Beksiński, Disarticulated

Dawson Gyllenhammer

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu_honors

Part of the Art and Design Commons, and the Language Interpretation and Translation Commons

Recommended Citation

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the WWU Graduate and Undergraduate Scholarship at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in WWU Honors College Senior Projects by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.
BEKSIŃSKI, DISARTICULATED

by DAWSON GYLLENHAMMER
BEKSIŃSKI, DISARTICULATED

TRANSLATING IN THE VISUAL FIELD

BY DAWSON GYLLENHAMMER
June 2nd, 2024
Honors Department
Western Washington University

ABSTRACT:
By translating a painting by Zdzisław Beksiński into a digital, three-dimensional model, this project establishes a unique translative method that challenges current academic discourses on translation. The dominant discourse is deeply concerned with preserving the meaning, content, and structure of an original source text. However, by engaging theories developed by Ann Carson, Jose Ortega Y Gasset, Stefano Harney, and Lyn Hejinian, among others, I open the practice to experimentation and play. Drawing on my own process of translation, I offer an approach called the “Amber Method.” This method consists of 5 principles, being 1) Contextualize the translator; 2) Obsess over a source text; 3) Understand the transformative effect of looking; 4) Explore possibilities; and 5) Invent new texts with an openness to play.
“I focus on the atmosphere, the music, and the mood. I perceive it very musically, every image. Perhaps others see it differently, or maybe their perception of music is different from mine.”

— ZDZISŁAW BEKSIŃSKI

TRANSLATION, N.
I. The action of converting from one language to another and related senses.

I.1. The action or process of translating a word, a work, etc., from one language into another.

I.3. The expression or rendering of a thing in another medium or form; the conversion or adaptation of a thing to another system, context, or use. Also concrete: something created as a result of this process.

1 | PREFACE

TASK:
This project documents the process of using Cinema 4D to render a painting from the work of Zdzisław Beksiński into a three-dimensional model, which allowed me to explore alternative methodologies for the work of translation. When I began, I had no background in modeling software. Therefore, the greatest undertaking was going from a complete beginner to a fluent digital sculptor within the time frame of two academic quarters.

TIME FRAME:
12/20/23 to 6/13/24.

2 | TRANSLATION AS MIRROR

I began this project operating from a conceptual framework akin to how translation is often talked about in contemporary academic settings: the original text is textile or puzzle, the de- and reconstruction of which requires a specific set of tools. Language is both an object of desire and a tidy place where rigid, prescribed methods enact formulaic reactions to fixed signs. Patterns are drawn, intent preserved. And through standardization and homogenization, correctness is imposed. If done correctly, the work of the translator is the work of reflection: translation functions as mirror. The successful reflector-translator avoids distortion. That which might be “lost in translation” becomes a central, animating concern.

To mitigate these risks, many scholars develop specific methods for translating a literary work from one language to another. They describe, extensively, the divots, grooves, and alcoves of a
particular language, and they attempt to map out a set of directives. They impose mandates and establishing a series of best practices for those just entering the field, while also suggesting that translation can be taken up across multiple disciplines. Because they critique any translation by assessing technical accuracy, many become quite myopic.

Others take a post-colonial perspective that frames the act of translation as a colonial practice, underscoring how agents of settler colonialism influenced the practices of translation they encountered. These scholars seek to uncover the methods with which non-Western cultures have undertaken this kind of work, and they understand translation as an act of delineating native from non-native, domestic from foreign, self from other. In this frame, translation becomes an ethical concern, one that calls the translator to examine his desires to render distinct difference as similarity.

Ethical concerns arise, particularly when a translation misrepresents a larger culture or ethnic group. These critiques extend, too, into feminist and queer theory, where scholars urge one another to re-translate texts that have been distorted by heterosexual or patriarchal perspectives.

These two perspectives—the reflective and the postcolonial—differ in motivation but share at least two overarching commitments. There seems, first, to be a strong moral obligation imposed onto the translator. Whether this pressure comes from the urgency of representing another’s culture or from the desire to retain meaning across languages, there seems to be a general sense that stakes are high: the translator owes it to the reader, the author, the culture—regardless of to whom, the translator owes. Sandra Berman articulates this debt well:

The translator’s task is inevitably an ethical one. In attempts to translate, we become most aware of linguistic and cultural differences, of the historical “hauntings,” and of experiential responsibilities that make our languages what they are and that directly affect our attitudes towards the world.

Both also, ultimately, contribute to a discourse that is deeply concerned with preserving the meaning, content, and structure of the original text. Captivated by a fantasy of authenticity, they seek to minimize the gaps—the distortions—that inevitably occur. It demands that both the original and the translation become what Lyn Hejinian has called “closed texts”: texts that attempt to prescribe single, singular, and clear interpretations. Gaps of meaning between the original and the mirror become errors in the reflector-translator’s attempt to realize a fetishized authenticity.

When I began my own translation process, I was preoccupied with this discourse. Was I doing justice to the original? Would my translation articulate the same notions and sensations as the source text? But as I began to learn the program, and as I continued to learn about Beksiński, I became increasingly critical of its imposed pressure. The questions I was asking did not align with the sensations and preoccupations that emerged in practice. Because the process transformed my understanding of translation, I looked elsewhere.
The concept that the method of one’s translation is dependent upon context opens all kinds of doors for practice. While mirroring translations generally impose a strict and intense moral obligation onto the translator, Carson’s emphasis on context interrupts that implied pressure. Suddenly, translation as a practice does not work toward a singular goal. Rather, it becomes contingent action, a distinct form of art, a context-event. This contextualized approach frees the practice of its ideological constraints, and room now opens for experimentation and play. Carson’s concept invited me to artistic liberty, and it invited my tastes and preferences into the process. It invited me, in other words, to center my intuition.

Its argument also prompted several questions. What happens when we treat the original text as an active space? What happens when we throw out the notion that the original text deserves the utmost protection, as if we were restoring a painting by carefully cleaning it with alcohol and acetone? What happens when we consider the original to be, merely, a starting point? Carson helps us to re-frame our intentions as translators, but we can also zoom out farther, to question what it means to grapple with a source text on a fundamental level. One concept that opens translation up is the notion that intertextual works—texts that contain traces of other texts—are not simply texts, bounded and self-contained. As Fred Moten proposes:

Seeing that a text is a social space is... a deeper way of looking at it. To say that it’s a social space is to say that stuff is going on: people, things, are meeting there and interacting, rubbing off one another, brushing against one another – and you enter into that social space, to try to be part of it... But once you enter into that social space, terms are just one part of it, and there’s other stuff too. There are things to do, places to go, and people to see in reading and writing.

By perceiving a text as a social space, the act of translation is no longer confined to its initial, purely surface, features. Instead, it becomes a network to move within and expand upon. It is no longer a delicate artifact in need of preservation. It is a thing to be traversed, a foundational surface upon which we act and react. Moten and Carson allowed me to appreciate that the work was not to replicate, but, rather, to engage with and explore those dimensions of the source that resonated with my experience of it. By creating, I entered intertext and generated an auxiliary node to the original social network.

But if we accept that translated texts are in conversation with their source texts, we must also consider the specific relationship between the social space that each represents. Jose Ortega y Gasset identifies the inevitability of distortion:

It shouldn’t try to be the work itself with a different vocabulary. I would say translation doesn’t even belong to the same literary genre as the text that was translated... The simple fact is that the translation is not the work, but a path toward the work... translation is only an apparatus that carries us to it.

By emphasizing process—the movement between texts—Ortega suggests that the work of translation distorts so significantly that it can never be accurately described as replication. As a result, the translated work must be regarded as an invention—an emergence—that contains recognizable traces of the initial text even as it allows for difference and departure.
4 | TRANSLATION AS AMBER

TRANSLATION, N.
II. The action of transferring or moving a person or thing from one place, position, etc., to another.

II.16.c Mathematics, the mapping of a set of coordinate axes to a coordinate system in which the new axes are each parallel to those in the original system.xxx

Having established an alternative way to understand the task of the translator, I’d like to turn to the specific translation at hand. The mathematical definition above implies an act of spatial translation akin to the one I undertook: it was movement and transformation. Translation became an act of maintaining the relative proportions of information as it moves from one visual interface to another.

There was, however, the added complication that my work’s coordinate system had an additional dimension. That is, I took a series of points organized along a plane (X-Y) and attempted to translate them into volume (X-Y-Z). This meant, in essence, that the value of Z was a wild, unknown integer—and that my intuition established dimensionality.

Thinking of the text as social space meant re-imagining this dimensional interpretation as an act of collaboration with the original painting: I engaged the source text in the work of dialogue. In characterizing the building of such partnerships, Stefano Harney suggests that “it’s not the thing that you do; it’s the thing that happens while you’re doing it that becomes important, and the work itself is some combination of the two modes of being.” xxvi This concept reminded me that interpreting dimension is, fundamentally, an event. It consists of doing, of action.

Preparing with theory could only carry me so far and, in the end, would be supplanted. Rather, the process of spatializing the original text would itself become discourse—the place where the painting and I would harmonize, agree, digress, and misunderstand one another.

After reading from these theorists and spatializing my task, I began to crave a visual metaphor, something that could express translation’s capacity to be expressive, imperfect, and saturated with forces. What if we imagined translation as akin to preserving something in amber? Fossilized tree resin encases the original object, distorting its outer form with sticky residue. The resin then dries and appears glossy, crystallizing into an irregular lens that enhances the original with unexpected refractions of light. Rather than stagnating the original, amber honors the static energies encased. xxvii Unlike a mirror, amber acts upon the object by allowing its own textures and tints to distort what is being viewed. Its presence is felt and honored as an organic apparatus.

5 | ON BEKSINSKI

Now, with the theoretical groundwork established, and in honor of Carson’s invitation to translation as context-event, I’d like to contextualize my approach in relation to the artist I translated. Zdzisław Beksiński (1929-2005) was a painter based in Sanok and Warsaw, Poland, who achieved some international recognition in his lifetime. Critics often explained his paintings as opportunities to peer into the collective unconscious or interpreted the words he inscribed onto paintings as allusions to other texts. xxviii

Yet Beksiński was deeply dissatisfied with many of the ways that journalists and filmmakers represented him and his work. xxix xxx In a 2002 interview, journalist Katarzyna Janowska asked if
his paintings could be seen as “fearful.” He responded, “Oh god, no. Art should be read aesthetically. I reject any contents in my art. Interpretation is imposed by others.” 

This frustration, iteratively revealed in such public exchanges, responded to attempts to map specific meanings and symbolic interpretations onto his body of work. In another interview five years earlier, he scoffed, “I don’t paint with a dictionary of Mircea Eliade in my other hand.” When asked about his opinion of Bogdan Dziworski’s short film, *Hommage à Beksiński*, he responded, “My paintings... take up 3% of that whole film...I hate that film.” And when Piotr Dmochowski, a friend and art dealer, urged him to allow others to express their interpretations of his work, Beksiński clarified that the interpretations that were dishonest to his intentions were being broadcast for the general public.

It is also significant that Beksiński had very little desire to publicize his own work, instead leaving much of his business to Dmochowski and the Sanok Historical Museum. Despite the fact that his disinterest vexed those who spoke on his behalf, Beksiński’s avoidance of the discourse surrounding his work extended to formal events that featured his art. He was rarely in attendance. The thing that seemed to trouble him most was his lack of control over how others engaged with his art. Considering this in the context of Fred Moten’s argument for text as social space, Beksiński’s discomfort could be understood as a reaction to analyses of his work that, upon mass distribution, closed pathways and blocked intersections that others might have used to explore and grapple with the intensely generative spaces his paintings produced.

Beksiński’s rejection of public perception posed an interesting dilemma for me. How should one go about translating a painting from an artist who was highly critical of the way others reduced his paintings through analysis? Through my process, I found a simple answer: do not analyze. Rather: act and re-act.

To understand what I mean, we can return to the artist. Later in the 2002 interview, Janowska asked, “So you have nothing to say? Your art is just a record of emotions which do not communicate anything?” To which Beksiński replied, “Yes, exactly so. I have nothing to say... if I had something to say, I would write it down... I don’t need a painting for that.” This statement lays bare an assumption that many of us have, that art must communicate a larger message or contain within itself a particular outlook or worldview. Beksiński challenges this assumption by suggesting that the text we are grappling with doesn’t mean anything—at least, not in the way we typically use that word. But this does not enact closure. On the contrary, it means that doors are opened. For my translation, specifically, it meant that I no longer had to fret about retaining meaning across texts. There was no magical gemstone hidden within.

What I was grappling with was simply documentation of a form on a surface. The only thing left for me to consider was emotion, or, “the atmosphere, the music, and the mood”—those elements that Beksiński implores us to heed. Understood in terms of translation as amber, the process would begin with the application of liquid resin onto the source text. This resin has the capacity to re-activate dormant, static energies that linger on the surface of these forms. At this step of the process, it is important to apply the resin carefully so as to re-activate the components that Beksiński deemed essential. The idea is that the atmosphere, the music, and the mood linger in the translation as particulates so that the drying process extrudes the right sounds and sensations.

However, before I get ahead of myself, I’d like to shift the
focus from painting as a noun to painting as a verb. Assessing the Beksinski painting as a context-event, as opposed to an object, allows for recognition of the inevitable ties that exist between act and product. If, with Harney, we understand the product of painting to be simply an artifact of the process of action and reaction, we deepen our understanding of the source text.xli

The source is revealed in its complexity—act of making is brought to the fore. When asked to describe his process, Beksinski responded:

All opinions that I allegedly paint dreams come from journalists... All I have in common with the surrealists is this oneiric method of creativity. I never wonder: why am I painting a bird sitting on someone's shoulder? It will happen completely spontaneously, just like in a dream. My creativity is totally easy-going, and if it fits, I just leave it there.”xlii

Beksinski initially said this to reject association with the Surrealists, since many journalists of his time tried to dissolve him into that larger movement. More importantly, though, he also clarifies his method for image-making, where singular marks progressively generate into unexpected forms and objects.

The nuances of this process are further revealed by a video log in which Beksinski documented his process. Although the frequency and duration of the log is unclear, we do have a daily record of his work in 1987. After each painting session, he filmed the current state of the canvas, briefly described the painting decisions he had made that day, and expressed his reasoning for working on certain areas of the canvas.xliii This home footage reveals that Beksinski's process usually started with a loose compositional sketch in ink that he then translated into oil paint as a haze of ambiguous forms on canvas. With each subsequent session, the marks became increasingly intricate, until the once ambiguous, blurred forms develop into distinct objects with clear edges.xliv

His practice was akin to an archaeological dig, where a series of obscured objects are pulled from soil and carefully polished off for display. It also means that each painting appeared incidentally, as if the painting was a self-generating zone of activity. In this video diary, Beksinski captured the specific and generative method of mark-making he partook in, this time-intensive, meditative process that pulled objects out of the canvas, images that felt as if they were already there, as if one only had to get the camera to focus correctly and all the details would suddenly emerge into view.

Interestingly, this process also carried a burden akin to that of an archaeologist's. When asked why his earliest brushstrokes were rarely visible in the final product, he responded by saying, “The longer time I finish the painting, [and] smoothen [it], the more expression evaporates. But I can’t [stop]. It would be dishonest to leave it unfinished.”xlv Beksinski clarified that this process of refining the image through action and reaction was also a loss of ambiguous expression. He understood excitement to exist within the potential of ambiguity, yet he felt obligated to reveal what he witnessed deep within the canvas. This suggested that if I wanted my translative process to mirror Beksinski’s, we have to train the eye. Beksinski didn’t just see. Rather, he excavated and articulated that which was not immediately visible.

Like amber, which requires millions of years to fossilize, translation thus becomes an act of ruminating and brooding.xlvi By sitting with a source text for such a long time, the bubbles from the liquid resin move, mutate, and distort, effecting the underlying image. Inevitably, when one looks at a text for long enough,
perception transforms. The real work of translation is training your eye to recognize and respect these distortions. This concept that observation fundamentally alters that which is observed is an issue in quantum mechanics. The “observer effect” articulates not only the preoccupation with observing material phenomena through a lens of uncertainty, but also the fact that by attempting to measure such phenomena, the observer distorts the object. Through this lens, translation as amber is an act of distortion that emerges through the work of prolonged looking.

6 | THE OPEN TEXT

Beksiński’s consistent rejection of reductive interpretations of his work is a generative stubbornness, for it completely alters how we are invited to engage with the source text. In “A Rejection of Closure,” Lyn Hejinian defines and calls for “open texts,” works that invite the reader into a collaborative process of meaning-making. Disrupting the implied reading order, using repetition to disarticulate established understanding, establishing arbitrary time limits that disallow a text’s conclusion—all methods Hejinian suggests to create an open text.

For my purposes, however, the most enticing method she offers is compositional technique, an approach that builds a literary work out of distinct units or “fields.” These fields, bounded as paragraphs, are formed from two respective axes in order “to achieve maximum vertical intensity (the single moment into which the idea rushes) and maximum horizontal extensivity (ideas cross the landscape and become the horizon and weather).”

A singular idea inhabits an expanse in which it can live, move, and be perceived. Singular ideas come to inhabit their own weather—their own atmosphere.

Hejinian’s understanding of a paragraph can also be used to understand a painting. I’d like to regard Beksiński’s paintings as singular units, units which become field. Throughout his career, Beksiński rejected those who attempted to enclose his paintings with specific, singular interpretations:

A painted sea is not meant to be the collective unconscious by Carl Jung... When I create, simple associations appear. Associations of several objects collide with each other, creating an apparent content. But that content is not intended by me.

Here he counteracted interpretation by describing the context-event of production. He continued:

I hate symbolic interpretation, so to deny such comparisons, If my art is about anything at all, it is about mood and atmosphere. There is a certain range of moods I like, nothing else. For instance, I do not want a cross to be interpreted as a symbol of redemption in a Christian understanding.

What Beksiński proposed here is a succinct disarticulation of typical methodologies for meaning-making. He asks that, while grappling with his work, we enter into a singular mood and atmosphere, that we consume this instant without attempting to gather evidence of symbolic meaning.

In asking us to reject closure—to avoid closing his work by way of a singular interpretation—he opened an opportunity rarely afforded: the opportunity to trust our instincts as observers. Rather than emphasizing historical contexts, questioning intent, or charting symbolic associations, he instead offered an opportunity to rely entirely on sense perception and curiosity. This gift—his insistence on his paintings as open text—can be quite intimidating. Suddenly we are without intellectual armor. We
are made vulnerable by the explicit invitation to pour ourselves onto the dynamically static energies within his paintings.

We are also invited to chart our own path through the distance between fields. When multiple fields are placed next to one another, sequencing brings into sharp relief the gaps—the distance—between. As viewers and as translators, we are pulled into the in-between. Much like resin, we seep into the hidden pores and cracks between the surfaces of the source text. Carson has expressed a similar sensation in the act of translation; “I like the space between languages because it’s a place of error or mistakenness, of saying things less well than you would like, or not being able to say them at all.” As Carson suggests, these gaps seduce with their capacity to stagnate and disorient us. They open vulnerabilities. They reveal translation is the work of remaining with impossibility.

As we have discussed, Beksiński opens his texts by asking us to consume his paintings without an attachment to meaning. However, translation in much of the modern discourse is described as a cross-cultural interaction, an offering of bridge to language and culture that functions through a different set of signs than our own. However, in the context of Beksiński, he explicitly desired his paintings to exist beyond the confines of his culture. This begs the question; how do you go about translating a text that refutes it’s association with a specific cultural context?

If a painting is meant to be experienced—inhabited, encased—as purely an aesthetic experience, then the translator is free to do so. The text is a non-contextualized object. The translator need not consider cross-cultural interaction, or, for that matter, the divots, grooves, and alcoves of language. I opened still further to play and experimentation.
# YOUTUBE TUTORIALS

The table below lists all of the video tutorial content I watched in order to teach myself the program Cinema 4D, as well as the specific concepts covered in each tutorial.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>LINK</th>
<th>INSTRUCTOR</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>TOTAL VIDEOS</th>
<th>KEY CONCEPTS COVERED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting Started in Cinema 4D</td>
<td><a href="LINK">LINK</a></td>
<td>E.J. Hassenfratz</td>
<td>6h 43min</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Primitive objects, using deformers, mirroring geometry, using splines, generator objects, using fields, volume builder &amp; volume mesher, placement tools, box-modeling &amp; subdivision surface modifiers, using mograph, using materials, using UV's and BodyPaint, using lighting, procedural and keyframe-based animation, squash &amp; stretch, simple camera movements, scene management, render settings, multi-pass rendering, magic bullet looks &amp; render tokens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Poly Apartment &amp; Shop</td>
<td><a href="LINK">LINK</a></td>
<td>Twistereli</td>
<td>40min</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extruding polygon faces, loop cuts, using boolens, &amp; extruding text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculpting Kickstart</td>
<td><a href="LINK">LINK</a></td>
<td>Matt Milstead</td>
<td>1h 49min</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C4d sculpting tools, re-meshing topology, and retopology with the polygon pen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Started with Redshift</td>
<td><a href="LINK">LINK</a></td>
<td>Elly Wade</td>
<td>31min</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redshift lighting, Redshift materials, Redshift node editor. and render settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redshift Fog Noise Volume</td>
<td><a href="LINK">LINK</a></td>
<td>Dave Bergin</td>
<td>5min</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adding moving fog volumes to a scene using Redshift</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following pages document all of the visual artifacts that came from this process of learning how to 3D model. Each individual project allowed me to develop different unique facets of the skill-set needed to produce a translation of the work that reached the right frequencies and feelings.
FIG. 1: INITIAL PAINTING
© Gallery of Zdzisław Beksiński.
FIG. 2: FIRST RENDER
This was my very first 3d modeling project, based off the tutorial series, “Getting Started in Cinema 4d” by E.J. Hassenfratz. This tutorial was the longest and most in-depth series I participated in, where I learned all of the fundamental tools C4D has to offer to start modeling, lighting and rendering simple characters.
FIG. 3: SECOND RENDER
This sculpture of a building was based off of a tutorial by Twistereli lviii. In this render I learned how build intricate scenes using more geometric shapes. I also experimented with materials and adding textures.
FIG. 4: FIRST RENDER OF A HUMAN HEAD
This head was made following a sculpting tutorial series by Matt Milstead. I constructed this face from scratch using the sculpting tools and a hexahadron sphere as my base geometry.
FIG. 5A-5B: COMPLETING A BUST SCULPT
I took the head from my previous sculpt and added to it, sculpting the ears, neck and shoulders in order to build a complete bust (a). I then added a bump map to experiment with applying cracked textures to the surface of the sculpt (b).
FIG. 6: SCENE RENDER 1
In this scene I wanted to render of a larger environment, working out how to play with the viewers sense of scale, as well as trying out some cloth simulations by creating the red ghost character.
FIG. 7: SCENE RENDERS 2 & 3
I completed two more isometric (top down) scenes, and my goal here was to pack these scenes with detail and character. I also wanted to experiment with creating dynamic lighting setups that added more mood to the scene.

After these scenes, I felt I had developed enough skills to begin my final sculpt of the painting.
FIG. 8A
I began sculpting the major facial features, and blocking out the two major masses of the sculpt.

FIG. 8B
I refined the shape of the features, added a mass for the ear, and began my first pass at carving a cracked texture into the subject’s face.

FIG. 8C
I experimented with building the frilled area of the sculpt using procedural generations, or generations which displaced geometry automatically without having to hand-sculpt every divot and groove.

FIG. 8D
I then landed on a process of manually creating the frills, starting with cloner objects and then merging the all of the geometry using a volume mesher.
FIG. 9: **REFINED BASE SCULPT**

I took the frilled structure and cut out the three major alcoves. I then sculpted the geometry of the frills to feel more organic and natural. I then carved cracks into the top of the structure, and finished sculpting the details in the ear. I added the earring geometry as well.
FIG. 10: REDSHIFT EXPERIMENTS
I began experimenting with lighting and materials in Redshift, based off of a tutorial series by Elly Wade. Redshift is a rendering software that allowed me to render very realistic lighting and textures in real time as I’m sculpting.
FIG. 11: FIRST RENDER
I implemented Redshift materials to the base sculpt, experimenting with redshift nodes in order to add a general gritty texture to the sculptures surface. I then used an HDRI lighting scenario, which is a 360 degree image that projects complex lighting information onto the sculpt’s geometry.
FIG. 12: FOG RENDER TEST
In order to capture the atmosphere of the initial painting, I began experimenting with generating fog volumes in Redshift, based off of a tutorial video by Dave Bergin. [lx]
**FIG. 13: INITIAL PAINTING, AGAIN**


© Gallery of Zdzislaw Beksinski.
FIG. 14: FINAL TRANSLATION 1
This high fidelity, high resolution digital render of my sculpture is the first formal translation I completed.
FIG. 15: FINAL TRANSLATION 2
I then took this digital sculpture, reduced the poly-count, and then used a 3d printer in WWU engineering building to produce a 3d print of my sculpture. Fig 15a Shows the 3d print prepped in the slicing software, 15b shows the finished sculpture with scaffolding still attached, and 15c shows the finished sculpture without scaffolding in direct light.
7 | ON FORM

Now that I’ve walked you through the production process, I’d like to take a moment to compare the two translated forms, to differentiate the ways in which they distort the source text. Here Jose Ortega Y Gasset again becomes relevant:

If we want to give an idea of its aesthetic qualities, we will have to relinquish almost all the substance of the text in order to carry over its formal graces. For that reason, it will be necessary to divide the work and make divergent translations of the same work according to the facets of it that we may wish to translate with precision.\textsuperscript{lxii}

Given this sentiment, it is important to understand which of the source text’s effects are accentuated in each translation. No single amber gemstone looks like another. Therefore, observing how each refracts light allows us to grapple more comprehensively with their intertextuality.

One effect that the digital 3d render and the 3d-printed object have in common is their capacity to trigger the viewers depth perception. In the case of the digital render, the entity rotating around the sculpture takes the form of a digital camera. This camera is perceiving an entirely invented digital space, formed from a complex system of computations that invent lighting and transpose textures onto a series of digital polygons. As a result, the viewer can perceive the depth of the object while witnessing a highly detailed, photo-image interpretation of the render.

However, in the case of the printed object, the object of rotation becomes the human head and the human hand. The benefit of this fact is that the observer is no longer confined to perceiving this object as it rotates on a static computer screen. Now the printed object is able to interact with light in ways that neither the initial painting nor the digital render could. My sensory experience of the sculpture and its contours changes when it is in direct sunlight, when it is in a dimly lit room. Much like encasing the source text in amber, each detail on the sculpture now introduces unexpected refractions of light and shadow. In effect, the beauty of the physical sculpture is that it is in constant conversation with the material environment surrounding it. It rejects closure and moves in the gaps. Much like amber, its innate tactility and physicality brood with life, inviting visual play in a way that a painting on a wall is incapable of accessing.

The physical print also loses the fidelity of the original sculpture. Because the sculpture had such intricate details, the digital render combined more than 500,000 polygons. The rendering of this dense polygon mesh took a lot of processing power, and over an hour of render time to produce a single frame. However, the biggest hurdle I had to face was that 3d printers can only accept .stl files that were at most 100 megabytes in size. My initial sculpt was 2.3 gigabytes, meaning I had to drastically reduce the poly-count of my initial sculpture in order to print it. This process was done using a 3d printing software, which interpreted my initial sculpture and attempted to re-create the form using 1/10th the amount of polygons. As a result, the once deep cracks I carved into the surface now become low-poly indentations, and the general fidelity of detail is lost significantly. As a result, the most refined details of the sculpture are simplified and smoothed over.

But the process of making a model print-ready offered a second layer of distortion. 3d printers—in my case, the Prusa i3 MK3S+—use a process known as additive manufacturing, a process that constructs an object with layers from the ground-up. Each layer of the 3d-print appears as a series of thinly sliced
cross-sections. Therefore, to print a 3D model, the file must first be “sliced” with software and the computer assumes the role of translator. The software interprets the current model and converts it into a series of evenly spaced cross-sections—in my case, 0.4mm thick—that are printed as successive layers of biodegradable PAC plastic. In addition to the base structure, a series of support structures must also be generated. The structures I generated resembled branching trees, which started at the base plate of the printer and connected to the overhanging structures of the sculpt (see figure 15b). The largest sculpture required 11 hours and 40 minutes to print. Once finalized, a pair of wire cutters allowed me to remove the supporting structures and reveal the print beneath.

This printing process felt quite violent in nature. It was an act of mechanization, a method of impersonal slicing and subdividing. It was an act of robotic deconstruction and reconstruction. It also felt like a method of digestion, a method of consuming the initial form so as to reflect it back as a mirror of the source file. But the printing process can also be understood as an additional layer of refraction and movement of energy: a literal transfer of electricity and heat—in my case, 572°F—into plastic.

8 | CONCLUSION

TRANSLATION, V.

II. To transform or turn into something different.

II.15.a transitive. To change or alter the nature, appearance, or condition of (a person or thing); to transform or transmute (a person or thing). Frequently with into or to. lxiii

The technical work of learning a new program; the artistic work of producing two final, visually complete forms; and the conceptual work of contextualizing my practice offer additional to my unique understanding of translation.

Looking at translation as a verb is an important starting point for this new methodology. Rather than regarding translation as a discipline or an object, centering translation as an action or process opens the possibility of acting upon the source text without guilt. My definition, which I have taken to calling “The Amber Method,” also recognizes and celebrates transformation as essential to the process. Ideally, it could be used for written-to visual translation, visual-to-written translation, visual-to-visual translation, and many other such energy conversions. Below are a series of guiding principles to consider when using the Amber Method:

1) Context. Begin with this. Set a series of goals for yourself. What are you looking to learn? Who is this for? What has prompted this translation?

2) Obsession. This practice is centered around an earnest and time-intensive grappling with a particular source text. It could also be seen as a process of meditation. The source text becomes a touchstone, a central object to center your psyche. Amber takes millions of years to fossilize. Do not rush this process. Carson described translation in similar terms. “Translation, yes, is an ideal process because it’s so big it envelops your whole day, but you can do it with very small things too.” When asked, “how?” she replied, "Well, looking at a stone. I mean, attention is a choice of where you put your mind.” lxiv The practice of translation, if you let it, becomes a place where one lives, experiences, breathes.
3) Looking. As I have already discussed, looking is an irreversible act of transformation. The object you look at in the beginning is not the object you will see in the end. With time, you will have memorized every minute detail. After a while, you may start seeing things, things that you swore were not there before. Things distort, become imperfect. Do not hesitate to document that. The drying of resin into fossilized amber is a constant act of transformation.

4) Exploration. Refractions, trapped air bubbles, stains from other concepts, these things permeate the mucus that is the amber you are forming around the object. And yet, once the amber dries (which does require significant time and considerable distance), these forms add flavor and context to the source object. What was once a peripheral incident is now trapped, frozen in time. These forms transpose upon the object, and their existence partially distorts that which is beneath.

5) Invention. The creation of one or more additional nodes to the social network of your source text. Your final form can diverge significantly from the source text—to the point that it is unrecognizable from the original. The primary requirement is that this creation was centered around this singular obsession, and the creation was an attempt to reactivate the source text, in hopes of carrying on the traces of its surface features.

This process is intended to be deeply generative and exploratory. It is, above all else, a concentrated transformation of energies towards an object of obsession. Consumption, reflection, refraction, and creation—these are your guiding forces.
ENDNOTES


xviii Bermann et al., Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation, p. 6.


xxiii Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study. Minor Compositions, 2013, p. 108.


Harney & Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study, p.104.


Harney & Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study, p.104.


Beksiński, Zdzisław, and Andy Teszner. “Video Diary of Zdzisław Beksiński.” YouTube, 1987, youtu.be/AAWm_eKr6LU?si=Tngz7Xkqpl4cQEOE.


Kwan & Wong, Translation and Global Asia: Relocating Networks of Cultural Production.


Carson & Wachtel, “An Interview with Anne Carson.”
WORKS CITED


