

**Cover Sheet for Assessed Coursework**

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**DECLARATION:**

This coursework is a FIRST submission and has NOT been submitted previously

I certify that the accompanying coursework is my own work and that anything take from or based upon the work of others has its source clearly and explicitly cited.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Received:

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<sup>1</sup> Salinger, J. (1953) *Nine Stories*, Little, Brown & Company, New York.

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## Preface

The following is a survey of contemporary translation. Translation here being, at it's simplest, the movement of information within mediums and between mediums for example A - B. And in some ways it's the '-' that I will focus on. The gap. The trace.

The discussion will revolve around and draw upon the work of cultural theorists, and artists. Specifically, Derrida, McLuhan and Duchamp. Between sections there might be a slight jarring, like a train changing tracks. This is the way I am going to explain the '-' though. The essay is an attempt to explore the benefits of exploring translation, and what it can reveal about contemporary art practice, in terms of production and reception. I am to advocate a critical awareness of the systems managing translation.

I will examine the translation of Eastern Buddhism into early to mid-twentieth century western culture. Buddhism has been chosen for the links with some of it's values to the notion of translation. This is a thread that will be followed through with the section on Duchamp. Duchamp leads us to gender and a meeting with a friend. Then I will turn to Derrida and more specifically the book. Following Derrida the essay will focus on several examples of translation in contemporary culture. This will be followed by a revealing of the shared origins of the language discussed and also the implication of conceding to a multiplicity of languages.

In the spirit of the subject, the form of the discussion is intentionally intertextual<sup>1</sup>. I want the text itself to engage an active reading, requiring an awareness of translation and intertextuality.

I borrow Salinger's nine story structure. Wallace's fondness of footnotes. Marks' haptics, US spelling. I want the text itself to function by way of these references, and signposts of its intertextuality. I want the act of translation by the reader to be engaged and productive. And now I shall sign off, like Danto.

*N/N.Y.C*

*M.D*

#### A note about Buddhism:

I will begin by grounding the essay in the origins of Buddhism. It is important that Buddhism is not just a reference point to the material discussed, but that the beliefs discussed are explored as complimentary to the later chapters, and suggestive as an approach to perception, in both this essay and the art it mentions. Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) who lived in present day Nepal, circa 410 BCE. "Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature of life. Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected, so compassion is natural and important."

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/ataglance/glance.shtml>)

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida said of his own writing that it was "entirely consumed in the reading of other texts." (Derrida, xiv 1978)

## Bananafish

We know the sound of two hands clapping,

But what is the sound of one hand clapping?

-A ZEN KOAN

Salinger, 1953

On January 27th, 2010, US author J.D. Salinger died.<sup>2</sup> Salinger hadn't published a novel since 1963. Salinger was a part of the school of Buddhism that swept U.S arts and literature in the 1950s. Upper West Side Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> The focal point of the encounter with Buddhism and the likes of Salinger, John Cage and Philip Guston, in New York, is often attributed to the class of D.T. Suzuki at Columbia University between 1952-57. At the same time, on the west coast, similar, if looser, Buddhist influences were reaching the San Francisco Renaissance which involved poets such as Allen Ginsberg.<sup>4</sup> The more Salinger developed his ideas of Buddhism and drew them into his characters, the more the critical reception of his work declined.

Salinger came to prominence with the publication of *Catcher In The Rye* in 1951. He would write recurrently about a set of characters called the Glass family. Each member having "become more and more involved with Zen" (Davis, 1963:41) in each subsequent story. This is much more telling of Salinger's own increasing interest in Zen Buddhism though, as the stories were not written chronologically: such that in Salinger's last

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<sup>2</sup> "On \_\_, 19\_\_, \_\_" Fleck, R. (2006) *Half Nelson*, Axiom Films. The film starred Ryan Gosling a high school teacher juggling "hangover's and homework" (DVD blurb)

<sup>3</sup> Danto, C. A. (2004) *Upper West Side Buddhism*, (Baas, Jacob, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Ginsberg first read *Howl* in 1955 at the "Six Gallery on Fillmore street, that has gone down in history as the moment of conception of the Beat movement." (Benson, H. 2005)

published work, *Hapworth 16, 1924* (Salinger, 1965) the story is set during the earliest time of the Glass family, and the young Seymour Glass writes a letter containing “prescient observations concerning the nature of existence.” (Hunter, 2001) Which is often claimed to be a thin veil for authorial self-indulgence.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the young Seymour Glass has a certain awareness and belief system in line with a Western idea of Zen, as a character, the reader understands that he will still go through the war and the events of the other stories, ending with his suicide in a hotel in Florida. All of these events seemingly renouncing his childhood clarity.

Davis describes Salinger’s work as struggling to reconcile the perceived differences between Eastern and Western thought:

The basic division in our literature, as R. W. B. Lewis describes it, is between the "party of memory" which is convinced of man's Original Sin and the "party of hope" which is convinced of man's innate goodness. Our greatest fiction (the party of memory) presents the conflict between stark opposites - guilt and purity, good and evil, experience and innocence. The oldest Buddhist poem ("The conflict between right and wrong/ Is the sickness of the mind") stands in direct contradiction to the polarities which have provided Western writers with the creative tension of art.

Davis, 1963:42

This is shown in Seymour’s rhizomatically expanding biography throughout Salinger’s oeuvre. Davis explores it through the comparison of *Esmé* (Salinger, 1950) and *Zooey* (Salinger, 1957):

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<sup>5</sup> “*Hapworth 16, 1924* is not only Salinger's worst post-*Catcher in the Rye* (1951) effort, it deserves some special award for authorial self-indulgence. The attention... a result of Salinger's infamous thirty-two-year literary silence... and his readers' affection for his previous fiction, rather than the work's merits.” (Geddes, 1997)

"Esme" is in the central tradition of the "party of memory" and presents those dichotomies which are basic to Western fiction - love and squalor. "Zooney," however, is the product of a Zen-infected guru and reveals the things which many critics have begun to question, especially in terms of direction.

Davis, 1963:45

At the same time, in 1957, Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955), which was influenced by Buddhism was under trial for obscenity. It is about the body, and physicality, and the unbearable 'lightness' of the time. Ginsberg too, was working in this synthesis of cultures.

Davis describes Salinger like one of Ginsberg's "lost batallion of platonic conversationalists" (Ginsberg, 1955)<sup>6</sup> :

...from Father Zossima to Bodhidharma - and his attempted East-West merger has led him into a masked form of rejection and withdrawal.

To deplore the influence of Zen on Salinger's art is not to indulge in cultural chauvinism, but simply to state that Zen's oneness and detachment are alien to the Western artist's struggle between love and squalor - the sound of two hands clapping. One hand does not clap; it only waves in a vacuum where the battle is never joined.<sup>7</sup>

Davis, 1963:47

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this line could almost be Salinger, "...who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall" (Ginsberg, 1955)

<sup>7</sup> See also; Bhagavad Gita. When Krishna convinces Arjuna to fight, because he is a warrior, and it is the purpose of the warrior to fight the battle.

Maybe one of the problems facing Salinger's *Hapworth 16, 1924* is that the character comes too close to that typical of the Eastern canon, which as Danto describes is "completely on the surface, like a moral möbius strip" (Danto, 1976:97) as opposed to the "feeling for interiority" (Danto, *ibid.*) with which western literature is concerned. This detachment is what is required for the Buddhist teaching. Yet it is directly opposed to the standard system and language of discussion of a work of fiction. And thus maybe it is not Salinger's work that falls into the middle space between East and West, but the reader, who is drawn into that open ground.

In 1985 Salinger's *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* was re-appropriated into Japanese culture, the development of which was heavily shaped by Buddhism, in the manga series *Banana Fish* by Akimi Yoshida. *Banana Fish* would be translated back into English and flipped<sup>8</sup> by US publisher VIZ media.

John Cage, who also attended D.T. Suzuki's class, seemed to resolve this synthesis in a more complete, less troubled way.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Salinger was trying to articulate in words what was at stake, Cage used Buddhist philosophy to "overcome the differences between music sounds and mere noise." (Danto, 2004:56) Furthermore it was about "overcoming the distinction between religion and life." (Danto, *ibid.*)

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<sup>8</sup> Japanese manga traditionally reads right-to-left. Sometimes a publisher for a left-to-right reading domain will 'flip' the artwork so that the frames flow left-to-right. This can be seen as going against the artist's intentions. However, it is useful in this example, as demonstrating the act of translation as a reflection, rather than the original object. It exists as the left-to-right and also it's mirrored right-to-left.

<sup>9</sup> "We are not...saying something. We are simpleminded enough to think that if we were saying something we would use words. We are rather doing something. The meaning of what we do is determined by each one who sees and hears it." (Cage, 1961:80)

In *Mysticism and Morality*, Danto expands on his ideas about what makes the practice of Buddhism like other religions, a religion:

A religious act is not one of a special class of acts, but an act performed with a certain attitude and through a certain perspective... we need not change our practices in any way, only the spirit in which we pursue them. It is instructive to think in this connection of a distinction that has very recently been blurred, the distinction between art works and ordinary objects: it has been found that ordinary objects can be art works without undergoing any internal modification -that art works and ordinary objects are the same things, though grouped in different ways and appreciated in a different spirit. the whole world can become aestheticized without there being any change in the world at all.

Danto, 1976:84

Cage was not only working on the principles afforded to him by Buddhist teaching, but also those of the art world he was a part of. Cage talks about this transformation of the ordinary object, "theater takes place all the time, wherever one is, and art simply facilitates persuading one that this is the case." (Cage, 2004:34) "He wasn't interested in destroying the barrier between art and life... He was interested mainly in observing that there is no barrier between the two." (Larson, 2004:62) Or as he put it himself:

When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking. And talking about his feelings, or about his ideas of relationships. But when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic—here on Sixth Avenue, for instance—I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that sound is acting. And I love the activity of sound [...] I don't need sound to talk to me.

Cage, 1991

This idea of the art object had precedent in western art with the work, primarily, of Duchamp. Duchamp had devoted himself to chess rather than art since the 1920s. On March 5th, 1968 Cage and Duchamp played a game of chess in which their movements of the chess pieces muted and unmuted several live musicians. They played until the audience left.

Belle da Costa Greene

Cage and Duchamp had been friends for many years. In 1913, the year Cage was born, Duchamp composed a score that was conceived by using chance operations. Chance was crucial to much of Cage's work. A cruciality that was based upon and derived from his use of the *I Ching*.<sup>10</sup> If Salinger's translation of Buddhism into his own work was one of escape from Western ideals, Duchamp's Buddhism was amalgamated with concepts and ideas from other religions, and one that sought to develop art, from the purely "retinal" to an "art in the service of the mind."<sup>11</sup> (Duchamp, 1968)

Duchamp conceived this as possible through his interpretation of the creative act, and a reorganization of the balance of power between viewer and artist:

...the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions...

...The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization...

...Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work.

Duchamp, 1957

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<sup>10</sup> An early Chinese text, used for divination. "Buddhist monks popularized the Chinese classic for its philosophical, cultural and political merits in other literate groups such as the samurai." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Ching](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Ching))

<sup>11</sup> This is oft quoted and usually cited from an interview with J.J. Sweeney, some 20 years before my source. By the time of this interview, Duchamp is well rehearsed. He describes retinal art as being the form of art since Courbet, through to Dada and Surrealism which began to question this state.

The implication of this being that art is art only through the perception of its viewer. This understanding creates a separation of the artist from the art object. Aware of this gap or maybe as Cage might have it, the complete lack of boundary between artist and art object, Duchamp's persona as an artist was something he played with continually. One approach to this was his use of pseudonyms. By creating aliases and signing work by them, Rose Selavy being one of many, Duchamp is creating a space within the work. Benjamin wrote that:

Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifest itself in its translatability. It is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation.

Benjamin, 1923:1

This careful assembly of signs by Duchamp asks the viewer to translate the work into their own terms. This is another way of talking about the shift that Duchamp's work provoked in "the nature of art, from a question of morphology to a question of function... ..All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually." (Kosuth, 1969:856) As Danto said, "the whole world can become aestheticized without there being any change in the world at all." (1976:86)

This position of looking is in line with Benjamin; "We penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday." (Benjamin,

1978:141) With *Rrose Selavy*, Duchamp is also exploiting another dialectic<sup>12</sup> within society, between the male and female. Transvestism through the character of *Rrose Selavy* draws attention to the 'gap', the in-between. Duchamp falls short of becoming female yet is still male. This is traditionally the position of the Androgyne. The Androgyne is the symbol of "true male-female balance" and the "key to Enlightenment." (Graham, 2002)<sup>13</sup> Lee argues that Duchamp's creation of *Rrose Selavy* was not directly about the Androgyne, although that is eventually what it comes to signify. (Lee, 2004:126) Lee believes that Duchamp is inhabiting a character, who is female. Rather than trying to move himself from male to female, he is acting the role of a female character. This it seems is on an alternative spectrum, possibly of fictional female, to fictional male. Following the method of approach previously suggested, by assuming that the whole thing is assembled as a trail of clues, Lee traces the character of *Rrose Selavy* to Buddhist bodhisattva, Kuan Yin. Kuan Yin is depicted as both male and female. The reasoning for this is that Kuan Yin is able to assume the most appropriate form for the audience.

In his obituary of Duchamp, Jasper Johns wrote that "...he wanted to kill art ('for myself') but his persistent attempts to destroy frames of reference altered our thinking, established new units of thought." (Johns, 1968:761) This seems very close to the buddhist notion of splitting, or removal<sup>14</sup> which in turn is very close to Derrida's déconstruction.

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<sup>12</sup> These binary positions can be argued in the dialectic form. This method has a long philosophical tradition, which includes Buddhism, and in modern philosophy the form attributed to Hegel, Immediate-Mediated-Concrete, which is important in relation to Derrida who we will speak of shortly. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic>)

<sup>13</sup> Of course Lacan should appear here somewhere. The Other with capitalised O.

<sup>14</sup> "...the removal of illusions, by the acquisition of knowledge." (Danto, 1976:28)

Bobba<sup>15</sup>

After trawling my networks, my contacts, extensive as they aren't,  
searching for an American, I found Bobba, and he agreed to meet,  
which we did over coffee at a small place of his choosing, and I say  
there is this book, I mutter this several times  
so Bobba says I know, that is why we're here, of course,  
in his growling west coast way,

of course, I say, and I explain how I want him to read my novel  
for me at this event, and he says, simply, ok,  
and in his practiced way he tells me of his life, and when he's finished  
I ask so did you like my book, which I correct to, were there any parts,  
that you felt might make an interesting reading,  
and he picks up the copy from the table and thinks a while,

whilst I wonder if I should have explained to him, more about myself,  
well yes, he says, the scene with the shooting, I like how obtusely you put it,  
and I nod, okay, okay, yes I see that, you know that's meant to be me,  
me, the author, being shot, and he nods and smiles a wicked smile,  
and you see you have to frame this, have you thought about that,  
and I nod as if to say no, well go on,

how much are you going to tell people, do they need to know,  
what the story is about, your intentions, your ideas about the scene,

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<sup>15</sup> This section follows the form of Mark Halliday's *Lionel Trilling* (1992)

and he says, they might ask questions too, have you thought about that,  
and I don't know what to say, but maybe I think it can just be  
what it is that moment, and then I agree anyway, yes, I say,  
yes, I'll tell them something, good, frame it he says,

and I mention casually the dissertation I'm working on,  
which I say is about translation, and he leans forwards and says,  
my boy, I know just who you need to look up, but the name slips his mind,  
and he mentions a friend who worked with Derrida, and the sixties,  
and for a while we feel small with our coffee, well it's like the poetry  
night we do up at the U, he says, a real lefty place, but nonetheless,

some people are out, other's aren't, and he means regarding,  
their sexuality, and he's thinking a thousand miles ahead of me,  
a lifetime, and it wires straight to gender and society, and he  
explains this all with his growl and practiced gestures  
in the same way he did; war, university and fatherhood,  
and he seems excited, and so am I,

and walking to the bus in the dizzle of traffic, I remember,  
it wasn't me being shot at all, but the reader, but it's meant to be  
like it could have been me, and should I explain this,  
thinking until my thoughts move on to one thing,  
or another, until I reach the purple bus and  
Bobba texts me the name that he'd forgotten from before.

## Jacques Derrida by Jacques Derrida<sup>16</sup>

Reading Derrida, his translator advises the reader to “let his<sup>17</sup> attention float,” (Bass, 1978:xvii) which is strikingly similar to the Buddhist notion of bare attention: “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception.” (Thera, 1962:31) This is the way that Derrida insists we approach his work, which is communicated, in this case, through the translator, from French to English and in our act of reading we are asked to perform to certain rules. In discussing Derrida, in particular his *Writing and Difference*, 1978, it is to acknowledge the system by which we can translate. Derrida is often discussed under the term ‘poststructuralism’. This involves the idea that, language is part of the Other, that we use to communicate, and which also separates us from the real, or that which is outside of signification, and conceptualized as desire. (Belsey, 2002:58)

Derrida uses the etymology of words rigorously. It is an important and equally natural<sup>18</sup> approach, and one that Derrida uses to play with the composition of his writing.

If text [texte] means cloth (tissu), the word texte is derived from the Latin textus, meaning cloth (tissu), and from texere, to weave (tisser); in English we have text and textile... ...all these essays have obstinately defined sewing [couture] as basting [faufilure: the faux, “false,” in fau-filure, or “false stringing,” is actually an alteration of

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<sup>16</sup> Barthes, R (1994) *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*

<sup>17</sup> This use of the pronoun was much explored by Derrida under the term phallogocentrisme, which sought to examine “both that gender is central, indeed the central, component of language (as conceived by structuralist linguistics) and that it is organised around the mark of masculinity.” (Livia 2001:5)

<sup>18</sup> Natural in the sense that to examine and discuss language/text/semiology it is, after the fact, quite obvious that one could quite fruitfully examine the root of the sign itself.

the earlier form of the word, *farfiler* or *fourfiler*, from the Latin *fors*, meaning outside. thus basting is sewing on the outside which does not bind the textile tightly.]

Bass, 1978:xiv

One idea that emerges from this is the possibility of there being in fact only one book, which would be a structuralist idea. A book is written as an interpretation, which is to say, translation, of some truth (Mallarmé, Derrida, 1978:10), which could be described as Lacan's Other. Derrida's description of the book is probably closer to Borges library of Babel<sup>19</sup>, in which every possible permutation exists, "that is, everything which can be expressed, in all languages." (Borges 1993:61) This metaphor makes visible the system within which books are written and bound, and also the meaning that humans ascribe to them. Derrida articulates this binding alternatively in the essay, 'Cogito and the History of Madness', discussing Foucault's essay 'The History of Madness'. This articulation, is described by Zizek<sup>20</sup> as, "the madness of the passage to the Symbolic itself, of imposing a symbolic order onto the chaos of the Real." (Zizek, 2008)

To approach translation with this notion of thought is to re-evaluate the position of the author. For Barthes, the idea of the author is a capitalist value, sustained primarily for its economic value (Allen, 2000:71). This is a big part of our conception of culture today. In terms of this essay, I have been talking about works primarily through their connections to their authors. This is a useful approach in terms of classifying the work or categorizing it. It does however underplay the 'death of the author', presented by Barthes. The death of

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<sup>19</sup> In the Library of Babel, Borges offers a beautiful description of how the Other could be imagined, "a round chamber containing a great book with a continuous back circling the walls of the room; but their testimony is suspect; their words, obscure. That cyclical book is God." (Borges, 1993:59)

<sup>20</sup> This is in fact part of a criticism on Derrida for missing this point. For Zizek, Derrida doesn't notice this enough, and remains more concerned with "the excess of the Night of the World..." (Zizek, 2008)

the author, by which the reader is born. The author, could now be perceived as the first reader of that particular text. Derrida uses the term, 'trace', to refer to the 'signifying chains which disrupt and infinitely defer the meaning of each signifier.' (Allen, 2000:67) This is the 'gap', the ghost and inbetween. That which is inevitably different in every reader's perception. The play of the trace's of one's whole existence. It was proposed that texts could be split into two categories, that of the readerly which could be read only one way and the writerly, which had a plurality of meanings (ibid., 78). Barthes shows that the readerly text can quickly become writerly<sup>21</sup>; "the readerly text explodes into a plurality which undermines its status as a readerly text..." (ibid., 80) Barthes likens the readerly experience to that of a detective, searching for clues, in order to reach a conclusion. (ibid., 79) The writerly can be perceived as something close to that bare attention.

Derrida actively engages with the idea of intertextuality in the presentation of his text, *Glas* (1986). *Glas* is structured almost as two separate essays, displayed in two columns, with notes cutting in to the columns throughout<sup>22</sup>. Derrida borrows the structure from Genet, who is also the subject of the right column. The left column is about Hegel. The composition of the text plays with the reader, as if even if a column is attempted to be read individually, the other column will contain similar words or phrases that inevitably pull the reader back to this other text, or rather the two columns as a single text. To return to the fragile opposition of readerly and writerly and also our Buddhist theme and the idea of bare attention; which in turn is similar to Jabès<sup>23</sup>:

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<sup>21</sup> One of the examples Barthes uses to do this is Balzac's *Sarrasine*. This narrative involves the confusion of gender, which functions almost in reverse to the example of *Rose Selavy*. *Sarrasine* is effectively the Other, entering into a system in which he doesn't understand the norms and thus mistakes the actual gender and performance of his love. See Barthes, *S/Z*. (included in *Image, Music, Text*, 1978)

<sup>22</sup> This is strikingly similar to the layout of Wallace's essay, *Host*. (Wallace, 2006:275)

<sup>23</sup> Jabès whose work Derrida explores, in *Edmond Jabès and the Question of The Book*, who is Jewish, like Derrida, a thread of Jewishness that will be picked up later.

We are like the spider.  
We weave our life and then move along in  
it.  
We are like the dreamer who dreams and  
then lives in the dream.  
This is true for the entire universe.

Upanishads, quoted by,  
Lynch, 2006:139

A young man went to see his Teacher and  
said: "May I talk to you?"

The Teacher answered: "Come back  
tomorrow. Then we'll talk."

The day after, the young man came  
back and said: "May I talk to you?"

As on the day before, the Teacher  
answered: "Come back tomorrow. Then  
we'll talk."

"I came yesterday and asked you this  
same question," replied the young man,  
disappointed. "Do you refuse to talk to  
me?"

"We have been in dialogue since  
yesterday," replied the Teacher, smiling.  
"Whose fault if we have bad ears?"

Jabès 1991:197

We are drawing towards the idea of intertextuality as a cartography of translation. The text becomes writerly, as we read its trace, cognizing the plurality of possible meanings in a text. The exercise of tracing the paths of intertextuality will never lead to a single unifying truth, as Mallarmé posited, but instead this plurality of meanings and interpretations of interpretations. Derrida again;

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessary of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism...

Derrida, 1978:369

Derrida points here to the root of why this is important as an artist, "...affirms play..." In the example of *Glas* and the work of others, such as Georges Perec<sup>24</sup> and B.S. Johnson<sup>25</sup>, this interplay of texts, is manifested visually. It causes a rupture in the ordinary process of reading, which challenges the reader to make these leaps between points, examine the gap. This is similar to Barthes use of 'play', the result of this described as "a resolutely anti-hierarchical conception of the production of meaning, rather than a grasping of the author's Truth: the false truth, as it were, of authority." (Harrison and Wood, 2003:965)

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<sup>24</sup> For an introduction on the physicality of Perec's work see, <http://www.wemadethis.co.uk/blog/2011/09/paul-finn-on-george-perec/> (Finn, 2011). Perec's work can also be viewed in relation to our previous comment about Borges, and his Garden of Forking Paths. Perec was a member of the Oulipo group who explored the use of "mathematics and formal modes of thought in the production of new literature." (Bellos, 2011:1) These mathematical rules created situations similar to Borges forking paths. Perec however documented the "progress of an imaginary computer-mind as it iterates a set of choices in real-time." (ibid)

<sup>25</sup> See Albert Angelo (1964) and House Mother Normal (1971) in particular.

## Restaging Goldstein

Jack Goldstein's work is known for its commandeering of "images and stylistic devices from the burgeoning media technology of the era, as well as the history of the Hollywood movie industry and its place in America's image of itself." (Nottingham Contemporary, 2011)

Goldstein translated familiar elements into new contexts and mediums. The work is read in relation to these contexts. Goldstein stated: "Art should be a trailer for the future."<sup>26</sup> (ibid.) Handelman suggests that this is about the presentation of a trailer of our world narrative. (Handelman, 2009)

The example I would like to examine is the initial staging of a performance work in 1979, and its subsequent re-stagings in 2002 and 2011<sup>27</sup>. *Two Boxers*;

The audience occupies seats in front of a boxing ring in darkness, before a fanfare heralds the appearance of two boxers. The three parts of the work allude to three possible modes of representation – the "heroic" contest is evoked by music, the strobe lit bout refers to the silent movie, and the final images assume the appearance of still photography.

Nottingham Contemporary, 2011

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<sup>26</sup> Ginsberg's idea of what art should be was similarly concerned with the future; "It's that you know and feel something that somebody knows and feels in a hundred years" Ginsberg, A. (1966)

<sup>27</sup> Footage from the third re-staging, which was itself the re-staging of the second, is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSG2QONkbTk>

In 1979 the performance was referring to the silent movie, a medium that had essentially become obsolete in 1927. This is a signifier that contemporary audiences can still understand. The history of cinema is very familiar and the myths surrounding it form a large part of the movies that are made.<sup>28</sup> It is also a familiar aspect of experimental filmmaking and video art. Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1966) is the exaggeration of this effect, which is the result of the technical aspects of the medium. The film is celluloid and must be projected. The projector functions by holding each frame in front of a beam of light for a moment, before closing the gate through which the beam is passed, moving to the next frame and reopening the gate, 24 times a second.

Arri, who have been manufacturing professional film cameras since 1924, in 2010 launched their first digital film camera. Digital film projection is now commonplace in most cinemas. The demand for digital film projection has increased with the improvements in the capabilities of 3D projection.

The use of cameras to record events and slow them down is analogous with the development of photography. Muybridge's studies of horses in 1877 slowed time whilst demonstrating the possibilities of future filmmaking. However, the use of high speed<sup>29</sup> sequences has become increasingly familiar, since the production of *The Matrix*<sup>30</sup> (1999). The use of high speed film has since become particularly prevalent in music videos and TV advertising, as well as live sports coverage. Where the scene is lit by a mains power

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<sup>28</sup> e.g. 2011 saw silent movie, *The Artist* (Hazanavicius, M.) screen at Cannes, winning Jean Dujardin best actor.

<sup>29</sup> High speed is referring to the speed that the camera captures each frame. A higher speed captures more frames and therefore allows the sequence to be played back at a lower framerate, which stretched the image into slow motion. Currently, television broadcasts are displayed at 25 frames per second (fps). High speed cameras will typically capture between 300 to 7000 fps, for broadcast. Generally for scientific purposes cameras can capture as much as 1m fps.

<sup>30</sup> The 'bullet-time' effect created here was developed by Michel Gondry, and uses a series of cameras all triggering in sync, allowing the perspective to alter -as would be impossible with a single camera.

supply the level of the light will vary within the time an image is captured. When this footage is played back, this variance becomes visible as a flicker. (Pennington, 2009) This flicker now serves as a marker of slow motion footage. It is caused by the production of the image, yet serves as a signifier for the speed of the film. It is this marker that I am interested in, with the restaging of Goldstein's *Two Boxers*. The strobe light combined with the final stillness of the boxers suggests this contemporary style of filming and also links to hollywood, consumerism and style in the same way the flicker signifier did in the original performance. The idea of the performance signifying an alteration in the perception of time is key to Bowring's discussion of the work:

Time is harnessed to reveal the full range of how we sense its passing... each gesture appears as distinct moves rather than a fluid act... We witness time not as a sequence of similar events or units continuing in a series in which each moment is alike, but instead as different durational periods.

Bowring, 2011

What I have explored, or rather, traced, here is the possible identification of signs within the performance, and one way in which these signifiers have arisen through the duration of time and changes in technology and media. At the time of the original performance the technology existed to capture images that would show this effect.<sup>31</sup> Thus the signifier could be said to be latent, originally only accessible to people aware of the use of this technology in scientific research, but today widely recognized through it's embedding throughout media.

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<sup>31</sup> As can be seen in this incredible documentary advertising the Fastax camera from the early sixties: [http://ia700500.us.archive.org/15/items/fastax-tion/fastax-tion\\_512kb.mp4](http://ia700500.us.archive.org/15/items/fastax-tion/fastax-tion_512kb.mp4)

## Time Travelers and Jewishness in America

One of the most familiar forms of translation within arts practice is the literary adaptation into film. This has been a consistent part of filmmaking since its inception.<sup>32</sup> This process has many benefits for the filmmakers, such as the fact that much of their audience will already be familiar with the 'story'. Benjamin wrote that "literature prompts in its receiver an experience of 'contemplation', while film generates an experience of 'distraction.'" (Dix, 2011)

The issue I want to focus on is the possibility for such adaptations to expand the text. This is possible when the story or content of the text is seen as the trace of it in the readers being. It is in that sense disconnected from the physical text. It is this trace that a film adaptation or indeed any subsequent translation into any medium, can then manipulate. Or as with Derrida's *Glas*, the two can remain parallel and distinct yet in play with each other.

Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* was published in 2003. The time traveller, Henry, often jumps uncontrollably through time. Henry eventually becomes aware of the date that he will die. There is however one scene at the very end, when Claire, Henry's wife, is much older and Henry appears at her side. It ends the story with the sense that Claire will be able to die also, with some kind of resolve, or satisfaction at seeing Henry one more time. The film adaptation of the novel<sup>33</sup>, was released in 2009. The plot of the film closely follows that described in the book. At the end of the film however, there is a different scene of Claire and Henry meeting after Henry's death. In this scene Claire is

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Hepworth, C. & Stow, P. (1903) *Alice In Wonderland*

<sup>33</sup> The rights for which were purchased before the book was even published, showing how closely the film industry is tied to the publishing world.

younger. The effect of this is that the receiver of both the film and the novel can imagine the characters meeting at both times. It promises that after the final meeting in the film, there will be at least one more, and the scene in the novel is made easier as there is the memory of this earlier meeting. This space that is created by the slightly differing texts (film/novel) of the same story, gives the possibility of a more satisfying<sup>34</sup> reading.

A more dramatic sense of this is shown in the example of *Everything Is Illuminated*<sup>35</sup> by Jonathon Safran Foer, and first published in 2002:

Jonathan Safran Foer, a young American Jew, journeys to Ukraine in search of Augustine, the woman who saved his grandfather's life during the Nazi liquidation of Trachimbrod, his family shtetl... Jonathan begins his adventure with Ukrainian... Alexander "Alex" Perchov, who is Foer's age and very fond of American pop culture... Alex... becomes the translator. Alex's "blind" grandfather and his "deranged seeing-eye bitch," Sammy Davis, Jr., Jr., accompany them on their journey. Throughout the book, the meaning of love is deeply examined.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything\\_Is\\_Illuminated](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything_Is_Illuminated)

The website for the work recalls the idea of 'play'. It provides links to several functioning websites based on aspects of the novel. Some of these have been created for their use on the website but others function outside of the reality of the novel. The user is pulled through several layers of fictional realities that lead directly to that which is their own. This

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<sup>34</sup> If you like happy endings.

<sup>35</sup> Foer's title provides a nice link to the rest of this essay. Suspected to be a reference to, 'In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia.' Kundera, M. (1984) *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. This title is in reference to Nietzsche's eternal return. This concept picked up by Derrida in discussion of Jabès (Derrida, 1978:373). Jabès who is writing "A meditative narrative of Jewish Experience and man's relation to the world." (Unknown, <http://www.upne.com/0819562475.html>) Which is strikingly close of Safran Foer's narrative of a Jewish New Yorker, traveling to Europe to understand his family history and his own relation to the world.

device is known as metalepsis.<sup>36</sup> The novel was adapted by Liev Schrieber in 2005. In Schrieber's version there are several fundamental differences to do with characters which provide scope for a very different reading<sup>37</sup>. This, particularly, is the case with Alex's grandfather:

In the book, Alex's grandfather was forced by the Nazis to choose between his own life (and the life of his son) and that of his Jewish best friend. He gives his friend up to the Nazis, who burn him alive inside of a synagogue, and covers up his own pain and fear by taking on the persona of an anti-Semite.	In the movie, he is portrayed as being Jewish himself, and having survived the massacre by pretending to be dead. He assumes a new identity to hide his true ethnicity.
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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything\\_Is\\_Illuminated\\_\(film\)\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything_Is_Illuminated_(film)))

One way of thinking about how this affects the reading of the text might be to use an analogy from quantum physics, and the description of the way an electron behaves in the famous double-slit experiment: "the electron sweeps from source to screen following all paths at once." (Cox, Forshaw, 2011:32)<sup>38</sup> The story is everything between the source and screen. The book or the film becomes just one of the paths. Such that, when the story is

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<sup>36</sup> <http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Metalepsis>

<sup>37</sup> An implication of this is the absence of the pre-war storyline of the novel in the film version. If it was in the film, it would presumably be very different due to the difference in the characters.

<sup>38</sup> "The use of abstract pictures or symbols to represent real things is absolutely fundamental in physics - this is essentially what physicists use mathematics for." (Cox, Forshaw 2011:34) A note on the book jacket professes, "This is our most up-to-date picture of reality." This is the physical reality of the Real. Like the Real it is veiled by strings of metaphors.

perceived as a trace, or memory, it is essentially in the form of all known paths at once, however much they interfere with each other.

This perception of the other traces, or the other plurality of paths through the story, require the perceiver to suspend their disbelief. This results in an active perceiver. This suspension of disbelief is inevitably performative where the medium is familiar. In this respect it is a performative gesture by the perceiver which allows them to access the work.

What this idea means is that rather than comparing all the possible paths (films, novels, songs etc.) in the search of an original or true, which would be like Barthes' 'readerly text.' Instead the text is writerly. There is a field of play denoted by the different paths. In the example of *Everything Is Illuminated* it isn't possible to superimpose the paths cleanly, as with *The Time Traveler's Wife*, however the result is the same. The story becomes a trace.

## Me on Wallace<sup>39</sup> on Frank on Dostoevsky

This notion of the writerly text raises the question of whether a translation can ever be said to be wrong. This is because translation is about interpreting codes. Codes must have a key to function. It draws upon Saussure's description of the sign and signifier, two sides of the same coin. Language works because it is part of an agreed upon structure. "A purely private language does not permit dialogue..." (Belsey, 2002:18)<sup>40</sup> A purely private language is the only way that an interpretation could never be said to be wrong. To go back to a previous point, this understanding of translation is liberating because it explodes the possibility of meaning. By agreeing that a wrong, or mis-translation is possible does not change the fact that there will always be a plurality of different translations. Difference of course being what Derrida argues builds up our units of language in the first place. Still, within these different possibilities, there is surely room to argue that they can be good or bad, or some better than others. It is this notion that Wallace explores in his essay on Joseph Frank's biography of Dostoevsky. (Wallace, 2006:255)

Part of Wallace's praise for Frank's work is that it lends context to the time in which Dostoevsky was writing, providing "a detailed understanding of the cultural circumstances in which the books were conceived and to which they were meant to contribute." (ibid. 258) In this way the reader is able to approach the text with a keener writerly sense. Aspects that may have lost some meaning or tangibility to the reader through their displacement in time, such as the formalities of conversation, might initially

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<sup>39</sup> Already mentioned is the use of footnotes here as a strategic nod to Wallace. Footnotes in themselves are a formal exposure of intertextuality. They allow references to be explained, and digressions to be made. They are like stunted branches in Borges *Garden of Forking Paths* (1993).

<sup>40</sup> Private language as a possibility, is elegantly dismissed by Wallace's footnote to *Authority and American Usage* (2006:87). This is demonstrated, citing Wittgenstein, and essentially shows that "language is public and communication impossible without consensus and rules." (Wallace, 2006:88)

seem comical or charming, that is, not without merit in that they provide an entertaining aspect to the text, but with a more involved understanding of Dostoevsky's context, they can also be appreciated as part of a very regimented, and particularly hierarchical society, which makes for a deeper understanding of the relationships between the characters.

Wallace's reading of Frank's of Dostoevsky is doing sets out a comparison between the kind of ideas that 19th century literature was able to propose successfully and the lack of those in contemporary literature. Wallace interrupts the linearity of his essay with shorter paragraphs that seem to express similar issues to the rest of the text but in a voice that the reader would be more accustomed to seeing in a novel. The reader is forced to make these jumps between the discursive voice of the main essay and the more poetic, personal voice of these smaller sections. They in fact reflect upon life in a similar manner to the first Dostoevsky novel mentioned, Notes From The Underground:

Is the real point of my life simply to undergo as little pain and as much pleasure as possible? My behavior sure seems to indicate that this is what I believe, at least a lot of the time. But isn't this kind of a selfish way to live? Forget selfish - isn't it awful lonely?

Wallace, 2006:261

And in fact: here, for my own benefit, I posed an empty question: which is better, a cheap happiness or lofty suffering? tell me then, which is better?

Dostoevsky, 1973:122

The effect of such technique is that the reader is coerced into this distracted state, pulled between the various seeming objectives of the text. The result is an awareness of the author of the text, Wallace, as a contemporary figure, present in the reader's reality. And of course in time, this link will become aged and distant.

From A to 云

...To transform the significance of language from work into signs, into visual expressions of the word, similar to the ideogram of the Chinese language.

Duchamp (2004:129)

Much of my discussion has been focused around, and entirely phrased within, languages that can be seen as related in their origins, as shown in *figure 1*.

The Buddhist texts that have been referenced were translated from Sanskrit into its form as part of the Chinese Buddhist Canon (Chung, 1995). Chinese is written in hanzi, which is built out of morphemes. These morphemes are derived from pictographs.<sup>41</sup> Dondis describes pictographs as the stage before a language develops into a simpler alphabetic form. (Dondis, 1974) Barthes suggests a history of reading and writing, in which writing was previously the privilege of the higher classes and in contemporary society the focus is on reading which is linked to consumerism. (Barthes, 1971:969) Studies in Linguistics suggest that language evolved; and this can be seen in examples of protolanguages<sup>42</sup> that exist today, such as language trained apes (Bickerton, 1995).

In an editorial for the influential Art-Language journal, Terry Atkinson is writing about “what ‘conceptual art’ is” (Atkinson, 1969):

Richard Wollheim has written, ‘...but it is quite another matter, and one I suggest, beyond the bounds of sense, even to entertain the idea that a form of art could maintain itself outside a society of language-users.’... I would suggest it is not

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<sup>41</sup> <http://zhongwen.com/wen.htm> An interactive genealogy and dictionary of Chinese characters.

<sup>42</sup> “...protolanguage, like an intermediate eye, is functional. It can be used to communicate.” Kirby, 2007

beyond the bounds of sense to maintain that an art form can evolve by taking as a point of initial inquiry the language-use of the art society.

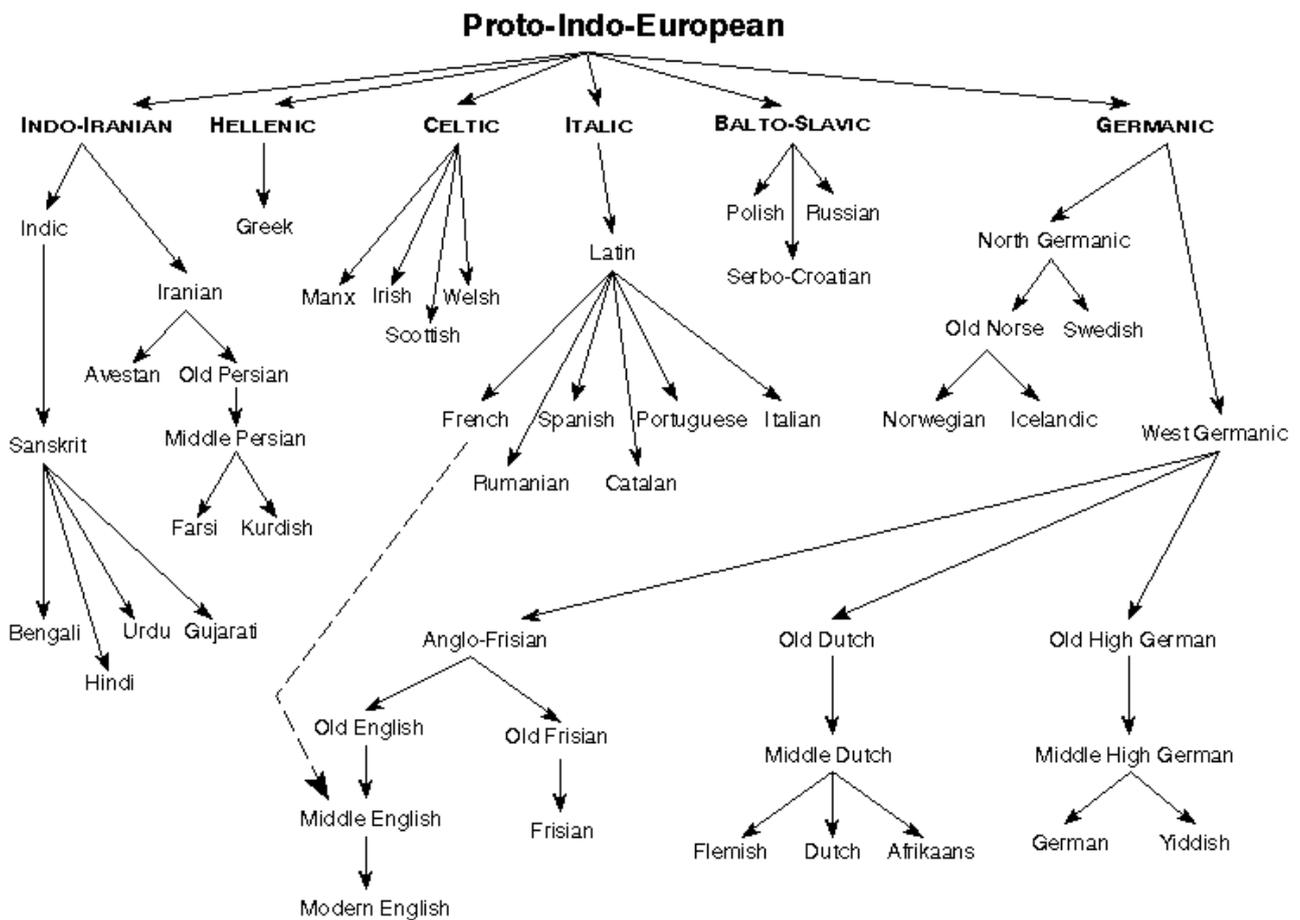
Atkinson, 1969:890

One of the issues that this comment draws attention to is that of translation between different art languages, or societies. There is a sense of mistranslation here, or rupture, and effectively a gap, created by use of language and the contestability of any definition of the word 'art'. A glimpse of the Real.

Derrida argues that his use of the word 'mark' is designed to escape a purely linguistic discussion. For it is "everywhere there is a relation to another thing or relation to an other." (Derrida, Ferraris, 2001:76)<sup>43</sup> Barthes cautions that the plurality of a Text, and here we mean, a mark, is not the map to "some origin of the text... The citations that go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*." (Barthes, 1971:967)

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<sup>43</sup> "I take great interest in questions of language and rhetoric... but there is a point where the authority of final jurisdiction is neither rhetorical nor linguistic, nor even discursive. The notion of trace or of text is introduced to mark the limits of the linguistic turn. This is one more reason why I prefer to speak of 'mark' rather than of language. In the first place the mark is not anthropological; it is prelinguistic; it is the possibility of language, and it is everywhere there is a relation to another thing or relation to an other. For such relations, the mark has no need of language." Derrida and Ferraris, 2001:76



Prepared by Jack Lynch, jlynch@andromeda.ntgers.edu

fig. 1 Lynch, J. (2006) Diagram showing the development of languages stemming from Proto-Indo-European circa. 4000 BCE.

*Drive* was one of three films released in 2011 starring Ryan Gosling. Gosling has become entwined with a certain feeling, sense of being, from his work: specifically, *Half Nelson* (2006) and *Blue Valentine* (2010). These films invoke the idea that the 'hipster', as countercultural movement is the end of countercultural movements, for it's complicity within the system. "A culture lost in the superficiality of its past and unable to create any new meaning." (Haddow, 2008)

This relates directly to the first chapter of this essay, and the western translation of Buddhism which became amalgamated through the 'beat' movement, with counterculture. The tracing of this historical trajectory explored the role of translation in recent western art, suggesting just one of many possible readings.

Chapter two proposed several theoretical concepts and discussions in which to ground this exploration. Specifically the notion of 'play' as described by Barthes and Derrida. Several contemporary examples of translation were explored in the context of the previous discussion. This showed some of the positive effects of approaching work from a 'writerly' position and the undermining of the author as efficient capitalist strategy.

The hipster movement is acting out it's own eternal return.

The third chapter addressed several additional problems in relation to translation. This includes the importance of context for historical works that Wallace and Frank are arguing for. Indeed Wallace notes that Frank's work on Dostoevsky took forty years to write.

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<sup>44</sup> dir. Refn. N. W. (2011) *Drive*, Bold Films, Los Angeles. Score by Martinez, C.

(Wallace, 2006:256) It is as Barthes said, “already read”. (Barthes, 1971:967) The study of linguistics and the origins of language, echoed Duchamp<sup>45</sup> and Derrida. Both of whom attempt to use the etymology of words to transpose a more accurate meaning.

*I am night air. I am video game soundtracks. I am younger than I am now and dreaming of being as old and free as I am now. I am the trace. I am knowing that the song is not really from the eighties, that it has been programmed using the latest technology, in memory of that past. A true echo. A reflection. I am the shots used in the chase sequences. I have played the video game better than the director of this movie. I am aware of these cues. I am knowing. I am my whole generations feeling of knowing. Awareness is key. The titles light up, like lipstick on mirrors, which is like that video game which we all read as an ironic interpretation of the eighties. No unifying truth, but rather, a solidarity of sideways movement, and eternal return.*

Translation is the process by which we attempt to make sense of our experience of art. Some artists seem to intentionally exploit this aspect, by the gaps they leave. McLuhan wrote that, “environments are invisible. Their groundrules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception.” (McLuhan, 1967) By examining the intertextual relations that we perceive in a work it will never lead to a single truth, but always expand the meaning and further develop experience by the space for discussion that such cartography creates. The trace is acknowledged, and a ghostly bridge identified.

Retaining an awareness of this in the development of art allows leaps to be made, shortcuts; such as casting Ryan Gosling. I have tried to demonstrate this in the structure

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<sup>45</sup> Also, Wallace’s essay deals with the ‘intentional fallacy’ which is exploring the same issue, that of intention, which Duchamp is talking about with his ‘creative coefficient’. (Duchamp, 1957)

of this essay. It becomes about the combination of languages and meaning which is inevitably processed into the singular memory of perception.

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