Gegen, or translating the (en)counter

The inside cover of *CounterText* identifies a 'context' which it names as 'post-literary', and which it understands as 'the precariousness of text and print in the 21st century' (Callus and Corby 2015: vi). The symptom that thus calls for the 'strategy' of the 'countertextual' is that 'literature is not what it used to be'. However, what might be seen, too rashly of course, as the demise of literature, also gives rise, in a dialectical move, to the hopeful impression that 'the literary might simply be elsewhere' today. This, in a nutshell, seems to be the rationale for what might be called a 'counter attack' (of literature or the literary) – the editors speak of 'a revanchism of the literary' (vi) – or indeed a haunting ('returning upon culture in affirmation of its achronic rather than anachronistic qualities' (vi). Inevitably – how could it be otherwise, given the economy and the law of genre at work in an academic journal – the 'letter' (or text) is returned to (literary) criticism, or the 'function of the critic' in 'post-literary' times: '"the function of criticism at the present time" might well be to attend to the post-literary and the countertextual and their distinct situations, challenges, and thrusts in the 21st century' (vii). What is at issue, however, is not only the legitimation of (institutionalised) criticism (or the 'profession of literature', the subject of 'literary studies' and its central place within the humanities, the teaching of and through literature, the tending to this 'strange institution called literature') but the sheer recognizability of text or textuality: 'how a *text*ured understanding of the post-literary might accordingly proceed' (vi).

Not that I am against the premises of this position, nor do I have anything to counter this analysis of the state of literature and the function of criticism as the 'professional' reading of literature; nor do I wish to question its fundamental reliance on a certain theory of textuality (which might well be the key to the current 'crisis' – not so much of literature maybe, but of

theoretically informed criticism in general). My aim is simply to investigate the gesture of 'countering' as such. Countering, what exactly? Text, textuality, the textual 'condition'? I will proceed by briefly returning to the notion of text and then look at the prepositional 'grammar' of the 'counter' before concluding with a few outlooks on how to understand 'countertextuality'. Shadowing this trajectory will be the question of translation and untranslatability of the counter (as the title suggests). The 'subtext' – the oblique underlying concern – will be another 'countering' movement that appears between the lines of the journal rationale, namely the challenge to 'theory', and to deconstruction in particular.

From Work to Text to Intertext

> Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary, from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred. (Barthes 1988: 170)

The word 'countertextuality' evokes the rise and fall of poststructuralism and deconstruction within the globalised, Anglo-American-dominated humanities. One of the major battlegrounds for this entirely invented and homogenised intellectual formation called 'French theory' – the result of strategic translations of key French texts written in the 1960s and introduced into Anglo-American academia in the 1970s (see for example Cusset 2008) – was the notion of text. In order to see what countertextuality might mean or do for the current context one would therefore have to return to the beginnings, the arrival or incubation of French theory in the humanities (and beyond), from the 1970s onwards. One of the first questions one might have to ask is: what kind of 'object' [*Gegenstand*], if at all, is a (counter)text?

The standard semiotic definition of 'text' established over the past few decades would probably run like this: a text is any combination of signs. Behind this innocuous but far-reaching

definition, however, lies an entire revolution with regard to (literary) criticism, or writing, reading and the construction of (linguistic and cultural) meaning as the central human (or, rather, humanist) activity. Roland Barthes captured this transformation in the title of his programmatic essay 'From Work to Text' (Barthes 1977). The encounter between Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism in relation to the interdisciplinary 'object' of text led to an 'epistemological slide' in the humanities and social sciences. For Barthes the text stands at the intersection of a number of propositions: method, genre, signs, plurality, filiation, reading and pleasure. All of these propositions, in fact, point towards a dynamisation (i.e. from the 'work', as for example in 'the book', to the text, as a 'methodological field' that is open-ended). Text is 'experienced only in an activity of production' and subverts any attempt (by criticism) to arrest and substantialise meaning into a completed or finite 'work'. Reading a text, in this sense, involves a certain but impossible experience of limits, of radical plurality, of the paradoxical. The meaning a text produces – the 'weave of its signifiers' – is irreducibly plural and disseminative, because it is, in fact, 'intertextual': 'The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text' but rather on the model of 'diffraction', 'filiation' and 'network' (Barthes 1977: n.p.). The metaphors Barthes uses stress the organicity of text: weaving, network, filiation are images, as he says, that are 'close to current biological conceptions of the living being' and the 'bio-graphical' in its etymological sense of 'life-writing'. Textual 'practices' (i.e. reading and writing) as a result become less clear to distinguish: they are, instead, a 'single signifying practice'. Reading is no longer to be understood as the consumption of a product (work) but rather as a pleasurable play (e.g. in the sense of 'playing a piece of music'), where language can 'circulate freely'. The result for criticism is that it is drawn into this pleasure game of the text, which undoes any possibility for criticism to understand itself as a kind of 'metalanguage'. Instead, it becomes sucked into writing and intertextuality and performs a kind of (erotic and bodily, or material) 'textual intercourse' (which is also one way of understanding the post-

literary condition, the erosion of the boundaries between literature and (literary) criticism, philosophy or 'theory' and literature, between creative and critical discourses).

In *Le Plaisir du texte* and *Théorie du texte* (both in 1973), Barthes had already moved from a notion of text as 'object' to text as a 'tissue of signifying practices' that are ultimately based on 'jouissance', 'signifiance' and 'textasy', as Robert Young explains in *Untying the Text* (1981: 31-2). Barthes wanted to get away from the traditional notion of text as 'the phenomenal surface of the literary work… [as] the fabric of the words which make up the work and which are arranged in such a way as to impose a meaning which is stable and as far as possible unique' (32). In this 'conservative' sense, the text is merely that which 'secures the guarantee of the written object' in the form of a 'moral', 'legal' or 'social contract', which subjects the reader into respectful and secure consumption. Away from this 'authentication' model, Barthes wished to give space to the 'subversive' or liberatory potential of reading-writing and textuality, opened up by the 'critique of the sign' (i.e. Tel Quel's (1968) and, in particular, Lacan's (2006) and Derrida's (1976) rereading of Saussure and linguistic structuralism).

The text became the 'meeting place' of language and subject, which led to a redistribution of agency, so to speak. It was also the point of intersection of the plurality of possible meanings and the escape of the 'ego-cogito' within 'signifiance' and the 'genotext' (the underlying 'structuration' of the analysable 'phenotext', according to Kristeva). Finally, the text could also be seen as the place of redistribution of language in the form of intertextuality: 'any text is a tissue of past citations' and 'any text is an intertext' (Barthes 1981: 39). Intertextuality, or the notion of the intertext, became the central presupposition of poststructuralist theory. The text was not only an open system but intertextuality was also the very condition of perceiving reality and thus has quasi-ontological status: 'Intertextuality is the impossibility of living outside the infinite text...; the book creates meaning, the meaning creates life' (Barthes 1976: 36).

Following post-Saussurean linguistics and poststructuralist theory, reality is thus not a given, but is socially and linguistically created. Poststructuralism, furthermore, sees language as a cultural, conventional, socially, ideologically and historically determined phenomenon, into which one is born; being an autonomous subject is a delusion for subjectivity is mainly a linguistic and ideological function. While neither 'empirical reality' nor 'objective truth' can be experienced outside of language, poststructuralism sets out to show that language is not a transparent receptacle of thought, but the slippery material which produces only partly controllable effects of meaning. Language is not only a means of communication for ideas that need to be expressed, but rather a semiotic system in which signifier and signified are inseparable. The author, like any other language user, is not in control of language, but is a 'decentred subject' — decentered by language — who takes up positions that language makes available. This negates any possibility for the author to be a moral guide or to be in possession of a privileged knowledge of reality. The aesthetic function, whether used by writers or critics, must be understood as an ideological category:

> For the aesthetic is for a number of reasons a peculiarly effective ideological medium: it is graphic, immediate and economical, working at instinctual and emotional depths yet playing too on the very surfaces of perception, entwining itself with the stuff of spontaneous experience and the roots of language and gesture. Precisely on this account, it is able to naturalise itself, to proffer itself as ideologically innocent, in ways less easily available to ideology's political and juridical regions. (Eagleton 1976: 20)

These assumptions had a liberating effect on the text and increased the importance of the reader. Roland Barthes, consequently, focused on the relation between these two (text and reader). In insisting on the plurality of meaning, he emphasised the relevance of intertextuality as the tissue of life itself. If reality is a linguistic construct, 'writing' [*écriture*] replaces the concept of authority as the primary object of critical investigation, and writing does not depend on the notion of the author-subject: 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the

negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' (Barthes 1988: 168). The Author and the principle of authority, as a transcendental signifier, is an attempt to reduce the plurality of meaning within the text. The elimination of these concepts, however, does not mean that a text has no writer (merely understood as 'scriptor'):

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (Barthes 1988: 170)

The end of the reign of the Author was therefore also understood as that of the reign of the Critic, who, as a mediator (as 'expert reader' or maybe also 'translator'), was the guarantor for the correct decipherment of the text's ultimate meaning; instead the central role now lies in (re)writing:

> [W]riting ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say WRITING), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases — reason, science, law. (171)

The 'liberation' of language from the function of authority, leaves criticism with the task not of deciphering but of 'disentangling' meanings; it is not the text's origin (the scriptor) that is important, but its *destination* and reception/interpretation (i.e. the reader):

> Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them are being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (171)

The purpose of this theory of textuality was to problemtise notions of reality and truth as linguistic constructs and thus to help undermine the moral superiority of the Author and the

Critic. The 'critical' reader should therefore no longer be concerned with finding some common sense or an established transcendental truth that was somewhere (intentionally) hidden in the text by an Author; nor should the reader be looking for confirmation of the already known, but rather face and embrace the (radical) plurality of meanings. Reading should be a reading for differences within this plurality. Given its infinity of meaning, the text undoes its own identity, destabilises its own discursive consistency in linguistic slips or 'slidings of the signifier' along the 'signifying chain'. Deconstructive criticism makes use of this uncontrollable character of language, and in pointing out the slippages and ambiguities, it hopes to increase the knowledge of the text, while attending to its inherent subversions and its difference from itself.

In this respect, Barthes also famously differentiated between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' text (Barthes 1975). The readerly and writerly form a continuum that should allow for a situating of texts with regard to their attitude towards their own plurality of meaning (or their 'closure'). What Barthes showed in *S/Z*, however, was that plurality also exists in a readerly ('a classical realist') text like Balzac's *Sarrasine*. In fact, there are readerly and writerly qualities in every text because there is no such thing as the absolutely different, or *the* Writerly Text, because difference cannot function as an ultimate affirmative value. As Barbara Johnson explained: 'Balzac's text already "knows" the limits and blindness of the readerly, which it personifies in Sarrasine. Balzac has already in a sense done Barthes's work for him. The readerly text is itself nothing other than a deconstruction of the readerly text' (Johnson 1980: 12). The difference between readability and writability, instead, lies in the respective relation they imply between text and reader. The writable element encourages the reader to read differently (in closing itself off from any straightforward 'realist', 'mimetic' or 'consumerist' reading). It encourages the reader to reread — which is itself already a potentially subversive activity (Barthes 1975: 15-16). The writerly elements bar the text from being passively 'consumed'. Instead the reader is encouraged to see him or herself writing; the readerly text, on

the other hand, uses a system of connotations the reader can rely on, encouraging him or her to expect the 'limited plurality' of the already known, which perpetuates itself in a well-established system of 'connotations':

> [I]f there are readerly texts, committed to the closure system of the West, produced according to the goals of this system, devoted to the law of the Signified, they must have a particular system of meaning, and this meaning is based on connotation ... . Definitionally, [connotation] is a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text): ... connotation is a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system. (7-8)

The experimentalist, or anti-realist, writerly, text breaks through this circle and therefore also demands a new way of reading:

> To read, in fact, is a labour of language. To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept towards other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labour. (11)

This round-up of poststructuralism's 'textual politics' provides (or one could say 'haunts) the context out of which current calls for countertextuality arise.

Textuality – Intertextuality – Countertextuality

> In sum, the world we perceive is a text written by a machine laboring in impenetrable, primordial darkness. (Dillon 1993: 198)

The shift from text to a generalised 'condition' of textuality was already announced by Barthes towards the end of his 'Theory of the Text', where he says that:

> [a]ll signifying practices can engender text: the practice of painting pictures, musical practice, filmic practice, etc. The works, in certain cases, themselves prepare the

subversion of the genres, of the homogeneous classes to which they have been assigned: we can adduce the striking example of contemporary painting, which in many cases is no longer, strictly speaking, either painting or sculpture, but the production of 'objects'; not to mention melody, for example, which the theory will treat as text (a hybrid of voice, which is a pure corporeal signifier, and language) much more than as a musical genre. (Barthes 1988: 42-3)

While for Barthes it is still a question of practice 'engendering' text(s) and (inter)textuality through the erosion of generic boundaries that creates (textual) 'objects' for criticism or reading, the notion of textuality, for 'full-blown' poststructuralists, so to speak, begins to encompass all meaning-making or the 'textuality of signifying practice' as such, which is 'grounded in the materiality of the signifier', as Antony Easthope explains in (1991: 42). Not only, from a literature department's point of view, are 'all texts our province', since all meaning is culturally produced through texts of all sorts, as Catherine Belsey writes: 'To the degree that texts are products, and indeed instances, of culture, the discipline of studying English literature comes to embrace a form of cultural history and cultural analysis that takes us beyond the handful of "great works" that used to be selected for study in order to preserve good taste' (Belsey 1998: n.p.); but through the institutionalization of cultural studies and cultural criticism the difference between 'world' and 'text' (a dichotomy that according to Bennett and Royle is 'like a vampire that won't lie down' (2004: 27)) is also thoroughly eroded. Poststructuralism 'undermines the very terms of this text-world dichotomy' by asking questions like: 'How do literary texts represent the world? Where does a literary text begin and end? Is an author an inhabitant of the world or the creation of a literary text? To what extent is history a kind of text? And what implications does this have for thinking about literature? Can literary texts do things to the world as well as simply describe it?' (27). All pertinent questions for sure, and questions that have lost nothing of their topicality. Bennett and Royle start their chapter on 'The Text and the World' with the last of these questions: can literary texts do things to the world as well as simply describe them? Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' (1681) serves as an illustration of 'textual seduction' (a fictional dramatization of a seduction that has 'real' effects on the reader (29)). A

clear distinction between text and world, fiction and reality, cannot be upheld because 'everything human that happens in the world is mediated by language', which translates into 'Derridean' as 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' ('there is no outside-text', rather than the relativist or nihilist interpretation often wrongly attributed to Derrida (and poststructuralism more generally): 'there is nothing outside the text' (or 'pure textualism'), as in 'there is no reality' or 'any reading or interpretation is as good as any other'). For the reading of Marvell's poem this means that it (the reading) is a 'text' in itself. Furthermore, the poem 'enacts' the dissolution between text and world itself in trying to persuade a fictional 'mistress' into consenting to have bodily (real?) textual/sexual intercourse. At the same time the poet is 'reading' the effects of this textual seduction 'onto' the mistress's body (her blushing for example). Texts, as Bennett and Royle conclude, are therefore 'always already part of the world' as much as they help 'produce our reality or worlds: 'There is no world without text. But there is also no text without, outside of, the world, no way to separate the two, no sense, finally, in talking about "the text and the world"' (40). Given that Bennett and Royle's *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* is now in its 4th edition, it creates a case in point: this *text*book clearly has been changing the 'world' of many students of English and has thus performed its own 'textual seduction'.

The move from text (whether in the 'objective' or the 'processual' sense) to textuality to an extent that might sanction the use of the phrase 'textual condition' implies, according to Mikko Lehtonen, a shift towards 'potentiality' or 'continuous production': 'The notion of textuality underlines the point that texts as such are always incomplete and on the move, and that in order for them to obtain meanings they must be read' (Lekhtonen 2000: 105). However, it would be wrong in pragmatic terms to see the potentiality of meanings as endless since texts are always read by concrete readers who come with their own limitations and potentialities, which, for reader-response criticism, corresponds to the requirement that concrete readers have to position themselves vis-à-vis implied readers to fill in the gaps every text must leave for a

concrete face-to-face situation between text and reader: 'Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence, the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text' (Iser 1980: 112). To enter into this 'negotiation process' is what Jerome McGann refers to as the 'textual condition', or that condition that humans always already find themselves in (McGann 1991: 3). Texts, for McGann are 'human acts' and textuality 'is a scene in which readers respond to the texts they encounter' (4).

The movement from text to textuality is thus one of 'entanglement' in which reading writers and (re)writing readers encounter material textual signifiers which are themselves part of a network or con- and intertextuality and whose meanings are not 'contained' in them but are produced performatively, so to speak, under the specific conditions in which they arise. The question that therefore ultimately (re)surfaces from this brief round-up of text-theories of the past decades is: how does the idea of 'countertext' or 'countertextuality' relate to all this? What, in other words, does the prefix 'counter' add to what we already know about texts and textuality?

The (Counter)Textual Condition

'I'll text you…'

One way of understanding the appearance of the countertextual is through the effect of digitalization. As Gregory Ulmer explains, in his response 'Text Culture Grammatology', which concludes the volume *Reimagining Textuality: Textual Studies in the Late Age of Print* (2002), living in a 'postliterate [post-literary?] era' after the 'pictorial turn' might also require a shift from 'literacy' to what he calls 'electracy' ('electracy is to computing what literacy is to

print' (Ulmer 2002: 244). Ulmer here builds on a lifetime's work (from *Applied Grammatology* to *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy* and beyond) which would be difficult to summarise here. What is meant by postliterate, the pictorial turn and electracy is a shift (due to a combination of the rise of visual and new media, computing and digitalization) from a book-centred idea of textuality to a more general understanding of inscription (Ulmer follows here the opening created by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*). The move, throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, from a literal notion of text and textuality to one that encompasses words and images, as well as a wealth of other 'paralinguistic' features associated with new media technologies and digital code, for Ulmer requires a pedagogical readjustment in writing-reading practices (hence his coignage of electracy as a new 'apparatus' that is replacing or has already superseded the literacy apparatus): 'Media literacy makes sense when our only tool is the book. The strategy is in the terms themselves: impose book models on the alien forms and practices emerging within the new media. The computer, however, opens the way to a completely new strategy, which is to continue the tradition of invention preserved in the heritage of our discipline' (Ulmer 2002: 245). For Ulmer this shift is an absolute requirement because 'one of the chief effects of the new media on our society is the destruction of selfhood as it has been constructed within the literate tradition. Replacing selfhood in the era of media is "the look", the desire to be an image' (245). His aim is therefore to arrive at a 'postliterate image-textual picture theory' (250).

This is of course all far from obvious and there is much resistance by the 'literate' (humanistic or philological) tradition in the humanities towards the cultural, institutional and pedagogical effects of digitalisation in general and the idea and implications of electracy in particular. There is also, arguably, no real break between two 'apparatuses' – an adaptation of the Foucauldian and Deleuzian term that Ulmer explains in the following words: 'Orality, literacy, and electracy are apparatuses or social machines organising the language of an epoch. An apparatus in this sense is a matrix that includes a technology, institutional practices, and

individual identity formation. The factors of change come as much from the social elements as from the technological' (246). Literacy and new forms of signifying practices relating to new, digital media and computerization (whether they be captured by the term 'electracy' or not) coexist and, most importantly, 'remediate' themselves in the sense given to the term by Bolter and Grusin (2000); that is, they mutually affect and rewrite each other: literacy practices still apply to new media while new media practices change the very notion of literacy.

One meaning of countertextuality could therefore certainly be understood as this transitional 'condition', between apparatuses. In this sense, countertextuality might be text that is 'aware' of its increasingly hybrid nature, between writing, images and 'hypermedia', in short, 'hypertext', in George Landow's understanding: 'Hypermedia simply extends the notion of text in hypertext by including visual information, sound, animation, and other forms of data. Since hypertext, which links one passage of verbal discourse to images, maps, diagrams, and sound as easily as to another verbal passage, expands the notion of text beyond the solely verbal' (Landow 2006: 3). A countertext under these circumstances might be something like Landow's or Ulmer's 'books' themselves: criticism that, through textual recuperation, tries to make sense of the dissolution of the 'mediatic' and 'technological' boundaries of text – which would be the ultimate fulfilment of Barthes's definition of criticism's own 'text': '*Let the commentary be itself a text*: that is, in brief, what the theory of the text demands… *The only practice that is founded by the theory of the text is the text itself*… by entering into the undifferentiated proliferation of the intertext… There are no more critics, only writers… The real taking-up of the theory of the text is the practice of textual writing' (Barthes 1982: 44). It is clear that, under these conditions, the notion of countertextuality would imply the extension, maybe even the globalization, of the (inter)textual onto the human-media-technology complex that, today, is usually designated by the term 'posthuman' (cf. Hayles 1999). It would thus be important to 'face' the weaving of these new ('cyborgised') forms of textualities and tissues with a critical

(or countertextual) apparatus that would be able to do justice to the materialities of these emerging 'intertextual/intertissual' forms.

What counters the counter-?

> One must recognise, countersign, reproduce the other's signature without reproducing or imitating it. (Derrida 2004: 29)

While there is a lot of mileage in the so far outlined understanding of the countertext, especially as far as the current changing material conditions for the production of texts are concerned, there is another important conceptual issue to be thought, and which refers more explicitly to the prefix 'counter-'. Simon Morgan Wortham, in his 'Counter-Introduction' to *Counter-Institutions: Jacques Derrida and the Question of the University* (2006), quotes from Derrida's 'Countersignature' as a reminder that 'to "counter" not only means to oppose or contradict, but also, inseparably, to engage, meet, make contact' (Wortham 20). Indeed, the adverb and/or prepositional prefix 'counter' signifies both and 'inseparably' so: 'proximity vis-à-vis' and 'opposition' (Derrida 2004: 17-18) and this 'double-bind' or aporia creates 'complicity, contagion, contamination between these two "counters"' (38). Every counter is thus also a 'contact zone' between an 'other' and that which is '(en)countered' – the 'uncanny experience of the *vis-à-vis*' (Wortham 2006: 23). In fact, the little word 'counter', like 'trace', 'supplement' or '*différance'* is one of these (auto)deconstructing 'concepts' or rather 'conceptualities' that both underpin and at the same time undo what, following Derrida, has been called the 'Western metaphysics of presence'. It in fact reconstructs a very specific 'scene' – that of an encounter of course – an encounter that gives rise to identity and difference, and an encounter that requires the subsequent repression of the alterity that, initially, gave rise to the encounter. In good 'literate' fashion, Wortham goes through the definitions of 'counter' in the OED to show that

the dictionary cannot contain the word's disseminative meaning. The 'definitions' Wortham lists, read, in fact, like a compendium to deconstruction: counter as 'contact', which 'involves the opposition of wholly realised entities, utterly distinct and fully constituted *beforehand*, only really comes *afterward'* (36); counter as used in 'keeping an account or reckoning in games of chance' as stratagem or 'leverage' of a 'counter-force' (38); counter as in 'the name given to an imitation coin…' as in 'counterfeiting', which takes up the deconstructive theme of the ultimately impossible distinction between and co-implication of original and repetition. The final definition, related to the historical 'debtor's prison', is etymologically related to the French *compter* (and to Latin *computare*, as in 'to count'). It is thus also linked to the idea of the 'computer', which returns us to the notion of countertextuality under the condition of digitalisation mentioned above. However, *all* the 'counters' have to be thought in relation to the idea of a 'countertext' of course. They all rely on an impossible, (auto)deconstructive move by which 'one thing *counters* another' through contact *and* opposition (proximity *and* distinction or distance). This is not just a contradiction, it is a necessary contradiction for an (en)counter to happen. The question thus arises: what counters the counter?

Gegen

> [Metaphysics] thus turns its power back upon its own proper power. It would be a power worked by a counterpower. But a counterpower that it would bear within itself. Thus a counterpower that it itself *is* and on the basis of which it will ultimately be instituted. (Derrida 1995: 58)

Before I get to this question, however, I need to add a few words on the idea of presence that is necessarily presupposed in any counter (and the counter's 'counter-presence', so to speak). As was mentioned at the beginning, the equivalent of the prefix 'counter-' in German is '*gegen'*, which is part of two central metaphysical concepts: '*Gegenstand'* (object) and '*Gegenwart'*

(presence). *Gegen*, in German, thus does different semantic work than counter, in English (and *contre*, in French– which both go back to Latin *contra*). Etymologically, *gegen* derives from the Old Germanic and Norse '*gagna-*' (also linked to the English against). *Gegenwart*, thus, literally, means 'turned' or 'directed against', or 'being opposite' ('*-wart*' or '*-wärts*' are derived from the Old German '*uert-*' 'to turn'), and is indeed very close to *Gegenstand* (literally, 'standing opposite'). Both play an important, if very negative, part in the work of Heidegger, whose project, as is well known, is the *Destruktion der Metaphysik*, or the undoing (through rereading) of the entire history of Western metaphysics. In fact, Heidegger, precisely because of their reliance on the 'counter-', prefers *Anwesenheit* over *Gegenwart* (i.e. a notion of presence based on *Wesen* – being or essence) and *Ding* over Gegenstand (i.e. a notion of object whose 'thingly character… does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object' (Heidegger 1975: 167)). Thus, in so far as the 'counter' involves representation it cannot grasp the 'thing-as-such', or the essence of thingness. Instead, the thing 'things', according to Heidegger, and in doing so it provides a 'world' (it 'worlds') and thus creates 'nearness'. Heidegger's is thus a critique of the metaphysics of thingness based on phenomenology (which has earned him some credit as a forerunner to object-oriented ontology; cf. Harman 2005).

Likewise, being as presence understood as being-there (*Dasein* or *Vorhandenheit*) is always being deferred or displaced (and differing from itself; cf. Derrida's *différance*) through its mediation by meaning (as opposed to pure reference): '*Meaning precedes reference*, and inasofar as things mean, they already inhere in words. The word is itself the encompassing relation (*Verhältnis*, which literally suggests "counter-holding") between word and thing, the possibility of a particular signification' (Eiland 1984: 47). The metaphysical idea of presence is actually constructed on a thingly nearness – we *are* in the presence of things – while it is precisely this nearness which always escapes *us*. This, similar to the logic of the counter referred to above, is what is at stake in Derridean deconstruction of presence more generally, whose aim

it is, as stated in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1976: 70): '[t]o make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words "proximity", "immediacy", "presence" (the proximate [*proche*], the own [*propre*], and the pre- of presence), is my final intention in this book'. What the counter does – in a classic metaphysical sense – is to both temporalise and spatialise whatever it '(en)counters'. In the case of a countertext, the encounter with a text is also based on a before and after (the text must always come before any countering move) as well as on a notion of differentiation that sees both (text and counter) as temporally present, but in the sense of being in the same space (otherwise an encounter wouldn't be thinkable). One could therefore say that the first counter-move, the almost originary countertext, is thus the necessary *and* impossible *Gegenwart* which is the *Gegenstand* of metaphysical thinking. The trace of this originary countertext continues to haunt any 'scene of reading/writing' that is based on some form of distributed or oppositional agencies (writer-text-reader-countertext) because of the necessary forgetting (or repression) of its own mediation or translation processes.

Countertextuality and/as Translation

> Or, je ne crois pas que rien soit jamais intraduisible – ni d'ailleurs traduisible. (Derrida 1999: 25) ['As a matter of fact, I don't believe that anything can ever be untranslatable – or, moreover, translatable.' (Derrida 2001: 178); an extensive commentary would be necessary to explain the equivalence or non-equivalence of 'as a matter of fact' for or, and 'moreover' for d'ailleurs, or, the functioning of the double negative in French for that matter – all major motifs in Derridean deconstruction (SH).]

Who or what is or comes against (a) text? Ever since the move from work to text, ever since (literary) criticism's task has shifted from appreciating the great works to intervening within intertextuality, ever since literary criticism is no longer (exclusively) about literature, there has been a need for countertextuality: text and countertext, a game between 'primary' and 'secondary' texts during which the 'secondary' has increasingly been taking over, maybe even

replacing the 'primary', and which, as a result, has thoroughly eroded the boundaries between 'literature' and 'criticism' and maybe even redistributed their innovative potential and forms of creativity (the 'post-literary'?). For theorists of translation, this comes as no real surprise, because it corresponds to the complex relationship between the 'source text' and its 'target'. Laurence Venuti, paradigmatically, establishes the connection between intertextuality and translation thus:

> Translation represents a unique case of intertextuality. It in fact involves three sets of intertextual relations: (1) those between the foreign text and other texts, whether written in the foreign language or in a different one; (2) those between the foreign text and the translation, which have traditionally been treated according to concepts of equivalence; and (3) those between the translation and other texts, whether written in the translating language or in a different one. (Venuti, 2009: 158)

This further expansion of the dimensions of previous notions of intertextuality – which is of course not new and has always been available, but maybe tends to be 'forgotten' in more recent theorisations – and which is a reminder of the irreducible pluriverse of languages, arguably, is the ultimate 'practice' of countertextuality today:

> A translation, then, recontextualises both the foreign text that it translates and the translating-language text that it quotes or imitates, submitting them to a transformation that changes their significance. As a result, the intertextual relations that a translation establishes are not merely interpretive, but potentially interrogative: they inscribe meanings and values that invite a critical understanding of the quoted or imitated texts, even the cultural traditions and social institutions in which those texts are positioned, while simultaneously inviting the reader to understand the foreign text on the basis of texts, traditions, and institutions specific to the translating culture. (Venuti 2009: 165)

How can one possibly counter such a move? In a globalised context where translation happens all the time this interrogative quality of translational intertextuality raises the stakes and puts contemporary theory at odds with its own (all too often forgotten) 'origins', namely translation itself. The current focus on the countertextual as the technology-driven transformation of text into code (cf. the idea of countextuality as digitalization referred to above) therefore threatens

to miss out on the 'other' context (i.e. the global(ised) plurilingual materialities of neoliberalism, migration and multiculturalism) in which it is taking place. How, then, do we translate countertextuality? Since translation doesn't only happen 'between' languages but also 'within' (a) language (for example, every time the phrases 'in other words' or 'as if' or perhaps even 'perhaps' occur, in any language), the move of the counter move has therefore already begun (in any language). This maybe, could lead to another, more comprehensive, understanding of countertextuality, namely one that is aware of its translational (en)counters – between bodies, things, texts and code, of course, but also between the irreducible plurality between (several) as well as within (individual) languages – which might serve as the (un)timely reminder of the initial insights of 'theory' (and poststructuralism and deconstruction in particular) .

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