Life on a strip : essayism and emigration in contemporary chinese literature
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CHAPTER 6

The Translator at the Floodgates

And so, after these reflections on essay(ization) and emigration, it is time to introduce a grey eminence that has discreetly exercised its power over significant parts of the argument.

It has surely not escaped the reader's notice that translation – the phenomenon I will focus on in this final chapter – has been "incidentally" mentioned at crucial moments in the present study. In a narrow, conventional sense, as a linguistic operation, it has come up in chapter 3, in the discussion of Liao Yiwu's and Su Xiaokang's life-writing. There, translation into English enables a generic shift, which in turn legitimizes the texts' essayistic potential and facilitates the activation of this potential by the reader. In section two of chapter 4, on Zhai Yongming and her involvement in audiovisual arts, I have referred to intermedial translation. I have argued that Zhai's employment of this technique is motivated by the same impulse as that of essayization, to wit her search for an optimal spaciotemporal form to connect "reality in poetry" and "reality in reality". Earlier, in part one, I have considered the mutual translatability of discourses on the essay and on emigration as a mechanism behind the quasi-discipline referred to as emigratology of the essay. I have returned to this also in chapters 4 and 5, discussing Bei Dao and Wang Anyi respectively. Close readings of Wang Xiaoni and Gao Xingjian in chapter 3 have pointed to essayization as a consequence of the author's and/or the reader's (mis)translation of life into literature.

In the last instalment of this study I will revisit the above arguments, and attempt to pull them together toward a coherent reflection on linkages between essay(ization) and translation. In section one, I will reconstruct a polemic on the translation of Paul Celan's poetry, by comparing metatextual utterances and actual translatorial strategies of three poets: Wang Jiaxin, Bei Dao and Yi Sha. In analysing the metatext, my focus will be on the convergence, or the lack thereof, of each author's views on translation – here taken as the travel of texts between languages and cultures – on the one hand, and their attitudes to emigration and essay(ization), on the other. Scrutinizing their translations of Celan's "Deathfugue" (Todesfuge) I will observe how the authors-as-translators' search for a new form for the text – in a different language, with different readers, against a different spaciotemporal background – triggers or strengthens essayistic mechanisms, and what they do to fit the essayistic element into their visions of literature. In section two, with Yu Jian as a central case study, I will reconsider intersemiotic and intermedial intra-oeuvre operations as an attempt at establishing a self-translatable meta-form. This leads to a question about the possibility of a "translational turn" in discussions of the essay – or, less obviously, an

"essayistic turn" in discussions of translation – and to further reflection on the mutual translatability of discourses, including the translatability of translation discourse itself.

With some considerable simplification, the logic of this chapter is as follows. As I have shown in part two, managing essayization is an important part of an author's oeuvre management. As such, essayization also affects translation, as process and result. Translation presents the emigrant author with especially difficult challenges, whether it is their work that is being translated or they translate the work of others. Whether the author-as-translator tries to increase or decrease the essayizability of the text usually depends on their more overall textual strategy. Therefore, by observing their approach to essayization we can to some extent reconstruct this strategy. In the case studies in this chapter, it turns out that the authors' struggles with essayization in translation reaffirm a vision of their strategy that has emerged in the preceding chapters, from my analysis of other texts, of other discourses of which they partake (including that on the essay) and of the metaphors they use. Hence my desire to look into the translatability of discourses, minimally within single oeuvres.

This manifestation of the same strategy, or of similar strategies at various levels of their involvement into (discussions of) literary writing also takes me back to the hypothesis that regards our penchant for extra-dimensional thinking. In my case studies, translation as a metatextual operation wants to re-bind a chaotic world whose particles are scattered between various discourses and caught in different entanglements to turn it into a single meta-shape. This shape has an architecture that is analogous to the essayistic Möbius strip, and can basically be described by the same topologically-structured notions that describe the essay: *sanwen /* recollecting for Yi Sha, *zawen /* re-collecting for Bei Dao, and *suibi /* collecting for Wang Jiaxin.

I. Essaying Translation: Sense or Sound

"[D]egrading the poem to such an extent that it proves inferior even to *sanwen* – what a pity for Chinese readers who may thus see in Celan anyone but the great master of language"[1] – laments Bei Dao in "Celan: It's Time for the Stone to Blossom" (策兰：是石头要开花的时候, 2004), in which he critiques several Chinese translations of Celan. This judgment was pronounced at the height of Bei Dao's attacks on Wang Jiaxin and Rui Hu's translation of "Deathfugue". In the same essay he offers his own translation, which is largely a critical recombination of various Chinese renditions he has previously discredited. Bei Dao's explicit arguments and his actual method are occasionally rash and ethically questionable, and clearly marked by his poetics and aesthetic hierarchies, as discussed in part two of this study. At the same time, more broadly, they reveal several of the flashpoints and thematic lines along which the discussion of literary translation unfolds among contemporary Chinese poets. The big picture that emerges from Bei Dao's utterance is roughly as follows: he, Bei Dao, poet with an infallible "feel for language" (语感), stands against numerous authors who carelessly sacrifice sound, in favor of essayistically (Bei Dao uses the Chinese term *sanwen*)[2] – which to

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[1] Bei Dao 2011: 353. I cite the essay according to the edition reprinted in 2011 collection of Bei Dao's poems and essays *Selected Works of Bei Dao* (北岛作品精选) (Bei Dao 2011).

[2] Ibidem.

Bei Dao means awkwardly, and signifies "degradation" of the poem – reconstructed sense, with the tandem Wang and Rui as a not-so-shining example.

Wang Jiaxin responded in "Something Hidden or Kept Secret: Taking Issue with Bei Dao" (隐藏或保密了什么：与北岛商榷).[3] For all his meticulous reasoning, Wang occasionally slips into the ruts of Bei Dao's stereotypical thinking: translation is either beautiful (≈ poetic) or faithful (≈ essayistic, or *sanwen*-like), in the spirit of Yevtushenko's (in)famous comparison, which I will not quote for reasons of female self-esteem. Wang's text revalorizes rather than deconstructs this opposition and his opponent's argumentation. Fortunately, Wang is a better translator than polemicist. Regardless of Bei Dao's negative appraisal and Wang Jiaxin's less than successful self-defense, I believe Wang and Rui's rendition of Celan's work shows that beauty and faithfulness – which is of course a perennially contested notion – are not mutually exclusive and that sound can be an elegant byproduct of sense, which, according to Wang, ranks higher than purely artistic value. What this discussion reveals is not so much a difference between two aesthetic systems as a difference between two existential orientations: one toward the self, and one toward the other. While, as Bei Dao's critics emphasize, a "feel for language" is to a large extent a matter of individual style and taste, Wang's arduous "essayistic" sense-seeking bears witness to his openness to the other and his empathy with the translated author.

Nearly ten years later, when this polemic lies behind us, but poets' discussions of translation still rarely transcend the dualism Wang Jiaxin and Bei Dao's confrontation reveals, the rebellious Yi Sha offers what he believes to be an alternative proposition. He professes that he has eventually taken to the canon of world literature and plans to "retranslate the classics" to make their voice heard in contemporary Chinese. Briefly put, his project assumes both de-aestheticizing and de-essayizing the translation process, and minimizing the distance between the translated author and the Chinese target audience. Among one hundred famous poems published in the 2013 anthology *When You're Old* (当你老了) compiled by Yi Sha together with his wife Lao G, there is a problematically (Chinese-)reader-oriented version of "Deathfugue", which I will juxtapose with Bei Dao's and Wang and Rui's renditions.[4]

Importantly, none of these three poet-translators know German. Bei Dao and Wang Jiaxin consulted various English translations and looked into English-language discussions of Celan. Yi Sha sticks to a single English translation, by Michael Hamburger, and ostentatiously ignores foreign discussions of Celan. Aside from this two-tongue distance from the original, to the best of my knowledge, Bei Dao's, Wang Jiaxin's and Yi Sha's (in that

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[3] Below, I cite the essay according to the edition reprinted in 2008 collection of essays *Finding the Phoenix a Perch* (为凤凰找寻栖所) (Wang Jiaxin 2008).

[4] This paragraph calls for a brief postscriptum. In November 2017, I participated in a series of conferences and workshops "Poetry and Translation" organized by Wang Jiaxin at Renmin University of China, Beijing Normal University, Beijing University and Shanghai Jiaotong University. To my surprise, a significant number of presentations and speeches delivered by Chinese poets (but not only), including obviously Wang Jiaxin himself, still revolved around translations of Celan. In Wang's utterances bitter memories of the abovesaid confrontation with Bei Dao returned more than once, and in a very emotional manner, which shows how painful that polemic must have been for him, and to what extent it hit at his most fundmental translatorial's principles: aesthetic, ethical, as well as social ones (there is a personal story behind it, although I feel I have no right to reveal it). Yi Sha's case was not mentioned at all.

order) command of English ranges from limited to very limited.[5] Notably, from the perspective taken in this study, this may be a good thing. The inaccessibility of the source text and a limited grasp of the intermediary text force these poets to address the issue of translation at every stage, often explicitly, which facilitates my investigation of their translatorial strategies – or minimally of what they say about these strategies. Besides, relay translation tends to magnify subtle differences and shifts that may be less visible in direct renditions. At the same time, paradoxically, this situation also repositions Celan's poem in its original context, which requires reconsidering translation as not only an operation performed on a complete text, but also a factor that co-constitutes this text's primary sense. To clarify the latter point, let's recall the history of "Deathfugue".

Paul Celan wrote "Deathfugue" in German in 1944 as "Todestango" (Death Tango), but it was first published in 1947, in a Romanian translation called "Tangoul Morții" by Celan's friend Petre Solomon. The German original appeared only in 1948. Celan was a German-speaking Jew. His parents were killed in a Nazi concentration camp in Romania in World War II, in 1942. "What then did it take for an orphan to voice annihilation in his mother tongue, which had become the murderers' tongue?" asks John Felstiner, Celan's English translator and biographer. And he answers, in the poet's own words:

> The German language, he later said, had to "pass through its own answerlessness, pass through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech". Yet it was all he had left: only his language "remained in the midst of the losses".[6]

The poem's three-year voiceless existence, between its writing and its first publication, and its one-year banishment into another language, after which it was modified and renamed by its author, are an integral part of the text. "Deathfugue" and Celan's poetry at large are to a significant extent translational per se, and almost every phrase in the poem reminds one of the shocking non-obviousness of Celan's choice to write in German. Below I cite the poem in Felstiner's translation from 1986,[7] which I find the best of the various English renditions I have seen, and the most non-obvious in the aforesaid sense. Occasionally, I will also quote from Hamburger's version, with which the authors of the three Chinese translations under scrutiny are familiar. Where relevant, I will provide the original phrasing in German. The full German original and its three Chinese renditions are found in the appendices to this study.

Deathfugue

1   Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
2   we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
3   we drink and we drink
4   we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped
5   A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
6   he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite

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7   he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling, he whistles his hounds to come close

8   he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground

9   he commands us to play up for the dance.

10   Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night

11   we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening

12   we drink and we drink

13   A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes

14   he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite

15   your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped

16   He shouts jab the earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and play

17   he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue

18   jab your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

19   Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night

20   we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening

21   we drink and we drink

22   a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Marguerite

23   your aschenes Haar Sulamith he plays his vipers

24   He shouts play death more sweetly Death is a master from Deutschland

25   he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then as smoke to the sky

26   you'll have a grave then in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped

27   Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night

28   we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland

29   we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink

30   Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye is blue

31   he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true

32   a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete

33   he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air

34   he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

35   dein goldenes Haar Margarete

36   dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

Fundamentals of (un)translatability

Bei Dao's first point in his critique of Wang Jiaxin's essayized rendition of "Deathfugue" says a lot about Bei Dao's approach to poetry translation. In his eyes, by and large, poetry is almost absolutely translatable without resorting to non-poetic techniques. Besides, he suggests, the Chinese language itself naturally "advances translation", especially that of poetry: it is "flexible and varied, benefits from everything that is around; except

neologisms and puns, which are always difficult to render [from one language into another], it is almost omnipotent".[8]

This questionable conclusion is drawn from his observation that Mandarin easily handles one of the most perplexing problems faced by German-English translators, i.e. rendering the title of the poem without obscuring what Felstiner describes as "the irreconcilable paradox embedded in the two halves of Celan's genitive, *Fugue of Death*",[9] which in English "loses the German genitive's compactness – *Todesfuge* – the compact, so to speak, between order and rupture, the word's two sides".[10] Bei Dao aptly notes that in Chinese this compactness is "totally natural", since the nouns for *death* (*siwang* 死亡) and *fugue* (*fuge* 赋格) can be directly paired without any unsightly "grammatical glue" like the English *of*,[11] fortuitously removed by Felstiner, but present in other English renditions.

Of course, it is doubtful whether Bei Dao, who notes that of the German original, he understands only a single word (*Deutschland*), would have realized this point if it were not for Felstiner's account of his experience of translating Celan in scholarly articles and Celan's biography, from which Bei Dao avidly borrows, usually without explicitly signaling this. Still, Bei Dao seems proud of this discovery. In his poetics of translation it proceeds to grow to grotesque proportions and assume the size of a universal stylistic principle. This is evenly pointed out by Wang Jiaxin in "What is Hidden...", and later put more forcefully by poet and prolific translator Huang Canran 黄灿然. Huang observes that Bei Dao, while "perfecting" extant translations of poems by Rilke and Lorca, obsessively deletes all instances of *de* 的, an (optional) subordinating marker of attribution or possession in modern Chinese, and other function words, and that Bei Dao presumably does this to make his idiom approximate the conciseness of classical Chinese. In defense of *de*, Huang claims:

> Taking simplicity too far will often turn it into simplification. In Bei Dao's case, it often boils down to simple reduction of the number of characters, especially the deletion of the functional *de*. *De* isn't a black spot on the modern Chinese language, but its pulse. [...] [i]f we remove *de* from the rhythmical lines of [many good contemporary] poems, we can't hear their heartbeat.[12]

Also, while in the case of "Deathfugue" modern Chinese does offer interesting lexical solutions for some of the problems that confront the English translator, Bei Dao appears indifferent to most of these, focused as he is on grammatical detail. For example, in the original, lines 7-8 contain the meaningful internal rhyme *Rüden* (hounds) + *Juden* (Jews). Felstiner finds it impossible to transfer this into English, so he substitutes it with another one: *close* + *rows*. In Chinese the source rhyme is translatable, into what could be called a graphic or visual rhyme, no less thought-provoking than its acoustic counterpart. The first character in the word for *Jew* (*Youtairen* 犹太人) consists of a (loosely) phonetic element *you* 尤 plus a (loosely) semantic component 犭, the latter being a variant of the character *quan* 犬 'dog, hound'. Additionally, the phonetic element *you* 尤 bears a striking visual resemblance to *quan* 犬.

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[8] Bei Dao 2011: 353.
[9] Felstiner 1986: 253.
[10] Ibidem: 257.
[11] Bei Dao 2011: 353.
[12] Huang Canran 2006.

Another challenge faced by the English translator is how to imitate the ominous alliteration of *Schlangen* 'snakes' + *schreiben* 'write' that recurs several times starting in line 5. Felstiner uses the generically narrower term *vipers*, in near-alliteration with "writes". Here, too, Chinese offers an obvious possibility that is used by Wang Jiaxin but disregarded by Bei Dao: *she* 蛇 'snake' + *shuxie* 书写 'write'. Bei Dao "corrects" Wang's wording into *xie xin* 写信 'write a letter', which, as Wang notes, is needlessly narrow and indifensibly disambiguating.

To maintain the atmosphere of linguistic estrangement and displacement that is characteristic of Celan's entire oeuvre, Felstiner leaves ever larger chunks of the recurring refrain ("dein goldenes Haar Margarite / dein aschenes Haar Sulamith") untranslated, culminating in the final stanza (lines 35-36). In Chinese this trick would not work, because of the mutual illegibility of Mandarin and German. German *Haar* and English *hair*, German *goldenes* and English *golden*, and German *aschenes* and English *ashen* are similar enough for this to be comprehensible to English speakers who do not read German. For Mandarin speakers who do not read German, this will not work. One way in which a Chinese translator might retain some of the text's audible "German-ness" would be to replace the Chinese name commonly used for Germany, *Deguo* 德国, with *Deyizhi* 德意志, a largely obsolete phonetic rendition of *Deutsch* that appears mainly in historical contexts, often with reference to the German Empire. This is what Yi Sha did. But I am quite sure there are other ways to render the perplexing non-obviousness of the linkage between sense and sound in Chinese. Poetry-sensitive native speakers have a lot of room for maneuver here. If I, as a visitor in the Chinese language, can speak to this, I would propose, for instance, translating the juxtaposed *goldenes Haar – aschenes Haar* into *jinse toufa* 金色头发 'golden hair' + *jinse toufa* 烬色头发 'ashen hair' instead of the *huise toufa* 灰色头发 we find in all three Chinese translations. *Hui* 灰 and *jin* 烬 and their conjunction 灰烬 all mean 'ash', but normally only *hui* is used to describe the color ('grey, ashen'). Substituting it with the less conventional *jin*, a near-homophone of *jin* 金 'gold, golden' – the only difference being that the former is a fourth-tone syllable, and the latter a first-tone one – would strengthen the dissimilarity-in-similarity between the two women invoked in the poem.

At any rate, Bei Dao's belief in the translatability of poetry is based on a belief in the limitless capacity of the Chinese language, and of his own poetic idiom, which effectively sinicizes, or beidaoizes, Celan, Rilke, Lorca... Whatever sounds strange or foreign is detected and adjusted to "proper" rhythmical patterns. Slight distractions are allowed, but when the fissures broaden and the surface of the poem becomes, to Bei Dao, essayistically overactive, with various streams of sense bursting into the poem chaotically and uncontrollably, he works hard to close the "ruptures" between the two sides of the word(s) in question.

This strategy is unacceptable to both Wang Jiaxin and Yi Sha. Yi Sha shares Bei Dao's view on translatability to some extent, inasmuch as he takes translatability for granted.[13] But that is their only commonality. In Yi Sha's opinion, translation is hampered by the practice of translating all authors into the translator's single, individual idiom and by basic linguistic misunderstandings. While he points out countless "unthinkable mistakes" in extant

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[13] Yi Sha 2013: 1-3.

Chinese renditions of many famous poems, he himself makes such mistakes as well, which is clear from his translation of "Deathfugue". Yi Sha renders lines 6-7 as 他写道：黑暗正在降临德意志，你的金发的玛格丽特 / 他写信，然后走出门去，满天繁星闪烁. This literally translates into English as follows: "He writes: darkness descends on Germany, your golden-haired Margarete / He writes a letter, and then goes out, the sky is full of sparkling stars". Glaring semantic problems aside, Yi Sha's use of punctuation also reflects his understanding of the nature of translation and the principle of translatability. He appears to think that shortening the distance between the author and his contemporary (Chinese) audience requires stripping the poem of ambiguity and discursivity. Instead, he re-focuses the poem around simple actions that he preasumably considers comprehensible to readers all over the world. Yi Sha commonly shatters the contemplative atmosphere of his source texts and translates them into narratives with clearly traceable plot-like structures, revealing a poetics with little regard for what is widely seen as a core characteristic of poetry, to wit its sound, in the broadest possible sense. The first poem in the anthology he compiled with Lao G is Czesław Miłosz's "Gift" (*Dar*), whose Chinese rendition is much more concrete and detailed than the meditative original, as if it were to be acted out on stage. The same holds for his translations of Anna Akhmatova's masterpieces.

Of Bei Dao, Wang Jiaxin and Yi Sha, Wang appears the most modest in his assumptions and ambitions as a poet-translator. At the same time, he often uses misleadingly elevated diction to enunciate his thoughts, claiming, for instance, that "a great translator is an apostle" and recalling Martin Luther's long years spent in an ancient castle working on the German translation of the Bible.[14] Yet, at least openly, he never lays claim to being a "great translator" himself or to translatorial perfection in any of his endeavors. Instead, he loves to quote Benjamin's famous metaphor of a tangent (i.e. the translation) which touches a circle (the original sense) only lightly and only at one point, and the philosopher's teleological divagations on a universal "pure language" which translation helps to "regain fully formed from the linguistic flux".[15] The poet believes that the translator's mission cannot be accomplished within a single text or even within the entire realm of textuality. It must be continued in life, even if this demands sacrifice. In "What Is Hidden..." Wang writes:

> I realize that to gain insight into Celan's work will take my entire lifetime. It requires faithfulness and patience, that "secret love hidden from people's eyes". It requires constantly returning to Celan's untranslatable vocabulary and his darkness, until it is finally lit up or until we arrive at a more profound understanding.[16]

Many years later, in a conversation with Wang Yuanzhe, the poet-translator reassures:

> Since in the process of translation many things are "lost", such as the prosody of the original, its intertextuality, rhythm, puns, you must somehow "make up" for these. But "make up" with what? With your life, and with the brightest things that Chinese has had. [...] Of course, I'm not free from concern [about issues of translatability]. But my primary responsibility is to

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[14] Wang Jiaxin & Li Chanwei 2015.
[15] Benjamin 2002: 261.
[16] Wang Jiaxin 2008: 50-51.

ensure that Celan can firmly stand on the soil of Chinese language, forever. This is even more essential than my own writing.[17]

In the arcades

One salient feature of Wang Jiaxin's translations is a consistent effect of estrangement. Densely sprinkled underdetermined phrases provoke the reader to re-measure emerging constellations in the context of their own cultural environment and their knowledge about the (author of the) original. They become points of essayizability – where the text seemingly asks to be "completed" and rejoined with life. Polemicizing with Bei Dao, Wang replies first and foremost to those of Bei Dao's assertions that he feels betray the latter's lack of empathy, solidarity and emotional imagination, and cut off the original's author from his poem. Wang defends his own, "essayized" rendition of Celan's poem, emphasizing that

> Bei Dao is blind to all of this. Maybe for him poetry is just lyricism, metaphor and image. Maybe it is precisely this disbelief in the capacity of poetry that makes him criticize others' translations for being *sanwen*-essayized, or "even less than the essay".[18]

Through the long lines of Wang and Rui's "Deathfugue", the reader wanders as if through spacious arcades – open-ended like those in Benjamin's eponymous project, with many open windows through which various free particles and threads of contexts may enter freely. However, one must walk cautiously since the ground is uneven, irregularly paved with scattered words that one can trip over, like Du Fu and Wang himself in Wang's "London Essays". The architecture gives the reader a feeling of freedom, and room for imagination and reflection. At the same time, it keeps them in a state of hightened attention to semantic shifts.

There are several areas that Wang and Rui find especially "dangerous", i.e. where they predict a strong turbulence of "paradoxes and meanings". There, they appear to slow down the translation, in order for their readers to consciously consider the consequences of their presence in the text – just like the translators have done. The pace decreases most dramatically where Wang and Rui introduce the work's protagonists, by name or through personal pronouns. There, their language becomes clumsy and non-poetic, especially when juxtaposed with Bei Dao's polished phrases.

Compare, for example, Wang and Rui's descriptions of *a man [who] lives in a house* (lines 5, 13, 22). Bei Dao translates concisely, losing the verb: 那屋子里的人 'a person in the/that house'. Wang and Rui translate more literally and meticulously: 住在那屋子里的男人 'a man who lives in the/that house' – as if they stopped for a while to observe. Whereas Bei Dao starts the sentence with *in the/that house* (那屋子里), Wang and Rui begin with the verb *live* (in the sense of 'reside': 住), shifting focus from the surroundings to the person.

When the poet-translators encounter *ein Meister aus Deutschland* in lines 24, 28, 30. Bei Dao pronounces succinctly: 死亡是来自德国的大师, which literally translates into English as 'Death is a/the master who comes from Germany / whose origins lies in Germany'. This strongly suggests that the master is of German descent. Wang and Rui

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[17] Wang Jiaxin & Wang Yuanzhe 2015.
[18] Wang Jiaxin 2008: 41.

have 死亡是一位从德国来的大师 'Death is a master who comes / has come from Germany', which may or may not mean that Death is German, so to speak. Death might be a demon without a homeland, who sojourns wherever he – with the masculine pronoun reflecting *Der Tod* in the original – is invited. Again, Wang and Rui seem to carefully examine this passer-by, however terrifying he appears, giving the reader time to reconsider various interpretations and implications.

And interpretations and implications matter a great deal, as is clear from Wang's analysis of the lines where Margarete and Sulamith appear: *dein goldenes Haar Margarete / dein aschenes Haar Sulamith*. Both Bei Dao's and Yi Sha's (mis)renditions literally retranslate into English as 'your golden hair-ed Margarete / your ashen-haired Shulamith", bringing out the physical presence of the women and their belonging to, or being "owned" by, another person, probably the man who writes. Bei Dao has: 你金发的玛格丽特 / 你灰发的素拉米斯, and Yi Sha seconds him, adding two optional attributive / possesive particles: 你的金发的玛格丽特 / 你的灰发的素拉米斯. Wang and Rui consistently stick to: 你的金色头发玛格丽特 / 你的灰色头发素拉米斯 ('your golden hair Margarete...'), where the women's hair is the grammatical subject, not the women themselves. Margarete and Sulamith are but "carriers of different hair, different ethnicity, different stories".[19] Wang devotes two long paragraphs to an insightful analysis of relationships between the writing man and the two women, showing how the women's (de)subjectivization and (de)individualization and the redefinition of the distance between them play a structural role in the poem in its entirety. By re-measuring these ontological parameters, the reader – including the translator whose responsibility is here to enable the translation to encompass as many hypothetical constellations as possible – plays out the full scope of the text's inward plasticity: from personal, autobiographical confession through philosophical dwellings to self-subversive metapoetry. As Wang writes:

> "He writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margarete". The subject here is a German man who writes in the house ("writes", and not, as Bei Dao would have it, "writes a letter"; not only is rendering this as "writes a letter" too concrete, it also significantly narrows and limits the sense of the original; what if he is "writing poetry" or simply writing, without any particular aim, indulging in the very act of writing), he is perverted to the marrow, he is the embodiment of a nation's fanaticism, but this does not prevent him from writing "lyrically" like a poet. What is the object of his lyricism? "Your ashen hair Margarete". Along with a romanticism that makes one's flesh creep, this sigh also betrays something else: the Nazi self-worship of the nation. All their actions were aimed at advancing this myth!

> This is the reason why the contrast between the two types of hair plays a pivotal role in "Deathfugue". "Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped". Here the role of the subject is taken over by "we", who are forced to drink the poisonous black milk, and shovel a grave for themselves [...]. The opposition first marked in this line broadens the space of the poem from this point onward, and reveals the theme of the work: the contradiction between two types of hair as a synecdoche of the contradiction between two different human fates [...]. Thus, Celan is using the contrapuntal technique of the fugue, in that

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[19] Wang 2008: 41.

he not only presents the tragedy of the Jewish nation in the concentration camps, and not only silently denounces the evil of the Nazis, but also hurls unanswerable questions in God's face [...]. Toward the end, the poem returns again to the contrapuntal artistic construction of the fugue: "dein goldenes Haar Margarete / dein aschenes Haar Sulamith". Here, the hair becomes an image and a symbol inscribed into this heart-rending poem [...].[20]

Wang is sensitive to the slightest flow of "substance" from the textual to the lived and from the lived to the textual. He scrutinizes the poem in order to determine whether its words and phrases matter in and of themselves as elements of physical / spiritual reality or function as figures of speech or tropes: metaphors, metonyms, allegories, symbols. Unlike Bei Dao and Yi Sha, he is the only one who detects the metaphorical implications of *golden hair* and *ashen hair*, and realizes the literalness of another forceful image: the smoke from the cremation furnaces that constitute the final part of the genocidal machinery of the concentration camps. Both Bei Dao and Yi Sha interpret the line *he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then as smoke to the sky* (25) as a comparison. They use the word *xiang* 像 '(just) like' to narrate what is going to happen to the Jews. Rising *like* smoke to the sky has much less dramatic connotations – indeed, it may even be taken as an allegory for a soul gloriously ascending to heaven – than rising *as* smoke, meaning in the form of smoke, which Wang and Rui render in a way that leaves no room for doubt: 尔后你们就会化为烟雾升向空中, literally: 'then you will turn into smoke and rise to the sky'. Preceded by this powerful picture, the corresponding image of the dead *lying not too cramped* (不拥挤) reveals its dark irony.

Conversely, Wang and Rui also stray from the original, sometimes more so than Bei Dao and Yi Sha. In line 24 their translation of the English / German verb *play* / *spielen*, which can mean 'play music / a musical instrument', 'play a game', 'perform a role' or 'have fun, amuse oneself', stays close to the latter reading. Rather than, for instance, something like 更甜蜜演奏死亡 'play Death more sweetly' (i.e. as if Death were a piece of music), they render the line as: 更甜蜜和死亡玩 'play more sweetly with Death', just like the playing with snakes elsewhere in the poem. Bei Dao and Yi Sha avoid this trap. Another image that is distorted in Wang and Rui's translation is that of the Jews playing musical instruments to accompany dancing. After their intervention, this changes into a scene where the Jews themselves play and dance (表演跳舞 / 给我们跳舞 – 'play and dance' (line 9) / 'dance for us' (line 18)). In a third example, while writing about the bullet that *shoots you level and true* (31), Wang and Rui do not provide the technical detail that the bullet is made of lead (which Bei Dao and Yi Sha do provide), but focus on the shooting person. The pronoun *he* (他) is repeated: 他用子弹射你他射得很准 'he shoots you with a bullet he shoots precisely'.

Unintentional as these omissions may be, they appear to mirror the translators' rhythm of thought. Notably, this rhythm resembles the rhythm of Celan's vocal interpretation,[21] though Wang says he has never listened to any recording. Bei Dao heard it once in German, and recalls Celan's diction as "now plain, now shrill".[22] With all due respect for Bei Dao's

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[20] Wang 2008: 41-42.
[21] Paul Celan's reading of "Todesfuge" is available online, e.g. at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVwLqEHDCQE [2017-07-07] or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHgYRtefUqs [2017-07-07].
[22] Bei Dao 2011: 354.

"feel for language" in Chinese, I would argue that Wang and Rui more adequately reproduce the musical effect of the poem recited in its original version, even if this effect in their case does not emerge from the musical properties of language. Where Celan modulates his tone of voice, as if imitating the orders of the camp guards, Wang and Rui speed up, or rather their thought appears to accelerate. Line length does not decrease significantly – on average Wang and Rui's are longer than the original by 2-4 syllables – but the translators become limited in their semantic scope, less equivocal, with more concrete representations and less grammatical "glue" in passages where the images are connected only loosely and can enter into new entanglements with external reality. When Celan's recital becomes enchantingly monotonous, Wang and Rui's translation opens up, allowing all possible context to enter the poem, to re-measure and re-structure it. Bei Dao finds the outcome of these operations *sanwen*-essay-like, or, precisely, "inferior even to the *sanwen*-essay". But evidently, rather than "scatter" (*san* 散) the poem, Wang and Rui want to expand it by pushing its limits in an unknown direction – toward a horizon beyond which the original text and the translation will find Benjamin's "pure language". With reference to part one of this study, this process of translating resembles a teleological *collecting* process of *suibi*-writing, rather than the *sanwen*-ist's job of *recollecting*.

By contrast, *sanwen*-ism does emerge in Yi Sha's translation. His lines are long too, in some cases as many as 10 syllables longer than the German original, as we see in line 4: 我们用铲子在空中挖出墓穴在那里你躺下不会觉得太窄, which literally translates into English as 'with shovels we dig a grave in the air [when] you lie down there you will not find it too narrow'. The (co)verb *yong* 用 'use' or 'with', the verb *juede* 觉得 'think, reckon, find, feel' and the directional compliment *xia* 下 'down' have no direct anchorage in the source text. Theoretically, these modifications should dynamize the scene. But Yi Sha's dynamic does not makes the action more vivid; it is, so to speak, a microdynamic that works within individual actions and makes them more strained and more physical. Sometimes, this leads to (near-)tautology (e.g. dig the grave using shovels), and sometimes to complication: the dead are said to lie down and perceive the grave in a particular way, which grants them considerable agency of a kind that is not there in the original. Yi Sha's translation hinges on its description of actions. When these become inwardly too intense, they break down the visual and acoustic structures of the source text, reconfiguring lines and adding line breaks and breaks between "recitation units": reading the long Chinese line 4 naturally in one breath, as Celan does in the recording, would be difficult. Heavily loaded phrases are also less likely to become essayistically active in the way they do in Wang and Rui's translation. If any abstract or metaphysical meaning manages to flow into the poem between one move of the shovel and the next, it is automatically turned back to its universal physical, pre-lingual source, and presented as an extension of palpable, lived reality.

Remarkably, the lines in Bei Dao's translation are usually 2-4 syllables shorter than Celan's, even though generally speaking, translations often avail themselves of descriptive elements lest too much content be lost. But this does not seem to bother Bei Dao. In some places, he simply throws out the ballast of sense, in favor of sound, to make the text run more smoothly and rhythmically – in musical not intellectual terms. However, this rhythm rarely sounds in sync with Celan's voice. Unlike Wang and Rui, Bei Dao encourages the reader to

surrender to Bei Dao's rhythm, rather than co-shape it by adding their own intellectual "beats", presumably to avoid a situation in which these could make the poem essayistically cacophonic. Bei Dao comes across as a conductor whose baton everyone and everything must obey, including the translated author himself. If we were to borrow Yang Lian's metaphor, Bei Dao, as a contemporary Odysseus, commands the sea of language to stand still, and what is more, to dance for him. His critical essay on the translation of Celan reinforces the association with Yang's *zawen*-like, rhetoric-driven essays and, in light of chapter 4, evinces many typical features of Bei Dao's own poetry-centric, and occasionally egocentric, essayism. The most evident, and arguably the most questionable, manifestation of this appears in the dubious rhetoric of the final passage of his interpretation of "Deathfugue". Here he appropriates one of the most dramatic phrases from the poem, as "background music" to his essay, interspersing his final sentences with the refrain: 死亡是来自德国的大师 'Death is a master from Germany'.[23] Wang Jiaxin objects:

> I think, were Celan still alive, hearing his poetry repeated again and again, he would be upset. Because he wasn't one to play on people's heartstrings. [...] He never wished to expose his suffering to earn people's compassion, and never presented the Holocaust to assert the moral superiority of the Jewish nation. Instead, by arriving at the core of the language, by digging deeply in search of an individual voice, he began his heavenly journey. Why not see this? Why not respect it? (Wang 2008: 46)[24]

How does it work? Why does it work?

If my reuse and recontextualization of terms I established (*recollecting*, *collecting*, *re-collecting*) and adopted (*sanwen*, *suibi*, *zawen*) earlier in this study raises questions, let me reemphasize that I have no intention of portraying the essay as an absolute category of the human mind or spirit, as some have done, or of positing my tentative vocabulary as universally applicable. Making the essay my point of departure for reflection on emigrant writing and on the relationship between life and literature was not motivated by its putative absoluteness and its equally putative conquest of other genres and other spheres of cultural discourse. On the contrary, it was informed by the essay's openness and vulnerability to psychophysical and textual realities. This, I hoped, would allow me to explore various ways in which authors handle the irreconcilability of the domains of lived experience and writing – *and* the desire to connect them as efficiently as possible.

The reemergence of the same terms and questions at various stages of my reflection, as I follow the authors in space and text, may then suggest the presence of repeatable patterns that determine the authors' experience of, and the actions they undertake in, various spheres of their being-in-the-world and writing(-in)-the-world. The essay *displays* these patterns, and does not *dictate* them. Broadly speaking, Wang Jiaxin writes essays and approaches essayization and translates in a *suibi*-like / *collecting* manner, Yi Sha in a *sanwen*-like / *recollecting* manner, and Bei Dao in a *zawen*-like / *re-collecting* manner. Something similar could be said about the other authors in this study, who do not appear in the present chapter,

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[23] Bei Dao 2011: 354.
[24] Wang 2008: 46.

because their involvement in translation discourse – if any – is mostly theoretical. But what is the mechanism behind this repeatability, and who or what is responsible for it? The first problem may be called technological, and the second, methodological.

Let's tentatively assume that everything is in the author's hands and mind, i.e. that this is an author who, consciously or otherwise, produces the effect of conceptual repeatability within their own oeuvre. In the terminology of this study, they follow one of three paths: that of *suibi / collecting*, *sanwen / recollecting* or *zawen / re-collecting*, whether they act as essay writers (as discussed in part one), gatekeepers of essayization (part two, chapters 4 and 5) or translators (part three). All of these notions have now come full circle, or, more precisely, these notions have now come three full circles – each with its specific architecture and mechanics. And perhaps they are not exactly circles. Perhaps they are three circle-like yet not-fully-circular hermeneutic trajectories whose non-circularity becomes visible only after a detailed review of gains and losses at every stage of the journey, as it was provisionally signaled in the opening chapter where I discussed "final causes" behind different explicit poetics? Or maybe they are not even circle-like trajectories, but, say… Möbius strips?

Each of these three trajectories – the circular, the hermeneutic-circular, and the strip-like – translates into a different existential situation. And each raises its own subquestion. For the circle: Is the inevitability of repetition a carousel powered by emotions or psychological habits that will not permit the author to jump off, gradually killing their creativity and originality? Think of Yi Sha's stubborn negations and rejections, Wang Jiaxin's stubborn hope and Bei Dao's stubborn pride, making each repeat the same patterns at various existential and artistic levels. For the hermeneutic-circular: Is it an intellectual treadmill built in the name of some higher ideal or hoped-for benefit to be reaped with each completion of the trajectory? Remember: Yi Sha wants to return to poetry as it existed before the emergence of poetic language, Wang Jiaxin dreams of connecting with the spirits of his great predecessors, and Bei Dao desires to rule over the sea of words. For the Möbius strip: is it a manifestation of a general mode of human existence, the very foundation of self-identification, that allows, *and* forces, (every)one to remain the same organic person regardless of what one does and experiences, and writes, and of the unpredictability of circumstance?

My (literary) imagination suggests this last picture: strip-shaped subjects who always return to themselves, from every physical, spiritual and linguistic emigration. And this happens not only when they actively attempt to connect different domains of their existence – for instance, in essay-writing – but also when they are immersed in chaos that is generated by essayization, or when they reach beyond the borders of their own milieu, undertaking the translator's task, or, hypothetically, in any number of other situations. Of course, there are as many shapes of the "circle" as there are authors. That I distinguish only three types here is a necessary simplification. It is based on topological and vector similarities I find in the oeuvres under scrutiny, even though each has its own, specific architecture.

At the same time, I am aware of an irresolvable uncertainty that undermines the above image: isn't it but a projection of the shape and structures of my own imagination on the world I observe? Perhaps my various points of observation as laid out in different chapters – grassroot-level approach, bird's-eye view, etc. – are but an effect of my own traveling up and

down, to and fro, on a big twisted Möbius-Ferris wheel, my conceptual laboratory dangling in a cabin? Perhaps, putting texts in the test-tubes of words, what I do is force them to travel with me on this machine, thus deforming their original trajectories?

Or, perhaps, both perspectives are defensible – or they are, indeed, one perspective. Perhaps something else "travels us", the researcher and the researched, along parallelly twisted tracks between which we easily "translate ourselves". This translation is possible as long as we dare first to take a quantum leap from one safe air corridor to another, through clouds of probability and other things explored earlier, especially in chapter 3.

As I was approaching the final sections of this study, I started discovering an ever-growing number of Möbius-strips in current scholarship that I had not been aware of before and that now suddenly seemed to mushroom around me, from Möbius-strip psychology and neuropsychology to a Möbius-strip structure of society and to a Möbius-strip model for executive leadership... I am not worried about its increasing popularity and hence perhaps the decreasing originality of my ideas. But I do feel uncomfortable about how many proofs of my hypothesis of the "hegemony" of this "two-but-really-one" shape may be found in the world and the absolutization of the image as a key to our internal and external realities. As such I find it important to return to my introductory caveats for a moment.

It is sadly paradoxical that humans, in the era of unprecedented discoveries in all areas of knowledge, have increasingly come to feel themselves so boringly repeatable, even if this is a twisted repeatability that allows for a dose of surprise. Still, I believe that, if it is indeed the case that we are internally "Möbius-stripped", we consist of not one but many concentric twisted strips that constitute orbits of our existence. And it is mostly up to us whether we jump onto one of the orbits and enjoy relative stability forever or for some time, or, alternatively, try our luck somewhere in-between or, possibly, outside. In this study, the life-and-writing essay strip is one such orbit, and the concept of the translational as a specific connection between source and target that I discuss in the following section might be another, more complex and situated in a next dimension. Yet, the orbits should not limit our thinking. They should be taken rather as something that facilitates our existence, making it easier for us when we need to catch our breath and perhaps calmly reconsider and organize our discoveries after a period of intense off-track searching. Obviously, this only holds if we keep ourselves from lingering too long in the comfortable cabin, rotating into dizziness.

Now that essayization reactions have been temporarily pacified by the translators, and, having come full something-like-a-circle, we are close to earth again, I will venture to crack open the door of the language-made capsule we are locked inside of, and reach out. I will try to "touch" the forces that infuse cultural spaces and shape various disciplines – including literature and science – and discourses like those on essay(ization) and translation, and that enable one to move within them and between them.

II. After the Word: Essayistic or Translational

In part two of this study I have noted the possibility of treating intersemiotic and intermedial translation in Zhai Yongming's oeuvre as an example of her search for the ultimate meta-form for her work, driven by the same intention as essayism, but performed in a multidimensional

and multimodal spacetime. But it is certainly not only Zhai in whose output we can find attempts at experimenting with non-literary techniques. Almost all of the protagonists of this study test the creative and/or theoretical potential of intersemiotic and intermedial practices, if only at the basic level of combining text with photographs (e.g. Tsering Woeser, Wang Xiaoni), paintings (Che Qianzi, Gao Xingjian, Yi Sha) or music (Liao Yiwu). While section one has focused on operational interactions between translation and essayization, the present section will reexamine their conceptual kinship, and the possibilities this kinship entails. I will undertake a single case study, on Yu Jian, for specificity rather than representativeness, and without drawing generalizing conclusions. This will help me concretize and synthesize some of the intuitions that have accumulated on the margins of my thought during the writing of the present work, also with an eye to future research.

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As far as Yu Jian's "applied" intermediality and intersemioticity are concerned, they emerge in literature's marriage with drama, photography and performance, in chronological order. However, if seen through the prism of his literary thought and metaliterary output, Yu's oeuvre displays an intriguing phenomenon that I will call "inward self-translatability". He manages, for instance, to extend the principles of versification (*fen hang* 分行 'division into lines, lineation') to discussions of painting, sculpture and theater,[25] and to transfer the rhythmic pattern of blues music into poetry and the philosophy of language.[26] As I have argued in chapter 2, his concept of essayization is also largely a case of translation, specifically of the translation of (anti-)emigrant discourses. On one level, discussed earlier, this is about processed images of physical migrations. But there is another level, that contains echoes of his findings from expeditions into different artistic realms and semiotic systems. To a significant extent, Yu's essayology is based on his long-standing interest in experimental drama, and translates further into a theory of recitation, discussed along with essay(ization) in his "Yu Jian on the Essay and Reading Aloud", analyzed in chapter 1.

Paradoxically, it is only Jakobson's "translation proper", i.e. interlingual translation, that provokes skepticism in Yu[27] – which does not prevent him from proudly exhibiting foreign editions of his works every now and then. Conceivably, his professed reluctance vis-à-vis interlingual translation may stem from a general reticence to playing with elements that he is unable to control, and probing the lands that his other-shore-less poetic sea cannot embrace and conquer for him. For Yu, foreign languages belong in this category. Or perhaps he is interested in translation not as the simple transfer of an object from one environment into another, but as a dynamic, reciprocal transaction between two or more realities – all of which must lie within his line of vision. Ideally, the translation's source and target are located within one oeuvre – his own, that is – or indeed within a single text, enabling him to trace literary structures and the anatomy of the discourse at the cellular level. This is analogous to Yu's attitude to physical emigration, which we reconstructed from his *sanwen*-essays in chapter 1: travelling is exciting and beneficial, as long as every stage of the journey starts and finishes at home.

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[25] Yu 2013a: 109-125.
[26] Ibidem: 25-55.
[27] Yu 2004d: 16 .

While experimenting with intermedial translation, Yu Jian made one of the foundational discoveries of his literary thought: the "verb-ness" of literature, culture and language.[28] This concept has since come to lie at the root of many definitions in his private vocabulary across a range of phenomena, from the metaphysical "other shore" (彼岸), through the philosophical *dao* (道) and *wen* (文)[29] to the essay: *sanwen*, literary and otherwise. Yu's first professional confrontation with non-literary art took place in the early 1990s in Beijing, when he participated in physical training for actors organized by avant-garde director Mou Sen. The poet subsequently joined Mou's and Wu Wenguang's project of adapting Gao Xingjian's philosophical play *The Other Shore* (彼岸, 1986) into a "postmodern verse drama" (后现代诗剧) under the quasi-academic title *A Chinese Parts-of-Speech Discussion of "The Other Shore"* (关于《彼岸》的一回汉语词性讨论, 1993).[30] After intensive brainstorm sessions Yu created "something like a play script".[31] The text consisted of several pages of unprocessed dialogues, without a clear role division, stage directions or scenography, for which a director may choose settings and add actions at will.

The "part-of-speech discussion" focuses on the question whether *bi'an* 彼岸 (normally rendered in English as 'the other shore'), is a *mingci* 名词, literally 'a word-that-names' (normally rendered as *noun*) or a *dongci* 动词 'a word-that-moves' (normally rendered as *verb*)[32]; meaning, whether it represents some static and remote reality, or instead refers to a dynamic process of constant becoming and changing. In Mou Sen's interpretation,

A shot from the video of "The Chinese Part-of-Speech Discussion". An actor climbing on the entangled ropes that cover the entire stage space onto "the other shore" – a small gallery hanging several meters over the floor, where other actors wait to pull him on by hand once he arrives at that side of the stage. The actor is repeating: "This is a river, and not a piece of a rope. I must reach the other shore". *Courtesy of Mou Sen and Yu Jian.*

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[28] Cf. Xi 2015: 262-263.
[29] Yu 2006a: V.
[30] Ferrari 2016: 322, cf. Yu 2004e: 176-184.
[31] Yu 2004b: 58.
[32] See Maghiel van Crevel's translation of "File 0" and the discussion on 'words-that-name' and 'words that move' in his "Translator's Introduction" (Van Crevel 2001).

protagonists are actors who are rehearsing the play, guided by (someone like) a director who wants them to understand what "the other shore" is. Their first answer is: "a word-that-names". The director, unsatisfied, using a method of teaching through playing, tries to wean them off their essentialist thinking. He wants to redirect their attention from abstract speculative reflection to the physical base of their existence, that is to the movement "which can never be wrong", for "movement is just movement".

While working on *The Other Shore*, Yu Jian came to appreciate the power of the verb, which he had earlier cherished as an ideal of literature without believing it could break down abstract structures of noun-dominated textuality. This led him to the re-discovery of his monumental poem "File 0" (0 档案),[33] written in 1992. In brief, the poem is a register, over 5,500 characters in length, of things and facts from the life of the person that the file is about: an anonymous poet whose biography overlaps with Yu's. The enormous archive with 301,800 drawers resembles an ossuary, white pieces of paper are the only credible "proof of [a person's] existence". Rare "words-that-move" lie buried in heaps of marrowless "words-that-name", or remain "hidden in dark thoughts". If they emerge from the darkness, it is only to execute the orders of despotic, totalitarian "words-that-name", to

> smash   get an erection   insert   tidy up   frame up   accuse   kick when down
> do   make   fix   shout yourself hoarse   devastate   disclose.

The message of the poem is pessimistic: human life is no heavier than a sheet of paper, suppressed and controlled by mechanisms of power-knowledge and of the writing that writes us. According to Yu's statements on his overall strategy at the time of writing "File 0", it was created to show rather than to mean something, to be ametaphorical and asymbolic, combusting itself like paper in the here and now of reading. But these are obviously not matters that the author controls.

In a 1994-1995 volume of his *Brown Notebook* series, Yu returns to "File 0" and rereads it in the context of experiments with "the other shore". He no more reads a-symbolically, but "post-symbolically", as deconstruction of symbolism rather than its negation. He does not attempt to release the buried verbs. Instead, he adds a layer of verb-ness to the surface of the loathed nouns, and sets the entire system in motion again:

> Poetry's vitality comes from the misplaced movement of words around already formed symbols. This movement can be described. A poem is a clarification of a sequence of such movements.[34]

Soon the poem was physically "moved": adapted, like *The Parts-of-Speech Discussion*, into a Grotowski-style stage drama by Mou Sen.[35] In 1992 Yu showed "File 0" to Mou, who saw the potential of "verb-ness" within the noun structures of the poem, and knew how to activate it. In his play, which premiered in the Brussels Théâtre 140 on 8 May 1995, nouns overwritten with new actions, dis- and mislocated, are re-joined into new, non-totalitarian "wholes", co-shaped by the audience. One actor, Wu Wenguang, speaks about his childhood from the perspective of his relationship with his father. Another, Jiang Yue, starts reading from a love

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[33] Yu 2003: 28-41.
[34] Yu 2004d: 29 .
[35] Videos of "The Parts-of-Speech Discussion..." and "File 0" I watched come from a private archive of Mou Sen, who kindly shared them with me in April 2017.

story in his past. Their monologues cut through one another, and are exposed to noise coming from various tools and machines operating on the stage. These include, among other things, an old-style record player that emits the recitation of "File 0": long streams of nouns from the archive of the gobbledygook. The play ends with an ambiguous scene: the actors throw apples and tomatoes into a big industrial fan. The fan smashes them and spreads the pieces all around the stage. This final scene has been interpreted politically, as an allegory for suppressed individuality and the Chinese government's oppression of dissidence. Yet, Mou Sen aware of this tendency, himself warns against such an "annoyingly" simplified understanding. Instead, he emphasizes the complexity and diversity of life, as something that art must be able to address, using simple but powerful and flexible measures to arrive at maximal existential capacity.[36]

Mou's performance can be seen as throwing nouns down from on high. Their falling generates kinetic energy which reaches its maximum just before the nouns hit the ground – meaning the minds of spectators as matrices where new images made of scattered "old" nouns appear. In Yu Jian's words: "When the 'nonsense' is being unveiled, the 'sense' emerges all about".[37] There is one bottom line of possible interpretations of the play, constituted by humans' common experience of growing up, however different their individual receptions of this process are. But whatever happens above this line, i.e. sense-production in the readers' imagination and associations, is wide open and unrestricted. In an interview with Mou Sen cited by the *European Times* (欧洲时报) we read:

A shot from the video of "File 0". Wu Wenguang and Jiang Yue telling their stories on the stage. The machine operated by Wu is the record player from which the recitation of "File 0" is heard. Bright objects in the background are apples impaled on steel rods. The apples will later be thrown in the industrial fan. *Courtesy of Mou Sen and Yu Jian.*

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[36] Salter & Mou & Wu 1996.
[37] Cit. from Xi Mi 2015: 265.

> Why *File 0*, without any number? It can be explained as "everyone's file"! As for what the play tells us, Mou Sen maintains that understanding is up to spectators, it is what it is seen as. Does the author have anything to say? If you really need a frame, then this is "about growing up".[38]

If the image of a frame with only one – namely, the bottom – edge brings to mind the shape of the single-edge-single-surface Möbius strip, this is a justified association. Incidentally, I imagine that it is also in line with Yu Jian's way of thinking. However, at the time this strip-like big structure of his oeuvre was not fully formed. The author could not, and perhaps did not want to, entirely control it, if only because in the process of intermedial translation he was sharing his work with another artist. Later on, he began to internalize translation to make it serve his poetics. To this end, he used artistic means that were within his reach: photography and shamanic recitation, as if trying to redirect the verb-ness energy that had been released back toward himself, to pull back the "sea", including all the new meanings it grabbed for him from the land.

Yu Jian distinguishes two types of recitation. The first is *langsong* 朗诵, a performance-like recitation which the poet criticizes mercilessly. In *langsong*, as he writes in "Yu Jian on the Essay and Reading Aloud", "the microphone is a translator"[39], and a bad one at that, as it is unable to mediate the inner complexity of a poem. It cannot recreate the darkness that is inside a text, and instead misleadingly clarifies (*lang* 朗), the sense, offering only one of endless possible interpretations contained within the poem. *Langsong*'s pursuit of reality is an intellectually passive experience confined to emotion-raising playing to the gallery. But there is also another kind of recitation: *nian shi* 念诗, which can do without the "translator" and even without vocal performance. Yu speaks about creative reading (创造性地念).[40] It can be done in public, as Yu does while organizing events consisting in "reading creatively" his own poems in his favorite Kunming bookshop (whose English name is Wheatfields, backtranslated from the Chinese *maitian* 麦田, which is a translation of the English *rye*, as in *The Catcher in the Rye*...) or the associated Salinger Café (塞林格咖啡馆), but also behind the closed doors of his room. According to Yu, the vocality of a poem can be realized within one's mind, using an inner microphone. The soundwave is triggered by impulses from external reality, from the "live scene", and pulled back before it reaches any audience. It conquers external reality for Yu, without involving him in intellectual or emotional relationships with the other. Yu equates this form of recitation, where both "medium" and "target" are internalized, with the *sanwen*-essay. In "The Possibility of Returning Home: Starting from Poetic Blues", he argues:

> I realize increasingly that poetry should have a dynamic, vivid scene, and that text is not enough. I decided that this time I will recite [*nian* 念] creatively, and not passively like before. I want to dictate the rules of this event. [...] I am not only the author of the text, but also the author of recitation. I emphasize: this is *nian*, not *langsong*. In [the first Chinese etymological dictionary] *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* [说文解字] the character *nian* 念 is defined as 'think frequently'. It consists of "now" [今] and "heart" [心], and could be explained through

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[38] Cit. from Yang Nianxi 1995.
[39] Yu 2006: 80.
[40] Yu 2013: 26-27.

these as follows: your heart is here and now. Not like in the popular *langsong*. *Nian* and *langsong* are two completely different notions. *Langsong* constitutes vocal expression, while *nian* is the evocation and continuation of thought. [...]

The *sanwen*-essayization of contemporary poetry doesn't rule out concerns about poetic metre. It means that rhythm is decided by thought. Profound reflection can't be formally conventionalized. Going one level deeper, as regards the sound, Chinese is a musical language. Its four tones can be seen as a very spacious order. Contemporary poetry returns to this basic melody of the Chinese language[41]

In Yu's case essayization emerges as internalized translation. It is kept within the borders of a spiritual homeland where – as Heidegger, his favorite philosopher, put it – poetically dwells a man[42] called Yu Jian. A similar trajectory is visible in other arts in his oeuvre, in particular photography, in which he has been seriously engaged for about ten years. Photography – as Yu writes in the introduction to a book of travel essays called *Notes from the Black Box* (暗盒笔记) – conquers the world, rapes Nature and sometimes the lives of other people, only to bring half-dead moments home and lament them, shedding letters like tears: "If photography means hurting, then let my writing be a penance".[43]

Lhasa River. A man carrying his boat. Photographer: Yu Jian. The picture has been included in Yu Jian's photography book *The Rock, Elephant, The File* (岩石 大象 档案, 2016). *Courtesy of Yu Jian.*

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[41] Ibidem: 27-29.
[42] Heidegger 1971: 213-229.
[43] Yu 2006: V-VII.

Translation, when incorporated by the essay, loops into what Tong King Lee calls the translational in his discussion of experimental Chinese literature from Hong Kong and Taiwan, defined by him as:

> a rhetorical figure that encapsulates different kinds of semiotic transference and border crossing. It operates as a conceptual method that mediates the intervening space between two texts or media, without there necessarily being any ontological mapping between them. This is where the translational differs from translation: whereas the concept of translation assumes a source-target relation that is largely mappable (even where the source text is subject to all sorts of manipulation, a segment-to-segment mapping must still be possible before deviances in the target text can be identifiable), the translational postulates a derivational relationship between two sites without always insisting on a point-to-point correspondence nor a hierarchy between them.[44]

We can also invert the perspective, and ask if the essay might just be a purely translational genre. Its twisted "source-target relations" make its theorists and practitioners see it as both a derivate of other genres and a matrix engendering *all* genres. This allows one to think of it as the epitome of the translational – or perhaps its prototype. The chronology here is unclear, and it is irrelevant.

A high translatability of essay-related discourse into discourses of the discipline called translation studies comes as no surprise. Arguably, this could be ascribed to the intriguing inclusiveness of translation studies rather than to the universality of essayism. In general, translation studies owe their successful expansion in the humanities and the social sciences at least in part to their own *omni*-translatability into other disciplines and discourses. As regards the translation(al) and the essay(istic), they are mutually processible to a large extent through the discourse on emigration whose language feeds both of them, and is metaphorically mapped in their respective structures.

In the scenery of the amusement park sketched toward the end of section one of this chapter, my activity in this study could be summarized in the following way, with some innocous self-mockery. In part one I invited the reader to travel with me on the twisted Möbius-Ferris wheel of the essay, only to dismantle this wheel in part two by meddling with its quantum micro-machinery, and then, in part three, to jump from the dismembered construction onto another, that of translation studies, which I believe to be working in sync with the previous wheel, but to be more stable or minimally better maintained and more visible in contemporary culture.

Obviously, re-naming the essay and kindred phenomena, and transcribing or inscribing them in the context of any broader, more influential discourse will not solve the problems they pose for writers and readers, including academics. But conceivably, certain methods of translation studies could prompt reflection on the essay, or guide it toward a new trajectory. Not without reciprocity: should any finding or technique – if only a single metaphor or a single question – from the essayism discourse prove useful for translation studies, this will not just advance the discipline but also our comprehension of the world. After all, it are not

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[44] Lee Tong King 2015: 19.

theories, methods, techniques or metaphors that explore and challenge the world but human minds, which are stimulated – or thwarted – by them, sometimes in unpredictable ways, to recall Hesse and his "reader number three". As long as intense inter-discursive exchange does not lead to confining literature, authors and readers in theoretical shackles but facilitates stimulating "tours through the hundred kingdoms of knowledge, memory, and thought", it is not a vain intellectual exercise, which this study has hopefully shown to a modest extent.

Also, my main goal in this work has not been to "solve problems" but rather to arrive at a structural understanding of some of the basic processes that occur between life and literature, by letting their particles collide and recording my observations. Hence, it may have appeared to the reader that I was taking pleasure in accumulating questions and celebrating their answerlessness, or even intentionally multiplying obstacles, for example in provoking and simulating hypothetical essayizations.

To be sure, I have enjoyed the quantum free fall in part two more than the ride along fixed trajectories marked by the discipline referred to as essayology in part one and the trial round on the big wheel of translation studies in part three. Moreover, I admit to being tempted to poke my finger and twiddle a little with the subatomic machinery of translation studies as well. I am particularly curious to learn what, after the meta-strip of translation discourse is dismantled, could be the next meta-level where we could try to reunite its scattered parts. But answering this question would require a bigger laboratory and a better-equipped workshop than those used for my experiments with the essay, and much more time. The current project must finish at this point, with a healthy dose of dissatisfaction as a driving force for future endeavors.