

Nomadic Subjectivities: Reflections on Exophonic Strategies in Yoko Tawada's *Schwager in Bordeaux*

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Abstract:

The author Yoko Tawada is well known for her exophonic and experimental work. Writing in German and in Japanese, she joyfully plays with questions of identity, nation-state, culture, language, among other. As exophony in theory and practice is at the center of each of her novels, it thus appears interesting to look closer to the strategies Tawada develops in order to disturb and subvert categorizations. Taking *Schwager in Bordeaux* as a case study, this paper intends to analyze how Tawada's exophony de/construct subjectivity. It will first put light on the very concept of exophony, before leaving the space for a close reading analysis of the novel on two specific aspects: dematerialization and rematerialization, which both will aim to draw an exophonic portrait of nomadic writing through its focus on subjectivity.

Keywords: Exophony, Subjectivity, Language, Yoko Tawada, *Schwager in Bordeaux*.

Introduction: Marking the Subject/s

In response to being asked why she writes not only in German, but also in Japanese, Yoko Tawada [多和田葉子/Tawada Yōko] explains: "I am a bilingual being. I don't know why exactly, but, for me, it's inconceivable to stick to only one language." (Gutjahr 2012, 29; my translation)¹ In her portraying a subjectivity navigating offshore, that is, away from monolingualism, the author has created an impressive body of work: since 1987, she has published more than 55 books – approximately half of which are in German, and performed 1170 readings around the world (Tawada 2020, online). She is recipient of numerous prestigious prizes for her literary oeuvre, such as the 1993 Akutagawa-shō (Japan), the 1996 Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preis (Germany), the 2005 Goethe-Medaille (Germany), the 2013 Yomiuri bungaku-shō (Japan), or the 2016 Kleist-Preis (Germany) (*ibid.*). Her work has also been extensively researched: from dissertations to articles over anthologies, from German to Japanese including French or Dutch. For the past two decades, critics have not ceased working on Tawada's writing. In 2010, for instance, two anthologies were published: Christine Ivanovic's *Yoko Tawada: Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk* [Yoko Tawada: Poetics of Transformation. Contributions to her oeuvre] and Bernard Banoun's and Linda Koiran-Leiduck's *L'oreiller occidental-oriental de Yoko Tawada* [The

Occidental-Oriental Pillow of Yoko Tawada]. Interestingly, “Tawada’s scholarship is a bit tipsy [...] from so much – admittedly necessary – talk of her writing project as a transformative one.” (Adelson 2011, 166) For critics, transformation appears to be the author’s strategic approach to topics such as culture, identity, colonialism, language, translation – the process through which she aims to question the globalized world in which we live.

Nevertheless, Tawada cannot be placed among writers of *Migrationsliteratur* [migration literature], for not only does this term reduce her writing practice as such, but it also tends to consider her work as being from a Japanese author who sees Germany with a Japanese eye (Horst 2009, online). Nor can she be considered solely as a writer of *Nihon bungaku* [Japanese literature] because she also writes in German, she thus stands in between (Tawada 2003, 7-10). This in-between creative space enables her to claim an “exophonic literature” (*ibid.*, 7; my translation), in which translation is central. The “rare language combination with relatively few joint readers,” the constant “switch[ing] between her two languages,” and the inscription of “bilingual perspective into each of her oeuvres in subtle, deconstructive ways” construct “[t]he particular form of Tawada’s literary bilingualism” (Yildiz 2012, 111).

The very act of writing in a foreign language, as an exophonic act, is illustrated by her novel *Schwager in Bordeaux* [Brother-in-law in Bordeaux] (2008), which was first written in German and then translated into Japanese (Saito 2010, 526). Tawada tells the story of Yuna, a young Japanese woman who studies and works in Hamburg, and who wants to learn French. Through her relationship to Renée, an older German woman, with whom she has an erotic connection, she obtains the opportunity to go to Bordeaux and stay in the house of Renée’s brother-in-law, Maurice. The novel is less the story of this stay than an eclectic amalgam of recollections of past events and experiences in which a great number of secondary characters navigate. Exophonically playing with languages, Tawada also “[s]trategically insert[s] non-translation [...] in [her] writing[]”: *Schwager in Bordeaux* namely contains “two-hundred-and-seventy-five *kanji* throughout [the] German text” (Brandt 2014, 183). Yet, the paragraphs’ content holds on to the meaning/s of the ideograms introducing them. This exophonic translation cannot but disturb the idea of construction. In fact, inasmuch as the author reveals binarism by depicting two linguistic and thus two identity shores on which she does not want to disembark, incorporating a sort of nomadism, she points to a problematic conception of the world, as she states: “These days, everything has to be fast and easily understandable.” (Horst 2009, online; my translation) Thus, a question arises: How does Tawada’s exophony de/construct subjectivity? Taking *Schwager in Bordeaux* as a case study, the following sections will first shed light on the concept of exophony. This paper will then turn to a close reading of the novel which will focus on two specific aspects: dematerialization and rematerialization. Both will aim to respond to the question *mark* regarding subjectivity in Tawada’s text. To better understand the paradoxical feeling that one might feel while reading *Schwager in Bordeaux*, for “it’s not easy to give a ‘whatness’ to her writing,” although it entails a “[m]agnificent [s]trangeness” (Galchen 2012, online), let us *exophonize* about this “crazy book” (Martin 2009, online).

On Exophony: Subtle *Schweinerei*

In her essay collection entitled *Ekusophonī: bōgo no soto e deru tabi* [Exophony: Traveling Outward from One's Mother Tongue], Tawada explains the concept of exophony, of which she first heard at a literature symposium in Dakar in 2002 (2003, 3). Eschewing any easy categorization of it as creole or migration literature, she states: "exophony refers to the general state of being outside one's mother tongue" (*ibid.*; my translation). Further, she considers exophony as symphony, and thereby implies the variety of *musicality* in other languages, hearing new/foreign words being the first step taken outside one's mother tongue (*ibid.*, 7). She also insists on the particularity of exophonic writing as making what one does not see visible, which can prompt a feeling of strangeness to the native speaker (*ibid.*, 10). Nevertheless, this strangeness is not to be understood as a misuse of words, grammar, etc., but as the way in which exophony appears. This resistance to the monolingual paradigm (Schyns 2019, 127) enables one to consider exophony "as a means with which to resist fixity and assimilation" (Young 2016, 193). Victoria Young is thus correct to point out that exophony is "the condition of displacement as something innate within *all* language and writing" (*ibid.*; emphasis in the original). This displacement echoes Tawada's very position, which she explains as that of being, in her case, between two languages (2003, 36).

Three aspects can be discerned in Tawada's theory on exophony as the process of: defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation (i.e., the emphasis on the symphonic quality of language, the displacement and movement within language, the strangeness in the use of a foreign language). They are very much interconnected, as they all refer to the *sensuality* of language, that is, the visual/graphic and the acoustic elements of language with which Tawada delightfully plays.

First, Tawada insists that the foreign language should be used as a medium for everyday interactions as well as for creative writing (Suga 2007, 26). This implies a detachment from one's mother tongue: an author should stand outside of it (Koiran 2009, 259). As Yasemin Yildiz rightly states: "This detachment is enabled by a multilingual environment, not because any specific language is preferred over another one, but because multilingualism can defamiliarize the very language structures in which we exist." (2007, 80) Considered as a process of defamiliarization from one's own language, exophony also refuses the assimilation of the foreign language as a second mother tongue: the former cannot become the latter. Creative writing appears to Tawada as "a foreign language" in itself (Koiran 2009, 277; my translation). Referring to the author's work of defamiliarization as an avoidance of mere repetition of words that have already been heard (Suga 2007, 27), the confrontation with the foreign tongue allows the writer to 'work on' words and ensures a reflection on language and its use. The reformulation of words and the defamiliarization process go hand in hand: to distance words from their meaning enables the very act of creative writing.

Second, the process of defamiliarization invites a "creative destruction" (Mae 2010, 380). Exophonic writing appears as a form of language deconstruction, which entails its reconstruction on the author's own terms (Tachibana 2007, 153). Here one might recall postmodernism, the focus of which is "to *de-naturalize* some of the dominant features of our way of life" (Hutcheon 1989, 2; my emphasis).

In this way, it becomes possible to see the very metamorphosis of language (Mae 2010, 379) through the exophonic appropriation of a foreign language. Interestingly, this materialization of language, insisting on its visual/graphic and acoustic aspects, enables at the same time the dematerialization of meaning: thwarting the assertion of a possible pre-lingual meaning to words, Tawada joyfully presents a sort of depth to words in their interconnections with other words of their own linguistic category as well as with other languages. Hence, language moves in itself: this “autonomous metamorphosis of a text” (Sakai 2010, 442) relies less on the “transmission of meaning” (*ibid.*, 441). Rather, Tawada’s deconstruction highlights her predilection for wordplay, irony, and humor, among other techniques, which ensure a constant going in and out of a linguistic area that cannot but recall the very act of translation.

Third, exophony implies translation, so as “to make visible what is invisible and repressed in the language we use in our daily life” (Arens 2007, 64). In fact, Tawada’s will to find words to depict the undepictable calls for this necessary translation. As the author herself states: “When I’m writing, it is always a translation in its broad sense” (*ibid.*; my translation). Thus, translation combines with creation, revealing the very act of writing (Suga 2007, 21). Translation here is not to be understood as “a process of literal translation from the mother tongue” (Wright 2010, 26), but as the deconstruction of the myth of the original. Tawada’s creative writing exposes exophony as a “translation[] without original[]”: broadening perspectives, exophony presents “languages from unexpected vantage points” (Anderson 2010, 55), while allowing the author, as well as her readers, to “discover something in ‘unexpected’ tunes” (Tachibana 2010, 282). Two characteristics stand out here: on the one hand, this shifting pertains to a “mizo (gap) or ‘Zwischenraum’” (*ibid.*, 277), a ‘within’ that yet does not imply bordering; on the other hand, it “involves a constant process of self-translation” (Suga 2007, 27), which echoes an *in-between-ness*. Referring to language, especially to its phonetic and semantic features, Suga Keijirō’s above observation of self-translation also resonates with Susan C. Anderson’s comment about the “surface translation” particular to Tawada’s writing (2010, 64): “Language in Tawada’s works is [...] physically real but also alien, and the only way for the subject to express this strangeness is through translating. This is always both insufficient and liberating” (*ibid.*, 66). A sort of unlocatedness that is entangled in a sense of the nomadic, permeates the novel and calls into question the materiality of the authorial persona.

Hence, if languages cannot contain an identity, how does an author exist and what do they*² permit by creating something quite concrete in this vagueness? What position can they* take while detaching themselves* from language? In fact, in her essay entitled “Tawada does not exist,” Tawada affirms the importance for the author of detachment from the text: the author as human being disappears, for the focus is on “[t]he authorial image produced from the work [– an image, which] is the true author, and the living person who exists as the author may be, in relation to the text, a complete stranger.” (2007a, 15) Not that the author is dead (as Roland Barthes stipulated), but that the “author in the traditional sense,” in the view of postmodern creative writing, does not exist, for a text is not considered as being “original”: it is seen as a collection of other texts, revealing its whole

intertextuality (Broich 1997, 251). Tawada indeed explains that “[t]he meaning of the author’s nonexistence will itself have changed” (2007a, 17). The authorial ‘I’ is thus merely a role taken on by it and symbolizes the very play and production on a stage (Gutjahr 2012, 26-27). It dresses up, depending on the story and on the content, which reveals a form of adaptation. This recalls again the process of translation. As a result, one is confronted with an author as “in-between space” (Arens 2007, 62): the authorial ‘I’ cannot be located so easily, if at all, or be reduced to belonging to one place. This inspires and responds to the nomadic aspect of the text, and also reminds us of postmodern writing. As Linda Hutcheon states: “No longer to believe in the ‘author’ as a person may be another way to restore the wholeness of the act of enunciation. The producer would be known as a position [...] to be filled within the text.” (1988, 81)

Further, the author’s unlocatedness influences the possible narrator’s unlocatedness; both mirror the nomadic aspect of Tawada’s texts. Language here seems to become the means to disrupt boundaries of enunciation, and to multiply acts and positions of enunciation. Chantal Wright’s assertion concerning one’s acquisition of a foreign language is thus questionable. She argues that “[t]o write in a language which is not one’s mother tongue means that one has already made it one’s own and, if it proves unsuitable for one’s purposes, that one hammers it and bends it and shapes it until it goes where one wants it to go and does what one needs it to do.” (Wright 2010, 23) Foreign language appears here at the service of the author, *forcibly* transformed to correspond with their* intention. As much as Wright warns us not to evacuate the author’s intention in their* use of a foreign language by enumerating points of tension for the translation of such texts (*ibid.*, 26-33), she does not take into account the very process of “defamiliariz[ation] and foreigniz[ation] [of] the German language” with which she concludes her article (*ibid.*, 36). Underscoring the “confrontational” of German exophonic text, she is surely insisting on the resistance of “straightforward translation” (*ibid.*). However, the ‘violence’ that seems to result from such exophonic texts does not render the “free floating and transnational intellectuality” as well as “the emancipation from identity schemes” (Ivanovic 2010, 175). The author does not force a foreign language to reveal itself, so as to express what they* want to convey; they* show the finite and infinite in every language, that is, the process of defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation surpasses the dubious reduction of a word to a pre-lingual meaning, while, at the same time, overcoming the monolingualism and entering a postmonolingual space. This “postmonolingual” refers both to a “temporal dimension” of “the effects of the monolingual,” and to “a critical function,” highlighting “the struggle *against* the monolingual paradigm.” (Yildiz 2012, 4; emphasis in the original)

Therefore, exophony appears as an act of redefinition of space, time, persona, people, things, etc. and calls into question subjectivity as much as materiality. Identity is put at stake, echoing the hybridity of its composition and refusing its reduction to a culture and a nation. Author, narrator, protagonist, and characters all find themselves in this in-between space, and so, incorporate this very unlocatedness. For instance, the following passage illustrates the process of exophonic writing in its creativity.

肉

[...] In dem Schwein ist Wein enthalten, und in dem Wein liegt ein Ei, sagte Yuna. (Tawada 2011 [2008], 114-115)

[肉 [...]] In the swine is wine contained, and in the wine lays a *yellow eye*, said Yuna. (my translation, focusing on the meaning and the wordplay; my emphasis)]

The *kanji* (ideogram) “肉” (*niku*) introduces the most obvious topic of this paragraph: meat as eaten by humans and flesh as eaten by animals. The free association of “Schwein” [pork] with “Wein” [wine] implies a meal: meat and drink. “Ei” [egg], which also contains proteins, mirrors “Schwein” and “Wein.” The visual/graphic deconstruction of language responds to a defamiliarization through the play around the invisible: a native speaker might not automatically *see* the words “Wein” and “Ei” in “Schwein”. Yet the acoustic aspect of “Ei,” of course phonetically connected to “Schwein” and “Wein,” does point us to a less obvious topic: subjectivity linked to translation. In fact, while the German words “Ei” and “Schwein” connect with the Japanese word “肉” (*niku*), the sound of “Ei” recalls the English “I” and “eye.” Therefore, this passage provides a good example of multilingualism, considered in its ‘postmonolingual’ sense, enabling a *moving* translation. The “Ei”/“I” refers to a subjectivity that is yet not fixed, while “Ei”/“eye” implies, in a tune of defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation, the visual/graphic aspect of language, which helps Tawada to play, experiment, and create language/s in a multicultural space (Finger 2011, 261). Confronted with a subtle *Schweinerei* [mess], which is produced from the wordplay around Schwein/Wein/Ei, the subjectivity’s meat [*niku*] echoes the words’ flesh [*niku*], so as to overcome the mind/body separation and at the same time question materiality.

Tawada’s theory and practice of exophony thus pertains to defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation, and underscores questions of subjectivity and materiality. Those are the very keywords around which the selected novel, *Schwager in Bordeaux*, is built and is building, as the following analysis will demonstrate, for

[i]n your mother tongue, words are attached to your person, so you rarely experience a playful, pleasurable sense of language. In your mother tongue, thoughts cling so closely to words that neither can take flight independently. In a foreign language, however, you have something like a staple remover: it removes what makes things cling to one another. (Tawada, McNichol 2014, 143)

Dematerialization: The Sea of Death

Extending exophonic strategies to question subjectivity, Tawada depicts a dematerialization of identity. Through a critical position about the “unequivocal identity assignments” (Pelletier 2015, 190; my translation), the author throws her readers into a sea of strangeness: the ideograms introducing each paragraph of the novel reflect alterity, as few readers will have access to both her German and Japanese work (*ibid.*, 191); they also echo the fragmentation of memories that form the basis of the novel’s content. Those very elements could lead us to the importance of death in the novel: the death of a stable

identity. Putting “existence [...] under the sign of nomadism” (*ibid.*; my translation), Tawada thus offers us an impressionist painting of the sea of death: making visible the invisible, rendering dematerialization possible – a process that will be analyzed in the following three points.

First, the author disrupts the expectations that the title of the book advances: *Schwager in Bordeaux* does not tell about the protagonist’s family story, for Maurice who lives in Bordeaux, is the brother-in-law of Renée, a friend in Hamburg with whom Yuna has an erotic relationship (Genz 2011, 64). Although Julia Genz explains that the second half of the title symbolizes disorientation because Maurice is not staying in Bordeaux, which enables Yuna to stay at his house (*ibid.*, 65), one might also point out that the word “Schwager” itself contradicts Maurice’s behavior, for it implies a certain stability through marriage. Therefore, exophony is here displayed: while the defamiliarization can be taken in its literal sense of troubling family relations, the deconstruction also blurs the structure of locatedness and status. Further, translation appears particularly in “Bordeaux”: phonetically and orthographically recalling ‘*bord d’eau*’ [waterfront], it also evokes a “state of uncertainty” (Koiran 2010, 337; my translation), which refers to the *in-between-ness* of temporal and spatial departure and arrival on which the novel builds (*ibid.*, 346). Indeed, even as Yuna is arriving in Bordeaux, she is recounting memories of her time in Hamburg, the place of her departure. Translation, having no original for Tawada, insists on the nomadic identity, which can no longer rely on a specific space and time.

Moreover, the protagonist’s arrival in the central station of Bordeaux (Tawada 2011 [2008], 7-8) underlines this *sense* of displacement. Explaining the “displacement from one’s native tongue” with a blurred vision, Young argues here on the “disturbance of sight” that entails a “disorientation felt by Yuna.” (2016, 198) However, given that the protagonist has already been disoriented by her arrival in Germany and by her confrontation with the German language, her disorientation in Bordeaux does not refer to her mother tongue, Japanese, but to a foreign language, German. That is not to say that the latter becomes the former, in terms of category. Rather, this displacement of sight is doubled: neither Japanese – present through the use of ideograms, nor German – serving as the text language, can help Yuna in this “unfamiliar cacophony” (*ibid.*) formed by suitcases, in cafés, etc. (Tawada 2011 [2008], 7) In fact, the protagonist and Maurice, who comes to pick her up, are communicating in English (*ibid.*). The delightful lost-in-translation state (in) which Yuna navigates, recalls the title. The cacophony becomes a symphony, which could be linked to the metaphoric dynamic of waves, for movements (separated or not) compose symphony. Thus, the image of water acquires its full meaning: “it is maybe a standing still and a hearing at the edge of sea, at the waterfront in Hamburg (the North German coast) and at the other waterfront (*bord d’eau*).” (Waterhouse 2011, 57; my translation) The displacement of space, time, and language reveals its potential in the dematerialization of identity – diluted in water, deafened by languages, yet realizing itself in nomadic ways.

Second, this assertion of a constant movement, that is, a displacement of persona in an undefined range of space and time, can be observed in Yuna’s way of dealing with death.

Eine Katze im Meer suchen: dieses Sprichwort behauptet nicht etwa, dass die Suche umsonst sei, sondern dass man in einem Meer alles Mögliche finden kann, sogar etwas Unerwartetes. Fahr zu einem Meer und starre auf seine Oberfläche. Stundenlang, tagelang. Eine Katze im Meer suchen: ein Sprichwort, das Yuna erfunden hat. (Tawada 2011 [2008], 200)

[Looking for a cat in the sea: This proverb does not more or less claim that the search would be pointless, but that one can find anything possible in a sea, even something unexpected. Go to a sea and stare at its surface. For hours, for days. Looking for a cat in the sea: a proverb that Yuna invented. (my translation)]

In this quotation, one might see a sort of conclusion, implicitly containing all the elements proper to Yuna's story. The homophony between *see* and *sea* that we will allow ourselves here, points to a sort of fluidity: not only does it reveal a constant displacement through the motif of water (sea), but it also highlights a fuzziness through the multiplication of viewpoints (see). In this area without border, in this *in-between-ness*, Yuna tells of her grief in fragments. The cat in this sea that Yuna seems to look for ("suchen"), which implies the use of sight, recalls her dead cat Tamao (Tawada 2011 [2008], 93-94, 197). This also reminds Yuna of the people she has known in her life who have died (her friends Carl, Ingrid, and her colleague Walter), disappeared (Maurice, her office's cleaner Gera) or who are somehow stuck in life (her friends Lilie, Elena, and her acquaintance Hilde, Uta) (*ibid.*, 195-196, 199-200). This motionlessness of the characters, for they stay in one place and one situation, seems thus to oppose Yuna's presumed mobility, as she travels to Bordeaux.

Further, Yuna points to an "Oberfläche" [surface], which alludes to the "surface translation" as a sign of "strangeness" (Anderson 2010, 64). It also evokes the surface of the human body in responding to this idea of motion. Here, the surface can be interpreted as skin. As Jeremy Redlich states, "[s]kin can be understood as a protective sheath that ultimately conceals the authentic essence that lies beneath, thereby making it foreign and external to the 'true' self. On the other hand, skin can be viewed as the essence of the subject itself, standing metonymically for the whole as opposed to foreign to it." (2010, 75) However, the "Oberfläche" disturbs any essentialism: not only is the "Oberfläche" the surface of water, pointing to blurred boundaries and constant redefinition or dilution, as if identity were becoming *invisible*, but it also refers to the superficial (in German: *oberflächlich*), that is, the irrelevance of boundaries. Aligned with this connection between surface/skin and body, the "Oberfläche" thus "unsettl[es] the congealed materiality of human borders [...] [and] [u]ltimately the very notion of a 'natural' body or 'authentic, essentialised' identity" (*ibid.*, 76). The deconstruction of identity here leaves space for the unexpectedness and the infinite possibilities that the quotation implies, and relies on both the protagonist and the secondary characters: Tawada describes their "perpetual state of transformation" (*ibid.*). What is/becomes strange is identity in its fixed form; what is/becomes familiar is subjectivity in its dematerialized form.

Third, one could say that the novel is more a story of others than of Yuna. If Bernard Banoun suggests a transferred autobiographical pact between the protagonist and the author because of the Japanese and German languages they both understand, unlike the readers who are defamiliarized,

and because Tawada's novel is a *mise en abyme* of Yuna's writing project (2010, 463), he does not question the notion of subjectivity. In fact, it is not a "similarity" between Yuna and Tawada (*ibid.*), which would contradict the author's postmodern posture, but a fusion between protagonist and secondary characters that ensures a dematerializing of identity. As Genz rightly argues, all author characters in the novel are "infected by a reduction of their writing activities" (2012, 195; my translation). This point of convergence alludes not only to a merging between characters, but could also signify a sort of destruction of materiality in its first sense: Yuna, Maurice, Renée, and others do not write anymore or are only barely able to do so, that is, the words cannot be materialized, made visible. Hence, Genz's interpretation of the triangular relation between Yuna, Maurice, and Renée as a sort of Japanese *translation* of Racine's *Phèdre* in Nō theater style (2011, 65), like the one the protagonist claims to be willing to stage (Tawada 2011 [2008], 13), is relevant less for its interesting argumentation, than for the accent on the Nō theater. Because Kabuki theater focuses on family relations – relations that are already put at stake in the title, as shown above, Nō theater appears as the best option: it stages ghosts and death (Genz 2011, 66), which shed light on Yuna's close bond with death in her encounters with others (e.g., her work colleague Walter's suicide (Tawada 2011 [2008], 65, 199-200)) and in her life (e.g., Tamao's death).

Hence, Tawada deprives the characters of any markers of fixed identity – such as an ID card, a paper stating name, space, and time, or by giving them a ghostly shape, extending Genz's argumentation and echoing the motif of water. The very fact that they have writer's block implies the impossibility of telling themselves about themselves, and thereby overcoming the fixating on one aspect that a normative identity tends to do. Interestingly, Yuna appears in the third person singular, already implying that she is not telling her story herself (Genz 2012, 195-196). The fact that the narrator is reduced to a mere observer underscores the fact that she has no point of reference (*ibid.*). Bearing in mind the process of translation inherent to exophony, one could argue that the feminine third person singular in German (*sie*) cannot but suggest the (feminine, masculine, and neutral) third person plural (*sie*) as well as the polite pronoun (*Sie*). One might go as far as underlining the phonetic and graphic similarity between those pronouns and the conjugation of the verb "sehen" [to see] in the present tense: *du siehst, er/sie/es sieht* [you see, he/she/it sees]. Inasmuch as the viewpoint can be multiple here, the narrative posture of the novel has already established a displacement of subjectivity that goes beyond place and time, beyond boundaries. Moreover, although others fill the novel through Yuna's memories, they are merely considered as a whole. The visual aspect, mirroring the graphic aspect of language in '*sie/sehen*,' reveals itself at its fullest: the protagonist tends to reduce these other character to mere colors. This process of depersonalization takes place in present of narrative, that is, when Yuna is at Bordeaux's swimming pool, while remembering past events. She then *sees* a boy with "some red welts" and "a woman with a blue swim cap" (Tawada 2011 [2008], 189; my translation). One might also detect a doubling effect: colors can be diluted in water. Not only the personae cannot have a *present*, but they are also deprived of any *fixed* identity, as if they were thrown into a sea of death.

As an exophonic text, *Schwager in Bordeaux* reveals the very tension inherent to materiality. Being outside any boundaries, Tawada's characters navigate in murky areas. This lack of substance is not so much the result of an immateriality that Douglas Slaymaker considers as typical of Tawada's writing and in which "travelers move across space, across time, back into memories, and out again into the future" (2007, 2); rather, it is referring to one's confrontation with a dematerialization as an experiment on identity, which aims to free it from any frame. The water as a true companion on this quest for death responds to the interconnected aspects of exophony. From the dilution of identity, in the sea of death, Tawada thus proposes a "reinvention of subjectivity as a conjoined literary and social project in [her] oeuvre." (Adelson 2011, 158)

Rematerialization: The Tower of Babel

The complexity of *Schwager in Bordeaux* reveals itself in the apparent contradiction between dematerialization of identity and rematerialization of language. Not quite an opposition, but rather a continuity in Tawada's practice of exophony, this ambivalence should be considered as a means to illustrate the constant translation with which characters deal. In fact, "language threatens one with captivity and suffocation, but words also provide the keys to loosen such constraints." (Slaymaker 2007, 6) Control, as synonymous with conventions, does not exist (anymore). Rematerialization responds to deconstruction, the aim of which is to reconstruct language *weirdly, strangely*. Through this process, language enables subjectivity to embrace freedom from normative injunctions, as much as does the dematerialization of identity, specifically with the merging of characters. Rematerialization also induces defamiliarization from one's mother tongue and from foreign languages. As Tawada claims, "[I] lose [...] Japanese when I'm writing in German, and then I have to reclaim it. I have to start from scratch" (Horst 2009, online; my translation). Polyphonic and hybrid – so: exophonic, *Schwager in Bordeaux* thus offers us the sinking of the Tower of Babel in deep water, as the following will describe in three stages.

First, exophonic creative writing calls into question rules in and for language, through which the process of defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation appears. Grammar symbolizes conventions here, as if "grammar were a law" (Tawada 2011 [2008], 62; my translation) and puts the persons learning a foreign language at risk, insofar as they may overrule the norms. The phonetic and orthographic similarity between *law* and *low* that we will allow ourselves here, cannot but illustrate the imprisonment: breaking the law means being low in the social hierarchy, which is made by language and only becomes visible by the very breaking of law. 'Low' could also allude to Yuna's frustration: at a younger age, she indeed tried to learn French in a school in Osaka; yet she was mocked – that is, lowered – by her teacher Viviane whose Japanese was perfect (*ibid.*, 60-61). Hence, grammar can be regarded as the imposition of law, the overstepping of which results in a criminalization, which in turn hinders imagination, that is, the enthusiasm of learning (Genz 2012, 190). Interestingly, Tawada does not suggest the necessity to master language here, but only to consider it in its uncertainty. In her subverting of linguistic rules by playing with words and following the principle

of free association (Bay 2012, 261), the author insists on the “non-availability [of language],” which echoes the exophonic translation without original (Genz 2011, 66). In a process of rematerialization, ideograms are used, and then meaningfully deconstructed in a paragraph in German, in order to demonstrate the “experience of/in the moment” (*ibid.*; my translation), which is bound to a *sense* of defamiliarization.

Further, this sense of defamiliarization is less the effect of the detachment from one’s mother tongue, than of the ridiculed insistence on grammar and other linguistic ‘laws,’ as the following example demonstrates:

迷

[...] Hätte Yuna alle Wörter streng nach Kategorien sortiert und eingesperrt, hätte sie sie sofort wieder finden können. Vogelnamen zu Vogelnamen, Schimpfwörter zu Schimpfwörtern, Adjektive zu Adjektiven. (Tawada 2011 [2008], 98-100)

[迷 [...]] Had Yuna strictly arranged and locked up all words in categories, she would have been able to find them again immediately. *Fowl* names to *fowl* names, *fowl* words to *fowl* words, adjectives to adjectives. (my translation, focusing literally on the meaning and the acoustic; my emphasis)]

The apparent necessity to arrange words in categories is here an irony, as in German, the word for ‘categories’ is synonymous with the word for ‘swear words.’ The subversive accumulation of names appears even more humorous through their metonymic relation as well as the flattening of proper speech to familiar speech: “Vogelnamen” [‘swear word’ in familiar speech] echoes “Schimpfwörter” [‘swear word’ in proper speech]. In addition, one might note the possibility of overcoming the revulsion to grammar. In fact, deconstruction can free language from the cage that “Vogelname,” literally meaning ‘bird’s name,’ implies. As much as “language [is] [...] [a] perpetual failure and [this] failure [is] [...] [a] chance” (Finger 2011, 261; my translation), this failure is itself doubled. Using Cécile Sakai’s suggestion to consider ideograms as plurivalent in Tawada’s writing (2010, 434-435), one might argue that the *kanji* 迷 (*mei*) recalls, through its meanings, the failure of one to learn (迷 as astray, lost) as well as the failure of language to explain (迷 as err, illusion), which Yuna herself observes earlier in the novel (Tawada 2011 [2008], 32). The rematerialization of language surpasses boundaries. Paper is thus seen to be as fluid as water, and language as irregular as subjectivity; both *incorporate* the nomadic.

Second, the disruption of language caused by its deconstruction appears in the exophonic conception of multilingualism. Because Tawada’s narrator and even the author can be seen sometimes as a medium, a conduit, or the “pavement trampled in the onrush of language and speakers” (Slaymaker 2007, 6), the focus turns to the words themselves, which still need to be conveyed, yet are freed from any assigning: “[a] word can be many words, as much as a language can, at the same time, be many languages” (Tawada 2007b, 27; my translation). Thus Yuna remembers reading a book by a Hungarian author, which had to do with the movie theater “Utopie” in Bordeaux (Tawada 2011 [2008], 98). Interestingly, the protagonist highlights the author’s

inclination towards multilingualism as a means to avoid a tower of Babel, for “a high tower is always dangerous.” (*ibid.*; my translation) Contrary to imprisoning stability that the tower of Babel represents, and in an inversion of the biblical blight of a multilingualism used to punish humanity for its hubris (Genesis 11:1-9, online), Tawada proposes multilingualism as a gift, and insists on its fluid materiality, which is inherent to translation. “[D]rawing beyond [her] primary languages of German and Japanese” (Adelson 2011, 157), the author goes on to French and Portuguese: thus the Japanese パン (*pan*) is not taken from the French ‘*pain*,’ but from the Portuguese ‘*pão*’ (Tawada 2011 [2008], 150): the fluidity in/of words enables the constant metamorphosis of language, not in order to propose new rules, but to point out the danger of framing.

Moreover, recalling Slaymaker’s consideration of the narrator/writer as a medium or a conduit (2007, 6), the effect of language on body that Shigemi Nakagawa reads out of the novel as experiment (2010, 660) or that Michiko Mae understands to be a part of Tawada’s “aesthetic strategy” (2010, 381), takes on here its full meaning: not only is the body of the protagonist doubtful through her merging with secondary characters and their depersonalization, as explained above, but the confusion of Japanese and German also calls the body of the text into question. Although each paragraph in German begins with a *kanji*, the length of the paragraphs as well as the importance of the *kanji* are constantly disturbed. Visually speaking, large-sized *kanji* are printed on pages where there is no German to see, even if they recall the paragraph in German in which they occur. Pushing the limits even of paper as material and considering it as language in itself, this multilingual structure, in being *exophonically* decomposed in front of our eyes, restores a certain freedom to language and cannot but recall its fluidity. One might wonder how far Tawada can push the motive of water in her conception of language; if the novel’s *un-structure* surely illustrates exophony through its process of defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation, Tom Rigault’s observations will appear revealing. He claims an “art of confusion,” an “editorial poetics” in Tawada’s oeuvre, that is to say that the very text as object echoes the complex expression of multilingualism (2017, online; my translation). *Schwager in Bordeaux* is thus the theater of fluid multilingualism: blurred to sight, adaptable to touch, cacophonic to hearing, water enables the cracking of the tower of Babel. Tawada proposes here a rematerialization of language, which struggles against its traditional (and familiar) conception, *waving* at a dematerialized subjectivity.

Third, the novel’s end, which revolves around the very de/materialization of Yuna, is the epitome of this rematerialization of language, for it binds the questioning of grammar and multilingualism through the motive of water. Interrogated on the novel’s title, which could be easily misread as “*Schwanger in Bordeaux*” [pregnant in Bordeaux], Tawada validates the hypothesis, even explaining that the lack of a determiner permits such association (Klook 2008, online). The protagonist could be the very prototype of exophony. In fact, Yuna is living an “existential crisis” (Genz 2012, 200; my translation): at the Bordeaux swimming pool, the protagonist carries with her a dictionary (German-French), which is stolen, as she is in the pool. Lost, she runs after the thief whom she calls Zoé, because only the last letter of the alphabet is free (Tawada 2011 [2008], 192-196) –

ironically playing with the arbitrary rule of the alphabet's ordering. Once again, one is faced with a doubling effect: as much as Yuna loses language through the loss of her dictionary, which is very material, the letter Z of the name Zoé signifies an end, as a sort of death of language. Interestingly, it is the thief who enables Yuna to open her changing room: having given up on finding Zoé and her dictionary, the protagonist stands helpless – even speechless – in front of the changing room, not remembering the code, which is her birth date (*ibid.*, 202). Zoé *literally* pops up and enters the code, opening the room (*ibid.*, 204). Here, the code, that is, numbers, becomes a “minimal biography” (Genz 2012, 200; my translation) to Yuna: numbers are translated into letters, insofar as the birth date enables a legalizing of a birth name. This alternate access to writing (*ibid.*, 201) can therefore be interpreted as a rematerialization of language.

Further, the motive of water helps to rematerialize language as much as to de/materialize Yuna. Already implied by the changing room that Andrea Bandhauer rightly sees as a “transitory place of function,” that is, a “place on the threshold of water, that fluid place, where dissolution and change are for Tawada made possible” (2012, 212-213; my translation), water gains its importance through the symbolism of maternity. In fact, shortly before Yuna got stolen, the water around her becomes pink (Tawada 2011 [2008], 192), as if to signify that the novel's waters were breaking to give birth to a protagonist. By going out of the pool to run after the thief and later ‘receiving’ her birth date, Yuna seems to reclaim her subjectivity through a play of rematerialization in a fluid dematerialization. However, this subjectivity is not to be misunderstood as identity, which the very last *kanji* of the novel highlights. As Yumiko Saito explains, the ideogram 汝 (*nanji*) means ‘you’ and is composed of the radical for *water* (水/*mizu*) on the left, while the part on the right signifies *woman* (女/*onna*) (2010, 530). She also finds an interesting mythological reference in the novel's last *kanji*, which she sees as symbolizing the river of the goddess Lethe: to drink from this water would mean to forget one's past (*ibid.*, 532). Yet the novel's end does not so much represent the erasure of the past, which would too easily combine water with purification; rather, it focuses on the coming to terms with one's past: all the dead friends and acquaintances of the protagonist as well as her cat appear in the closing pages, as to lead her in the way of grief (Tawada 2011 [2008], 199-200). In this way, the last *kanji*, 汝, illustrates a rematerialization of language: putting names on the dead, recalling here a fluid sequence of events for which words have been missing. This hypothesis is strengthened by Genz's interpretation of this ideogram as “exceeding the position of the third person” (2012, 201; my translation). Indeed, the *kanji* ends the novel itself, for it appears large-sized on the last page, taking (over) the whole space (Tawada 2011 [2008], 205).

Yet, not that Yuna could possibly take the narrator's position (Genz 2012, 201), but that the first meaning of 汝, that is, ‘you’ and by association to another and more common way of saying ‘you’ in Japanese: あなた (*anata*), underscores Tawada's “idea of mother tongue as *anata*, a strange or foreign entity.” (Taniguchi 2010, 271) Language, the very act of speaking and writing, portrays subjectivity as being external to conventions. The ambivalence pointed to at the beginning of this section as echoing the

nomadic finds its resolution here: the rematerialization of language enables the dematerialization of identity. The tower of Babel sinks under the pressure of water – an *anormative* pressure?

Conclusion: Fluid Circling

“We are constantly changing, and change is not a threat. It is much more difficult to try to understand this process of transformation than to hold on to a rigid, permanent shape.” (Brandt 2006, 43) Here, Tawada excludes any linear transformation, for that would contradict her position on exophony – and in a broader sense on subjectivity and language – as being a translation without original. Mirroring this statement, the novel’s end is thus neither a “renaissance,” nor a “baptism”: it is a “regression up to even the blood of the womb,” (Bay 2012, 266; my translation) implied by the pinkish water around Yuna (Tawada 2011 [2008], 192). As much as this regression implies the constant metamorphosis of the protagonist, relieved from any fixed identity, it is also about the eternal return to/of words, lightened from any pre-lingual meaning. Thus, “the I is comparable to a circle” (Koiran 2009, 271; my translation). That is not to say that creativity would disappear; it is exactly through this process that “something new becomes possible.” (Bay 2012, 266; my translation) Creative writing takes form and loses form, forms and deforms.

Hence, the circle cannot but recall Tawada’s conceptualization of exophony. The process of defamiliarization, deconstruction, and translation that composes it, is itself not only in constant relation, for the three aspects explained earlier cannot be separated, they do function together, as a whole – as a hole, that is, *metaphorically*, a circle, but this process also allows calling into question subjectivity and materiality, providing an *in-between-ness*, an unlocatedness that echoes the position of Tawada’s protagonist – or, better: her *a-position*, and Tawada’s own position – or, perhaps: *non-position*. Yet the author does not refute placement, she grasps it as displacement. Therefore, to the question of how Tawada’s exophony de/constructs subjectivity, one can answer that *Schwager in Bordeaux* is the result of a non-ending subjective experiment that a play of de/materialization helps to de/form. The focus is on the nomadic, which is understood as constant movement. This nomadic aspect induces a dematerialization of identity as fixed and stable, and a rematerialization of language, for the fluid multilingualism means becoming, not being.

Further, it comes as no surprise to read the reflections on identity Yuna has, after being contacted by the police as a possible witness at a crime scene in Hamburg’s harbour district (Tawada 2011 [2008], 50): “This I had no name, no past, it came and went like a pattern of clouds in the sky.” (*ibid.*, 51; my translation) Insofar as the ‘I’ that should be built on an identity, that is, name, status, etc., appears as ephemeral as clouds, the protagonist empties this pre-lingual meaning given to identity through the pre-lingual meaning of language, unballasted, too. The ephemeral here means less a disappearance than that which may be symbolized by the water cycle: the water contained in clouds will fall, evaporate, form clouds, fall, evaporate, and so on. This cycle points to a fluid circling: a nomadic way to strangely shape subjectivity.

Tawada explains that she had “rather be between language A and language B, [and] might want to go, find, and fall into a poetic *gorge*.” (Tawada 2003, 36; my translation and emphasis) So, in exophonic terms: a gorge, a ravine... 峡谷 (*kyōkoku*) [gorge], 郷国 (*kyōkoku*) [one’s native land]. Here is the dilution of the myth of the original: subjectivity appears in its hybridity, detached from any citizenship, that is, as a “free floating and transnational intellectuality” (Ivanovic 2010, 175). Perhaps, exophonically: a gorge, a ravine... a gorge, *la gorge* [throat]; a gorge, *die Gurke* [cucumber]; a gorge, *la gorge* [bosom]. The sexual/ized words induce a sort of gender fluidity: the gorge possesses a cyclic form in which the cucumber, too linear, cannot fit. This calls into question language again, for from the throat come words. Yet, is it the throat that enables foreign words or is it the bosom that reveals the mother tongue? Putting together the subjectivity resulting from the first exophonic play and the gender fluidity appearing in the second one, one cannot but agree with Yildiz, when she claims: “Subjectivity is thus identified as a site where belonging to nation and gender are potentially reconfigured in new ways through a process of detachment. Exposure to a foreign language is hence part and parcel of the process of producing a desired new female subjectivity” (Yildiz 2012, 123).

Indeed, “we have to try to give form to what we see, as far as possible, so that we can talk about it, about things which bother one, which are frightening.” (Horst 2009, online; my translation) So says Tawada.

Endnotes:

1. All quotations are in their original orthography and typography.
2. “They/their” followed by * is used as epicene pronouns, and thus is gender-neutral.

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