Silence as Noise: The Resistance of Translation; Translation as Resistance

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Abstract: This contribution brings together Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card*, Jean-Luc Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, Wayne Koestenbaum's fables, and Édouard Glissant's *Treatise on the Whole-World* to conceptualize a framework for translation informed by media studies, deconstruction, queer theory, and performance studies. Through reading my own "undeliverable" correspondences with noted translator Mary Ann Caws, I consider how the epistolary affect of contemporary virtual interactions requires closer attention to the staging of coincidence and copresence, voyeurism and intimacy, but also to the lapses that allow passing—the detours and détournements of transmission. In continuing to probe the efficacy of translation as a mode that exceeds the parameters of the territorial and the individual, I revisit my earlier theorizations of the "migratory text" as a work that is born in translation to consider how the untranslatable begets translation as a point of disconnective contact; how translation can serve as its own resistance.

Keywords: Digital intimacy, epistolary, media studies, migratory text, translation studies

"I write you": On Ciphers, Acronyms, Anonymous Non-Encounters

MAC writes me messages I don't receive. I get them hours later, days later, or I don't get them at all. And so I have to imagine all the messages meant for me. I have to imagine all the intention in the world, everything I'll never encounter but which touches me, still, in spite or maybe exactly because of this non-encounter, an error or accident that actualizes my own desire to feel and be felt without knowing it, without being conscious of the feeling or the attempt to record it, or reproduce it, or (especially), to understand it. And I can imagine MAC, which means I can picture her but also put myself there, I can place myself in her position, I can become MAC-in-the-act-of-sending what will never be sent, despite so much virtual purpose and the physicality of typing; MAC's discerning fingers darting across the alphabet, a keyboard which becomes a keycode, a cipher that can't or isn't meant to be decoded; something that exists only to remain, attended and unintentional, not to be penetrated, not to be broken down and deconstructed, not to be solved or resolved, worked and worked out; not to be *cracked*, as the popular expression goes.

Jacques Derrida (1987) likes the post card because of its ability to banalize the cipher through reproduction. Writing, too, can inoculate the experience it wishes to harness, allowing the forgery to displace an original, the "single 'true' letter" (Derrida 1987, 11) of Derrida's beloved missive. "What I like about post cards," Derrida elaborates, "is that even if in an envelope, they are made to circulate like an open but illegible letter" (1987, 12). MAC, who will remain MAC for the duration of this composition, becomes legible here only because I have privileged the acronymatic character of anonymity—the *acr-* which marks, above all and below, both beginning and end, an edge or tip for naming—and the charge of innominate encounters, reducing her to her initials so she can initialize Derrida's own dream of a ciphered language,[1] a communion in crossed correspondence between

herself and me, between me and her: not text, nor picture, neither caption nor address, but a backlit screen showing nothing but its backlogged brilliance: a message reflecting only its sender's visage, partially obscured in the glare of the midday sun in spring (it's April here). In this way, it becomes possible—ecstatically—to send ourselves back to ourselves.

This essay is an attempt to put translation in play; to play translation through its affinity for infidelity. Every message is encoded with such noise, as Claude Shannon (1948), founder of information theory, understood when he formulated his five-step sequence for communication. And what's more: information is not only interrupted by noise, but dependent upon it for transmission. Whereas Shannon's framework allows us to examine the function and role of noise as an external variable intrinsic to the operation of delivery, we should remember that noise does not necessarily arrive from the outside but from the message itself. Entropy, here, serves as latent awareness (process) *and* precondition of delivery (production): the moment when content marks the disintegration of form, unless it's the other way around. Closer attention to the inherent instability of correspondence can remind us: what is untranslatable is not the same as what is resistant to translation. In that resistance—to fidelity, to equivalence, to cultural homogenization and dominance— what is brought to light is a framework for translation that is transparent, not, as Walter Benjamin (1968) desired, to escort an authentic original but in fact to perform as a collaborative act that opens up the processes of its own mediation, relating its passage through borders both national and linguistic, psychic and material. The task of translation thus becomes *mobility*, where mobility is the remaking of space through our positions within it. What is remade, what is undertaken, what is confronted through this interaction is not just the code—the text, the lingual script—but the source itself: as sovereign, as natural and naturalizing, as pure and absolute.

Towards Copies Without Originals: Working Notes

1. Whenever I read my notes back, I don't retrieve events so much as try to reconstruct them by adding other annotations, backdated: an attention to interval.

2. The evaporation of "the message" upon delivery is a game of glances, I think, a negotiation between appearance and disappearance, which I've often felt to be the necessary condition of language, or maybe composition. To detour, to distract or digress, and then—with no indication or authorization—to return my glance to the subject, and the reader, while the latter isn't looking.

In her essay on "Dead Flesh, or the Smell of Painting," Mieke Bal (1994) posits the representation of death as the aporia of representation—its limitations, the impossibility of representation as a form of unfurnished immediacy. But don't all experiences of knowledge and sensation arrive indirectly or not at all? Decades earlier, Walker Percy (1958), in "Metaphor as Mistake," makes the point that in order to be ascertained, a thing first needs to be adulterated through the symbolization of metaphor, the mistake of metaphor which is really *the metaphor as a mistake*. The kind of translations I have pursued, I am still pursuing, might not be called "translations" at all but originals born in translation, what I have elsewhere theorized as a *migratory text* (2019; 2021): a corpus characterized by its attention to collaboration, polyphony, archive, and abstraction.

3. Attracted to mimesis as a textual behavior. Attracted to a mode of inquiry that would allow us to exploit the constitutive limits of the archive through recital, enumeration, resemblance, which is never not ever exactly a doubling. This task would beg the indulgence of a critical reader (a critical reading?), a love of looking failure in the face. I want to say that the limit can also be the edge, a necessary precipice, the threshold from which *something other than the historical past* ghosts the history of our present.

4. It is not just that memory has no chronology but that chronology has no memory; this is why everything that is written here must first be recorded, re-transcribed, confronted with its own discrepancies.

5. Remember: Every act of sending (correspondence) relates nothing if not instability (intrinsic to the operation). Is it or isn't it the same of semiosis, which relies not on reading but on misreading?

6. What's the difference between giving and sending, sending and transfer, transfer and transmission?

7. Notion of the intercepted postcard. Remember to put ʟ *before* ᴋ.

Wayne Koestenbaum (2020), in "The Task of the Translator," writes that originals are respected only if they pass through translation's veils. Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha, a long line of thinkers, ordered chronologically, tend to the same vision—the indebtedness of the original to its translations—from variant outlooks: translation as after-life; as survival; as genesis, the literal marks of a hybrid resistance. But is it or isn't it true that translation wants to subvert such fixed sequences, and their progression? Old and young, past and future, heritage and homelessness, origin and trace, original and copy. What translation says is *in every system there is a kink*. And any kink implies a crack, or better, fold—a twist—in every absolute authority. Another way of saying this is when we double the sequence—recorded, copied *out*—the outcome is no longer fixed, but undone.

8. Want to reach a point where every debt returns as a gift. Want to reach a point where transcription exceeds voice.

9. For example, when I read a copy of this text—excerpted, with several omissions (publication data, page numbers, and even its author all missing)—I read it as if I have just now encountered it. Actuality or authenticity is replaced with transmediated immediacy; sentences I am well-acquainted with *look* new, and in their g(l)aze I am shown (back to) myself with the understanding that if everything born is born illegal, birth puts into question not the subject, but the law. It is not fidelity but forgetting that presents itself as the necessary condition of translation.

10. Want to reach a point where speaker is confused with listener, where sender returns as receiver. Erase all differences between the transcription of event and the event of transcription, or exploit them, through withdrawing.

Just as Derrida (2000) recognized, in his seminar discussion on hospitality, that in order to safeguard a letter, he'd have to extend its distance from his body—through securing it elsewhere—it becomes necessary in the act of correspondence, the act of translation, to manufacture distance so as to materialize a fundamental intimacy. Elsewhere, Alan Bass writes in his own translator's introduction to Derrida's *The Post Card*: "What we call a text always implies supplementary, unpayable debts" (1987, x). But these debts are not burdens; such absences in the text are in fact spectral presences: invitations to read between the lines and across the margins.

Wayne Koestenbaum's "The Task of the Translator," which is not a re-reading of Walter Benjamin's oft-exercised original so much as a re-writing of the German Jewish philosopher's critical essay into something that more closely mimes fable-cum-autotheory, advances through attraction: the bizarre love triangle between a writer (Daisy), a translator (Gavin), and the instructor (Wayne) who teaches the writer's work in translation. War and desire—variously intimated, encountered, and undertaken throughout the text's fifteen pages—serve as the story's backdrop while informing the stakes of its subject: translation's imperial leanings, fraught with privileges and power relations that often go unexamined; as well as the charge of translation's productive promiscuity, what I earlier called its inherent

infidelity. *Delivery*, in this reading, serves neither exactitude nor equivalence but incompletion and imperfection; translation, indeed, is a mode that tends to the sketchy, the tentative, the rough and unfulfilled—meaning that is found, and found *wanting*.

High on the allure of translation—or perhaps, rather, the cultural capital of the commodified original as it circulates, accreting value at each waypoint—Wayne begins teaching the originals-in-translation before they've even been translated. Earlier, Wayne's insistence for processual documentation—and for documenting the process of language's mediation, converting it into knowledge and scholarship—suggests a framework for inverting not only normative models of translation but moreover, the act of artistic production and the very concept of what constitutes a finite (or finished) work of art, the text proper. If it's true, as Benjamin has considered (himself in translation, most commonly read in the English through Harry Zohn), that "all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines" (Benjamin 1968, 82), then it's Wayne, who, as resident artist-teacher, operates "midway between poetry and doctrine" (Benjamin 1968, 77), Benjamin's own analogy, after Mallarmé, of translation itself. Wayne, as go-between, as advocate and agitator, conducts the friction necessary to generate translation as an event, open-ended and extant: *permitting or designed to permit spontaneous and unguided responses.*

"Gavin was taking notes for a future translation of Daisy's in-class breakdown on the second evening of the war," Koestenbaum writes. "Wayne was trying to teach Gavin's future notes, even before they were written down or translated, and this precipitousness, this earliness, was posing problems, complications to be discussed between teacher and translator, later, at the Y, in Gavin's room, after Daisy had returned to the Waldorf" (2020, 159). It is no coincidence that this scene should end—must end—at the local Y: public, temporary, susceptible to rest but also recreation; the rendezvous as vague, as variable, amidst steam-curdled stalls separating bare bodies, or providing each a short-lived space of refuge, a spare moment of fugitivity. Can you return to a place you've never been? Concept project for a future memory. Another way of asking this question is asking ourselves: *where am I in the stories I read, or watch, or listen to?* To locate the agency of translation for its capacity to both converge and dislocate is to locate our own subject position as readers within the porous landscape of the text. No longer witnesses, nor those who are invited to testify on behalf of the text, as I've written elsewhere,[2] readers, here, converge as accomplices. All texts, of course, do not end in publication but only ever begin there, shedding the funereal polish of completion as they begin to interact and expose themselves to manifold partners.

The epistolary affect of our virtual encounters across the screen informs a version of intimacy and authorship that relies on attachment *and* dispersal, the serendipitous or systematized encounters that emerge in-between bodies, not all of which are human. If Koestenbaum's "The Task of the Translator" can be read as a re-writing of Benjamin's essay of the same name, it is also a translation, ferrying Benjamin's embryonic pure language into the arena of the everyday. Voyeurism as reproduction operates as leitmotif; multimodal renderings enact and scatter across the story's pages; Koestenbaum limns transmediation— as Wayne continues to film the daily conversations between Daisy and Gavin; as Georgie, a seminar student, collects "exploitative footage" of Daisy crying for a video documentary about Gavin; as Daisy and Gavin film each other, nude-wrestling in the mud—as potentially precarious, but not without reward. Indeed, in Koestenbaum's re-telling, the dialectic of original-copy is reversed, reversible: in its afterlife, it is not only the original but the copy, too, which undergoes changes, accumulating allure precisely because of its imprecise qualities, its harboring of "uncapturable trace;" the danger of translation, as evidenced by the fable's final sequence, is not the possibility of its shrouding the original[3] but that the original will return to ghost its own present rendering, draping its material (body), as Daisy does, over an inert imitation.

Yet what is being enacted here is not replacement, nor annihilation, but a mode of silence that can be best described as the noise of translation—what refuses to be interpreted, let alone circulated or produced as knowledge, codified as scholarship. Likewise, the story's dramatic finale, where, after his Oscars acceptance speech, Gavin shoots himself, and Daisy, climbing on stage, drapes her body over her translator's, should be understood, not as a warning but as an invitation. It is only when Daisy and Gavin become "singularly plural" and "plurally singular," as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) has written—to be together in difference as a mode of address *and* a way of thinking—that translation can finally make good on its promises of phatic exchange and relation. Nancy's attempts to reorient community, to reorient the social and the individual by releasing each from the "indeterminate multiplication of centripetal meanings, meanings closed in on themselves and supersaturated with significance" (2000, xiii) inform translation as an ethos and a praxis, in which the refusal to begin with absolute opposition (the division between self and other) and its enclosure paves the way for a thinking and a feeling that is shared, meaning that can only ever be on behalf of and in the presence of another: mutual exposure.

Even more potent, however, are the moments in which "connection" falters; when connection falls short, to the extent that everything that passes between us performs as an operation of distension, a stretching out that interlaces differences even as it preserves singularities. True contact, Nancy insists, "is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection" (2000, 5). The process of translation, too, as a collaboration premised on coincidence and copresence, on imbrication and interaction, a togetherness that is kin to the anonymous, moves not by continuity, but contiguity, where touch is not nearly or never penetration but simply the failure to consume fully; to be in touch with another, to touch one another, is to acknowledge this shared separation, an unknowability (or better, untranslatability) and the urge for nearness, which is intimacy. The point is not to find one's self in another through the production of love or language and literature, but to *lose one's self*. This is why the untranslatable begets translation as a point of disconnective contact: an endeavor to record the sensation of each caress, the friction of touch which can also be the failure to render, the inability to convert, to assimilate all the way. This is why translation can be its own resistance. To resist the terms of translation in its most normative framework means to reconceptualize the role and function of the translator, which necessitates, of course, reimagining the work itself.

If there is indeed a parable smuggled through "The Task of the Translator," it is one about the breakdown of translation *on account of* the breakdown of the translator—as singular, as stable. I want to use Koestenbaum's story to continue probing the efficacy of translation—not as a form of cultural imperialism or the accumulation of literary resources through importation—but, on the contrary, as a mode that exceeds the parameters of the territorial and the individual. In the slippery encounter between writer, translator, and scholar, what power relations that cohere the literary-art market with the academy (and other institutions both cultural and political) are made visible?

11. All of the paintings referenced by Mieke Bal, in my version of her "Dead Flesh" (from an edited collection classified as a "conference proceeding") are omitted.

The question of untranslatability is a question of representation, a question of representability: translation as (the) impossible. Gayatri Spivak (2012) also understood the necessary impossibility that is both the conditions for and the consequences of translation. In her analogy of the infant's incessant grabbing (*begreifen*) on to things, which opens her essay "Translation as Culture," Spivak demonstrates the swerve of "crude coding," the "never-ending weaving" that constitutes translation and which, as an act of negotiation and encounter, muddles the border between "inside" and "outside" (2012, 241). Here, the body as both script and instrument of inscription reveals each representative domain,

each domain of representation, as equally available, equally vulnerable to both interference and exposure. In this giving, which is a reception, evasion and contact (the flux and innuendo of all intercourse, all forms of relation) should be read as a re-treating, a distancing that is not about the containment or security of an original or primary source but about edging as an ethical-erotic practice and ontology.

Consider another of Koestenbaum's fables, "The Sexual Translator," a story about a translator, Abel Mars, whose theory of synesthesia can only be passed on "in covert, perfumed practices" (Koestenbaum 2021, 142), practices that the fable's narrator can't or won't describe. Such a revelation can only transmit through sexual action, an aerobics (sinuous but unspecified) that undermines its actors' capacities to reason. Abel's task as a translator is "to uncover what the original author could not divine" (Koestenbaum 2021, 141); his theoretical framework of translation can only be uncovered between lines, or bodies, the point at which language stammers into ecstatic flight: murmurs that ask us only to feel and be felt, only to encounter without having to identify; to accept and enjoy that acknowledgement of unknowability (*blur* as mobility, as hospitality), a dissimulation or disassimilation that resists conversion into lexical knowledge yet insists to be shared. Translation can only be received—that is, rendered—through these second hands, relations which need not be visible to take effect, effects which ask to be imbibed without representation.

> 12. Unlike choosing which files to keep, a student writes me, and which files to discard on a flash drive, my brain automatically selects and saves what it wants to. The notebook lets you keep in touch with yourself, they write, not the you in the present but the you who was written down.

MAC, when she isn't writing to me, has written several books—translations, and cookbooks, and memoirs, and essay collections—among them: *The Eye in the Text*, whose library-cataloged copy sits on my nightstand, awaiting another checkout, or relishing, instead, the truth of its own delay: Oct 25, 2002, reads the most recent timestamp, etched in black ink that has bled into the page prior. In *The Eye of the Text*, MAC theorizes "architexture" as a methodology, probing how readers might attend to the passageway between the textual surface and its construction (or building process). This mobile event—an optical elusion—can only arise through the reader's contribution, their affinity for looking; "as if," MAC writes, "the eye could also turn inward, training its gaze upon that same parapet of the self this time not facing outward toward the object, but inside" (Caws 1981, 88). This exposure, which is *double or nothing*, is tuned to both the visual and the verbal, a poetics of perception that, as MAC writes, "insists upon the immediacy of the eye and upon an *intertexturality* of the visible and the audible and the understandable in their mobile interrelations" (Caws 1981, 11; italics in the original)—but moreover, I argue, what remains illegible, what evades acoustic orbits, what, in contradistinction, has to be imagined (as empathy, as an impossible ethics) to be seen.

> 13. What is the difference between passage and threshold, threshold and corridor? The book as a meeting place for generational drift.

> 14. Annotation as subject and method. Apotheosis of the text: when I can no longer distinguish my notes from the narrative. When the past is confused for its mediation. And I know it's done if it's incomplete.

> 15. Translation as relationship, not equivalence (or equation) … [translation as] a mutually transformative process built upon displacement, not denial: a radical reinvention of the source *as* the trace.

In order to transmit, to be transmitted, the original needs to be exposed, that is to say, it needs to be brought to light through a certain subjection, to be subjected to risk, action, chance, a disclosure that is also (and must be) abandonment. All modes of display rely on

this displacement. Or, as Édouard Glissant has articulated: "*Translation is like an art of flight, in other words, so eloquently, a renunciation that accomplishes*" (2020, 16; italics in the original). For Glissant, translation *as an approach*, is neither a distillation nor a hallucination—what is crucial is not any fetishized or fictitious essence to be mined or mimed but a "*frequenting the trace*" (Glissant 2020, 16; italics in the original), which can only happen through movement, through encounter and swerve, through looking, yes, but even and especially, through listening.

16. Remember: All resemblances benefit from a mistaken identity.

Among Glissant's aspirations throughout his *Traité du tout-monde*, translated into English in 2020 by Celia Britton, is to delink narrative and history, and more specifically, to devalorize the individual storyteller, to call into question their production of a narrative of history that serves as a literal pre-text for governance: the rule of history as the history of ruling powers, which must be written down in order to be turned into fact. Yet the intensification of simultaneity (as repetition) and repetition (as simultaneity) manufactured by the Internet, an experience likened, by Glissant, to an "explosion," undoes conventions of writing and divisions of literature. It is not writing, however, but reading that has undergone the most radical transformation, where *reading* means to be in flux, on the move, carried by the text but also bearing further instructions. Whereas Glissant acknowledges that, in the midst of this explosion, "we cannot keep hold of anything that would anchor us," instability and insecurity bear fruit: "must we also learn," he ultimately asks, "how to learn without holding onto anything?" (2020, 99)

Karl Marx (1937), imitating Friedrich Engels, with whom he was in constant corres-pondence, writes that every revolution is fixed, in the sense that each attempt at a new historical consciousness proceeds from an extant model: the gift of the past which is its catastrophe. No new revolutions, only new stage sets. Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, wants to suggest that history, like language, can only be translated through assimilation. Translation, *in other words*, returns to the original if only to evacuate its contents.

17. When L comes before K, the text invites us to value arrangement as a primary form of information; to value the compilation of new arrangements from which to share experience as song.

18. *To view this image*, the white text reads, printed across each block of black, *please refer to the print version of this book.*

Return to Sender: The Inadvertent Gift of the Text

MAC writes me under the subject title "disappearing act of noncoincidences." The body is blank, empty, which I generally prefer. Because I like to fill the body myself, or think about filling it, not at this moment but momentarily, a filling that is still in-formation.

Underneath, a day later, while looking back at the noncoincidences, which have, through the length of space and duration, become plural, I notice more of her messages. Words that never reached me on account of my last name's common misspelling. The second *n* coming before the first *i* instead of after. When I write it this way, I can confuse myself; I can forget my own name, or form another in its place.[4]

19. What's the difference between silencing and gifting another person with sound? To name is also to say you are like and unlike the sonic quality of a specific combination of language.

I find these other messages; I come across them; I approach them as one approaches a clandestine meeting, the secret that conceals nothing, not even its desire to be shared.

MAC, however, had a desire to send these unsendable messages, retrospectively and post-facto, forwarded from her mail delivery subsystem, to share the error messages that become their own message subjects; a body that becomes a head, or heading: *I love that I never know if things Get To You! the myriad self you are …*

"A tragedy, my love, of destination" (Derrida 1987, 23), Derrida writes on June 6, 1977. But the tragedy is not the fact of a message's falter; the tragedy is the fact of a destination *in the first place*. And I like the idea of missed communications but even better, communications that remain missing. I like the idea of what's not received, what can never (not ever) be returned to sender, as if anything in this life can ever be returned, not really, not like that, not all the way, not ever. And isn't it better? To remain in debt, then, to every addressee, to every person with whom we've corresponded, which is to say to remain in debt to everyone who has ever gifted us with their presence, who has ever gifted us with their absence, who has ever looked for us in spite or maybe because of the disappearing act of noncoincidence. What can never be given or given back, what can only ever be forwarded, passed on, a potentiality that is imminent and always. We need only wait together.

MAC's messages, in this sense, are utopic, insofar as something at present is missing, in that such texts resist the totality of a discursive reading or the past tense of being read, becoming, not a means to an end but in fact interminable, distended, discontinuous, not unlike the act of itinerancy, the drift of people who move, not toward a finite arrival but in the pursuit of another exit. MAC's messages are utopic, too, insofar as they conjure the past—*I wonder if you got this?*—and the future—*Is this there?*—to critique the present; attesting to lack or absence or certain deficiency. Such texts, unreadable in their sites of origin, tend, instead, to the indefinite present, the present as defiant. Time, such haphazard transmissions remind us, is nothing if not a gift. Likewise, the failure to consummate communication allows one to prolong it, to extend it, to accumulate a meta-communication that doesn't merely talk around, or about, the original, but also re-enacts it. MAC and I speak about the unspeakable, and it is because of silence (error, failure) that we together produce noise, a delicate vibration to alert me that another message has arrived. Such is the unconditional hospitality of translation, in which originals are produced through copying out.

> Hi beloved Chris, I always get the wrong address except that with you it is always already and every time and where the right one …

Although hers is a cipher not meant to be decoded, MAC's messages to me make possible a transfer, an errantry built on errancy, a double movement that would not be possible otherwise; that would not be possible, paradoxically, if her original had transferred correctly. In being undeliverable, her message sends back to her; the message becomes also its own sender, text as author, as automatic and autonomic, secreting the additional code that constitutes the exile of nativity: *unknown address*. We might read the common error as the "carte of the adestination" (Derrida 1987, 29): the necessary combination of distancing and détour(nement) that begins by not beginning. Derrida prefers post cards because they fulfill for him a number of requirements which add up to the intimacy of voyeurism: the "absolute nonsecret" as a staging ground where the backdoor pleasure of a witness "to know, to testify, to attend" (Derrida 1987, 47) manifests in the portability of the post card, the teleportation of the post that is, above all, a solicitation, one that has passed from hand to hand, from ear to mouth, from tongue to lips.

If the border of the frame always involves a struggle for movement, or movement is always a struggle with the border of the frame, as media theorists such as Mieke Bal (2008) have asserted, then to be outside the frame means to be on the verge, to remain in flux, to attend to a horizon that one does not meet but that one can only picture; a

horizon that cannot be experienced directly but sensed only through *another*—the second-hand relation; the repetitive pretext for communication—*Has this reached you?*—that only comes after. Thus, MAC's messages permit a spatial and temporal straddle, decussating the space of the not here and the not not here but also the time of the not passed or the time that has gone unrecorded: a vertiginous epistle that dodges representation, preferring, instead, to document its own stochastic traversal. José Esteban Muñoz (1999) locates the political valence of failure as a *doing something else*: "that is, doing something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time's always already flawed temporal mapping practice" (174). Failure, or what J.L. Austin (1979) called "infelicity" in his well-known framework for performative utterances, are in effect set up to foster alternative realities; the "certain disabilit[y]" that occurs whenever they fail "to come off" (237), a "misfire" (238) built on the discrepancy between intention and outcome. It is not that, in misfiring, nothing happens, as Shoshana Felman (2003) reminds us in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, but that *something always happens*. Attending to the incidental, the inadvertent, the provisional and improvisational, harvests ingredients that make translation possible as a mode of incantation and swerve. And then again, and then again again—

To think of MAC thinking of me is to think not of a contemporary (and universalized) nowness but of nearness, begging the beginnings of a hypostasized me that is neither here and now nor then and there—a me that is endlessly deferred and enduringly intra-textual: the me that lives inside the text, but also and especially around it; MAC's sub-text which is also mine, the shared inter-text of correspondence, the secret infra-text of erratic disclosure. It is not where we are meant to be; it is where we are going.

> 20. And because I do not trust originals, I photograph my hand-written notes, and reproduce them here.

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Notes

1 As I write this, or read it back, I think of Walter Benjamin, again, and his desire for a pure, but also expressionless, language: language as encryption (coded, conveyed), where to *cover up* is also to *pile up*. See: Old Church Slavic *kryjǫ, krýti* "to cover, hide, shroud," and its correspondence with Lithuanian *kráuju, kráuti* "to pile up."

2 "I like to think of the restructuring and resuturing of the body, so necessary to this operation; I like to think of the elasticity required to provide structure, to form connectivity, adaptability, or the adaptation of turning the reader into more than just a witness but one who also testifies, whose testimony becomes a part of the text; I like knowing that the principal path need be curved, detoured, and undeterred in its deviation." See: *A and B and Also Nothing* (Los Angeles: Otis Books | Seismicity Editions, 2020), 87.

3 See Benjamin's specific prescriptions: "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully." In Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69–82.

4 You will recall that Derrida likes post cards because of their essential reversibility, an elasticity that is somatic but also spatial: "one does not know what is in front or what is in back, here or there, near or far, the Plato or the Socrates, recto or verso" (Derrida 1987, 13). But still more significant is that these distinctions *no longer matter*: in that radical obscurity, passage—translation as correspondence, as mobility, as anonymous encounter, both ethical and erotic—bares itself.

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