’.³³ This designation inspires my composition’s title—“Production and R’production” (omitting the ‘e’ as a homage to the lipogram)—and largely frames my purpose to articulate the creation of a new yet correlative text from the process of

³⁰ Chattopadhyay, A. (2019). *Jacques Derrida and the Paradox of Translation: “You must go on. I can’t go on. I will go on.”*. Accessed on 24 July 2019 from https://www.academia.edu/589470/Jacques_Derrida_and_the_Paradox_of_Translation.

³¹ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (title).

³² The lipogrammatic form: a composition in which a letter or sequence of letters is suppressed.

³³ Reimer, A. (2010). *Translation, Imitation and Parody*. Sydney: Australian Journal of French Studies 47(1):36-45.

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translation. Hence, I propose “translations are not a loss or erosion of the real, but a reinvention or reimagining of it; they are productions, not reproductions.”³⁴

Building upon this conceptual model, my study of Module A in English Advanced— “Textual Conversations”—and our prescribed texts, Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* (1943) and Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* (2013), both English translations of French works, equipped me with the critical skills to articulate the ‘textual conversation’ between translation and original. This conceptual angle of the ‘conversation’, where translations become “engaged in a discourse through time”, is the edge I use to build upon centuries of translation and reception theory which already conclude that a translation is not a photo-realistic copy of the original.³⁵

Convinced by the coherent logic and sequence of Lillian Specker’s French essay on post-colonial intertextuality, *Contre contre-enquête?* (2017), which is stratified into three conceptual frames— contextual, temporal and spatial, I similarly structure my critical engagement through the lens of a temporal frame and spatial frame.³⁶ These frames function separately yet co-dependently, reflecting my thesis, allowing me to self-reflexively structure commentary on the nature of originals vis-à-vis their translation through form and structure, logically organising in-depth analysis. Underpinning both frames is Derrida’s deconstructionism, most pertinently aborded in his essay on translation, *What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation* (2001), as I explain, “Adair engages in a Derridian deconstruction in his extrication of cultural resonance from of Perec’s original”.³⁷ With Derrida’s premise of deconstruction in mind, I extricate the texts’ form from its meaning to effectively isolate and analyse the cultural undercurrents which facilitate this textual dynamic between original and translation—what I call “the symptoms of a translation”.³⁸

Informing both the spatial and temporal frames was my study of how spatiotemporal configurations within texts can shape meaning from my Extension 1 prescribed texts— from “time is out of joint” in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603) to Bakhtin’s ‘chronotope’ and spatiotemporal configurations in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Building upon this foundation, having been suggested French cultural theorist Gaston Bachelard’s text, *The Poetics of Space* (1957) through correspondence with an academic specialising in this intellectual field, I was implored to consider spatial configuration

³⁴ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.3).

³⁵ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.4).

³⁶ Specker, L. (2017) *Contre contre-enquête?* Sydney: University of Sydney

³⁷ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.7).

³⁸ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.6).

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as a tool to decode and understand the colliding cultural underpinnings of each text.³⁹ Thus, I ultimately conclude that the spatial configuration incited by the lipogrammatic form is “the binding agent that holds both texts in orbit of this conversation through time”, offering key insights into audience and sensibility.⁴⁰

In the temporal frame, Gérard Genette’s masterwork of narratology *Narrative Discourse* (1979) and Theodore Martin’s essay, *Temporality and Literary Theory* (2016), comprise the critical base upon which I canvas my argument and explicate the reciprocal discourse between Adair and Perec predicated on “a simultaneous ‘shared time’ and ‘temporal autonomy’ within narrative.”⁴¹ Further, Derrida’s essay, *The Spectres of Marx* (1994), aided in my conceptualisation of this discourse, as he metaphorises the presence of the precursor text as “a ghost”, simultaneously dead yet alive, absent yet present, self-referential yet co-dependant.⁴² Accordingly, I deduce that this discourse between Perec and Adair “is simultaneously absent, whereby each text stands on its own, yet present wherein their inextricable connection and self-reference is unmistakable.”⁴³

I accompany and strengthen my critical thesis through the ficto-critical form by deploying the extended metaphor of ‘the game’—hence, my subtitle, “The Game of Translation”—designed to conceptually capture the paradoxical playfulness and jocular tone of the strict lipogram.⁴⁴ This extended metaphor tailors an interactive and engaging experience for the reader, packaging dense theory within an accessible form, appealing to both an academically esoteric audience as well as a less intellectually-exclusive readership. I was compelled by my Module B critical study of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV: Part I* (1600) and his dextrous use of the extended metaphor of metatheatricality to effectuate his authorial purpose. Thus, I use an extended metaphor to further conceptualise Perec’s purpose of ‘constrained writing’, as I explain “one may be free and have fun only by adhering to the ‘constraints’ of a detailed rule book”.⁴⁵ I couple this metaphor with a personal and at times conversational tone in my critical commentary to further blur the lines of creative and critical, similar to Woolf’s extended essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), as I write “now that we have had a flick through the rule book, let’s play!”⁴⁶

³⁹ Academic at University of Sydney specialising in Post-colonial and Algerian Studies (Miss Lillian Specker).

⁴⁰ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.16).

⁴¹ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.13).

⁴² Derrida calls this ‘hauntology’ (a portmanteau of haunted and ontology); Derrida, J & Kamuf, P (translator). (1993) *The Specters of Marx*. London: Routledge

⁴³ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.15).

⁴⁴ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (subtitle).

⁴⁵ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.6).

⁴⁶ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.7).

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For the duration of the creative process, I dwelled upon the blending of extended metaphor with narrative further in the work of Virginia Woolf, namely her manuscript, *The Pargiters* (1932). Like Woolf, who utilises alternating essay chapters with a fictional equivalent to metaphorise her thesis, I interweave my critical response with intermittent ficto-critical ‘framing devices’, designed to ‘translate’ my critical commentary into narrative form. Like Anna Tsing’s book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), which depicts a metaphorical narrative journey to illustrate her concept, I chronicle a day in Paris of a Frenchman and an American— “a Frenchman and an American walk into a...library”—forefronting the dimension of cultural unintelligibility and maintaining a nonchalant and jocund tone, further underpinning my concept.⁴⁷ These creative intercuts find deeper significance with retrospection into my year 11 Extension 1 study of French New Wave cinema. Having analysed Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Breathless* (1960) and its pioneering ‘jump cuts’, my framing devices serve a similar function—giving the impression of jumps or suspensions in space and time. Depicting these interactions between two juxtaposed French and American sensibilities in such a way self-reflexively canvases the colliding cultural conceptions of space and time of each text, reframing translations and originals as colliding, although in perpetual textual interaction.

Moreover, imitating Pablo Martin Ruiz’s *Perec, Borges, and a silent solution for La Disparition* (2012), I pepper my prose with allusions to the French language (“French-isms”), employing French-derived words such as “ambiance” and “au contraire”.⁴⁸ The “mélange” of these interlinguistic terms implicitly recognises my response’s position between the ‘void’ of French and English, “where the tectonics of form and language meet”.⁴⁹ This ultimately acknowledges the irony of attempting to untangle language *through* language, after all a fallible medium, further underscored through the colloquial and unreliable narrative voice of my framing devices; “Two texts. Oh, who knows!?”⁵⁰

My original piece, *Production and R’production*, is focused towards an esoteric market such as the academic journal, *New Literary History*, or the *Modern Languages Review* publication, which seek to platform new emerging precepts of literary and reception theory. Yet, my playful framing devices and extended metaphor coupled with side-by-side analysis of French and English, make this albeit esoteric theory accessible to a wider readership, broadening the conversation. As such, I feel that the composition process has significantly honed my skills as an essayist and that my

⁴⁷ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.1).

⁴⁸ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.3 & 9).

⁴⁹ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.6).

⁵⁰ *Production and R’production*, Original Composition (p.1).

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response has fulfilled my original intention—to shine a light onto the process of translation and propose a new informed model to be considered within the paradigm of a constantly changing globalised society encountering an increasing need for cultural intelligibility. In this way, the final line of my Major Work resonates strongly: “while this game has finished, it is not yet time for us to close the box”, as I hope my composition represents only the start of a conversation.⁵¹

⁵¹ *Production and R'production*, Original Composition (p.17).

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