To Make Sense of a World:

Translation, Germaine Koh, Globalization

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Abstract

To Make Sense of a World: Translation, Germaine Koh, Globalization

Chantale Potié

This thesis proposes that Vancouver-based artist Germaine Koh's (b. 1967) practice demonstrates the political and ethical dilemmas of translation within a globalized world. Here, translation is understood as a practice that aims to question means of navigating and interpreting through globalization's afforded networks; it tries to make sense of global macro problem areas at micro levels. As I argue, Koh's work tries to make sense of the social matter emerging from increasingly estranging geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-cultural realities. I have divided my text into four parts to I explore the ways in which Koh's work performs acts of translation. In part one of this thesis, *Translation: Prayers*, I define and consider translation as the practice of interpreting and/or converting under two basic orders: 1) those that pertain to meaning and form; and 2) those that pertain to movement and positioning. In part two, *Globalization: Alienation*, I delineate the global world I am referring to and demonstrate how translation functions in terms of mobility. In part three, *Social: Connections,* I engage with Koh's work to consider how globalization uses translation as a tool to foster both social alienation and social interdependency. And in part four, *The Double Bind*, I elaborate upon the central contradiction at hand, where translation surfaces as both the problem and the solution. Indeed, Germaine Koh's work exposes the contradictions of translation and of globalization. In that translation is able to afford globalization its reach and ability to communicate across languages and currency, this text questions whether translation can accordingly perform critical efforts against globalization.

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Sometimes you can see a celestial object better by looking at something else, with it, in the sky.

Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, viii

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Note on Method

> Attention is a task we share, you and I. To keep attention strong means to keep it from settling.
>
> Anne Carson, poet and translator [1]

There is a way in which words, objects, signs, and gestures are able to stand in for something more than their formal, intentional components. There is way in which some *thing* can mean *so much* – a way in which a concept, phrase, sound, or space can set off springs of imagination, as one tries to make sense of the world. One way to think about this phenomenon is as a translation.

Translation surfaced for me as an act I could perform and consider in trying to make sense of the current global order. At a time when social, political, and market relationships are being fostered across great distances and boundaries, breakdowns and frictions continue to emerge as a result of accelerated global imbalances. These asymmetries present great challenges to nations and individuals hit by their impact. Global moves hit locally. Erupting in the midst of the connections that globalization works to support are lasting remnants of social asymmetry. How to make sense of such a reality?

I sense that translation offers a way of making sense. And I yearn (desire) to understand why and how I think it can do so. Poet and translator Anne Carson suggests that "desire can only be for what is lacking, not at hand, not present, not in one's

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[1] Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*: *Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), xiii.

possession nor in one's being."[2] I am writing on translation because it orbits just slightly out of my reach. The more I research the concept, read of it, and consider its properties and processes, the more opaque it becomes. "Activities of knowing and desiring," Carson observes, "have at their core the same delight, that of reaching, and entail the same pain, that of falling short or being deficient."[3] I believe that artist Germaine Koh is also trying to make sense of the world, and that she, too, does so through strategies that might be understood as translational.[4] This reaching that Carson speaks of is, I think, a yearning both Koh and I share, and it continually yields both delight and pain. Indeed, I have come to see that the lack of a satisfying resolution or 'perfect fit' between subject and object of understanding is characteristic of the concept of translation itself.

Translation is a concept that travels between disciplines, between people, and between languages. Its meaning depends on who applies it, defines it, or conceptualizes it. Translation itself, in other words, is constantly in a state of translation. After years of sitting with translation, I have come to define the term for myself. Yet the definition that I will develop over the coming pages does not settle translation, or resolve it. Definitions follow, and in other times, lead, waves of history, communities, politics, and desires. In *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, cultural theorist Mieke Bal writes that "while groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept

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[2] Writing on desire, Carson is following along a tradition established by the Greeks and by psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 10.
[3] Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 70.
[4] Here and onwards, when I write of "the world," I am referring to a globalized world. Many worlds exist, but my subject here is the contemporary, contradictory, and networked world under capitalism.

may *mean*, we gain insight into what it can *do.*"[5] This is what I hope to accomplish through my thesis with translation. I am reaching to define what translation may mean, so as to better understand what it can do.

In particular, I want to know: can translation be employed by individuals so as to facilitate social, supportive, reciprocal, and care-driven means of communicating, interpreting, and understanding in an unstable lived global reality? Indeed, these concerns for social, supportive, reciprocal, and care-driven means of being in the world are evident in Koh's practice and in her biography. Koh has been practicing as a multi-disciplinary artist since 1989, a year of revolutionary waves that rippled out from resistance movements against communist regimes. Many have made the argument that since 1989, the world is experiencing an amplified form of globalization, enabling capitalism and modernism, competition and innovation to spread and develop more widely and deeply than before.[6]

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[5] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto press, 2002), 11.

[6] To name a few, social and political theorist Arjun Appadurai, political scientist Jacques Rupnik, and journalist Thomas Friedman have made this claim. See: Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2006), 21; Jacques Rupnik, *1989 as a Political World Event: Democracy, Europe and the New International System in the Age of Globalization* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013); Thomas Friedman, "…And the Walls Came Tumbling Down," in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 44-72. Others posit that globalization began long before 1989, with the first known voyage around the world taken by Ferdinand Magellan between 1519-21; this voyage initiated European exploration and trade. See Mauro F. Guillén, "Is Globalization Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble? A Critique of Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature," in *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates*, eds. George Ritzer, Keynep Atalay (West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4-17. Others still have proposed that, in fact, globalization began with the spread of the Roman Empire in 200 BCE. See: Karl Moore and David Charles Lewis, *The Origins of Globalization* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009). At the very least, globalization since 1989 recognizes a present-day version of globalization that can be clearly identified through its amplification of previous global models.

What initially inspired this thesis was the question as to whether translation as a concept could be satisfyingly used to write about art in this socio-economic context. Partly, my project is about finding a way to ethically interpret the asymmetries that a globalized world offers, as it pushes strangeness into socially ill-prepared environments at such an accelerated and unprecedented speed. Linguistic translation became necessary with the expansion of globalization to accommodate the increased movement of people and money across lands and borders, languages and economies. Partly, my project is about stretching notions of translation into a territory of aesthetic forms, not just linguistic forms. And lastly, my project is about pushing myself to write *through* translation – to be self-reflexive and attentive in how I interpret through the protocols of art history. I have tried to carefully and responsibly situate myself in relation to my chosen artist, artworks, theories, and histories, while additionally looking past (and around) what I want to, hope to, or think I should see. This is not to say that I am present in this text as a character. Rather, in that this text is about interpreting with care, I consider myself present in how I interpret the subjects and objects of my research. Objectivity is not my goal. In trying to practice an act of translation through a critical analysis of Koh's art, I hope to gain insight into the concept's challenges, strengths, and breakdowns.

Translation becomes for me, a lens through which to make sense of the contemporary twenty-first century order – a way to interpret and traverse globalization's afforded movements with a sense of ethics and care. At least, this potential is what I am trying to gauge. Can translation make sense of globalization's deeply political, economic,

ecological, and relational disorder? I ask this question earnestly. But, being honest, I know that translation, on its own, is inadequate for such a large task.

Introduction

Between the late nineties and early aughts, Vancouver-based artist Germaine Koh executed a series of projects that responded to the social and subjective components of daily transactions. *Thanksgiving* (1999, fig. 1) circulated coupons in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper that simply indicated the words "thanks" and "many thanks." Newspaper readers were meant to cut out the coupons and exchange them socially, thereby, as the artist wrote, turning "abstract notions of value into concrete actions."[7] Similarly, in *Change* (1999, fig. 2), Koh distributed metal tokens engraved with the French words *bon* or *bien*, to mean good. Participants who received the tokens were encouraged to disseminate them in return for good acts. And *Cambio* (2002, fig. 3), which is the Spanish word for "change," is an edition of self-inking rubber stamps made to mark Mexican currency with the words *un beso* – rather than *un peso*. *Un beso* refers to a friendly cheek-to-cheek greeting. To stamp such a term on a form of currency is as if to offer the sign of an intimate gesture instead of (or at least alongside) the sign of a financial one.

Translation is a process of interpreting and performing meaning, rendered through a conversion of one form to another, one language to another, one place to another. In

[7] Germaine Koh, "Thanksgiving," Germaine Koh, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=58 (accessed January 4, 2014).

many ways, these works both deploy and are informed by aspects of translation. While both *Change* and *Cambio* engage with linguistic translation in their turn to French – *bon, bien* – and Spanish – *cambio, un peso* – all three works additionally translate the value of the given forms. *Thanksgiving, Change,* and *Cambio* each convert the monetary value of coupons, tokens, and currency into a relational value as a way to reinterpret the meaning ascribed to economic forms. Whereas newspaper coupons generally offer financial discounts to be circulated commercially, Koh's coupons in *Thanksgiving* offered gratitude to be circulated socially, thereby translating their *a priori* value. *Change* translated the value of a token from one of quantity (equal to an objective amount of money) to one of quality (equal to a subjective definition of worth). And *Cambio*, as a stamp, also became a tool to enact translations of meaning. As a legal tender, currency is understood economically. However, the inscription of an action, a kiss, onto an already-meaningful object subverts that object's preexistent value – its meaning in the world. Through these acts of translation, Koh encourages social and personable expressions of gratitude, good will, and affection, expressions that have been increasingly articulated by what money can buy under capitalism.

The most significant aspect of translation at play in the three works, however, lies in their address to an idea of exchange value and its general equivalency. Standing for money, monetary forms are made to move from one hand to another and one place to another in exchange for goods and services. Indeed, Karl Marx would say that forms of money translate social human relations into financial relations.[8] Exchange value abstracts

[8] Karl Marx, "Part 1: Commodities and Money," *Capital: Volume 1: a critique of political economy*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Ben Fowkes (London & New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1992), 125-177.

performed labour; it is no longer useful (towards a practical purpose) but exchangeable (towards profit). Such translations have contributed to what we call estrangement, alienation, depersonalization, and being-alone in the world. Koh is putting the emphasis back on relations. *Thanksgiving, Change,* and *Cambio* interpret and perform the meaning of monetary forms by converting objects of capital exchange – coupons, tokens, and currency – to objects of social exchange.

The world today, a globalized world, accommodates unremitting instances of human relations translated into monetary value. This is an idea that was expanded upon by Marx and further disseminated by Marxist thinkers and actors. Among them is Anne Carson, who is drawn to Marx's notion that "money is not like a language but it is like a translated language."[9] In that translation is the exchange and conversion of language, translation makes language strange. And similarly, money, as something to be exchanged and converted, makes life strange. Marx wrote:

> Ideas […] have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign (*fremde*) language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable [...] So the analogy [that money is like a translated language] lies not in language but in the foreign quality or strangeness (*Fremdheit*) of language."[10]

According to French theorist Jean-Luc Nancy, borrowing from Marx, it is "through the interdependence of the exchange of value in its merchandise-form (which is the form of general equivalency, money), [that] the interconnection of everyone in the production of humanity as such comes into view."[11] Defining twenty-first century globalization as the movement of the global market wherein *everything* circulated becomes a commodity,

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[9] Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 28.
[10] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973), 80 quoted in Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 28.
[11] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 37.

Nancy identifies a knot of social interdependency that forms by means of commodity production, exchange, and capital. Indeed, Marxist and exiled Soviet politician Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) anticipated this radical turn towards global exchange. In 1914, at the onset of World War I, Trotsky provided a definition of globalization that is still relevant and appropriate:

> The forces of production which capitalism has evolved have outgrown the limits of nation and state. The national state, the present political form, is too narrow for the exploitation of these productive forces. The natural tendency of our economic system, therefore, is to seek to break through the state boundaries. The whole globe, the land and the sea, the surface as well as the interior have become one economic workshop, the different parts of which are inseparably connected with each other.[12]

A globalized world, like many worlds, is full of inequalities, injustices, contradictions, and asymmetries. Positively, globalization promotes civil and political liberties while demonstrating increased means of connecting and exchanging across borders. A globalized world defines nations by their level of socio-economic development and their GDP rankings. However, critical ethnographer Celia Haig-Brown reminds us that "globalization too often employs moves more culturally and economically imperialist than reciprocal and dialectical."[13] This strange world is one where language, objects, currency, and relations are exchanged, subsequently translated, and constantly re-evaluated.

In Koh's work, exchange is performed for communal purposes, rather than for commercial ones. Her works, in effect, retranslate the abstraction of exchange value,

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[12] Leon Trotsky, *War and the International*, *1915: with the Zimmerwald manifesto, An open letter to Guesde* (New York: Young Socialist Publishers, 1971[1915]), vii.
[13] Celia Haig-Brown, "Taking Indigenous Thought Seriously: A Rant on Globalization with Some Cautionary Notes," *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 104:2 (2008): 18.

injecting back into it the social relations that it had obscured. Perhaps such connections, in modest portions, can work to alleviate feelings of estrangement. Attention has been re-directed towards the actions of the participants in the trade, rather than on tangible currency and the objects that are traded for it. In other words, if money is a translation, this is a way of un-translating it. We could say that Koh's practice here is meta-translational. It is performing a translation with something that is already translational in its very nature. As a general expression for the value of objects and services, money establishes financial claims on exchange. Koh wants to remember, and to circulate, social claims on exchange. She addresses the equivalent forms of trade (money) that mark the habits and values of those implicated in and involved within globalization's systems. The objects in *Thanksgiving*, *Change*, and *Cambio* move through social networks as opposed to commercial networks, and strive to reanimate direct relational value in favour of exchange value. This is translation in action. By means of making social claims guided by mutual responsibility and interpersonal exchange, Koh's works carry the potential to counteract the de-socialization that is characteristic in mediated processes of globalization.

So far, I have positioned translation as both a part of social estrangement in a time of financial globalization as well as a way to remember the social amidst estrangement. And here is the problem at hand: if translation is a cause for alienation (through the translation of nearly everything into money), does translation also carry the potential to act as an antidote to such alienation? Dutch cultural and linguistic theorist Doris Bachmann-Medick clarifies the dilemma: "translation becomes on the one hand, a condition for global relations of exchange ('global translatablity') and, on the other, a

medium especially liable to reveal cultural differences, power imbalances and the scope for action."[14] If translation is the condition, can it also be the cure? In that translation is able to afford globalization its reach and ability to communicate across languages and currency, can translation accordingly perform critical efforts against globalization? This final question is what drives my thesis forward into a consideration of how one artist has confronted the realities of living in the world.

Many late twentieth and early twenty-first century artists like Koh, attuned to the breakdowns and strangeness of globalization, have offered attentiveness to social connections and local experiences as a rejoinder. Local and site-specific practices have been developing in forms of contemporary art since roughly the early nineties, particularly in practices that advocate for social change against the ever-consuming and estranging impacts of modernization and globalization. UCLA art historian Miwon Kwon has identified the globalized condition as "the intensified mobilization of bodies, information, images, and commodities" and noted how this has been facilitated by "the greater and greater homogenization and standardization of places." Under such circumstances, Kwon has called for a cultural practice that is mindful of "our psyches, our sense of self, our sense of well-being, our sense of belonging to a place and a culture," as a way to deal with contemporary social and political crises at a local level.[15] Such practices by artists like Suzanne Lacy, Francis Alÿs, and Krzysztof Wodiczko, to name a few have aimed to perform and support reciprocal and dialectical social actions. As an artist, educator, and writer, Suzanne Lacy (b. 1945) advocated for art situated and performed within local environments, to be engaged with local publics, notably coining

[14] Bachmann-Medick, "Translation," 23.
[15] Miwon Kwon, "The Wrong Place," *Art Journal* 59:1 (Spring 2000): 33.

the term New Genre Public Art to designate such artistic practices. Belgian-born Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs (b. 1959) has had a long career of engaging with local spaces, people, and rituals as a way to consider political and social concerns. And Poland-born artist Krzysztof Wodiczko (b. 1943) has worked to democratize and politicize local architecture and design. He has done this by, for example, animating buildings through projections and by adapting or introducing socially accomodating objects and structures within city spaces. Many artists such as these have attempted to return to what had been endangered: acts of communicating, relating, and exchanging locally and socially rather than globally and economically.[16]

Throughout her artistic career, Koh has employed the local as networked, in that the local is never remote but is forever connected, socially and economically, with various other interconnected local spaces and publics. She positions herself or members of the public within both local and global social histories, material cultures, and environmental conditions. She pays particular attention to how she and others – as those individually and collectively situated in various ways – intimately experience their world. In doing so, Koh has instituted site-specific projects that attempt to make sense of the particular homogenizing and alienating tendencies of globalization. Born in 1967 in

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[16] I regrettably do not have the space to expand more on such practices. Those interested should read Suzanne Lacy, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Nicholas Bourriaud, and Nato Thompson, all of who have written extensively and thoughtfully on the history and motivations of local and socially engaged art practices. See: Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Dijon, France: Les Presses du reel, 2002), and Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (New York: Creative Time; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

Georgetown, Penang on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, Germaine Koh grew up Asian Canadian in Armstrong, a small Okanagan Valley town located in the Southern Interior of British Columbia. During much of her artistic career, she allied herself with no geographic "home," characterizing herself as being of "No Fixed Place" and as having no fixed address.[17] Currently, she publicly situates herself as based in Vancouver, BC. Koh attends to the world through its objects, patterns, connections, and habits, representing them through social, sculptural, architectural, digital, and performative practices. The objects she employs – objects of capital, of technology, of leisure, and of culture – are those that have been produced, nurtured, and exploited by world-forming projects – projects of colonization, industrialization, and modernization that have etched the political and economic delineations of the globalized world. As she repurposes such objects, Koh carefully considers their meanings, forms, and social uses.

The local as networked comes into play for Koh through translation; she attends to estrangement by making the familiar strange. Though Koh has never, to my knowledge, directly referred to the discipline of translation itself, her work has been described as enacting translations and engaging with systems of translation – understood here to mean processes of transformation and conversion.[18] She is a translator of everyday phenomena,

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[17] This statement was repeated in her circulated biography until recently. She no longer publically identifies in this way. "Germaine Koh," in *Germaine Koh: Works*, by Patrice Loubier Ken Babstock, and Gerrit Gohlke (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2005), 109, *Infinity, Etc.,* exhibition pamphlet (Toronto: Mercer Union, February 24 – April 1, 2006), "Germaine Koh," *Artnews*, http://artnews.org/artist.php?i=918 (accessed March 4, 2015), "Germaine Koh, Around About," *Gallery One One One*, University of Manitoba, http://www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art/content/galleryoneoneone/koh.html (accessed January 2, 2015).

[18] For example: Patrice Loubier, "Attractions de l'ordinaire," in *Germaine Koh Works* by Patrice Loubier, Ken Babstock, and Gerrit Gohlke (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2005), 11, and Melanie O'Brian, "The Way the Wind Lies: Germaine Koh's Codes of

transmitting codes, compositions, and constructions of local environments through altered forms. In short, Koh translates the recognizable, often through the use of altered social and spatial contexts. In doing so, she tries to open up spaces for alternate meanings to emerge. Nikos Papastergiadis, a cultural studies professor at the University of Melbourne, suggests that translation "is not an occasion for the global coming to the local," nor I would add, the local coming to the global. Rather, translation, he continues, is the process of "both translating each other into something else seen as an instance of inter-local exchanges."[19] Translation is a practice that aims to question ways of navigating and interpreting through globalization's afforded networks; it tries to make sense of global macro problem areas at local micro levels. How do overarching motions hit upon communities, and how can we make sense of a reality marked by veiled, swift, and unreachable financial forces? As I will argue, Koh's work tries to make sense of the social matter emerging from increasingly estranging geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-cultural realities. To quote Bachmann-Medick on translation's possibilities, Koh's work can offer an "agent-oriented view of globalization."[20]

Using Germaine Koh's practice as a case study, I will explore how socially engaged art employs translational strategies that are intended to question presupposed claims on and in the world. As translation scholar Lawrence Venuti puts it, translation is an interpretative act "grounded on a reconstruction of the values, beliefs, and

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Contingency," *Germaine Koh*, exhibition brochure (Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, April 26 – June 1, 2002), 1.

[19] Nikos Papastergiadis, "Marina Fokidis speaks with Nikos Papastergiadis," *Flash Art* 39 (March/April 2006), 48.

[20] Doris Bachmann-Medick, "Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture," in *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*, eds. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2012), 31.

representations that define [a given] situation."[21] In identifying some of these formal and social modes of translation through Koh's work, I also hope to address the gaps that are inherent within its processes. What can we learn through gaps? First and foremost, I am interested in Koh's enacted artistic strategies that constitute an attentive and interpretive method of making sense of the world. In a 2004 email conversation with artist Chantal Rousseau, Koh wrote that by creating works vulnerable to loss and transformation, she sought to force the viewer "to consider how and whether to intervene or preserve the situation, how to act, how to describe it, how to remember." Her work, she continued, "proposes an immediate attention to the present."[22] Koh, in other words, is asking questions (and is prompting her audience to ask questions) very much in line with ones that my thesis is asking – how to interpret and how to respond?

Globalization measures translation through accessibility (to industries, markets, and media; to resources, information, and people) and its potential to increase profit. My project measures translation largely through a sense of ethics, as a way to integrate care into means of interpretation and understanding while nonetheless remaining situated in the midst of global motions. The detrimental or positive effects of translation develop through *how* the tool is used. Without self-reflexivity and reciprocity, acts of careless interpretation and conversion follow the course of imperialist, colonialist, and modernist histories of interpretation that entrench power relations, privilege, judgment, and

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[21] Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (Milton Park, Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 4.

[22] Koh quoted in Chantal Rousseau, "Five Questions for Germaine Koh Relating to Conceptual Art," Germaine Koh website, unpublished interview with Chantal Rousseau, February 2004, http://germainekoh.com/content/press/rousseau2004.html (accessed March 4, 2015).

prejudice. This thesis proposes that Germaine Koh's work demonstrates, in practice, the political and ethical dilemmas of translation within a globalized world.

To make this argument, I have divided my text into four parts wherein I will explore how Koh's work performs acts of translation as ways of making sense of the present-day reality. In part I of this thesis, *Translation: Prayers*, I will outline the many definitions of translation and explain how the term will be employed in this text. It will highlight translation as a means of interpretation, as a process of movement, and as an ethical tool to consider interpretation and movement. In part II, *Globalization: Alienation*, I will contextualize the global world I am referring to in terms of movement and I will demonstrate how translation can function in terms of mobility. Additionally, I will describe how the strategies of translation deployed in Koh's work demonstrate the gaps and hazards created by global movement. In part III, *Social: Connections,* I will engage with Koh's work to consider how globalization uses translation as a tool to foster both social alienation and social interdependency. And in part IV, *The Double Bind*, I will elaborate upon the central contradiction at hand, in which translation is realized as both the problem and the solution. Germaine Koh's work exposes the contradictions of translation and of globalization, contradictions that only seem to tighten over time.

To be sure, with translation come failures and fractures. Implicit in every act of translation is a breakdown of interpretation, movement, or ethics. To borrow an idea from the field of linguistic translation, no translation emerges as an exact replica of the original, either in form, content, meaning, or position. Sometimes this transformation is recognized, and sometimes it is obscured. Translation theorist Susan Bassnett writes that translation "is a primary method of imposing meaning while concealing the power

relations that lie behind the production of that meaning."[23] If Koh's imposition of meaning is critical of political and economic conditions, Koh's own exercise of power is nonetheless obscured through her practices. For me, translation is bittersweet: sweet, in that I am drawn to its exercise of sense making, its poetic, reaching, and critical nature, which appears in its motion to try to re-understand the understood; and bitter, in that I recognize its failings and misguidances. Mieke Bal sharply observed that "even if translation effectuates a passage, it can never really build a bridge."[24] So, I wonder: are the relationships fostered through translation reciprocal or one-sided? Do they produce closed conversations or open ones? And do they lead to actual transformations or just assume their shape? I cannot offer generalizable answers to these questions, because responses or results depend on the contexts and intentions of precise instances of translation. What I do hope to indicate is translation's potential contribution to the task of interpretation in a climate of globalization, a climate wherein knowledge and objects circulate widely and quickly on asymmetrical and uneven grounds. These are grounds that are, in large part, the terrain of hegemony established by cultural and economic imperialism. Translation will not always succeed; often it will fail. But perhaps in accepting the failures of translation, we can move closer to making sense of this contradictory world.

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[23] Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 37.
[24] Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, 65.

I – Translation: Prayers

In its narrowest sense, translation proper is the transfer of meaning and style across languages, converting the content of one language into another. It is a turning from one language to another. The practice of linguistic translation deals with words and phrases, texts and speech. A linguistic translator's goal, following a Euro-American tradition of translation, is most often to reach a point of equivalence with the form and content of the original. This linguistic sense of translation is the jumping off point for my research.

In many ways, Koh's work *Prayers* (1999, fig. 4) illustrates this narrow sense of translation as a linguistic project. *Prayers* is an *in situ* machine installation that converts typed words from inputted data into vapour. The installation employs interface software to read and translate keystrokes typed on an office computer. In real time, the typed data is electronically translated into Morse code, after which the signals are emitted outside through puffs of smoke by way of a standardized fog machine. Installed in office spaces and galleries, the smoke was exhaled in short bursts on the streets of Vancouver, BC (2001), Winnipeg, MB (2001-02), Seoul, South Korea (2003), London, England (2003), Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON (2008), and Kamloops, BC (2013). On these streets, language literally went up in smoke.

But in many more ways, *Prayers* illustrates a more formal and metaphorical translation. From words to fog, the messages were converted from a form of linguistic communication to a form of conceptual communication – from words to an idea (or recollection, or lack) of words. In Koh's art, then, translation is not only about words.

Nor is it thus limited in other spheres of contemporary usage. In mathematics, for example, translation is the name for the process by which a form moves, from one place to another. In English, the word itself derives from the Latin word *transferre*, referring to "a carrying across, removal, transporting; transfer of meaning."[25] The Latin etymology of translation serves as a useful way to begin a shift from purely linguistic to more conceptual senses of the word. Indeed, Koh has described much of her practice as an "escape from language," that uses forms, images, and actions to speak, as opposed to words.[26] *Prayers,* for example, does not ask its audience to consider what words we use to communicate, or even what message is being conveyed. Rather, it asks how we shape and utilize our strategies of communication. On this note, Koh has stated that one of the reasons she makes visual art is that "ideas often have to be experienced physically," further noting that her work is "always rooted in a physical encounter with the material of the world."[27] Works such as *Prayers* offer material translations more than linguistic translations. Moreover, such material translations become useful because, as poets Robert Fitterman and Vanessa Place note, "ordinary language does not use itself to reflect upon itself."[28] In Koh's hands, the material translation of language and ideas often bears this self-reflexive capacity.

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[25] "Translation," Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=translation&allowed_in_frame=0 (accessed December 13, 2014).
[26] Germaine Koh qtd. in Matthew Kabatoff, "Signals: An interview with Germaine Koh by Matthew Kabatoff," *Rhizome* (January 30, 2001), http://rhizome.org/discuss/29880/ (accessed October 24, 2014).
[27] Koh quoted in Kabatoff, "Signals," *Rhizome.*
[28] Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualism* (Berkeley, CA: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009), 39.

We might do well to attend to this self-reflexive call and consider translation outside of the strictly Anglo-Saxon traditions that the English language has carried forth. Translation scholar Andrew Chesterman warns readers not to universalize such understandings of translation. If the term has developed certain conceptual associations in Indo-European languages that stem from Latin, many languages that do not share the same Latin roots understand and thereby conceptualize translation differently. While it is true that translation in English denotes "an act of moving or carrying across," Chesterman writes, the same cannot be said about translation in all languages: "The corresponding terms in some other languages (such as Finnish, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Tamil) do not foreground the notion of carrying something across, but rather notions of difference or mediation," with the action of turning taking precedence over carrying.[29] In Finnish, to translate is *kääntää,* which means 'to turn,' in the sense of, Chesterman notes, "(transitively) turning a page […], (intransitively) turning a corner, [or] turning in a new direction."[30] Chesterman suggests that this meaning highlights taking a new direction or entering a new context. Similarly, in Turkish, the verb *çevirmek* means to 'make turn,' referring to intentional movement and a change in direction. The Japanese word for translation is *honyaku* (翻訳), "where *hon* has the basic sense 'turn, turn over, flutter' and *yaku* means 'substitute words'." In Arabic, *targamah* (ترجمة) refers to mediating or guiding interpretation.[31] While Euro-American translation has historically given precedence to questions of fidelity and equivalence, interpreters of

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[29] Andrew Chesterman, "Response / Translation Studies Forum: Cultural Translation," *Translation Studies* 3:1 (2010): 104.
[30] Andrew Chesterman, "Interpreting the Meaning of Translation," *A Man of Measure. Festschrift in Honour of Fred Karlsson on his 60th Birthday*. Mickael Suominen et al., eds. (Turku: Linguistic Association of Finland, 2006): 6.
[31] Chesterman, "Interpreting the Meaning of Translation," 8.

translation in other languages may understand it more in terms of difference and the negotiation of difference.[32]

Contemporary notions of translation in English, beginning with the emergence of translation studies as a discipline in the 1960s and especially with the discipline's prominence in the eighties and nineties, have increasingly loosened the ties that bind translation by tight historical knots of fidelity and equivalence. Many have argued that understandings of translation as an act of entering a new context (turning) or negotiating a new context (mediating) have come from the increased movement of people, culture, and languages within capitalism's increasingly globalized processes.[33] The academic boom in translation studies at the end of the twentieth century emerged within the context of globalization after the Cold War, where world commerce and connective technology linked nations, states, communities, and individuals together in new and unfamiliar ways. As translation became ever more necessary for commerce and trade, it made the global expansion of market capitalism possible. Linguistically occupied with communicating across languages, translation as a field has been conceptually occupied with defining itself amidst a globalizing world wherein languages move and flow more readily across political and cultural boundaries. As languages flow, alternate definitions and ideas of translation challenge what translation was and how it can be practiced. Here, with the

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[32] For more on the subject, see: Chesterman, "Interpreting the Meaning of Translation," 3-11.

[33] Such authors as Birgit Mersmann, Michael Cronin, and Anthony Pym have made this claim. See: Birgit Mersmann, "Global Routes: Transmediation and Transculturation as Key Concepts of Translation Studies," in *Transmediality and Transculturality*, eds. Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013), 405-424; Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003); Anthony Pym, "Globalization and the Politics of Translation Studies," *Meta : journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal* 51:4 (2006): 744-757.

example of *Prayers*, Koh is not unlike a good translator, attempting to communicate beyond literal meaning so as to convey the context and culture of a text. The fog is not meant to express what has actually been written; rather, it is meant to express, manifest in a fleeting way, the concealed lives and labour that inhabit the buildings exhausting the fog. Who or what is fueling these post-industrial exhaust systems? Communicating the culture of a text – and, to go further towards my subject at hand, the culture of objects, spaces, and people – means communicating historical, geographical, economic, and aesthetic patterns alongside circulation and reception systems.

As a term that has moved through time, languages, and intents, translation has many senses to its name. I have already noted that translation is what Bal would call a "travelling concept," in that it travels between disciplines, and as such, in how it is used and understood. Linguistically, to translate is to turn words and phrases from one language to another language. Metaphorically, to translate is to interpret from one meaning to another meaning. Materially, to translate is to render one form into another form. Mathematically, to translate is to move a body from one point to another point. And ethically, the one definition not found in the Oxford English Dictionary, to translate is to employ political and social responsibility when interpreting and converting. Quebec translator Pierre St-Pierre defines translation as a social, political, cultural, ethical act.[34] I would add that translation is also an economic act, in that it facilities exchange and shapes the value of its products. Because translation encompasses these many facets that are part of the composition of globalization, it becomes a sharp tool for engaging

[34] Paul St-Pierre, "Introduction," in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, eds. St-Pierre, Paul and Prafulla C. Kar (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 6.

critically with the changing formations of globalization – a globalization that brings the economic to bear on the social, political, cultural, and ethical in unpredictable ways.

Socio-cultural theorists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Rada Iveković, Nikos Papastergiadis, and Nicolas Bourriaud have highlighted the ethical strands of translation and the motivation to translate ethically by means of the term 'cultural translation.' Spivak and Bhabha, for example, have theorized cultural translation as a form of postcolonial resistance, a response against multiculturalism's essentializing of cultural identities.[35] In their writings, it is more often (though not always, in the case of Spivak) the subaltern figure who translates hegemonic culture, not the other way around. Croatian philosopher Iveković agrees that translation is a vital form of resistance, further framing the concept as a way to open up meaning subsequent to the crossing of boundaries.[36] Papastergiadis has highlighted translation as "a metaphor for the process of communication," and as a productive form of engaging in acts of reciprocity and exchange.[37] Curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud identifies the translator, whom he names the *radicant* figure, as one who is engaged in "translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviors, exchanging rather than imposing."[38] In these ways, the somewhat nebulous notion of "cultural translation" is used idealistically, describing the positive outcome that translation elicits rather than the demonstrable steps that must be

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[35] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as culture," in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar eds. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 163-176.
[36] Rada Iveković, "Transborder translating," *Eurozine* (2005), online journal http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-01-14-ivekovic-en.html (accessed January 4, 2015).
[37] Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulance of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2000), 131.
[38] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009), 22.

employed to achieve such an outcome. Translation scholar Robert C. Young summarizes the appeal of cultural translation:

> cultural translation seems to offer a means of considering the wider effects of the ways in which cultures are transported, transmitted, reinterpreted and re-aligned through local languages, and more broadly through other cultures with which migrants come into contact."[39]

But what exactly does it mean to translate ideas, transcode images, and transplant behaviours? Cultural translation has had a long history of advocating for exchange and communication between cultures, but its empirical structure remains ambiguous.

Alternatively, sociologist John Law uses the word "translations" to characterize the connections formed between agents of the world (that is, everything in the world). Such translations are at the methodological heart of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). As developed by Law, along with Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, ANT is the practice of tracing relationships within a network – relationships that define and shape its participating actors: ANT "is descriptive rather than foundational in explanatory terms […] It tells stories about 'how' relations assemble or don't."[40] Recognizing the vectors between network nodes as *translations* – the ties that shape/transform the actors to varying degrees – Law writes that "translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. It is about moving terms around, about linking, and changing them."[41] ANT asks: What are the connections between the actors? Where are the connections? How do

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[39] Robert J.C. Young, "Cultural Translation as Hybridisation," *Trans-Humanities* 5:1 (2012), 156.
[40] John Law, "Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics," in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 146.
[41] Law, "Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics," 144.

these connections impact the, albeit constantly changing, system as a whole? And consequently, how do they impact the system's actors?

The emergence of such varied understandings of translation, like those that I have listed above, have led to inconsistent understandings of the term, which is variously thought of as an act, process, strategy, theory, or method.[42] Such inconsistencies persist, in large part, because of the term's ambivalence: it does not possess strict denotative allegiances. Translation means many things, is employed towards many objectives, and is used for many different actors. Latterly, such complexity has spawned a new scholarly discipline – translation studies – based on the "dialectical relationship between theoretical, descriptive and applied translation studies where each one provides and uses insights of the other two."[43] Which is to say that theoretical translation informs descriptive and applied translation, descriptive translation informs theoretical and applied translation, and applied translation informs theoretical and descriptive translation. Indeed, it is through this dialectical relationship of methods that translation becomes an appealing tool to use to think about social communicating, meaning, understanding, and movement. Translation considers the multiple levels on which people socially and linguistically exchange – how exchange is enacted, how exchange is described, and how exchange is

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[42] Though never expanded upon, semiotics is embedded throughout this text. Semiotics is present through my employed language ("denotative allegiances") but, more often, it is present in how I write about words/objects/materials/spaces ("signs and symbols") in search of the meaning(s) of these things in the world. Ultimately, however, my focus on translation is intellectually elsewhere. I am writing of interpreting and making sense of being in the world through mainly hermeneutical and ontological thinking.

[43] The term "translation studies" was itself coined by James Holmes in his text "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, ed. James S. Holmes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988 [1972]), 67–80. See also: J.A. Naudé, "An Overview of Recent Developments in Translation Studies with Special Reference to the Implications for Bible Translation," *Acta Theologica* 22:1 (2002): 45.

conceptualized – amidst the confluence of languages and means of understanding brought about by contemporary globalization. Indeed, one of Spivak's definitions of translation is as a catachresis – to employ incorrectly.[44] By understanding translation as such, Spivak highlights how translation has been used to mean a variety of things outside of its textual definition; to use the term culturally, politically, socially and psychoanalytically, as she does in her own writing, is to waver from its literal meaning. And yet, as Spivak argues, no other word will do. Translation's literal-turned-metaphorical definition (and its consequential invitation of variable meaning) is precisely why 'translation' is the only word that can be used to speak of such things. Translation considers how global participants engage with the world, how they communicate in the world, and most importantly to my thesis, how they *make sense* of the world. Which is to say, translation tries to open a space for meaning, conjured through social relations on increasingly economically- and materially-driven platforms. The intersection of the applied, described, and theorized means of translation, in addition to its context-dependent meanings and definitions, come together to position translation as an operative tool.

Indeed, translation's ambivalence can be useful in practices of self-reflexive interpretation. For the purposes of my thesis, I have chosen to frame translation according to a different schema than those offered by theories of cultural translation more generally, by ANT, or by translation studies' scholarly model – though I have derived much from these precedents. Drawing on what I have learned and winnowing it down to its basic dynamics, this text considers translation as the practice of interpreting and/or converting

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[44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as culture," in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar eds. (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007),163-176.

under two basic orders: 1) those that pertain to meaning and form; and 2) those that pertain to movement and positioning. Balanced above such orders, translation is also in the position to be used to critically consider the politics and means of interpreting and/or converting: translation is inherently entangled with ethics.

Interpretation becomes a key act in this text. How do we and how can we interpret in such a strange, asymmetrical world? How can we make sense ethically and how can we understand the strange movements that surround? Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote in *Truth and Method*, a 1964 philosophical consideration of hermeneutics, that "every translation is at the same time an interpretation."[45] Figuratively, to translate is to render meaning; it is interpreting the meaning of something/someone/someplace into, inevitably, another form. With Koh's *Prayers,* interpretation takes on an interesting role for viewers in that the work's meaning is clouded in strangeness. How did the pedestrians and inhabitants interpret the irregular breaths of smoke emerging from an unassuming building? We cannot know if they interpreted the work as the artist intended or otherwise. But that is not necessarily the point of *Prayers*. The presence of signaling vapor on the streets, the performance of the typists, and the work as part of Koh's artistic oeuvre is the point. The encountered strangeness is the point.

Koh calls this work a sort of "exhaust system."[46] It acts a release, establishing the activity as a visible, yet intangible, trace of events. Viewers were not expected to decipher precisely what the typed data was emitting or communicating through the smoke. Rather, they were invited to consider, stand with, and walk through the smoke's form. In

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[45] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (NY: Crossroad, 1992 [1960]), 384.
[46] Koh quoted in Kabatoff, "Signals," *Rhizome.*

Koh's artist statement on the work, she notes that the form of smoke references once-revolutionary methods of technological communication like telegraphy, binary languages, steam power, smoke signals, and Morse code.[47] By reinterpreting inputted data from a computer into coded smoke signals, *Prayers* evokes the evasiveness and ambiguity of communication despite the continual development and renewal of supposedly enhanced technologies. Despite the work's simplicity and inconspicuousness, *Prayers* brings to mind, for me, the difficulties of accurate translation – its very impossibility. Almost like poetry, Koh breaks translation down to its smallest components – typed words to letters, then letters to the corresponding Morse code pattern, Morse code to ephemeral smoke, and from there to nothing discernable at all.

Much like translation, the meanings and movements of the smoke in *Prayers* are dependent on the interpretations of its users and viewers. As a work of technology and communication that drifts out onto the city streets, anonymously, linguistically illegible, *Prayers* cannot be understood unilaterally. In the work's original configuration, office workers were the users of Koh's programmed computer; they agreed to participate with the installation during occupational hours. The monotony of a generic workaday action, typing, was translated as a fleeting mist. "I was thinking of people sitting at their computers," Koh remarked in an interview, "sending e-mail messages out 'on the wing of a prayer'."[48] Perhaps purposefully, Koh mistranslated the common World War II aviation expression 'on a wing and a prayer,' which refers to desperate hope in conditions of great uncertainty. A pilot flying and landing in the fog, dust, and smoke of war did so with the

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[47] Germaine Koh, "Prayers," Germaine Koh website, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=65 (accessed January 4, 2015).
[48] Koh quoted in Kabatoff, "Signals," *Rhizome*.

help of both machine and faith. When typing on the configured computers, the users of *Prayers* were at once communicating professionally, and manually enacting *Prayers* through their keystrokes. Koh facilitated nonverbal communication between those in buildings and those on streets, unknowable receivers of the messages. She created a means to translate utilitarian text into hopeful prayers – prayers to, perhaps, make sense of all the simultaneous connections and disconnections in the world, to make sense of the distance amidst the closeness.

In its practice and demonstration, *Prayers* seems to mimic the increasingly common remote social exchanges that telecommunication technology extends forth. But Koh has added a self-reflexive bent; the project's purpose is to stop, reach, and connect with people in unknowable and incalculable ways. Post-industrial nations like Canada and the United States no longer primarily rely on manufacturing economies and manual 'blue-collar' labour for national economic gains; they rely increasingly on white-collar professions in market, service, telecommunication, and knowledge economies. The workplace has shifted from the factory to the office. The artist imagines workers sending out messages on the wing of a prayer, engaging in social relationships increasingly mediated through the globalized economy, technology, and transportation systems. However, when the work was exhibited in Kamloops, BC in 2013, the programmed computer was positioned directly within the gallery space (fig. 5), and the specific work-place meanings of the initial installation became generalized to a broader gallery public. Gallery visitors became the users (the translators), as they could type and interact with the artwork voluntarily. Koh's variation of setting and intended publics suggests that,

more than just white-collared workers, we all desire to make connections in this estranging world.

On this note, Koh's work is illustrative of how translation can take shape, of its converting and interpreting strategies, of its intentions, of its failures, and of its ethics in response to global economically minded endeavours. Translation as ethics requires the practice of care between those involved, in what anthropologist James Clifford recognizes as the "tactical negotiation of boundaries."[49] Koh's strategies bear similarities to those of ethical translation – in practice and in motivation. Thinking of translation in terms of ethics means, in part, accepting that a failure of interpretation, conversion, movement, and ethics can and will occur. Developed out of post-structuralist and deconstructionist traditions of polysemy and the slippage of signification, translation reacts precisely against the traditional systematic formation of modern linguistic translation: a process employed through coded rules and structures to find *the* singular translation.[50] In fact, a translation cannot reproduce exact meaning and form; there will always be added and/or lost information/contexts/references. However, points of convergences are positioned alongside points of asymmetry. Speaking to notions of failure and untranslatabilities, Bachmann-Medick writes on the asymmetries that arise amidst process of translation, including the interwoven "asymmetries of global relations," "linguistic asymmetries," and "power asymmetries."[51] These inevitable imbalances in translation are signs of the tension, conflict, and discontinuity that are especially

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[49] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 211.
[50] Françoise Massardier-Kenney, "Antoine Berman's way-making to translation as a creative and critical act," *Translation Studies* 3:1 (2010): 260.
[51] Bachmann-Medick, "Translation," 27, 29, and 38.

amplified by economic, political, and social relations of power, currently exhibited through globalization.

II – Globalization: Alienation

Globalization is a political economic condition that alters the means by which participants subjectively, socially, and professionally relate to the totality of its networked processes. In order to foster such relations, to reach across borders and languages, globalization pointedly uses translation in the narrow linguistic sense. Writing on participation, Magda Raczyńska notes that today, it "permeates all spheres of life, not only cultural but social and economic spheres as well."[52] Global participants are those who are implicated in financial exchange, production, maintenance, and waste processes within developed and developing nations (as categorized by the United Nations' World Bank). They contribute to capitalist economic processes under a large-scale paradigm that sociologist and political economist Mauro D. Guillén characterizes as "contradictory, discontinuous, and even-haphazard."[53] Globalization ensures widespread dependence on competition, innovation, and capitalist market systems to support a joint goal of socio-economic development. Developed nations in particular are marked (and measured) by a series of qualifications, including: national civil and political liberties; governance of (an increasingly federally deregulated) capitalist financial system; high-ranking GDP

[52] 1968-1989: political upheaval and artistic change, eds. Claire Bishop and Marta Dziewańska (Warsaw, Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 121.
[53] Mauro F. Guillén, "Is Globalization Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble? A Critique of Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature," in *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates*, eds. George Ritzer, Keynep Atalay (West Sussex, U.K.: Wikey-Blackwell, 2010), 16.

earnings; post-industrial economies centered on service-, tech-, and knowledge-based labour; the exportation of under-valued manual and support labour to developing nations; the accelerated extraction and importation of natural resources from developing nations; the privatization of capital; and the personal, social, professional, political instrumentalization of telecommunication (i.e. connective) technology. Conversely, developing nations are marked and measured, in part, by: extractive economies, industrial production directed by transnational corporations, export of remote service and support labour to developed nations, and the integration of a capitalist exchange economy facilitated by the World Bank.

In addition to a political economy, globalization is the product of the accelerated movement and exchange of everything. And this focus of globalization invokes the sense of translation as the interpretation and conversion of *movement*. Translation's Latin etymological references to movement, border crossings, and conversion (*transferre*) repeat through history. For example, in Catholicism, translation is the movement of relics from one location to another. In the bible, translation is the movement of someone from earth to heaven. In medical discourse from the seventeenth to nineteenth century, translation was the movement of disease from one person to another (virality). In law, translation is the transfer of property from one person to another. For mathematicians, translation indicates the replication of a geometric shape and its movement within a grid or network. A form can translate horizontally, diagonally, vertically, can be reflected and/or rotated. Neither the original shape nor the double undergoes formal manipulation under translation, yet their placements and surroundings have changed through the movement produced by translation. Translation, therefore, is not simply linguistic,

hermeneutic, or formal; it recalls motion in the world. And motion is one of the most obvious signals of globalization, with its dissemination of the capitalist and modern projects. With socio-economic development comes market productivity alongside social, cultural, political, and ethical expectations instituted (but not necessarily practiced) by Euro-American directed corporations, institutions, and governments. The ever-increasing circulation of nearly everything supports and nurtures the globalization paradigm.[54] Gestures of uprooting and replanting, of travel, of being lost, displaced, of connecting and disconnecting, of being tracked, of tracking, of imports and exports, of trade – these are all common motions under globalization. How to interpret these moves? As a means of communicating between languages and as processes of movement, translation reinforces globalization in a very tangible and profitable way: translation enables globalization to prosper and dominate.

Information, economies, and communication are represented as being much more accessible under globalization through the mass dissemination of visual, textual, oral, and data materials. Because of this, global participants have become much more aware of the socio-political inequalities and injustices that have stemmed from lasting imperial, colonial, and modern motivations and institutions through critical documentation. Guillén suggests that globalization fosters "greater interdependence and mutual awareness (reflexivity) among economic, political, and social units in the world, and among actors

[54] Certainly, in such a time, mobility is not an available option for everyone and everything. Global mobility is awarded to those willing to engage with capitalism through their funds, resources and/or services. Also important to note is that mobility has been granted value through imperialism and globalization, but not everyone defines wealth, comfort, and security through the surplus of capital and movement.

in general."[55] Even with an extended awareness of exploitation and disparity, participants are nonetheless implicated in global processes. Indeed complicity in globalization enters through direct and indirect participation in the financial economy

The financial economy refers to the management and exchange of financial resources wherein labour, property and quality are abstracted into financial sums. All of these abstractions are translations. Marxist and cultural intellectual Ernst Fischer (1899-1972) wrote that these abstractions foster strange commodities and strange relationships.[56] In short, they foster alienation. It could be said that capital and its commodified counterparts contribute to a reduction (a savings) in intimate, accountable, direct, and care-driven (unprofitable) social relationships. "Marx believed that money makes the objects we use into alien things and makes the people with whom we exchange them into alien people," writes Anne Carson.[57] Money creates an impersonal market, injecting an abstract currency as a mediator between relationships. Globalization offers benefits in the form of objects, service, efficiency, aesthetics, travel, leisure, information and so forth so to offset (or at least quiet) the depersonalizing effects of its processes.

Through her work and through her initiated social exchanges, Koh circles around the alienating habits of global participants within the financial economy. Accordingly, the work *Pledge* (2002, fig. 6) mirrors a recognizable economy while questioning accepted means of taking part in the global economy. Part of the series of transaction works I referenced earlier, *Pledge* consists of an edition of 5000 copper coins, embossed with an unidentified promise: "I WILL." Serving as a form of currency outside of market laws,

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[55] Guillén, "Is Globalization Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble?," 4.
[56] Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, trans. Anna Bostock (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), 43-44.
[57] Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 17.

the coins translate abstract intentions of promises into a concrete form. They require the donor of the coin to make a pledge to a recipient, who in turn receives the coin, the responsibility of bearing the weight of the pledge, and the task of ensuring that the donor follows through. *Pledge* works to counteract the presuppositions on which participation in the global economy is based. In its performance, *Pledge* disrupts typical patterns in the exchange of market currency, in which donors and recipients each benefit from a transaction as a way of constructing capital – donors of money receiving an object, service, or assurance, and recipients receiving money to put towards future purchases of objects, services, or assurances. *Pledge* disrupts this mutually beneficial system so as to experiment with promises of accountability and responsibility wherein participants do not necessarily materially profit from an exchange. If they do benefit, it is personally through a sense of kinship, respect, gratitude, or the like. By translating objects of exchange and expectations of rewards in such a way, *Pledge* unsettles the widely naturalized status of economic claims and questions accepted means of taking part in the globalized world. It serves as a general pledge to connect with others.

Pledge plays with the form of money as a general equivalent, in that currency is used to exchange for something else in the world. This play of equivalency enables the work to function as a translation; though, in this case, it has converted mechanisms of capital exchange to ones of social exchange. The participants set the equivalency, rather than the market. In translations of capital exchange, our perceptions of the social relations and labour that money represents are lost in the transactions. In this case, Koh is purposefully remembering the social relations and labour that money abstracts. There is no economic value attached to the exchanged gestures in *Pledge*, only individually-

defined social, psychological, and cultural value. Fischer wrote that when we speak of price trends and stock exchange prices, we "acknowledge the inhuman, autonomous movement of objects, a movement that carries human beings along as a stream carries twigs of wood."[58] For Fischer, the industrial society became accountable to its objects and became distinguished by the "*objectification* of social relationships."[59] Today, global society is additionally distinguished by the *financialization* of social relationships, as globalization moves to capitalize on human connections. As I see it, Koh's works offer a counterbalance to acts of profiting off of social relationships. Her translations in *Pledge* are not those of general equivalency, but of an equivalency that can be newly stated and re-stated with every occurrence.

Yet, while *Pledge* performs a critical response to the global dependency on money exchange, the currency still serves as an abstract mediator between participants. So, while I admire the direction of this work, I question its performed results. I question the dissemination of the coins in *Pledge* and how widely they were dispersed outside of art circles. I question how sincere the participants in the exchanges were in their offerings of assurance and trust. And last, I question how much worth, so to speak, the participants settled on the claimed pledges. How high were expectations that the pledges would indeed be met? Perhaps what the coins actually demonstrate is commerce's inability to offer social confidence and security; these are qualities that simply cannot fit within forms of currency, no matter how they are translated. The coins translate abstract intentions to an exchangeable form, but there is a breakdown in the coin's ability to actually effectuate interpersonal contracts. It is always a mediator, never direct. For the

[58] Emphasis in text, Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, 82.
[59] Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, 82.

artist, the coins offered an opportunity to formalize "social bonds of trust," but as an artwork with no associated stakes, it simply represents an idea of a task rather than actually demonstrating the task's capabilities.[60] However, such breakdowns in results do not necessarily represent failure or loss. Techno-science theorist Donna Haraway has observed that "breakdowns provoke a space of possibility precisely because things don't work smoothly anymore."[61] Translation's failure can enable users to define the limits and possibilities of what has been previously understood and interpreted. There is some value, some worth, some agency in recognizing one's own limitations of understanding and in finding the gaps. Haraway adds that this is, of course, a painful process.

In addition to a political economy and a product of the accelerated movement of everything, globalization is also an extractive economy. It prospers through the exploitation of available resources. The exploitation of resources like wood, the material used for Koh's *Accord of Wood* (2013-ongoing, fig. 7), demonstrates the extractive workings of globalization, particularly within the context of Canada. Presented in the form of a prism in the Kamloops Art Gallery, Koh's *Accord of Wood* comprises thirty-two logs of pinewood stacked horizontally to measure 8 feet long, 4 feet broad, and 4 feet high, equaling the measurement of exactly one cord.[62] Faint speckled perforations are

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[60] Koh, "Pledge," Germaine Koh website, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=43 (accessed March 3, 2015).

[61] Donna Haraway quoted in Haraway and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, *How Like A Leaf: An interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 115.

[62] The cord, a unit for measuring cut piled wood, was first introduced in seventeenth century England and continues to be used today in Canada. It is an example of one of many residual traces of colonialism. "cord, n.1, 9.a," OED Online, March 2014, Oxford University Press, http://0-

visible throughout the wood, revealing the markings of the Mountain Pine Beetle (fig. 8). Pine trees are at once a culturally and ecologically valuable symbol of Canada's constructed national identity, an economically valuable resource for provincial and national logging industries, and a traditionally valuable life form and material for Indigenous knowledge, medicine, and artistry. The wood translates into all, or none, of these. On another level, the Mountain Pine Beetle mirrors the extractive nature of globalization's transnational corporations, translating their economic practices. As an adult, ¼ inch in length, the pine beetle flies from the infested tree, where it matured, to a more favorable host pine. The Mountain Pine Beetle invades a tree by tunneling beneath its bark and laying approximately 60-80 eggs. They hatch and grow within the tree, emerging a year later as matured adults to complete the cycle and conquer vulnerable neighboring trees. The beetles themselves are complicit within an extractive reproductive economy.

Koh's *Accord of Wood* very consciously plays with the dual associations evoked through the use of the word "accord" in the work's title by referencing a formal political agreement (an accord) and a logging unit of measurement (a cord). The word play evokes the idea of a linguistic translation ('a cord' becomes 'accord'), but as with *Prayers*, what is at stake is less the linguistic aspect of translation than the content, meaning, and form of resources and how these are transformed and translated in a global economy. The exhibited beetle-marked wood was acquired from an internal Kamloops Art Gallery source, Dawn Vernon, registrar at the gallery. An accord was produced from the transaction, in the form of an invoice for $500, paid to Dawn Vernon's father, Ross

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www.oed.com.mercury.concordia.ca/view/Entry/41428?rskey=CcutNO&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed April 15, 2014).

Vernon, for the wood obtained from his Crown land property in Heffley Lake (fig. 9).[63] Displayed in the gallery alongside the cut logs, the invoice highlights the agreed upon economic transactions undertaken by the gallery to generate the objects on display. Exhibiting the invoice in the gallery enables the invoice to take on meaning outside of its practical purposes. Indeed, located in the gallery on the wall, it serves to document the accord by which two parties officially agreed to payment for a resource acquired on Crown land (or, alternatively, for a resource acquired on Native land). Alongside its proof of purchase, *Accord of Wood* deliberately addresses the implicitly implicated economic and colonial networks surrounding pinewood, in addition to most all natural resources in Kamloops, British Columbia, and Canada.

Accord of Wood displays logs of timber infected with the Mountain Pine Beetle. Since the 1990s, the Mountain Pine Beetle has become a threat to the harvest of profitable forest timber in British Columbia's central interior forestry, precisely around the region of Kamloops. Ironically, the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation that currently has such a negative impact on the forest industry, in fact, resulted from the modern and industrial actions long practiced within the industry itself, in part through the practice of repressing of wildfires. Historically, natural forest fires were a way of regulating insect colonization – trees burned and fell, making way for young, healthy trees; but wildfires have been suppressed in recent decades for safety and economic reasons. The global warming linked to industrialization has also made pine trees more hospitable to pine beetles year-round, and especially during previously inhospitable colder seasons. The insects burrow beneath the outer bark of pine trees, and restrict the necessary nutrient flow between the tree's roots

[63] Email from Charo Neville to Germaine Koh, February 5, 2013, as part of the administrative documentation for *Accord of Wood*.

and needles, thereby efficiently killing the attacked pine. In 2012, a report by the government of British Columbia estimated that "710 million cubic meters of commercially valuable pine timber, 53 per cent of all such pine in the province" had been affected by pine beetle infestations.[64]

Interestingly, the movement and increased acceleration of the financial exchange economy mimics the ever-increasing colonization of the Mountain Pine Beetle. When presented with the increasing effects of the pine beetles, the Canadian government and the national forestry industry responded by removing all of the affected timber. They attempted to out log the beetles by aggressively cutting down each and every attacked pine, investing $107 million in doing so.[65] New mills were constructed to process the mass amounts of dead pine and a federal plan was established to export the excess pine to China's lumber market. In fact, this strategy had little impact on pine beetle infestation; rather, it devastated the affected forests even further, temporarily benefitting the forestry industry economically, but leading eventually to an industry collapse when the market became flooded with cheap two-by-fours at the same time as the American financial crisis hit.[66] The rapid insect colonization of pine trees generated both symbolic and practical losses for many. "Situations of potential loss can be valuable," writes Koh, "in that they may prompt us to pay particular attention to the present."[67]

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[64] "A History of the Battle Against the Mountain Pine Beetle: 2000-2012" (British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, 2012), 9.
[65] "A History of the Battle Against the Mountain Pine Beetle," 4. http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/mountain_pine_beetle/Pine%20Beetle%20Response%20Brief%20History%20May%2023%202012.pdf/ (accessed March 2, 2014).
[66] "A History of the Battle Against the Mountain Pine Beetle," 10.
[67] Koh quoted in Susan Barnett, "Small Gestures and Acts of Grace: An Interview with Germaine Koh," *Women: a cultural review* 13:3 (2002): 368.

Bearing the marks of the Mountain Pine Beetle, a menace to the forest industry's economy, the timber in *Accord of Wood* becomes politicized. It demonstrates the ecology politics of the Canadian government, which increasingly seeks economic value in ecologically valued material – here exemplified in this case of the pine trees. The federal solution to the Mountain Pine Beetles was a solution based on destruction rather than on a careful consideration of the responsive ecosystem. In this instance, industrial production contributed to the problem at hand (in that it prompted the rise of global warming) and industrial processes were enforced as the solution. In this instance, the problem and the solution might have best not been one and the same. Koh offered a sense of empathy with the infested wood, through her care in acquiring, exhibiting, and considering the material. Here, Koh practices empathy through her objects, subjects, and spaces, as a sense of politics. In an unpublished interview with Chantal Rousseau, she elaborated on how her work pursues a "restrained kind of politics": "my political strategy generally comes down to promoting empathy by emphasizing the kinds of commonalities and shared connections that underlie our activities."[68]

In an effort to re-evaluate the politicized wood's worth from economic to ecological, cultural, and practical worth, Koh translated the object – through context, meaning, and form. First, by moving the wood out of its native environment into the gallery, Koh translated the wood's context. Within the gallery, multiple contexts and wood systems were brought into view, while the wood remained stationary. Within the gallery, the infected logs served as a resource document of global conditions. The pine in *Accord of Wood* – logged, stacked one on top of the other, and shaved of pine needles –

[68] Koh quoted in Rousseau, "Five Questions."

became unfamiliar from its otherwise recognizable form as symbolically majestic flora. Second, Koh translated the installed objects meaning, from wood to artwork, by displaying *Accord of Wood* alongside administrative documentation that recorded the wood's acquisition by the Kamloops Art Gallery. Included alongside the receipt from the Kamloops Art Gallery to Ross Vernon is a series of email correspondence between Koh, curator Charo Neville, and the gallery staff in preparation for the exhibition.[69] Finally, Koh initiated an ongoing process of translating form by deciding to alter the material character of the wood over time. Here, Koh writes of her plans for the wood in question:

> Starting out as logs, [the wood] will subsequently get milled into planks the next time it travels [for an exhibition], then planed at the next, then maybe assembled into a crate at the next, then perhaps built into something practical. The project will [address] issues of how resources are transported and traded and transformed into good[s], where the value gets added and so on.[70]

The artist will continue to reshape the acquired wood as it travels and becomes further integrated into the global exhibitionary network. Arguably, the more translations that the work undergoes, the more the work will acquire cultural capital and artistic credibility, and the more truly globalized it will become.

What these translations do is bring up the realities of resources in relation to the market and institutions. Through Koh, the logs become aesthetically and artistically valuable within contemporary art networks. They become means towards building cultural capital. They also become critically and symbolically valuable for their role within a national political, industrial, and environmental discourse. And most evidently, they became profitably valuable for Ross Vernon, who sold the wood to the KAG.

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[69] Germaine Koh, email interview with the author, March 24, 2014.
[70] Email from Germaine Koh to Charo Neville, September 22 2012, as part of the administrative documentation for *Accord of Wood*.

Koh is making connections with *Accord of Wood,* between how resources are harvested, moved, understood, and employed. Connections that are often lost, damaged, or concealed are brought to our attention through processes of translation. Koh concentrates on these global side effects, and contemporary everyday realities. She highlights examples of the globalized present that are all too often concealed by the broader globalized discourse and global imagination. Through her use of currency in *Pledge*, Koh converted the content of the coin to make it strange, even more alien than identifiable money. The coin is one of the most obvious signs of moving capital; its operations hidden in plain sight. But national resources and their exploitation are familiar as well. The goal is to make them strange.

New Dehli-based artists Raqs Media Collective have appropriately summed up this need for strangeness:

> We begin to lose interest in understanding something that we only know too well. We begin to lose understanding. We begin to lose an interest in understanding. This is why there must always be strangers at the threshold. There must always be room for people and practices that were outsiders, that are passing through, that are capable of responding to our deep inner needs for defamiliarization.[71]

So to renew an interest in understanding globalization with all its lost connections and contradictions, the tools provided by globalization, like translation, must be altered in unfamiliar ways. French translator and translation critic Antoine Berman (1942-1991) also argued for a process of transformation, of defamiliarization so as to, ultimately, access and interpret anew. Though art practices and galleries are implicated in and with (often clashing) systems of power, art nonetheless carries the potential to attend to that which always seems out of one's control. Writing on the

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[71] Raqs Media Collective, "To Culture: Curation as an Active Verb," in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, eds. Beatrice con Bismarck et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 104-105.

work of a Romantic poet Novalis, Berman reflected on "the reuniting process through which the familiar would become fully strange/foreign, and the strange/foreign [would become] fully familiar."[72] The tools provided by the system, or at least their complicit contexts, must be altered so to renew an interest in understanding. Indeed, Germaine Koh subverts familiar objects and surface concepts to restage their comfortable familiarity, a familiarity that distracts from alternate meanings and interpretations. A 2001 interview with Koh illustrates her approach to the familiar and strange:

> I have great faith in the power of commonplace things to tell us about ourselves, how we live, and how we relate to each other. I think that the minor things that mediate our everyday lives inevitably bear a residual meaningfulness, and much of my work has been an effort to allow these things to speak quietly back to us. […] I would like to create moments in which the commonplace, the mundane and the ubiquitous are rendered remarkable again.[73]

What both Koh and translation do – literally, conceptually, materially, and formally – is move people, objects, and knowledge from their habitual network of relations into a world of strangeness, into a new strange network of relations.

III – Social: Connections

Koh's strategies of translation offer a way of retrieving lost connections and contradictions, as a way to negotiate one's individuality in relation to collectivity. They do this by connecting socially to globalization's breakdowns through acts of play,

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[72] Antoine Berman, *Lettres à Fouad E-Etr sur le romantisme allemande* (Pairs: La Délirante, 1968), 21 quoted and translated in Françoise Massardier-Kenney, "Antoine Berman's way-making to translation as a creative and critical act," *Translation Studies* 3:1 (2010): 262.
[73] Koh quoted in Kabatoff, "Signals," *Rhizome*.

attention, and self-reflexivity. Indeed, these strategies are ways of finding meaning, and as such they are inherently translational. Germaine Koh employs translation to make sense of the social implications amidst a globalization that so often facilitates connections for profit over holistic well being. Translation enables connections so to feel a sense of belonging; translation works towards finding a way of feeling connected to the world. At its foundation, translation addresses the hopeful potentials of inclusive communication amidst global woes of dislocation, inequality, and unrest.

Translation's relational promise of social connection through communication is given additional ontological weight by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy has suggested that strategies of connecting socially are ways of finding meaning in the world by 'being-with.' Translation, in this sense, is what happens when beings in the world brush up against each other and navigate their relation to that experience. Written in 1995 amidst unceasing examples of global, political, and bloody conflicts, Nancy's *Being Singular Plural* addressed the means by which "we" relate to and position ourselves with one another in the world. In the book, Nancy attempts to reposition notions of the individual, shifting them towards community by suggesting that Being itself is always "being-with," and that we are decidedly co-ontologically determined as individuals by our encounters and relationships with others. Nancy questions the exclusive identity of "we" that develops in communities, and asks how communities can retain both their plurality and the individualities of their members. He further suggests that while we are trying to find meaning, we miss the fact that we *are* meaning, and that our circulation in the world is the circulation (movement, translation) of meaning. For Nancy, we (humans) express and collapse this infinitely tangled circulation through the very use of the word

"we."[74] By speaking to, for, and on behalf of the world, the communicator tries to *make* the world.[75] Indeed, to make a world requires a visionary imagination: decisions based on who belongs, how things and people move, how it functions, and what it is to "be". There is always a projected future in mind when engaging with such a task, when circulating the collective "we."

Since 1989, as local communities have experienced some of the more jarring effects of globalization's movements – effects characterized by Arjun Appadurai as an increase in 'relations of disjuncture' – this task of creatively circulating the collective, connective "we" has been increasingly taken up by artists. These are artists who have become more and more concerned with making a contemporary reality through the mobilization of "community." As Claire Bishop has influentially observed, there is an interest in nurturing social participation as an "attempt to rethink art collectively."[76] Whether it is known as new genre public art, relational aesthetics, participatory art, dialogic art, littoral art, socially-engaged art, or most recently, as social practice, Bishop notes that this turn to social participation in art aims "to place pressure on conventional

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[74] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 3.
[75] For more on 'making the world' see Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*.
[76] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; Brooklyn, NY, 2012), 3. Prior to the nineties, social forms of art, as understood by canonical art history, developed in the early twentieth century with the emergence of the avant-garde – a diversity of artistic practices that reacted against the status quo, against industrial and capitalist systems, and against political and class injustices. Art historians Claire Bishop and Grant Kester offer detailed historical case studies in their respective books *Artificial Hells* and *The One and the Many*. Using the Futurists, the Dadaists, the Constructivists, the Situationist International, the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia, and the Collective Action Group as examples, the authors each illustrate how great historical crisis and change in the twentieth century consistently yielded socially invested art practices.

modes of artistic production and consumption under capitalism."[77] The globalized economy, with all its movements and translations, is a main target for the transformative potential of social practice.

In many ways, however, social practice's desired results resemble those advocated for by translation; emphasis is placed on notions of transformation, negotiation, care, communication, interdisciplinarity, and the ethics of such, as opposed to modern aesthetic notions of form, representation, and expression. Art historian Grant Kester advocates for forms of social practice that honestly consider the ethics of creating art with the public and in public, in addition to the real world potentials of such aesthetic actions. He wrote: "the effect of collaborative practices is to frame [social] exchange (spatially, institutionally, procedurally), setting it sufficiently apart from quotidian social interaction to encourage a degree of self-reflection, and calling attention to the exchange itself as a creative praxis."[78] Kester is writing about processes of making strange as a means of considering the world differently – specifically making the social strange – and is doing so along the same lines as I have been writing about Koh's translatory practice. In that Nancy questions the exclusive identity of "we" that develops in communities, and asks how communities can retain both the plurality and the individualities of members, these processes of making strange are exercises in finding ethical and fulfilling ways of being-with. Both social practice and translation play with how to subjectively and socially negotiate belonging in the world.

Koh is interested in making connections – connections between people, between forms and understandings – through play as a way of being-with others. For example, in

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[77] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 2.
[78] Kester, *The One and the Many*, 28.

RSVP (2007), Koh organized a series of performative dinner parties around Vancouver that emphasized such social practices as "negotiation, friendship, service, networking, competition, and civil affairs."[79] Koh's social pieces are largely intended to encourage a responsive engagement – communication and mediation in a constructed space. In *Spot Radio* (2003, fig. 12), Koh disseminated a compact FM radio station, capable of being broadcasted from any location without outside authorization, encouraging the exchange of thoughts and ideas from residents of the community to their neighbours through open radio waves. It was presented in Banff, Canada (2008), Birmingham, England (2006), Berlin, Germany (2005), and Amsterdam, Netherlands (2005). In Koh's work, members of the public find themselves as key contributors to the works. The artist translates by hacking a tool to convert the voices of her participants into sound waves made audible for strangers listening to the radio of their car, home, office, wherever. But the work is also about opening up a space for reciprocated translation, wherein her participants translate by accepting to engage with and discuss with the people around them; which is to say that they are brought into a process that fosters attentive interpretation of others.

Through acts of play, many of Koh's works prompt such lines of questioning for me: how do strangers communicate? Who is permitted to share and disseminate thoughts? What does it mean to play together when publics have been largely guided towards utilitarian pursuits – to work, extract, purchase, and expend – by the promise of individual gain? For example, *League* (2012-ongoing, fig. 11) is a free-style athletic club developed as a means for local Vancouver residents to gather and engage in collaborative,

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[79] Germaine Koh, "RSVP," Germaine Koh website, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=107 (accessed January 4, 2015).

improvised play once a week in Karrisdale's Elm Park. Koh defined the project as an inclusive exercise in learning, adjusting and developing through recurrent recreational activities.[80] In addition to invoking acts of improvised play, *League* seems to be guided by ontological concerns of trying to find (and present) meaning in the world by being-with, to use Nancy's language. Perhaps, rather than trying to make the world, Koh is trying to *play* with the world and make sense through play. She creates a play of associations with the surrounding environment, a play of forms for understanding the world, a play of meaning. In conversation, Koh has emphasized that she does not intend to leave interpretation of her artworks open, but that she tries to "develop a *play* of references."[81]

In addition to strategies of play, Koh employs strategies of attention – attention to the movement of people, objects, money, data, and so forth. She demonstrates this in the performance project *Watch* (2000). The artist sat for several consecutive days, from nine to five, in a small empty storefront display window, with the simple task of attentively watching the flows of the streets with the passing pedestrians, labourers, vehicles, and urban life. With this project, I think of French author George Perec, who in October 1974, sat in Paris' Saint-Sulpice Square on benches and in cafés for three days to watch "what happens," as he put it, "when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and

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[80] While the project is open to everyone, I have wondered about which kind of publics are actually participating. A project initiated as inclusive does not necessarily mean the project involves a diverse range of publics. Koh, "League," Germaine Koh website, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=131/ (accessed December 2, 2013).

[81] Germaine Koh, email interview with the author, December 7, 2013.

clouds."[82] He documented in words the monotony he saw and later published them in a short book. The difference with Koh is that she did not record her findings, leaving her the sole traceable carrier of the non-events. Koh's project was notably a performance of "what happens when nothing happens," framed by a window and separated by glass. As she watched through the transparent street level vitrines, disconcerted participants were given access to watch her back in full view. Koh called for the attention of others, in addition to marshalling her own. The artist, in the space, looking out, translated the meaning of the space for those involved – for herself and for her involuntary participants. Koh's call for attention, and her simultaneously attentive and invasive performance of it in *Watch*, responds to the distractions that occur in one's city, within one's neighbourhood, and amongst one's neighbours. Koh translated the cities and streets she occupied simply by situating her body noticeably within the space.

By allowing her actions to be visible, Koh accepted accountability for her viewing practices. She attempts to make others aware of their actions by demonstrating that someone is watching; more precisely, an Asian female is watching. She knowingly presented a routinely racialized and sexualized body in a street side sale window. What does it mean for Koh to look out directly at a public that may be in the habit of communicating with and assessing others through bias and prejudice? And what does it mean for Koh to have presented herself to a public that may have experienced instances of intolerance and prejudice themselves? Performed in urban neighbourhoods that were undergoing processes of gentrification in the early aughts – in Montreal on rue Ontario Est (2000, fig. 13), in Toronto on Queen St. (2001, fig. 14), and in Edmonton on Whyte

[82] George Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2010), 3.

ave. (2001, fig. 15) – Koh positioned herself as a witness to the neighbourhoods' social, spatial, and economic changes.[83] Rue Ontario in Montreal is a long, historically Francophone street with a record of immigration, industrial labour, aggressive (and invasive) infrastructure for global capital (the 1976 Olympic Games), and the commercialization the gay village in the 80s.[84] In the 90s, the city began mining rue Ontario's relatively low property-value and its queer (strange) cultural capital so as to revitalize the street and its overall neighbourhood. In response to Koh's performance, the publics on this particular street would have responded in ways I cannot imagine, given its class, racial, and sexual diversity. Some may have expressed judgement, curiosity, indifference, confusion, anxiety, joy, recognition, and/or even reciprocated attention in response to Koh's watching. We cannot know.

Koh pays attention to the fragmented flows of urban cities in *Watch*. But what then? How to interpret the increased social information and what to do with an acquired awareness of flows? Relations of disjuncture and global asymmetries can foster unbalanced exploitative relations, interpretations, and positions, whether intentionally or not. Did Koh's participants suddenly gain awareness of their distracted habits, or did they simply experience unease and quickly retreat elsewhere out of sight? What, moreover,

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[83] Germaine Koh, "Watch," Germaine Koh website, http://germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=53 (accessed January 15, 2015).

[84] Research that detail these urban changes more closely include: Brian Slack, Lourdes Meana, Martha Langford, and Patricia Thornton, "Mapping the Changes: The spatial development of Industrial Montreal, 1861-1929," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 22:2 (June 1994): 97-112 and Martine Géronimi, "Identité urbaine, reconversion industrielle et dynamique territoriale à Montréal: le cas d'Hochelaga-Maisonneuve," *Norois* 199:2 (2006): 45-60.

does the notion of translation bring to our ability to understand this art and the questions that it gives brings up?

In its authorial intention and in its written history, participatory art, like *Watch*, is often framed as an attempt to create a more democratic exchange between artists, communities, viewers, and users.[85] But Claire Bishop has questioned art's ability to foster democracy and artists' commitment to it. I, like Bishop, am wary of such democratic claims. In a critical response to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, Bishop wrote:

> The quality of the relationships in "relational aesthetics" are never examined or called into question. When Bourriaud argues that "encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them," I sense that this question is (for him) unnecessary; all relations that permit "dialogue" are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does "democracy" really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is *what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?*[86]

As I consider Koh's social practice within the framework of translation, Bishop's question continually resurfaces: what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why? I could also ask, what types of translation are being produced, for whom, and why?

As I consider Koh's social practice within the framework of translation – processes of understanding and making sense of the movements around us – I realize that

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[85] Nicholas Bourriaud's writing on relational aesthetics provides perhaps the most influential claim of participatory's art democratic sense of purpose. He writes: "What strikes us in the work of this generation of artists is, first and foremost, the *democratic* concern that informs it." For Bourriaud, artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Angela Bulloch, Carsten Höller, Gabriel Orozco or Pierre Huyghe "are governed by a concern to 'give everyone their chance,' through forms which do not establish any precedence, *a priori*, of their producer over the beholder […], but rather negotiate open relationships with it, which are not resolved beforehand." Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 57-58.

[86] Emphasis mine. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 65.

translation may sometimes be insufficient in its move to alleviate the alienation nurtured by globalization. Translation works to connect people, things, and ideas in strange, unfamiliar ways. But this is not enough to cure the condition of estrangement. For Spivak, translation is a process that emerges to negotiate the social injustices and alienation born from Euro-American political and cultural ideologies. Referencing psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's (1882-1960) writing, Spivak defines reparation as a process between guilt and displaced accountability in front of the violence and politics of mass culturing.[87] Spivak argues that the motivation to translate stems from a psychoanalytic desire to amend and repay that which ultimately cannot be amended and repaid. Translation, in this sense, emerges as a way to address guilt from globalization's affordances and assume a sense of displaced accountability. However, in Spivak's writings, translation "is not under the control of the subject who is translating."[88] It is a process of "shuttling" that occurs, to use Klein's words, of signs from "inside to outside, from violence to conscience" that creates "the production of the ethical subject."[89] Translation here is the movement of understanding the world; it is the way in which we negotiate our position and standing with regards to everything that is in and outside of us.

The difficulty of honest accountability – acknowledging one's complicity – is a symptom of the paradox within practices that are critical of capitalism and globalization. Koh demonstrates accountability for her viewing practices in *Watch* by making her actions, or lack thereof, transparently visible. But, in my view, she does not demonstrate accountability for her interpreting practices. There was no communication between Koh

[87] Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 14-15.
[88] Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 13-14.
[89] Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 13-14.

and her participants, nor did she record what and how she saw. In such instances of translation, the results are decidedly one-sided as opposed to reciprocal. One-sided for the artist, and one-sided for the viewers. Indeed, the difficulty of honest accountability – acknowledging one's complicity – is a symptom of the paradox within practices that are critical of capitalism and globalization.

Alternatively, in *The Haunting* (2010, fig. 16) Koh experimented with practical accountability with the installation of household lamps on the floor of Berlin's Invaliden 1 Galerie. Using an accelerometer, a device that measures physical acceleration and vibration, sensors translated the movements of the nearby street traffic into flickering, contingent incandescent light emitting from the lamps. Presented in the small gallery space with a vitrine facing an active street, pedestrians outside could see the exhibit inside and the gallery visitors inside could see the street activity outside. The title of the piece, *The Haunting*, refers to the eeriness produced in the space. The visitors experienced the space change, but the conditions of the changes were not readily apparent to its public. If we usually expect lighting in a gallery to remain constant, it was, in this instance, variable, unpredictable, and dependent on human and machine movements. By translating the constant swarm-like activity that underlies the configuration of many contemporary (modern) cities and urban landscapes into variants of brightness and dimness, Koh's work suggested that the constantly developing technology cultivated within cities actually haunt us.

Exchange was performed in *The Haunting* with bodies and electricity*,* in which both the people and the energy became dependent on one another. The vibrations of bodies in the streets (and in vehicles) translated the input from the accelerometer's

measurements into energy, which produced light in the gallery. In part, *The Haunting* was about the instability and unreliability of exchange. The work was reliant on an unknowing participating public to translate the movements of the city into a conditional energy source. In this instance, the performed exchanges were always accounted for. However, *The Haunting* did not execute a reciprocal relationship with the urban world that it was dependent on. The gallery required the accelerated city movements measured by the accelerometer, but the city itself did not need the light from inside the gallery.

The location of *The Haunting* is able to mean as much as what was aesthetically presented to the public. Currently, Berlin is economically depressed but culturally alive.[90] Koh referred to Berlin as holding a place in the global imagination as "a point of political exodus" – it is a recognized city that has lost faith in political remedies and maneuvers, looking instead to art and socio-cultural practices as a way to cope with its own violence and subjugation.[91] In 2010, when *The Haunting* was presented, Invaliden1 Galerie was located in the increasingly gentrified *Brunnenstraße* district of Germany.[92] During the Cold war, the Berlin Wall was constructed right through *Brunnenstraße*, situating the gallery in a site that was temporarily within the bounds of East Germany. *Brunnenstraße* signals the border that separated Western capitalism and Soviet communism. Before and since the division of Germany, the country has had to reinvent itself, often as an urgent coping mechanism. The contingency of the *Brunnenstraße* district – galleries opening

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[90] Berlin has become a destination for mobile publics, many of them artists. With living expenses cheap, artists are able to base themselves in Berlin, though must, paradoxically, rely on the international market to actually support themselves and their practice.
[91] Koh, "Building Berlin," in Germaine Koh, Markus Miessen, and Magnus Nilsson, *Building Berlin* (Kitchener, ON: Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery), 6.
[92] Invaliden1 Galerie is now located in the similarly trendy Kreuzberg district, in the centre of Berlin. During the Soviet Empire, Kreuzberg was situated in West Germany, yet was a considered a poverty-stricken neighbourhood.

and closing in rapid succession – points to the overall instability of the local, of Berlin and other such globalized cities, that engage with social change yet are implicated in contradictory globalist progressions of capital (be it financial, social, cultural, or political). These sorts of economies do not encourage or foster reciprocity, care, or equal footing. *The Haunting* tapped into this instability by translating the movement of the city into a conditional light source (energy) – contingent, because it was reliant on an unknowing participating public. Only with the active citizens – on the streets, altering the city politically and socially, in unknowable ways, illuminating a space in ways they are not aware of – can such art gain and maintain relevance. As I see it, *The Haunting* demonstrated the way in which we are all connected, and have effects in the city, in the world. Even if we feel disconnected from the world, we are not. We are physically, relationally, ecologically connected to the world. Often, money and technology abstracts these concrete connections.

In practicing translatory strategies of play, attention, and reciprocity, Koh's works are looking for meaning outside of money and capital. They become a way of attempting to differentiate oneself from global financial processes, even if they do not always succeed at doing so. Koh's works are about imagining other ways of understanding and making connections. To translate is to suggest another meaning.

IV: The Double Bind

In Part II of this thesis, I detailed the ways in which translation, as deployed by Koh, can be useful towards identifying globalization's social breakdowns – translation as the

movement and conversion of wood and currency. And in Part III, I detailed how Koh's strategies of translation work to mobilize the social as a way of responding to globalization's breakdowns. The artist's strategy is transational in that it seeks to replace economic bonds with social ones. As a process in trying to rectify experiences of globalization's disenchantment, translation becomes useful for those living within it try to make connections. Finding and creating connections through translation illustrates how people, things, and systems are related and responsive. If we are emotionally alienated from our world, connections show us how we are nonetheless physically responsible for our world, materially invested in our world, and socially dependent on our world.

There is, it would seem, something ambivalent and contradictory about the work that translation performs and the paths that it opens up to us. In that translation is the mainspring for globalization, can it also be productively enacted as a way to ethically respond to the unjust social causalities of globalization? Can a paradigm's mainspring also act as its ethical counterpart? Translation functions to both replace global (economic) bonds with social bonds and to replace social bonds with global (economic) bonds. In the process, it may be, that it marks out something of a double bind.

The dynamic of the double bind, first described in 1956 by anthropologist and social scientist Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), occurs when an individual (or group) is given mixed messages that conflict with one another.[93] This creates a situation where no matter what decision the individual (or group) chooses to take, they are not able to successfully address the whole of the message. Their answer may succeed partially, but

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[93] Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley & John H. Weakland, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," in Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1970]), 201-227.

never fully, given the nature of the dilemma. Bateson calls this dilemma of communication an "inner conflict."[94] I have found translation, as a travelling concept that exists in multiple modernities and used towards different ends, to be knotted in a double bind. Bateson, along with his psychotherapy research group, introduced the concept of the double bind in a paper entitled, "Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia," which specifically pertained to mental illness. Subsequently, Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1927-1989) described the double bind as a situation in which "the 'victim' is caught in a tangle of paradoxical injunctions, or of attributions having the force of injunctions, in which he cannot do the right thing."[95] Spivak defined the double bind as "learning to live with contradictory instructions."[96]

The dilemma at hand is translation. Translation produces a conflicting message. Translation is offered as an act of critical interpretation and conversion, to confront global estrangement with the strange, to be employed with care, responsibility, and self-reflexivity in the company of others, as a way to find meaning where it has been lost. Users of translation in this sense yearn for a sense of security – socially, intimately, politically, and otherwise. This is the hope of translation, and these are the possibilities that it holds within its name. But in practice, in the world, regardless of our hopes, translation performs economically and linguistically; it is utilitarian, always forward for the sake of capitalist prosperity. Translation is useful to the construction and self-determination of capital across great distances, languages, and nation-states. Linguistic and financial translations (to translate languages and currency) attempt to prevent

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[94] Bateson, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," 206.
[95] R.D. Laing, *Self and Others* (London: Tavistock, 1969), 144.
[96] Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education*, 3.

breakdowns in communication and production; they ensure constant accelerated movement and efficiency. Translation affords globalization access to the world. In responding with and enacting translation, participants will not be able to address globalization fully – only provisionally. As a response to globalization's social breakdowns, translation is contradictorily, simultaneously, the right answer and the wrong answer. It performs the double bind. What to do with a dilemma of a concept? How can we work with it? Gayatri Spivak suggests that to work with a contradictory theory like translation "exercises the imagination to play the double bind." To be sure, playing the double bind can help further clarify the form of the dilemma, but cannot definitively answer it. Koh plays the double bind through her art practice. To play the double bind is to be aware of contradictions. It is to pay attention to what the contradictions are and to how they function.

In fact, there is one not one double bind at play, but two. Globalization too is caught in a double bind. Together, Translation and globalization intertwined, they form a large entangled knot. Globalization produces contradictory messages. It offers wealth, possessions, and success to those who engage with its advantageous competitive, inventive, and profitable activities. Globalization can be very generous to those who participate. But most do not *choose* to participate in its formation. Most have inherited dependencies on the unsustainable system. By participating, participants are implicated. Indeed, many have to make the system work because of an intrinsic reliance on it. If it fails, participants are those who pay. To reiterate Celia Haig-Brown's findings: "globalization too often employs moves more culturally and economically imperialist

than reciprocal and dialectical."[97] Globalized telecommunication technology has facilitated processes of connecting with others through wires and signals. One is never really alone with a technology that transmits so quickly and efficiently – always social, always with. But this produces a dilemma. This connectedness is partial and fragmented. Images and sounds made accessible by technology do not account for full sensorial experiences, offered by a body (bodies) in front of another body (other bodies). Constant partial connectedness makes it harder to simply be alone. We estrange from ourselves when armed with the security and comfort of devoted wired (or now wireless) communication. We are distracted, and unknowingly turn against the building of self-knowledge, against practices of self-reflexivity, attention, and thoughtfulness. And so, the dilemma is that globalization has two truths: it produces networks that bring many people, things, and places closer together in unprecedented ways, and at the same time, it contributes to an estrangement from others and a detachment from oneself.

With regard to globalization's and translation's contradictions, capital is what spurs them both. According to Marx, capital itself is the "fraternization of incompatibles…it forces contraries to embrace." Marx continues by enumerating the conflicting components of life:

> If you suppose man to be man and his relation to be a human one, then you can only exchange love for love, trust for trust, etc… But money is the enemy of man and social bonds. It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, slave into master, master into slave, stupidity into wisdom, wisdom into stupidity. It is the universal confusion and exchange of all things, an inverted world.[98]

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[97] Haig-Brown, "Taking Indigenous Thought Seriously," 18.
[98] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

In that both globalization and translation are contradictory and compatible, to play the double bind is to work with both processes together, to see what they invoke upon each other. To play the double bind is to be aware of the contradictions – to pay attention to what it is and how it functions. Koh's work is full of contradictions. Sometimes contradictions can be failures: situations when things do not fit within a given form, or operate as expected, or say what is desired in the way it is desired, or work for viewers the way they want it to work. As inclusive social means of enacting awareness, play, and skepticism of global affordances, Koh's works can sometimes be intellectually inaccessible. Koh's language is conceptual, layered and strange. Viewers who are not invested in paying attention to artworks that demand time and care can become excluded from the conversation, even though, the conversation is often meant to include and engage with them.

Contradictions emerge, in part, because globalization and the market economy are not experienced unilaterally in every region of the world. Translation scholar Michael Cronin reminds his readers that "not every part of the planet will experience globalization at the same time or in the same way."[99] Scholar Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar suggests that globalization could also be defined as modernity gone global.[100] But modernity gone global does not indicate that modernity means the same and performs the same moves globally. Modernities that develop in difference countries, civilization, and contexts do not multiply the same model of modernity. Gaonkar understands these products as "alternative modernities" and, likewise, Isareli scholar Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt refers to

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[99] Cronin, *Translation and Globalization*, 34.
[100] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 14.

them as "multiple modernities."[101] Modernities "always unfolds within a specific culture of civilizational context," writes Gaonkar, suggesting that "different starting points for the transition to modernity lead to different outcomes."[102] Bourriaud described our contemporary landscape as "born of global and decentralized negotiations, of multiple discussions among participants from different cultures, [and] of the confrontation of heterogeneous discourses."[103] Which is to say that globalization is busy and noisy, compounded of local histories and motivations, conversations and actions that cannot be understood unilaterally. Monolingual solutions will not solve global problems. What we need is an attentive multilingual approach.

Building on this, Cronin makes a case for globalization *as* translation, in that globalization affects local environments uniquely according to their specific history, conditions, and affordances:

> [W]ithin a context of multiple modernities it is more proper to talk not so much about translation and globalization as about *globalization as translation*. This is to suggest that there is no single model of globalization which is adopted willy-nilly by different nation-states but that each country or community translates elements of the global and informational economy into local circumstances. The result is the nationally and regionally differentiated experiences of globalization across the planet. Translation is not simply a by-product of globalization but is a constituent, integral part of how the phenomenon both operates and makes sense of itself. […G]lobalization has not meant the demise of translation as an activity, but, on the contrary, late modernity has witnessed an explosion of demand for translation. However, it is not simply economic self-interest which is placing translation at the centre of the globalizing process, but other issues which relate more properly to a politics of recognition."[104]

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[101] Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities*, 14l; Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129:1 (Winter 2000): 1-29.
[102] Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities*, 141.
[103] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 43.
[104] Cronin, *Translation and Globalization*, 34.

Cronin argues that there is a rise in Euro-Americans imaginatively identifying with cultural, social, ecological, and political gestures outside of their experienced worlds. He calls this a politics of recognition, wherein individuals recognize themselves in those unlike themselves – inevitably, those who are seen, but not heard, through media and digital dissemination. Cronin sees translation as carrying the potential to perform a care-driven and reciprocal politics of recognition. He positions contemporary thinking of translation as embracing "self-reflexive sensitivity to the dangers of misunderstanding, distortion and censorship" rather than as wielding instrumentalist communication.[105]

Playing the double bind, this performance of a dilemma, is both valuable and fruitful because, as hermeneutics scholar Nicholas Nicholas Davey argues, art is able to actualize problems and answers, even if only within the protected boundaries of art and aesthetics. Davey's claim that "the enigmatic quality of art works is precisely what is of value about art" relates closely to how I understand translation: it is translation's elliptical nature that makes it valuable and useful.[106] In trying to delineate the space between art and its actuality, Davey argues that experiments, concepts, ideas, models, and so forth can be developed through art as responses to problems that cannot necessarily be practically enacted in a lived economically-driven, politically-minded, institutionally-structured society. Which is to say that while philosophy and theory can address an issue and conceptualize an answer, art is able to *actualize* the problem/answer, even if only within its own protected framework. As Davey puts it, this transformation moves implicit potentiality towards actual results (whether or not such results are favourable or effective).

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[105] Cronin, *Translation and Globalization*, 35-36.
[106] Nicholas Davey, "Hermeneutics and Art Theory," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 442.

This notion works as a response to critiques of art's insularity and inability to produce real change, no matter its proclaimed stakes and claims.[107] Artistic practices like Koh's serve as examples in how translation functions in the world, in a lived reality outside of the text. Art is able to illustrate such hard pressed, beleaguered possibilities because it is exceptionally secured through its disciplinary edges. Art is able to illustrate worlds that cannot yet exist in the real. There are ways in which art, under many forms, social and otherwise, is able to open up spaces for meaning that are not so accessible in a practical, practiced reality.

Playing with the physical contradictions of a work of art in space are Koh's installations of *There/Here* (2011, fig. 17). In the work, doors supported by wood frames were spatially distanced from one another yet technologically connected to one another. Operating one door triggered duplicate movements in the neighbouring door. Each door acted as both the controller and the controlled. Users of the work were prompted to negotiate with other participants through the technology and through the strangeness of the space itself. Exhibited as part of two separate exhibitions, Koh and collaborator Gordon Hicks, artist and technical engineer, produced two mildly different versions – one with the doors in close proximity and one with the doors separated by distance and barriers.

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[107] Art Historian Grant Kester and artist Pablo Helguera are particularly critical of art that art that refers to social change without actually embodying social change. They call this symbolic art. Helguera argues that, all too often, artists create socially engaged projects with good intentions, yet fail to devote the required time, commitment, consultation, and negotiation needed to ensure successful engagement with social publics in meaningful ways. See: Grant Kester, *The One and the Many* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) and Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2011).

At the Surrey Art Gallery in 2011, *There/Here* was installed in a small gallery room where participants were able to see and hear the direct effects of their actions. If a user moved to close a door while another user moved to open the opposing door, each user would struggle to become the active agent of the apparatus. One would like to stay outside, while perhaps the other would like to go inside. And yet, both were already inside the gallery. When one entered though a door, moving from outside to inside of the constructed space, s/he became, at the same time, outside of other door. Koh plays with conceptual imaginings of inside and outside within the formally enclosed room. To try to configure oneself became an act in tightening a knot, tangled in being unable to define spatially where and how one was grounded, alongside the loss of agency in opening and closing doors according to ones desires. Participants found themselves in a space where they may contend more overtly with the incompatible desires of others. A recording of the installation demonstrates this scenario: the artist acts as a participant, opening one door, walking through, then closing it (here); another participant interacting with the other door (there) attempts to open his door, while Koh struggles to close hers.[108] A door presents a doubling; it can either open a space, or close a space. In fact, with *There/Here* in the Surrey Art Gallery, there is no outside or inside. The two doors have simply been placed in an available space, constructing borders and notions of perimeters, allowing participants to enact translations. Translation is, in this sense, to cross over, to bring ones body over, as well as to interpret and/or convert instances of movement and positioning.

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[108] Germaine Koh, "There/Here," Germaine Koh website, 0.50 seconds, 2011, http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=6&pg=projects&projectID=122 (accessed January 4, 2015).

In this space, the mirrored actions of the motion-connected doors demonstrated direct, face-to-face relational experiences. "Constructed from hacked door operator mechanisms, custom microcontrollers and a real-time Internet data stream, the system provides the sensation *here* of a physical event happening *there*": so writes the Surrey Art Gallery, adding that "positioning, movement, speed, rhythm, and pressure emerge as tools for communication."[109] If positioning, movement, speed, rhythm, and pressure emerge as tools for communication, what do they communicate? As I see it, these actions are adept in communicating claims of invitation, belonging, and/or rejection. The technology itself does not allow for a very nuanced conversation (the dialogue comprised of opening and closing doors and the doubling movements in the affiliated door), but for broad responses that relay inclusivity or exclusivity. They are means of communicating where one stands, both literally and figuratively. They are also means of *translating* where one stands, of interpreting one's needs and/or demands. Rada Iveković writes on the mediation involved with translation: "between two terms, two languages or two cultures, there is always the possibility of a relatively successful mediation or translation – one that is insufficient but will offer hope by half-opening the door to a meaning."[110]

Alternately, when *There/Here* was installed at the University of Toronto Mississauga in 2011, each door was positioned in separate ends of the campus, where the work demonstrated more indirect, detached instances of relational experiences. Christof Migone, artist and director/curator of Blackwood Gallery in Toronto, began the *Door to*

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[109] Surrey Art Gallery, "There/Here," Germaine Koh website, http://germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=122 (accessed December 13, 2014).
[110] Iveković, "Translating transborder."

Door project in 2011, curating a series of exhibitions in which works of art confront the public outside of the gallery space. The project has been described as shifting

> the question to one of exchange and investigates the specificity of where public space meets private domicile. The audience is no longer the passer-by but the resident, the occupant, the one who answers the door.[111]

As a part of the *Door to Door* series, in cooperation with the University of Toronto Mississauga, curator Migone installed Koh's *There/Here*, within the public atriums of an educational institution (fig. 18). One was positioned in the Student Center Atrium on the east side of the University of Toronto Mississauga campus, the other positioned in the CCT Building Atrium on the west side of the campus (fig. 19). How does communication change when the presentation alters from two doors facing each other in a contained room at the Surrey Art Gallery to two doors isolated in separate regions of the University of Toronto Mississauga? What is transferred across in both instances? With the doors out of sight, no longer spatially connected, language has been discarded as a form of communication between users. Users were no longer able to talk, negotiate, laugh, yell at the person maneuvering the other door. Koh has described her work as an "escape from language," with much of her practice communicating through action rather than through speech.[112] Translation moves meaning from one form to another, to use Bourriaud's words, putting "the associated tremors on display."[113] In the case of *There/Here*, what tremors were put on display?

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[111] Christof Migone, "Door to Door with Christof Migone," *Activities and Events 2012, Dexterity,* Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery brochure, http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/en/evenements_archives.php (accessed January 2, 2015).
[112] Koh quoted in Kabatoff, "Signals," *Rhizome.*
[113] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 54.

In 1970, R.D. Laing wrote of the psychological actions performed by individuals within contradictory and alienating capitalist world. He recorded emotional social responses that contradict logical responses, collective responses, scientific responses, and institutional responses. These writings were published in *Knots,* Laing's book of poetry about the strange and familiar human patterns of behaviour that inevitably produce emotional "knots, tangles, fankles, *impasses*, disjunctions, whirligos, binds."[114] Emotional responses contradict logical responses, which contradict collective responses, scientific responses, and institutional responses. Globalization tightens such behavioural knots that have long been fastened - tied the industrial revolution, and before then since the enlightenment. In the context of world trade, users of objects, resources, and materials experience no direct relationship to the people who produce, harvest, and sell such items, and moreover maintain little knowledge as to where such items come from and how they are made. This gap between objects and people and other people facilitates estrangement from the lived in world.

In *Knots*, Laing wrote of notions of inside and outside, noting that they have become entangled; they cannot be isolated from one another yet they have been linguistically identified as distinct. What is inside someone when they feel disconnected from the outside? What is the outside world when it does not correspond to one's interiority? Laing writes:

> One is inside
> then outside what one has been inside
> One feels empty
> because there is nothing inside oneself
> One tries to get inside oneself

[114] R.D. Laing, *Knots*, Vintage Books Editions (New York: Random House, Inc. 1972 [1970]), v.

that inside of the outside
that one was once inside
once one tries to get oneself inside what
one is outside:
to eat and to be eaten
to have the outside inside and to be
inside and outside [115]

Feelings contradict with experiences. These are the tremors that I see within Koh's *There/Here*. They are tremors formed from knots made of conflicting relationships with experienced and performed globalization: connective relationships and direct relationships; consumer and producer relationships; economic and emotional relationships. The doors do not work on their own; human movement sets the doors in motion, yet does so through hidden technology and by way of the artist's motivations. In relating to the door, a user interacts indirectly with another user through the mechanized object itself. *There/Here* illustrates detached relational experiences that capitalism and globalization facilitate with connective technology specifically.

The two instances of *There/Here* demonstrate how context and proximity alter translation and its conjured meanings. Going back to the original Latin roots of translation – to carry, transfer, transplant, convert, and displace – translation is a way to reframe, to displace the conventional into the political. In the post-colonial sense, with theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, translation is about people who have left their place of origin and enter into a new environment bearing their culture with them. Translation scholar Kyle Conway calls this "translation as transposition."[116] Here: Someone opens Door A and walks though, exiting. There: on the other side of the world,

[115] Laing, *Knots*, 83.
[116] Kyle Conway, "A Conceptual and Empirical Approach to Cultural Translation," *Translation Studies* 5:3 (2012): 265.

Door B has opened, and someone walks in, entering. With each iteration of a passage, a similar passage is reiterated elsewhere. The two users are not aware of a physical other, and yet, something is shared, is it not? Translation relies on the series of connections between boundedness and mobility.

Accordingly, the two instances of *There/Here* perform knots of contrary positioning and responding, knots such as those written about by Laing. Koh's *There/Here* offers a relational experience, but in both direct and indirect circumstances they become distorted experiences. Much like linguistic translation, one does not/can not expect a complete, perfected interpretation. It is, rather, about the mindful process of trying. Defining hermeneutics as a task "to understand the 'meaning' within human expressions," Davey situates hermeneutics neither as a method nor as a theory, but as a way of "self-understanding."[117] He argues that hermeneutical approaches to art do not offer *an* interpretation; rather they offer "interpretative perspectives" onto art towards the goal of opening up its dimensions.[118] Instead of trying to determine the meaning of something, hermeneutics acknowledges that we – the viewers, participants, interlocutors, and interpreters of a work – determine meaning in things that are dependent on our own attention, interaction, history, knowledge, understanding, and emotional/physical responses. Translation studies has long implemented hermeneutical concepts mainly through a shared attentiveness to interpretation. Translation is a form of understanding the world, in trying to alter forms so as to reimagine and reinterpret. Results are not always visible or knowable in the ways that we expect or want them to be. Indeed, perhaps translation is most effective as an ontological strategy – as the (always

[117] Davey, "Hermeneutics and Art Theory," 437-38, 441.
[118] Davey, "Hermeneutics and Art Theory," 441.

unfulfilled) practice of acknowledging one's position as one amongst the many, amidst imaginings that project wants and desires against other conflicting/supporting/neutral wants and desires. Under the circumstances and asymmetries of globalization comes a desire to pay attention to its flows – a social desire to locate, study, and inform on instances of disjuncture alongside a less feasible desire to repair or correct such instances. Translation is a product of such desires.

In 1984, civil rights activist Audre Lorde (1934-1992) made the acute assertion that "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."[119] Moving this phrase from its intended context of civil rights in America to the current global economic paradigm, the statement still holds true. Performing moves instituted by globalization and capitalism, no matter how critically they are performed, cannot shake the market's economic and political capital. But, as I see it, translation is not a master's tool. It is a social tool. Translation is a tool that can be used by whoever picks it up and by whoever wields it with reflexivity and care. Linguistic translation is a tool that has been appropriated by globalizing and modernizing projects because it is practical, effective, and easily directed towards intended results. Indeed, translation is an ambivalent tool and its function is decided upon by the ends to which it is put.

Ultimately, to play the double bind as Koh does with *There/Here* is to acknowledge and to practice one's position as one among many, amidst the wants and desires of oneself and others. Wants and desires that can be conflicting, supportive, neutral, or otherwise and can produce feelings of invitation, belonging, rejection, and the like. Walter Benjamin wrote on translation that it cannot possibly *reveal* or *establish* the

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[119] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007 [1984]), 110-114.

deep relationship between languages, "but [that] it can *represent* [the relationship] by realizing it in embryonic or intensive form."[120] Translation can represent this clenched double bind by existing and performing in all of its intensive multitudes and contradictions. This is its embryonic form – never complete, a dilemma.

Conclusion

Germaine Koh is a globalized artist, using contemporary strategies to translate a globalized culture. Her work demonstrates a concern with how the current economic reality affects the social reality, with situating history within the present, with employing participatory practices, with interdisciplinarity, and with defamiliarization. Globalized culture presents itself in both the familiar and the strange. The globalized culture is full of problematics and contradictions, creating a vast disjunction. But by changing the forms of components from the globalized culture, as I have argued Koh does, some of these trappings can become discernable, and thereby can be responded to. They can be responded to quietly, and then it is hoped, powerfully.

Translation emerges as a coping mechanism to address the strange confluence of global hegemonic knowledge claims alongside local contextual knowledge claims. How to negotiate between the realities and effects of globalization, with its mistranslations, misrepresentations, misalignments, and mismanagements of people and communities as monetary subjects rather than social beings? Translation responds to globalization's

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[120] Walter Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926,* eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 72.

contradictions, its efficacies and inefficacies. Can translation, using aesthetic social means like Koh, counter such global realities? Ultimately, translation cannot counter the entrenched but decentralized underpinnings that have so dramatically increased the "scale, penetration, and velocity of global capital," to quote Appadurai.[121] Translation may be one possible strategy, but it does not offer a means of creating a "new architecture." It does however offer an imaginative means of responding, corresponding, communicating with the current architecture.

Ethically, translation must be approached and performed within individuals as a mindful, carefully guided consideration of the contexts, individuals, and publics that they are tangentially aligned and/or misaligned with. Acts of interpretation and conversion that do not practice self-reflexivity and reciprocity in the face of the global are acts of careless interpretation. Responsible translation is a difficult, demanding, and to repeat Haraway's words, a painful process, because breakdowns occur and will continue to occur. Translation cannot solve problems of globalization, but, at the very least, it can open means of interpreting and understanding what and where the problems are.

[121] Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization," 16.

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Figures

Figure 1 Germaine Koh, *Thanksgiving*, 1999.
Set of two coupons published in The Globe and Mail, 6 November 1999.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=58.

Figure 2 Germaine Koh, *Change*, 1999.
Engraved metal tokens for distribution.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=60.

Figure 3 Germaine Koh, *Cambio*, 2002.
Self-inking rubber stamps, for re-valuing currencies.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=46.

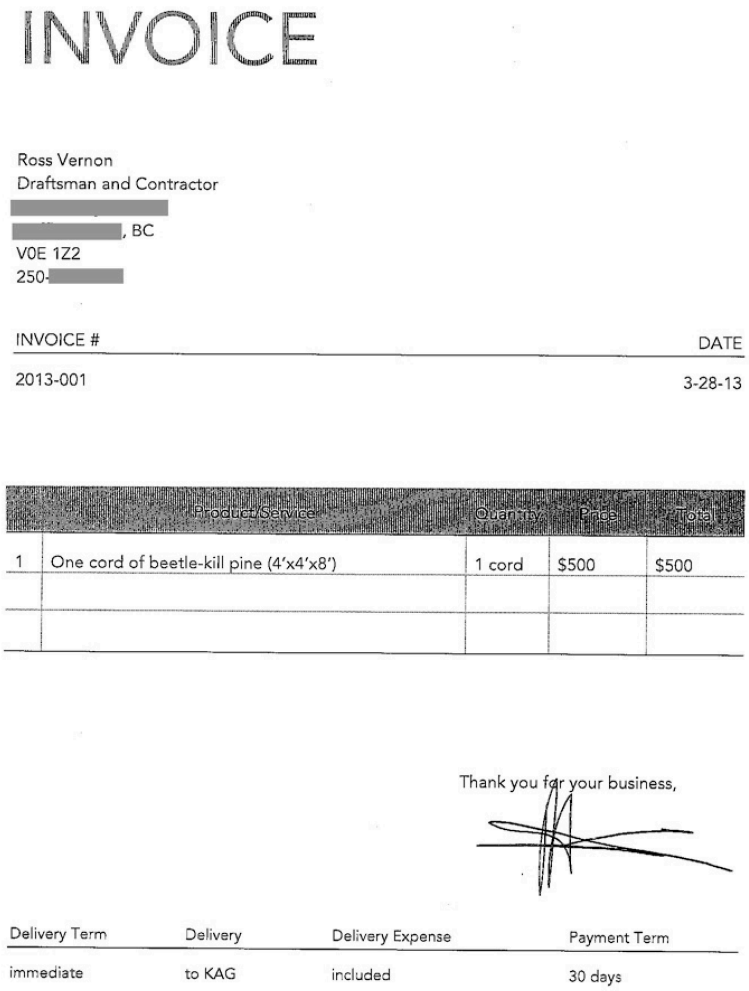
Figure 4 Germaine Koh, *Prayers*, 1999.
Intervention with computer interface and fog machine transmitting office activity as Morse-encoded smoke signals.
View of presentation at Plug In ICA, Winnipeg, 2001-2002.
Photo: Germaine Koh.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=1&pg=projects&projectID=65.

Figure 5 Germaine Koh, *Prayers*, 1999.
Installation view of *Weather Systems*, Kamloops Art Gallery, 2013.
Photo: Scott Massey, SITE Photography.
Source: Sarah Cook, Marcus Miessen, and Yulia Startsev, *Germaine Koh: Weather Systems*, ed. Paloma Lum (Kamloops, BC: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2013), 33.

Figure 6 Germaine Koh, *Pledge*, 2002
Copper tokens, for person-to-person distribution, edition of 5000.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=43.

Figure 7 Germaine Koh, *Accord of Wood*, 2013-ongoing.
One cord of pine wood, 4’ x 4’ x 8’.
Installation view of *Germaine Koh: Weather Systems,* Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops BC, Summer 2013.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=136.

Figure 8 Germaine Koh, *Accord of Wood*, close up, 2013-ongoing.
Detail, markings of pine beetles.
From *Germaine Koh: Weather Systems,* Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops BC, Summer 2013.
Source: Chantale Potié, May 22, 2013.



INVOICE

Ross Vernon
Draftsman and Contractor
[redacted], BC
V0E 1Z2
250-[redacted]

INVOICE #	DATE
2013-001	3-28-13

	Product/Service	Quantity	Price	Total
1	One cord of beetle-kill pine (4'x4'x8')	1 cord	$500	$500

Thank you for your business,

Delivery Term	Delivery	Delivery Expense	Payment Term
immediate	to KAG	included	30 days

Figure 9 Invoice from the Kamloops Art Gallery to Ross Vernon for one cord of beetle-kill pine.
From administrative documentation provided alongside *Accord of Wood.*
From *Germaine Koh: Weather Systems,* Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops BC, Summer 2013.
Source: Germaine Koh.

Figure 10 Germaine Koh, *Spot Radio*, 2003.
Portable low-power FM radio station for community use.
View of presentation at Birmingham Artsfest, September 2005.
Photo: Germaine Koh.
Source:
http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=35.

Figure 11 Germaine Koh, *League*, 2012-ongoing.
Community-based participatory project.
Flyer for League, depicting "Cyclada," 2013.
Source: http://germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?pg=projects&projectID=131.

Figure 12 Germaine Koh, *Watch*, 2000.
Work-day performance in storefront display window.
View of presentation at le Mois de la Performance, Montreal, 1-6 Dec 2000.
Photo: Aneessa Hashmi.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3&pg=projects&projectID=53.

Figure 13 Germaine Koh, *Watch*, 2000.
Work-day performance in storefront display window.
View of presentation at Solo Exhibition, Toronto, 5-7 Feb 2001.
Photo: Phil Klygo.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3 &pg=proje cts&projectID=53.

Figure 14 Germaine Koh, *Watch*, 2000.
Work-day performance in storefront display window.
View of presentation on Whyte Avenue, Edmonton, for Visualeyez performance festival, 6-9 Aug 2001.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3 &pg=proje cts&projectID=53.

Figure 15 Germaine Koh, *The Haunting*, 2010.
Used lamps, accelerometers, custom circuitry.
Installation at Invaliden1 Galerie, Berlin, 2010.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3&pg=projects&projectID=121.

Figure 16 Germaine Koh, *There/Here* (collaboration with Gordon Hicks), 2011. Found doors, modified door mechanisms, custom electronics, Internet connections. Installation at the Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey BC, 2011.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3&pg=projects&projectID=122.

Figure 17 Germaine Koh, *There/Here* (collaboration with Gordon Hicks), 2011. Found doors, modified door mechanisms, custom electronics, Internet connections. Installation at the University of Toronto Mississauga, CCT Building Atrium, Mississauga ON, 2011.
Photo: Gordon Hicks.
Source: http://www.germainekoh.com/ma/projects_detail.cfm?PageNum_rsDetail=3&pg=projects&projectID=122.

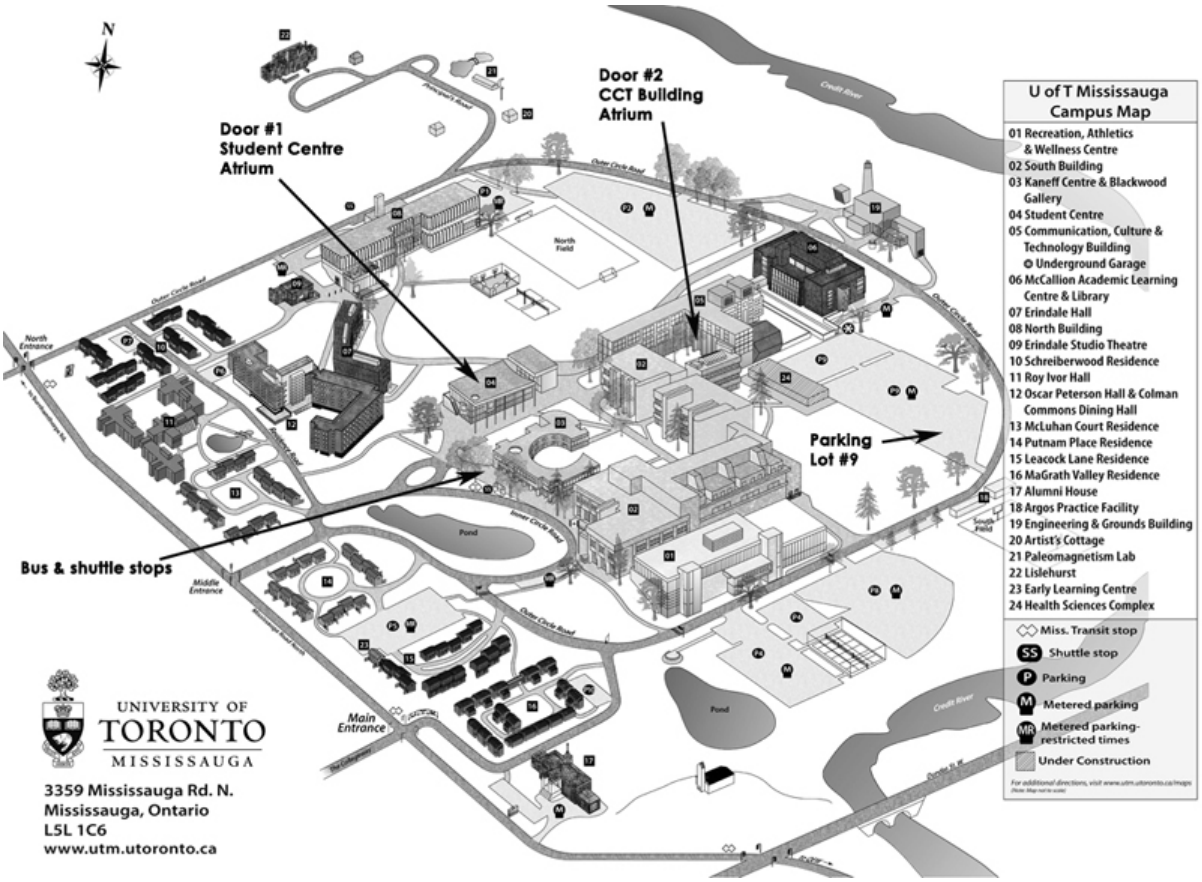


Figure 18 Germaine Koh, *There/Here,* (collaboration with Gordon Hicks), 2011. Map of University of Toronto Mississauga.
Arrows pointing to locations of Door #1 (Student Centre Atrium) and Door #2 (CCT Building Atrium).
Source: University of Toronto Mississauga.