Chapter 8

Translation Poetry: The Poetics of Noise in Hsia Yü's *Pink Noise*

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'Good day,

With warm heart I offer my friendship, and my greetings and I hope this letter meets

you in good time.'[1]

When a message such as the one above is written and spammed by a machine to

thousands of email addresses, such an event alters our relationship with language,

texts, and words. The abundant circulation of digital texts that people in

technologically advanced countries are exposed to on a daily basis, since the

invention of broadband, has rapidly defined a textual environment that has

transformed our assumptions about reading and writing. American poet Kenneth

Goldsmith comments: '…the underlying ethos and modes of writing have been

permanently changed…Words very well might be written not to be read but rather to

be shared, moved, and manipulated'.[2]

Concrete and sound poetry, and literary devices such as pastiche, collage, and

cutups, can be seen as the direct result of the technological turns that started with the

widespread use of the phonograph, and continued with the typewriter, the tape

recorder, the photocopy machine, the computer, all of which have radically impacted

creative writing since the end of the 19th century.[3] All those technological inventions had in common the function of facilitating the reproduction and manipulation of oral and written texts, playing an enormous role in writers' experimentation with the materiality of language.

   Pink Noise (Fen hongse de sangyin) is a book printed on acetate pages, including thirty-two poems in English and one in French as originals, and their translations into Chinese, by the Apple Macintosh search-and-find software *Sherlock*.[4] The original poems are composed using phrases, mostly found by clicking hyperlinks in spam emails, then lineated by Hsia Yü to look like poems. These are printed in black ink and made be followed by their machine translation into Chinese, printed in pink. The two different colours therefore mark two kinds of appropriations, the one of texts from the Internet and the one of the translation (figure 1). *Pink Noise* thus situates itself in the long tradition of using existing materials and re-contextualising them in the creation of a new work.

   What, then, is the conceptual framework that distinguishes a poetic work such as Hsia Yü's *Pink Noise* from Ezra Pound's radical, multilingual, collaged poetry, or Kurt Schwitters's 'Merz' poems, which were composed by assembling together fragments of overheard conversation and random phrases from newspapers and magazines, or Tristan Tzara's simultaneous poem 'The Admiral Looks for a House to Rent', written and performed in three different languages at the same time? The crucial differences pertain to the digital context of its creation, and a certain conceptualization of translation and noise as creative devices. In the digital context, the strategies and modalities of signification have been transformed, first and foremost by considerably expanding the field of textuality, and by putting all sorts of

texts in topologically unspecific networked circulation, available to be looked at, shared, and manipulated, sometimes quickly or partially read.

In the following sections I will examine *Pink Noise* within the context of Hsia Yü's literary production, and, more generally, within the context of globalised, post-modern Taiwan. I will also attempt a discussion of this collection and its processes of remediation of poetic language, focusing on the mechanisms of localization activated by *Sherlock*'s translation.

Pink Noise within Hsia Yü's literary production

Hsia Yü has a varied CV: she graduated in performing arts, specialized in creative writing; she worked in a publishing house, at a TV broadcasting agency, in an art gallery, as a journal editor, as a translator, as a lyricist for 'the princess of Taiwan's underground rock' Sandee Chan,[5] and established herself on the Taiwanese literary scene as the first and most successful postmodern poet. After many years living interchangeably in France, New York, and Taiwan, in 2002, Hsia Yü eventually returned to reside on a more or less permanent basis in Taipei, where she continues to be a productive and influential writer in and beyond Taiwan.

Hsia Yü's poetry collections include: *Memoranda* (Beiwanglu, 1984), a self-published volume, containing poems from 1976 to 1984 that surprised both the ear and the eye by linking together in analogy words that are normally unconnected;[6] *Ventriloquy* (Fuyu shu, 1991), featuring invented characters and where, as implied in the title, the main theme is the distance between the spoken word and the subject of speech; *Friction Ineffable* (Moca wu yi ming zhuang, 1995), composed mostly of

concise and highly abstract cutups from the previous collection *Ventriloquy* and thus further radicalizing the estrangement; *Salsa* (2000), containing longer, almost narrative-style poems; and a double album CD, *The More Mixed Up with Music the Better* (Yue hun yue dui, 2002), containing poems from her collection *Fusion Kitsch*, and sung by various rock stars or recited with music by the poet herself.

Pink Noise is a product of the digital turn of the 1990s, when the Internet from being a specialized medium rapidly became an ordinary means of communication and expression, a new context, and a state of mind. It was first published by the author herself in 2007. Together with the poems and their translation, at the end of the book there is also appended an interview with the poet by A Weng, in Chinese, translated by Zona Yi-Ping Tsou into English.

As is apparent from such a succinct résumé, much of the motivation for this author's work seems to come from the postmodern interest in repetition, quotations and clichés. More recent books, such as *First Person* (Di yi rencheng, 2016), a bilingual book-length photo poem, also play around with the ideas of the speaking voice, visuality, illegibility, poetry and the controversy of signification. *Pink Noise*, with its lines in the second-hand Weblish language as *objet trouvé*, and their machine translation, constitutes no exception. The book has indeed a dependency on automated system, in the same way as contemporary e-poetry can do.[7] However, authorial intervention is also important, since Hsia Yü not only selects and arranges the texts, but she is also the designer, maker and publisher of the book. This makes *Pink Noise* distinctive, as it is not a wholly machine-operated text but rather stages a rhizomatic subjectivity operating in a digital world.

The book is also aesthetically pleasing to look at and it feels physically heavier than a regular paper book of equal size. It was printed in limited editions, and

the price reflected this, being higher than a normal book. The text as image is quite dominant, but in fact, reading the poems is impossible, unless we interpose a sheet of paper between the acetated pages of the book. At a more minute level, the book presents linear verbal poetry, sometimes composed of segments from adverts, some times by random excerpts from online communications, and some other times by lines spanning from Shakespeare to Baudelaire, to more recent minds. The reader is then presented with semantic elements, even though they can be combined in surprising ways. The essay appended at the end of the book makes this object more bookish, and although the pages are unusually not numbered and transparent, there is no violation or denial of the book's potential page space, as we may find in many a visual, hypertextual, animated, interactive, holographic, or sound poem.[8] These attributes all point to the idea that, while very much an art object, *Pink Noise* does not deny its identity as a book: Hsia Yü's chosen medium is the book.

Simultaneously, while the book itself has considerable and stylish authorial intervention, conceptually, because of its reliance on citations and translation, and, above all, because it is written and translated by the machine, it is expressive of an approach to poetry that refuses familiar strategies of authorial control and the conventional idea of the poem as the product of a single authorial and original voice.[9] Some of the hallmarks of poetry as conventionally understood, such as the use of metaphor and imagery and the expression of sincere emotion by especially sensitive individuals, have to be radically reconsidered here.

Owing to its eye-catching appearance, its genesis, and its thoughtful conception, this book has triggered the interest of a large number of scholars. These scholars have discussed it in relation to issues of authorship and of the deconstructivist echo of the poetic word, of identity and concepts linked to poetry's

originality and linguistic (in)commensurability; they have also discussed Taiwan's broader socio-cultural condition in the digital era, and language and globalization in the digital ecosystem of the Internet. In a paper presented at the AAS conference in 2010, Jennifer Feeley gives an introduction to the history of machine translation to foreground her discussion of *Pink Noise*'s collaborative writing between a human and a computer. Referring to Johnston's and Deleuze's theorizations of the simulacrum, Feeley reads this collection, in the light of deconstructivist speculations on the notion of original. Tong King Lee dedicates a whole chapter of his book on experimental Chinese literature to *Pink Noise*, entitling it 'Machine Translation and Hsia Yu's Poetics of Deconstruction'. Echoing and expanding Feeley's main points, Lee takes Derrida as his main theoretical reference, with a host of other literary and translation theorists, from Barthes to Benjamin to Pym to Gentzler. Jonathan Rollins in his book chapter 'Hsia Yü's Translingual Transculturalism from *Memoranda* to *Pink Noise*' also surveys 'the poet's radical experiments in language and culture […] by reading her work as an example of translingual, transcultural poetry according to theories put forth by Mikhail Bakhtin, Mikhail Epstein, and Steven G. Kellman' (247). Jacob Edmond's discussion of *Pink Noise* appears in a chapter of his book *Make It the Same: Poetry in the Age of Global Media*, 'Chinese Rooms'. Here Edmond illustrates a number of authors, including Hsia Yü, Chen Li, and Jonathan Stalling, who relate to Chinese and English translation, with the aim of defamiliarizing language. Michelle Yeh and Lili Hsieh both approach *Pink Noise* from a critical angle that goes beyond deconstruction. According to the title and epigraph of her article 'Towards a Poetics of Noise: From Hu Shi to Hsia Yü', Yeh aims at examining this book within the framework of a 'poetics of noise', while succinctly focusing on three themes: love/sex, life and art. Given the limited space of her article, and the wide time frame

of her exploration, Yeh's essay however does not probe, as promised, into a poetics of noise. Instead, it examines *Pink Noise* from the perspective of feminist writing, thus shifting attention to the broader social context of Taiwan, highlighting how sexual transactions are portrayed and how they relate to and are proscribed by the capitalist system. Lili Hsieh's 'Romance in the Age of Cybernetic Conviviality: Hsia Yü's *Pink Noise* and the Poetics of Postcolonial Translation' is perhaps the most incisive of all these inspiring studies, eloquently elaborating on Hsia Yü's conception of *Pink Noise* within a rhetoric of love and Taiwan's colonial background. Hsieh convincingly reads the poems in *Pink Noise* 'as the realistic representations of the transformed and transforming public sphere of cybernetic conviviality' (3) and discusses the question of 'the status of English as a global language, the loss and love of translation in a postcolonial context, the return from narratology to a musicology of poetry, and the tremendously rich 'nonsense' that happens when two heterogeneous and disparagingly hegemonic national languages meet' ('Abstract').

The reflections offered by all these studies are ample and sophisticated. Surprisingly, however, *Pink Noise* has not yet been read through the lens of sound studies. Sound studies can in fact introduce a critical dimension, in addition to the thematic one, that helps investigating the ideological dimension of the Internet and of translation as cultural forms. The poet herself stated that *Pink Noise* was conceived as a result of having been listening to Taiwan sound art, 'from music, noise, off-key, low-frequencies, sampling, jazz syncopation and such, … I just wanted to work out the best form for this 'poetry noise'… to offset the lettristic noise…'[10] What Hsia Yü calls 'poetry noise' here may refer to certain treatment of the many citations taken from all the texts circulating and overcrowding the Internet. Like the processing of extracted audio signals through modulation, sampling, and other techniques of sound

manipulation in sound art, *Pink Noise* aims at transforming the original polyphony of the extracted material found in the Internet into new poetic compositions. Hsia also compares this processing to that one of the 'lettristic' poets, who in their asemic writing worked to empty writing of its specific semantic content, while maintaining its visual form. This adds to *Pink Noise*'s visual dimension: asemic writing looks like regular writing but it is in fact 'unreadable'. Similarly, the poems in *Pink Noise* look like poems, but they are made of waste language and rendered 'unreadable' by the texts' superimposition. Such a celebration of language failure is what links *Pink Noise* to the art of noise: as in a piece of sound art, Hsia Yü puts glitches at the centre of her creative process. Indeed, what characterizes sound poetry is not just its audibility, but primarily an aesthetics of language that disengages poetry from meaning, linguistically encoded structures, or grammatical synthesis. Following these indications, the challenge I set for myself is then to explore *Pink Noise* through the epistemology of noise, hoping that drawing on sound studies and thinking about the visual and aural noise of these texts as art of noise will help me disclose the process and theoretical tenets of this book.

Pink Noise and the Epistemology of Noise

I shall start with the title and discuss *Pink Noise* within the operations of noise as a sensory phenomenon and as a cultural theory. Throughout, I will draw from both

cultural theorist Stephen Kennedy's conceptualization of the digital space and methodology of sound and American artist Joseph Nechvatal's theory of noise art.[11]

In electromagnetics, noise can be named after colours, such as violet, blue, brown, white or pink. The practice started with the denomination of 'white noise', a phenomenon taking its title from the extension to audio of the visual phenomenon called 'white light', where a combination of lights of different wavelengths in the visible spectrum are perceived as white. Analogously, white noise can be compared to this phenomenon, inasmuch as it combines together all signals of different frequencies into a flat frequency of equal intensity. Pink noise is instead a filtered sound, inversely proportional to the frequency, defined as 'pink' because light with a similar spectrum would appear pink. Pink noise is also defined as 'human friendly' noise, because humans can tolerate it more easily. In information theory, any alteration in the transmission of a message is also defined as 'noise'.

Noise functions as a disturbance factor to the detached observation of a knowable world. Applied to art, noise has been invested with a subversive function, as a phenomenological means that is able to give access to non-representational meaning. In computing signal processing and in sound art, as Nechvatal explains, noise 'can be considered data without meaning; that is data that is not being used to transmit a signal, but is simply produced as an unwanted by-product of other activities. Noise can block, distort, or change the meaning of a message in both human and electronic communication'.[12] I see *Pink Noise* as drawing on both these two conceptions of noise, developing a tension between non-representational meaning and the non meaning of the signal interference.

Bearing Nechvatal's definition in mind, we can take the epigraph given at the beginning of this paper, and any other spam texts circulating on the Internet, as

examples of noise in electronic communication. We can similarly take Hsia Yü's poem-lineated English texts as language noise, i.e. texts made of 'data without meaning', that will be turn into poems with 'non-representational meaning'. Made of samples of the textual inundation in today's networked digital world, *Pink Noise* presents us with texts that look like poems but are made of white noise interference. Indeed, Nechvatal also specifies:

> We must consider that noise takes place in a general media culture of massive electronic deluge, where the mercurial reproduction of free-floating (ineffable) signifiers of language, sound and images has blurred into a problematized complex/compound/prodigality sometimes referred to as *information overload*. In one respect, all sounds and images are already a kind of noise: data without meaning.[13]

In the same respect, *Pink Noise*'s English poems can be considered as being made of by-product language, randomly selected citations with or without quotation marks, 'free-floating signifiers of language'. This is language appropriated from the multitude of voices circulating on the Web, and which produces visual glitches and aural noise, both indicating communication failure. The method of sharing and exchange, of appropriating segments of texts, gives shape to a counter sub-cultural practice of remix and information overload, which recycles found digital texts. But *Pink Noise* does not linger in a polemical comment on digital culture. It rather performs it, showing how a large amount of text is always a click away from everyone, available, and open to any manipulation. Visually, aurally and conceptually, we are in front of a totalizing effect, an abundance of interwoven

voices, expropriating the space of the single authorial voice.[14] Thus *Pink Noise* also undertakes a radical consideration of poetry and the poet, the former being made of material that is extraneous to the poet and the latter acting more as a sound artist or a *bricoleur*. Globe trotting through the Web, the poetic word has lost its specific location, and with it any claim to originality. But since Hsia Yü selected and combined the found textual segments at a specific time and place, and the book itself is a limited-edition collectable work, the final product is in fact not a piece of entirely automated writing, but an original work with an author.

Hsia Yü's manipulation of web-found language does not simply communicate a free postmodern play of signifiers. Within the overarching referent of cyberspace, we are not asked to try to fill the gaps, but to browse these texts and gaps, as we browse the Web. Furthermore, *Pink Noise*'s cutups may perhaps be incongruously compiled, but they do not attempt to disengage familiar words; instead they still retain conventional meaning; by a playful and exuberant operation of assemblage, they paradoxically often read as so conventional that they sound trite, with several idiomatic expressions. So, for example, we find lines such as: 'Words fail me' (poem 5); 'In the desolate frozen wasteland' (poem 14); 'Remember that great love and great achievements involve great risk' (poem 12); 'There is comfort in this sadness' (poem 15); 'Tu as largement rempli l'abysse qui est en moi' (poem 27); 'Things seem to get worse before they get better' (poem 32); or segments of 'small talk', such as in poem 4:

> "I have this green hutch, from Romania
>
> Late 1800s," she says. "It's a great antique piece
>
> It's a great colour, a very bright green

The doors are held together by bent nails. It's

Fabulous. I have eclectic tastes.

Nothing really goes but it works."

These poems in English, then, let words stream out hijacked, as we encounter them on the web. They are commonplace, trivial, repetitive, familiar, and automate our reading. With appropriate reference to sound, Lawrence Lessing refers to this patchwork mechanism as 'remix culture', and Lev Manovich calls it the 'database logic' of the new media,[15] wherein the focus is no longer on the production of new material but on the recombination of previously produced and stockpiled data. Such a dynamic intermediation of texts leads to what has been called Work as Assemblage,[16] a cluster of texts that modifies constructions of subjectivity. The subjects producing the Work as Assemblage are multiple in many senses, both because they are collectivities in and among themselves, and also because they include nonhuman as well as human actors. The machine is also a poet that produces the text, and the text is also multiple, because is an assemblage of multiple authorship. The reader, immersed in the noise of the re-assembled texts on acetate pages, can claim equal rights on them to the poet Hsia Yü.

The obliteration of the original voice by the machine does not imply an antithesis to human, since it is still the poet to assemble the poems. As elaborated by cultural theorist Stephen Kennedy, both the human and the machine inhabit the digital space: 'Not a dichotomy of real and virtual but a unified experience where those two realms collide to create mediated experiences and environments without essential qualities'.[17] In such digital space, 'technology is not a specific object or collection of

objects, but is a constellation of generative and regenerative elements in a number of forms that are not always stylistically uniform or thematically stable'.[18]

Given the digital environment where private and public, human and machine, past and present coalesce, *Pink Noise* is a hyperreal facsimile that exploits mass-consumed language as poetry, engages public and private, and brings about a compelling world of uneven digital globalization in postcolonial Taiwan. Even when writing has become more graphic than semantic, more an event than a medium for referential communication, *Pink Noise* still fundamentally goes beyond the page, into the context, exploring what Amie Elizabeth Parry has recognized as Hsia Yü's poetic project: the underlying structures of knowledge, subjective and collective belief, and the values and structures of feeling that they support and help produce. The underlying questions of this collection, as Parry pointed out in relation to other work by Hsia Yü, are still the epistemological questions of What do we know? and How do we know?[19]

The discrete segments of the cluster poem all contribute to the poetic world in the same way: His Yü attempts some levelling of the different kinds of textual identities and human experiences, the lines from spam emails and the lines from Shakespeare's sonnets. They are the new 'post-spectacular articulation of banality'[20] that makes our collective knowledge. *Pink Noise* samples the chaotic digital environment, where extension and proximity are accentuated, and where we can engage in some activities of exchange and make 'journeys full of encounters'.[21] But whereas Kennedy concedes that in the contemporary digital landscape 'echoes resound in the shadows'[22] and 'noise resolves to harmonize',[23] in my view the 'harmonized' Weblish compositions in *Pink Noise* do not equal poetry. They need the

'improvised performative' of translation in order to be activated as poetry, 'affirm monstrosity' and 'mirror desire'.[24]

Translation as the Viral Mutation of Language

Sherlock investigates, finds connections to the linguistic extracts, translates word by word, line by line, and among the gaps, glitches and overlaps, 'in cognitive dissonance',[25] finally filters white noise into pink noise – that is poetry.

According to Nechvatal, in order to transform noise into art (i.e. be subversive and creative), the artist has to use 'noise to re-route and break our mental habits'.[26] I see *Pink Noise* doing this by being ideated as a bilingual collection. In order to 're-route' our mental habits, it is not enough to have poem-look-alikes made out of the noisy digital totality of voices, connecting the unconnected; they need to be further estranged, while being localised, through the operations of machine translation. As notably stated by literary theorist Victor Shklovsky, the poetic device of *ostranenie* (estrangement) aims at resurrecting consumed words, so as to awaken the mind to a critical view on the word.[27] Similarly, the Surrealist poet Comte de Lautreamont (aka Isidore Ducasse) advocated that all elements, no matter where they come from, can be used to produce new combinations in which meaning can be altered, through the estrangement of the familiar. Such a *détournement* works for Ducasse as a contamination, as a virus within the hosting organism, operating empathically with it, so as to subvert it through semiotic overwriting.

Thus, rather than claiming symmetry and dissymmetry between 'original' and translation, Hsia Yü invokes translation estrangement to explain aesthetics, emotion and the pleasure of forms; that is, an unpredicted deviation in the relationship between sign and meaning, original and translation, and global and local. Following an argument similar to that of Emily Apter in 'Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability',[28] Hsia Yü seems to warn against the tendency in world literature of relying on equivalence and cultural commensurability. Sherlock's wrong translation shows linguistic incommensurability between Weblish and Chinese, as we can see if we compare any of the English originals, the Chinese, and a back translation into English:

You work all day and get half drunk at night

Nin fuwu zheng tian, he dedao yiban he zai wanshang

You, Sir, serve all day, and get half drink at night

A little chaos every now and then seems necessary

Yidian fenluan changchang sihu biyao de

A little chaos often is like necessary

When it comes to a matter that is close to your heart

Dang ta lai dao shi jin ai nin de xizang

When it comes is close to your heart

You are addicted to excitement

Nin shi shangyin de dui xingfen

You are addictive to excitement

You'll love these easy recipes

Nin jiang ai zhexie rongyi de shipu

You will love these easy recipes

And the kids will adore this crafty activity

Bingqie haizi jiang chongbai zhege guiji duoduan di huodong de shiqing

Moreover children will worship this thing of trickery activity [29]

Sherlock's incomprehension works as resistance to the homogenizing impulses of the Web. I consider this as *Pink Noise*'s main conception as a bilingual collection, with texts in Weblish translated into Chinese poems by a software function. *Pink Noise* 're-routes' our mental habits, presenting us with the noise of the digital textualities; then it goes a step further, enhancing estrangement through the operations of machine translation. And yet, at the same time, such enhanced estrangement is what makes the texts localised, because it is Hsia Yü who has decided to do this, within Taiwan's socio-cultural context. This is how Hsia Yü transforms the white noise of the English texts, into pink noise - that is poetry.

The discursive condition of the collaboration between the voices of the internet collectivity, Sherlock and Hsia Yü, is fragmentary and visually complicated, thus diverting the attention from a linear aggregate reading of the poems to a discontinuous, more conceptually driven fruition of the work. In fact, it is impossible to read the book without taking the pain of interposing a sheet of paper in between the pages. After doing so, the bilingual reader will read original and translation, soon finding that whereas the original more or less works as a conventional poem, the translation into Chinese sounds awkward, ungrammatical, and anachronistic. In a heightened back translation by Steve Bradbury of poem 20, 'Newsletter filled with diets' becomes 'Current affairs loaded with food and drink' (*shishi tongxun bei zhuangzai yinshi*), 'For whom I'm searching' becomes 'I forage' (*wo xunzhao*), 'Yes,

technology' becomes 'Right, technique' (*shi, jishu*), etc.[30] By having these texts translated by the software function *Sherlock*, introducing the discordant language of the Chinese translation, *Pink Noise* presents us with the grand narrative of the technological global culture, while also subverting it. When machine-like Sherlock translates, for example, 'fucking' into 'sexual intercourse' (*xingjiao*), or 'and' into 'moreover' (*bingqie*), 'creeping' into 'crawling' (*rudong*),[31] the suggestion is that poetry is not within the meaning of the original, nor in the translation, but in the 'cognitive dissonance' demonstrated by the gaps between original and translation. Hsieh astutely points out that the translation shifts resulting from Sherlock's translation

> are 'luminous mistakes': the comic effect is that the banality of everyday English is rendered into a pedantic, academic or jargon translation, […] the machine-generated translation anachronistically reflects the literal translation of the 1950s and 1960s Taiwan […]. The sense of defamiliarization in the Chinese poems of *Pink Noise* therefore has an historical as well as an aesthetic dimension.[32]

Benjamin conceptualised the authenticity of the work of art as a quality that is topologically inflected: an original is located into a specific territory and historical moment. The copy of an original, on the other hand, is virtual, ahistorical, de-territorialised. It is inauthentic, not because it is different from the original, but because it does not have a precise location. Benjamin's distinction between original and copy not only recognizes that an original can be copied and de-territorialised, but also that a copy can become an original if re-territorialised. The same applies to

translation, which does not have to be primarily concerned with accuracy, but which in order to become an original needs to be concerned with context and connotation, whatever engenders the specificity of a topological reference. That is what the poet Hsia Yü, through Sherlock's translation, does in *Pink Noise*.

Hsia Yü herself states in the interview appended at the end of the collection that more than 'translated poetry' this is 'translation poetry'. In this light, the change of colour in the printed poems (black for the originals in English, and pink for the translation into Chinese) carries symbolic meaning too, inasmuch as the performative process of translation renders white noise (black print) into pink noise, corrupted language into affect, love and poetry.

Because *Sherlock* clearly refers to Sherlock Holmes, it anthropomorphises the machine, thus triggering a regular misunderstanding that sees a piece of computer software as an autonomous entity, characterised by human-like processes and motivations. Furthermore, Hsia Yü contributes to such a misunderstanding of a hybrid subject, half-human, half machine, when she refers to it as a lover:

> But now I feel a new romance coming on with this automated translation software, my machine poet. And what really turns me on is that, like any lethal lover, it announces from the beginning that is not to be trusted.[33]

Sherlock problematizes, drains, transfigures, and shows a rupture, making language particular. It compels us to take notice that original and translation conflict with each other, but it also directs us towards the transformative possibilities of translation, which encourages us to adopt an attitude of exploratory curiosity. In other words, the

Chinese poems provide for a complicating narrative, intrinsically intermingled with, but clearly distinguished from, the grand narrative of digital globalization.

Language is fragmented or sliced, then clustered together and inadequately translated: a linguistic breakdown to match the immersive and compressed World Wide Web, full of coalescing, conflicting, and ineluctable voices and texts. This is part of a general critique of the language of the internet; but it also has particular relevance to Taiwan because linguistic crossing and communication problems have repeatedly been part of the Taiwanese context, with its history of heated debates on the abandonment of one 'national language' over another. At least as early as 1943, Taiwan's government tried to implement a series of language policies, first endorsing and then abandoning the colonial language (Japanese), and subsequently 'returning' to Chinese as a national language. At the time of the Second World War, however, many Taiwanese had learned Chinese characters only as Japanese *kanji*: the ideographs were the same, but they had a different pronunciation and sometimes a different meaning. Therefore, such a partially shared orthography between Chinese and Japanese made the recovery of Mandarin as national language ambiguous, since it was not clear what the object of decontamination was. Moreover, Mandarin was also challenged from within, as the inhabitants of Taiwan were largely southern Min topolect speakers in the first place. Taiwan's language problem, that is, was at once cross-national and intranational.[34] Taiwan's historical circumstances and multilingual environment gave language opacity and heft. The essentially plural, commingled, and always already othered linguistic and cultural environment created opportunities for translingual practices and artistic experimentation. I see *Pink Noise* as precisely arising from the conjunction between this historical context of linguistic complexity and the new language modes of the Internet.

In general, Hsia Yü's aesthetics of the cut-and-paste simultaneously works as a celebration and as a critique of the Internet. It emphasises the collectivity, the group, in collaboration with the single poet, figuring the poetic production as a collective remix. According to this logic, instantaneous connections and subjective random associations are elevated to the status of performance itself, intended as public and creative gesture.

The miniature disconnections between originals and translations presented in *Pink Noise* can be seen as reflecting this gesture, by expatriating language, uprooting it, estranging it, and also freeing it:

> The books that illuminated my youth were by and large translations… I've always loved those sentences that are rendered with a clumsy fidelity, those adorable literal versions that are virtually indifferent to Chinese grammar… and all those second- and third-hand translations from Russian via English and Japanese and who knows what else.[35]

This not only gives a glimpse into an affective, nostalgic overtone of this work, but it also offers a reflection in the spirit of the ontology of poetry. Should we wish to do so, how could we possibly translate effectively to render such nostalgia, such a locally bound memory, into the language of another context?

Metaphorical and idiomatic language is clearly difficult to translate, and even more so in machine translation, where ambiguities are most likely bound to generate mistranslations, as the machine only equates X to Y, in a much more absolute way than human equations. Sherlock reads and transcodes between the two languages, creating poems whose language resembles the corrupted language of Hsia Yü's

childhood. The activity involves desire, ambiguity, innuendo and several misunderstandings.

In the machine, a great part of the poetic tradition is stored, but neither email spams nor *Sherlock* were designed to write poetry; therefore to use them in this way is in itself a rebellious act. Moreover, rather than reinforcing a common meaning, *Pink Noise* fractures linguistic integrity and generates general semantic and aural confusion. *Pink Noise* succeeds at failing. It also shows that even when code and linguistic translation come together in machine translation, this cannot be considered as a process of decryption (as Warren Weaver suggested in 1949): asymmetries among languages and cultures are responsible for the cogent reverberations necessarily borne by all translations.[36] In particular, the translation made by the software *Sherlock* operates by identifying and extract Hsia Yü's fragmented 'originals' in the pool of texts and stores, in a kind of recycle of words, snippets and small pieces of the texts. In this way, *Sherlock* contributes uniquely to the literary enterprise by creating an emergence, a cue to the confluence of texts and languages that the translation performs. So, again, languages here resonate with historical and cultural specificity.

The voices reverberating in *Pink Noise* are an effect of digital text editing that has changed the writing habits, and made cut-and-paste practices much more prevalent than was previously the case with typewriters. We can therefore read this work as an emphatic critique of appropriation and transformation or of 'neoliberalist market-utopianism', which, as Haomin Gong and Xin Yang have judiciously discussed in their 2017 book, has much to share with the 'cyber-cultural techno-utopianism', with their ideals of 'decentralization, systemic deregulation, structural flattening, atomic individualism, unconstrained communication, automated control

system, and so on'.[37] This is the semi-autonomous world that *Pink Noise* would make creative and aesthetic through the subversive act of translation. The tracing of a territory between the conceptual and the sensory, legibility and de-coherence, tradition and iconoclasm, *Pink Noise* attests that willy-nilly we move within a cosmos of recycled words, images, sounds, objects. *Pink Noise* thus enacts the plurality of the subject, dilating and pluralising the text, making it grow and expand as an effect of its combinatory, citational technique, in vast stereophony. In such a context, *Pink Noise* poses a question about who is speaking and whether it really matters. All voices, all their forms, and their value are heard together in the plural noise of a community of bodies, but it is Hsia Yü who uses all the textual plurality as material for a work that is hers: 'We will need those rhyming skills/Some people are born with/Others develop'.[38]

Just as in Nechvatal's 'viral aesthetics', the virus is not to be understood as malicious, but as an aesthetic and benevolent mechanism that uses the host to live. It rapidly transfers genetic information helping their host survive in hostile environments (206). In this way the virus and the noise nurture in us a sense of polysemic uniqueness, which involves territorialisng as well as deterritorialising. In this way, *Pink Noise* goes against imposed configuration, crossing over macro and micro histories, local and global.

Reference to noise is paramount to the conception and understanding of this book. As a piece of noise art, *Pink Noise* is immersive and performative, pushing boundaries, carrying non-referential knowledge, so as to approximate the dynamism of sounds and rhythm. Noise is unwanted and needs to be tuned: 'We will need those rhyming skills'. The concept of noise as music, and of music as language (e.g. 'lyrics'), are not novel propositions.[39] As the creative process used by the avant-garde

artists of Italian Futurism, noise is here a physical and phenomenal presentation; it constitutes the composition, regulated 'harmonically and rhythmically'.[40] We find in *Pink Noise* traces of the same antagonist impulse of the futurist noise, although it also goes beyond such an attitude. In the end, Hsia Yü's cross media noise reveals optimism, in suggesting a cognitive-ethical decision transformed by a project of limited intersubjectivity, a letting in of the Other, without any claim of knowing what the Other is like:

> Noise. Noises. Murmurs. When lives are lived and hence mixed together, they distinguish themselves badly from one another. Noise, chaotic, has no rhythm. However, the attentive ear begins to separate out, to distinguish the sources, to bring them back together by perceiving interactions.[41]

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[1] Spam email reported by a website dedicated to the debunking hoaxes and exposing scams since 2003. Cf. http://www.hoax-slayer.com/thomos-dah.shtml accessed 4 June 2017.

[2] *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, ed. by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2011): p. xxi.

[3] For a comprehensive overview on the use of these technological innovations in literature, see *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century. Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[4] Named after Conan Doyle's literary character Sherlock Holmes, the software was created by Apple Inc. in 1997 and adopts the icon of the detective's hat with a magnifying lens.

[5] Sandee Chan. 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' (*Cheng penshe ji li qu*). 1995, https://dustysojourner.wordpress.com/2010/04/page/2/.

[6] See for example 'Look again' (Lianlian kan, 1979), which presents incommensurable analogies in the form of tests for the primary school. Hsia Yü 'Look Again' in *Memoranda* (1984), p. 6.

[7] For a discussion of e-poetics, see David Jhave Johnston, *Aesthetic Animism. Digital Poetry's Ontological Implications* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2016), and Daniel Morris, *Not Born Digital. Poetics, Print Literacy, New Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[8] Examples of Chinese poems off the page, include Yao Dajuin's post-concrete work, or Miluo Kasuo's animated poems.

[9] In *Cloning Aura. Art in the Age of Copycats*, Chiara Maioli appropriately asks: What makes of a writer the author of a literary work? After all, she continues, in ancient oral cultures, transmission of knowledge was possible only through the spoken word, and stories were received, repeated, circulated, appreciated and preserved, without asking who the author was (p. 23). In the logic of the postmodern debate, which led to the 'death of the author' (as Barthes famously named it), the individual is conceived as not being a free and aware creator, but as the result of impersonal structures acting mostly on the individual's unconscious level (see for example the philosophy of Levi-Strauss and Foucault). According to such a de-authorizing conception, the writer is not anymore the one who generates, but a copyist, a *bricoleur*, a collector of pre-existent writing. The anxiety of influence, as theorised by Harold Bloom in 1973, is then transformed into euphoria, into the ecstasy of influence (J. Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence. Nonfiction, Etc.*). The emphasis, in other words, is on the unsustainability of the new. It is after all the admission that poetry, as culture in general, is an infinite palimpsest, and that there is no poet who 'writes in a pneumatic void: every gesture is – consciously or not – intimately connected to what it has been already done', and profoundly influenced by the context (p. 94). Chiara Maioli, *Cloning Aura. Art in the Age of Copycats* (Brescia: Link Editions, 2016).

[10] Cf. 'Poetry Interrogation – The Primal Scene of a Linguistic Murder'. Interview with Hsia Yü, by A Weng. Translated by Zona Yi-Ping Tsou. *Pink Noise*: pages unnumbered.

[11] Stephen Kennedy, *Chaos Media. A Sonic Economy of Digital Space* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). Joseph Nechvatal, *Immersion into Noise* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011).

[12] Nechvatal, p. 17.

[13] *Ibid,* 14.

[14] While all the sources of the extracted segments are visual, rather than audio, the poem-like lineation and rhythm, the many lines made of extracts from spoken conversations, and the sound of the languages in the mind of the reader makes them aural too. In this light, a plausible audio rendition of *Pink Noise* would consist of a piece in which both English and the target language texts are read by different voices in superimposition with each other.

[15] Lawrence Lessing, *Remix. Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (London: Penguin Press, 2008), and Lev Manovich, *The Language of the New Media* (Cambridge and London: MIT, 2001).

[16] Kathereine Hayles, *My Motehr Was a Computer. Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[17] Kennedy, p. 26.

[18] *Ibid.* p. 17.

[19] Amie Elizabeth Parry, *Interventions into Modrnist Cultures. Poetry from beyond the empty screen* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 85.

[20] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 232.

[21] Kennedy, p. 44.

[22] *Ibid*. p. 18

[23] *Ibid*. p. 44

[24] Berlant, pp. 228 and 26.

[25] Nechvatal, p. 83.

[26] *Ibid*. p. 15.

[27] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Devise', in *Victor Shklovosky. A Reader*. Ed. by Alexandra Berlina (New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 73-96.

[28] Emily Apter, 'Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability: Translation as Critical Pedagogy', *MLA Profession* (2010: 53-55).

[29] Cf. Poem 10, 'If not quite a harangue, at least a little discourteous'.

[30] Cf. Poem 20, 'I am an expert in nothing', back translated by Steve Bradbury in 'A Creative Mis-Translation' of Hsia Yü's *Pink Noise*'. http://www.drunkenboat.com/db9/mistran_text/bradbury/Pink%20Noise.html.

[31] Cf. Poem 1, 'Brokenhearted and ordinary daily moment'.

[32] Lili Hsie, 'Romance in the Age of Cybernetic Conviviality: Hsia Yü's Pink Noise and the Poetics of Postcolonial Translation', *Postmodern Culture. Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought on Contemporary Cultures*, vol. 9, no. 3, (May 2009) 13.

[33] Hsia, 'Poetry', 2.

[34] On this topic, cf. Jing Tsu. *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

[35] Hsia, 'Poetry', 3.

[36] Following Kuntsman's adoption of the concept of 'reverberation', I mean to attend to both 'distortions and resonance […] in process of moving through various digital terrains'. Both 'distortion' and 'resonance' are terms consonant to sound. Cf. Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman (eds.) *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 13.

[37] Haomin Gong and Xin Yang, *Reconfiguring Class, Gender, Ethnicity and Ethics in Chinese Interent Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 7-8.

[38] Poem 1, 'Brokenhearted time and ordinary daily moment'.

[39] Douglas Barrett's *After Sound. Toward a Critical Music* constitutes an absorbing reading on the subject (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[40] Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises: A Futurist Manifesto*. Translated by Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon, 1919/1987), p. 23.

[41] Henri Lefebvre *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 27.