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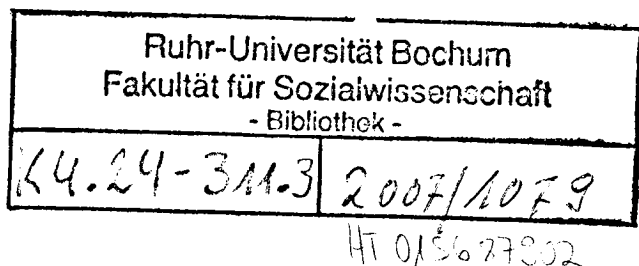
A Canon of Our Own?

Kanonkritik und Kanonbildung in den
Gender Studies

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

<i>Karin S. Wozonig</i>	
Dimensionen des Kanons	9

<i>Christina Lutter</i>	
Vorwort	15

DISZIPLINierter RAUM

<i>Aleida Assmann</i>	
Kanon und Archiv – Genderprobleme in der Dynamik des kulturellen Gedächtnisses	20

<i>Marlen Bidwell-Steiner</i>	
Kanonkritik zwischen Herrschaftsraum und geschütztem Raum	35

<i>Ilse Müllner</i>	
Der eine Kanon und die vielen Stimmen. Ein feministisch-theologischer Entwurf	42

<i>Hans-Uwe Lammel</i>	
Hippokrates, der medizinische Kanon und die Frauen	58

<i>Kerstin Palm</i>	
Kanonisierungsweisen von Kanonkritik – die Geschlechterforschung zu Naturwissenschaften als Reflexionsmedium disziplinärer Kritikoptionen	76

<i>Christa Binswanger</i>	
Shakespeares Schwestern, Medusen oder „Ich ohne Geschlecht“? Zu weiblichem Schreiben, Kanon und feministischer Literaturwissenschaft	90

ZWISCHENRAUM

Susanne Hochreiter

- „Das offene Netz möglicher Bedeutungen“.
Queere Positionen in der Debatte über den deutschsprachigen
Literaturkanon 104

Anna Babka

- ‘In-side-out’ the Canon.
Zur Verortung und Perspektivierung von postkolonialen
Theorien & Gendertheorien in der germanistischen
Literaturwissenschaft..... 117

Tatiana Barchunova

- A Library of Our Own?
Feminist Translations From English into Russian 133

Erzsébet Barát

- The importance of a discursal approach to
translation as an organized practice 148

Marina Blagojevic

- Canons and Contexts: Beyond fragmentation 159

Raluca Maria Popa

- Communist Women Speaking Internationally:
A Revision of the ‘East’/‘West’ Divide? 175

Karin Harrasser

- Cyberfeminismus. Träume von Modellierbarkeit 189

VERHANDELTEN RAUM

Gabriele Griffin

- Women's and Gender Studies –
The Quintessential Subject in Process 202

Victoria Robinson

- Internal and External Shifts and Constraints
on Women's Studies and Gender Studies:
Implications For the 'Canon' 217

Therese Garstenauer

- The inevitability of a Canon in Women's and Gender Studies,
and what to do about it 228

Anna Temkina, Elena Zdravomyslova

- Gender and Women's Studies in Contemporary Russia 240

Veronika Wöhrer

- "Doing Feminism" and other Theoretical Interventions 254

Diana M.A. Relke

- Loose Canons: A Canadian perspective on feminist
power relations and knowledge production 266

- Die AutorInnen 275

Erzsébet Barát

The importance of a discoursal approach to translation as an organized practice

1. From nostalgia of difference to a political struggle over autonomous translations

In my paper, I shall propose a move that can go beyond the disarming logic of equivalence, the central category in Tatiana Barchunova's paper in this volume. In its stead, I shall propose that the particular Russian examples of translations Barchunova draws on should be relocated in a broader framework that sees translations as matters of social practice. I have decided to conceptualize translation through the perspective of social practice, in order to be able to give a situated account of the translating event and to thereby avoid valorizing the "arbitrary" imposition of the notion of connotative, referential and pragmatic equivalence on the "target text" as if it were a matter of a decontextualized rational argument.

My point is to expose that any appeal to the source text/target text dichotomy as the ultimate criterion of judgment valorizes some reasoned evidence, as if those very claims to reason had not been themselves shaped by what (feminist) translators believe to exist. As Caroline Ramazanoglu (2002:136) points out, most of feminist criticism tends to discredit existing exclusionary and derogatory knowledge claims about women by appealing to some empirical non-adequacy. In agreement with her, I would like to adopt her concern here and argue that our judgment of a good translation is not merely a matter of textual equivalence that can be empirically proven faithful to the "original text," but it is rather a matter of their particular histories and their social and cultural situatedness, an integral part of which are the existing criteria of validity themselves. Let me clarify: I do not argue that we should give up the criterion of validity altogether in the name of some "universal" contingency, but I argue that we should attend to the intersection of knowledge claims and lived experiences in order to explore what makes the appeal to decontextualized equivalence more plausible than an appeal to ideological investments of the competing criteria of a "good translation" at a given historic moment. The latter approach should definitely involve the exposure of the discursive constitution of "evidence" and

the authority with which the speaking feminist subject comes to legitimize her claims. What I shall therefore try to carry out in my contribution as a first step towards such a redefinition is to reread Barchunova's paper and expose the textual slippages in her arguments that try to normalize the contradictory entanglement of diverse forms of reasoning, and furthermore expose them to be appropriated by the dominant practice of fractal categorization in Susan Gal and Gail Kligman's (2000) sense of the word.

I also feel interpellated by Barchunova's text to choose this critical discursive framework in so far, as she proceeds to evaluate the Russian translations of de Beauvoir, Braidotti, Irigaray and Butler in terms of their power to "remedy the cultural injustice and promote the cultural recognition" as proposed by Nancy Fraser's (1997) relative differentiation between the forms of injustice that are distributional and those that are recognizational in their effect. If our ultimate interest in evaluating the quality of translations is whether such a project goes beyond affirmative action and "achieve[s] the level of structural transformation of the social order" (Barchunova), which I fully agree with, then we cannot subscribe to the equivalence model of translation. In accordance with the critical feminist requirement of situating our own research questions, we need to expose that the referential logic of the equivalence model is blind to the very social space that should be transformed into a less unjust order, and that this very blindness is the inevitable discursive effect of categorization, since it does not observe a constitutive heterogeneity of social reality but is anchored in an either/or empiricism. Translation as a social practice, however, may speak to the heterogeneity of women's existence and that of its theorizations in so far, as discursive representations are seen as intertwined with the non-discursive dimensions of the social struggle over the very terms on which the criterion of "good translation" comes to be legitimized. Ironically, the discourse of "equivalence" may easily push us into a world of the "natural," the "original" text, positioning its translation as indeed the "target" of validity claims, bypassing any space for reversing the direction of criticism and posing other questions of validity of the ideas in the "source" text, such as relevance or appropriateness for the social situation it is meant to engage with. This disposition produces the translation as the unproblematic extension of the "source" and hides the irony of calling it the "target". Such a position, instead of acknowledging difference, simply seems to be a form of "replaying the nostalgia of difference, and [sets up] a presumed 'authenticity' to be held against the corruption [of bad translations]" (Chambers 2003:171). This nostalgia will safely deliver the status of

"expert in (theorizing) translation" that will authorize us to reduce the struggle into matters of assessing the "unfaithfulness" of our "naturally textual targets," preempting in fact any form of textual autonomy.

I believe the last thing we would need at this historic moment of entering the academic field as advocates of feminist perspectives is to position ourselves in the comforting shelter of the nostalgic observer of the "distorted" and "damaged" target texts, thereby reproducing the existing power relations instead of destabilizing them, among other things, by translating (particular) feminist scholarship under the sign of a non-critical model of textual equivalence. Instead, we need to assume a shared discursive space that draws the critique and the translator into complex configurations of meaning, into a dialogue with those texts, and then we can shift our critical gaze from misinterpretation to the social and cultural "conditions of the *dialogue* in which different powers, [pre- or post- and Soviet) histories [...] and *languages* are inscribed" (Chambers 2003:171, italics added). This concept of "dialogue" can be applied — in a broader sense of the word — to reframing matters of translation as a dynamic contestation of "equivalent texts," a "new marking of the 'West[ern feminisms]'" as a [textually mediated] site of ongoing power *and* contestation, of centrality *and* dispersal" (Clifford 1989:179, cited in Chambers 2003: 171, italics in the original), where the a priori hegemonic position of "source text" comes to be constructed as an empty category, since there is no fixed reference point securing the status of the "true original."

2. From fetishized "mistranslation" to struggle over standpoint

One of the explicit foci of the general concern about how to achieve a more democratic structural transformation of the social order in the post-Soviet period is in particular the decision about how to open up a democratic discursive space for feminist rethinking of women's place in post-Soviet societies. The relevance of habitual ways of language use has been addressed from the very beginning of the transition period in media research, my more immediate field of research interest. The feminist concerns about the possibilities of democratization of the media space also include research that does not see its own language use on the outside of the discursive field of the media. Researching the new dominant genres of reality television, also involves deciding which of the existing tradition of

media research should be brought along to our analysis¹, especially when the programs are understood to be taken over into the process of globalization. One aspect of the anxieties involved addresses the politics of translation usually under the sign of "migrating feminisms" or "traveling theoretical concepts." The question for both media studies and translation is how to open up a democratic discursive space for feminist rethinking of women's place in the media in post-Soviet societies in a way that is partly achieved by translations of key "Western texts," but without relegating the translation to mere extension and faithful reproduction of the "original." What I see as a necessary first move towards such a defetishizing dynamic approach to translation is similar to the recent changes proposed in media studies.

In the past three decades, the trajectory of changes to the focus of knowledge production in media scholarship (feminist or otherwise) has been from production, media as a workplace through texts, and the semiotic analysis of (sexualized) representations of women/men and their relationships, to reception studies and the analysis of the dynamic of interpreting by a particular audience. In these knowledge claims it is the wellbeing of the "audience" that serves to legitimize the diverse concerns of "distortion" that are established by a recurring appeal to the actual empirical diversity of women's lived life, including their actual ways of "consumption." In so far as these justifications take a non-mediated experience of the corresponding audience as their source of knowledge, the turns in media research may be considered to be a constant struggle that is contesting the meaning of "audience" itself.

At the same time, in terms of the politics of research, one could also say that cultural studies' general concern with ideological distortions has been motivated by an ongoing quest for the possibilities of transforming the various media spaces into a democratic public space that should attend to diversity. In this regard, media research has been inevitably interested in empowering the "audience" by appealing to its difference. However, this democratization project has come to be articulated mostly from within a functionalist model of communication that presents the media text as a

¹ My own talk "Variation to Co-optations: The Uses and Abuses of Feminism" in Vienna (reprinted in Blimlinger, Eva / Garstenauer, Therese (Hg.) (2005): *Women/Gender Studies: Against All Odds*. Wien: StudienVerlag. 21-29.) raised the importance of self-reflexivity when differentiating between woman-centered approaches and critical feminist social research in the context of the neo-liberal claims to post-feminism appealing to a discourse of non-situated 'choice.'

self-contained damaging "message" that will be perceived equally harmful from any particular audience position. As far as "difference" is concerned, the potential of its diverse meanings come to be conflated and demobilized under the realm of the program/audience dichotomy. The category of "audience" is perceived within an originally modernist model of communication that presupposes a fetishizing differentiation between performance and its audience, similar to the unproblematic distinction between source text and target text. It is a disarming differentiation that precludes the very aim of agency. In other words, what has not been systematically put on the research agenda in media research is the very discourses of audience /audiening, including those valorized in the research.

The importance of the legitimizing appeal to the "audience" is also raised by Nick Couldry (2004). His major concern with reception analysis is its methodological assumptions about the scope of reception itself. His central claim is that focusing on the immediate context of "consumption" (mostly in the home), the analysis of reception, which can be best exemplified by Ien Ang's (1996) work, in fact preempts the agency of the actual audience in the research. Couldry takes issue mostly with Ang's contradictory position on "living in a media saturated world" for neglecting what people do with media in a broader range of cultural participation /consumption. He proposes to theorize reception in terms of media-based practice. This would result in moving beyond the multiple but self-contained and thereby homogenized sites of consumption in contemporary reception analysis and would lead to a consideration of the diverse activities in which any particular media-related talk is embedded. Pushing the focus of research across the diverse boundaries of social practices then could do justice to Ang's claim to a media saturated world and would in fact open up the privilege of the researcher to contestation. The research objective then would shift to seeing how media can function as point of anchorage for other (non-media based) practices.

For my current purposes, I will extend his model further and argue that this move would not make the category of "audience" empty, which seems to be Couldry's implied understanding, but would rather redefine it as a heterogeneous category that has internalized difference within its previously impermeable boundary as an effect of introducing the category of social practice.

Applying Couldry's move for situated media practices to our redefinition of translation as a practice, what matters to us is to see what people (feminist researchers included) come to do with these translations across

what range of situations and contexts. One specific instance of such an activity is making the actual decisions when selecting the works; another is producing criticism of the translations themselves in relation to the network of texts from which the particular work has been singled out. This network of texts would, for example, also potentially mean texts of reception at the time of their appearance. In such a research we would in fact explore the genealogy of the order of translation discourse embedded in other particular disciplinary discourses and the dynamic of the power struggle in the course of the crossing from one to another practice. I shall therefore analyze the examples of translations Barchunova sets out, to assess and focus on the rhetoric of argumentation in order to persuade the reader about the importance of inserting the text into its cycle of production/consumption and argue that the corollary of this shift is to address matters of translation in terms of the analytical category of "discourse" instead of "language."

Drawing on a critical feminist discourse analytical perspective, I would then like to expose the ways in which the logic of a given discourse comes to position their speakers within a given order of values, whose dominant hegemonic practice of categorization seems to be a hierarchically recurring fractal logic, informing our diverse practices of translating as well.

3. The hegemony of a recursive fractal logic

I am going to expose the rhetoric of Barchunova's argumentation in her paper for this volume in order to substantiate my analytical claims about dominant exclusionary discourses of translation. What I will eventually focus the analysis on is the appeal to decontextualized equivalence as a more plausible criterion than an appeal to ideological investments of the competing criteria of a "good translation" at a given historic moment.

Above all, let me observe that a practice oriented approach to translation would inevitably involve the extension of our analysis to questions that problematize (1) the actual processes of decision making regarding the apparently diverse and contradictory texts that have been eventually chosen for a translation into Russian, (2) the decisions regarding the shortening of the selected works themselves, since most of the works are not translated in full length, (3) the policies of the foundations supporting the translation projects, as well as (4) the very reception of the translations themselves in the Russian academic context once published. I believe these are the first

steps for situating the translated texts themselves, if we wish to grasp the specificity of the local interest in a systematic manner without engaging our research in the blinding effect of an unconditioned contingency.

Maybe this is how we could put the struggle between the textually mediated world of the translator and that of the author in its social and historical context, precisely as suggested by Leo Ginzburg, which is not the same as presupposing that the intersection of their worlds should be simply reduced to some inherent "balance" outside of actual social contestations of meaning. Then we could also ask the intriguing question: How come that the so-called Soviet-time intellectuals' works on women's exclusions under state socialism, who got exiled from the country for their very works of this critical kind, such as Natalia Malakhovskaia and her associates, do not seem to shape the emerging discourses of various feminist scholarship? How is it possible, or is it really the case, that even the wider (feminist) academic audience of the Fraser text in Russia is not familiar with the debate in the US around Fraser's distinction of injustice in terms of recognition and redistribution? This silence is all the more of a salient slippage since that debate in *New Left Review*² took place between Nancy Fraser, whose political ideal of democratization is the one Barchunova claims to subscribe to, and Judith Butler, who seems to be the most popular author translated into Russian as far as the mere number of works are cited in Barchunova's bibliography are concerned.

Within this social framework of conceptualising translation as a practice, the latter formulation of the question may also help us to link the different categories of "mistranslation" together as effects of different discursive representations of gender/gendering, as different (academic) discourses of gender. Then, what we would want to expose are the different ideological investments of those instances of misfiring.

What should this crossing involve? Above all, a dialectical definition of "discourse" in relation to "practice" from a feminist historic materialist perspective. In short, the understanding that "discourse" is not a mere synonym of "language." As my starting point, I will draw on Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough's (1999) definition of practice for my working definition of this term, which refers to "habitualised ways [of acting], tied to particular times and places" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough,

² See Butler, Judith (1998): Merely Cultural? In: *New Left Review*. No. 227, January-February, 33-44. and Fraser, Nancy (1998): Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A response to Judith Butler. In: *New Left Review*. No. 228, March-April, 140-149.

21), one integral dimension of which is the reflexive mode of involvement in what we understand we are doing. This definition implies more than a particular instance of action, in our case that of the actual performance of translating. It also implies the act of reflection when theorizing the criteria of validity as well as the more stable pattern of routine we draw on in the course of this evaluation, including models of translation and dominant ways of setting up categories for comprehension.

To redefine discourse from a feminist perspective I have turned to Rosemary Hennessy's (1993) work, since she also addresses the explanatory power of "discourse" through the perspective of criteria of validating. She claims that the major problem of feminism is to formulate the relationship between women's life as the ground for feminist knowledge and the gendered subject of feminism in a congruent way: "It is not enough to claim that feminism's subject is discursively constructed rather than forged out of experiences common to all women. The political effectivity of this claim rests to a great degree on how discourse itself is understood" (Hennessy: 55).

Hennessy contends that this political subversion could be achieved by explaining a materialist relationship between discourse and other aspects of material life. In my view, her objective here is to include the discursive within the materiality out of which the social is produced, and thus to go beyond an empiricist foundational approach to "women's experience" against the stories/theories "about" it.³ That is, she wants to advance the concept of gendered identity as discursive positionality and the concept of choice from among the discursive positions as historically conditioned particularities embedded in relations of power. She then moves on to develop Louis Althusser's (1971/1984) concept of "ideology" and says that this

³ Joan Scott in "The Evidence of Experience" (in: H. Abelove et al. (eds.) (1993): *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge. 397-415), addresses the problems of experience in terms of difference. She argues against the grounding of any category on the basis of a self evident experience. She claims that any appeal to some incontestable evidence weakens the critical potential of a feminist theory in that it is informed by the same empiricist epistemology that it intends to undermine. Such an approach precludes the possibility of exposing the very practices that rendered the difference gender makes invisible. What is needed according to Scott is the historicisation of experience, the analysis of its workings through the ways it produces different identities.

historic situatedness of subjects or representations can be grasped through theorizing *the materiality of discourse as ideological practices*⁴.

However, in my experience this is a position that is *least* welcome in contemporary post-soviet regions⁵: Ideology has here become a four letter word. Nevertheless, I suppose, the example of "mistranslation" of the concept of impeachment in Barchunova's paper could especially be telling in terms of a discursive approach. I think the more profound problem with translating impeachment as "condemnation" is not that much concerned with damaging the coherence of the original argumentation but rather with its relation to the actual practices of jurisdiction in Russia. In so far as there is no legitimate procedure implemented in Russia that could summon a public officer to court and make him accountable for his political action, there is no legal discourse available to draw on, unless there is time, energy, and financial resources for an annotated translation that would set out introducing the checks and balances of the US political system. Even more to the point, without such discourses there is no meaningful position of "public officer" available for the members of the political elite. But what the system seems to know and remember all too well is how to translate discourses of representative democracy into populist discourses of moralizing without any concerns about the "quality" of such a translation.

⁴ Within social linguistics, the most recent work that conceptualises practice as a "middle ground category," as the link between relatively stable social structures and particular events, is Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough's work (1999). Despite their insightful argument that explains what it means to say that the ontological condition for social practices is their dialectical heterogeneity, a point I fully agree with, I do not include their work in the major body of my text at this point. The reason for my decision has to do with their unwillingness to assume that all meaning making practices are ideologically invested. When they set out to differentiate critical social scientific discourses of empowerment from and above other (scientific) discourses as better, they achieve that by accepting epistemic relativity, ideologically situated knowledges that are relative to social positions of people but refusing, yet denying judgemental relativity as – in their reading – that would inevitably entail that all discourses are equally good. Chouliaraki and Fairclough theorize discourse as one integral aspect, one "moment" of praxis. Consequently, any particular formation of discourse is defined as a way of representing social practice x or y from a position within the process of social production in social practice x embedded in networks of power relations.

⁵ See my earlier publications on the gate-keeping mechanisms against feminism, drawing on discourses of anti-communism, anti-Americanism, and radical homophobia in Barát (2004): *The 'Terrorist Feminist': Strategies of Gate-Keeping in the Hungarian Printed Media*. In: Michelle Lazar (ed.) *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan. 205-228.

That is, what we may want to be able to carry out as critical linguists is to explore how perspective and evaluation is carried out in and through the texts that are embedded in the order of discourses of translation and politics, and at what points they seem to bypass any criterion of "equivalence." As a result, I hope the key methodological question is not what method we have adopted, but rather what paths, what values we have disavowed, left behind, covered over or left unseen. In short, as Avery Gordon (1990:492) would put it, what we need to ask is: In what discursive fields does our work of translating occur?

To conclude, I would like to expose the dominant practice of categorization that seems to inform Barchunova's own argumentation and those of the translations she problematizes as cases of mistranslation.

I contend that there is an infinite systematic reproduction of the differentiation between the discourses of gender by feminist research that "repudiates the idea of [natural] givenness" and every-day conceptions of gender that take it as given. The absolute divide between the two modes of existence seem to hinge on the presence versus absence of reflexivity in matters of human understandings. Once we have got this main divide established at the expense of the non-reflexive "every day," the criterion of success of feminist scholarship in Russia cannot be but formulated as "extreme credibility" that implicates some hyper-activity on behalf of feminist scholars, and especially those of translators of "Western feminist research."

What I would like to expose about this logic is that once there is the critical science/every-day divide established, the argument can "naturally" slide down the slope of exclusions and set up the theoretical dispositions versus empirical data divide within the category that has previously been implicated as one referring to a purely reflexive domain, and one of extreme nature. But even within this purely theoretical feminist domain there is a further differentiation implicated along the same criterion of heightened reflexivity against empirical data (collection) between the Western scholars whose contributions (theory, methodology and data altogether) are of a higher order in comparison to local scholarship that in fact reintroduces the matter of apparently non-reflexive disposition of faithful reproduction when it comes to local academic performance of translating.

The workings of this mode of categorization have been described as a discursive practice of fractal distinction by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000). They argue that the distinctions are "recursively applicable – like self-similar fractal patterns in geometry – and therefore can be nested. [...]

The result is that within any public [domain] one can always create a private; within any private [domain] one can create a public" (Gal and Kligman 2000: 41).

I would like to explore this logic further and propose that as long as one's position remains within this hierarchical fractal logic, and as long as one understands that the movement within it is to observe the principle of immediate constituency, the reapplication of the "same" criterion will not emerge as contradictory. Consequently, "[w]hich level of contrast and context is invoked in any instance of use is a matter of positioning and of the perspective of social actors and institutions" (Gal and Kligman 2000: 41).

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