# Selbstübersetzung als Wissenstransfer

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# *The Act of Reading* in Translation
## On Wolfgang Iser's Self-Translatability

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This article takes the renowned study *Der Akt des Lesens* (1976) by Wolfgang Iser and its translation *The Act of Reading* (1978) as its starting point. The differences between the two texts are discussed in terms of Iser's own idea of translatability as a cultural practice that was outlined in the short text *On Translatability*. This theoretical frame will shed light on the decisions made in his own translations, and will help to develop a conceptualization of self-translation as a practice inherent in cultural change.

The discussion of self-translation seems to start from an anachronistic, if not paradoxical premise – at least from the perspective of Anglophone cultural studies. Concepts like ›original,‹ ›equivalence,‹ and ›faithful rendering‹ of the original text in translation studies have been long abandoned for a focus on ›alienation,‹ ›displacement,‹ and ›alterity.‹ Considering especially alterity alongside notions of ›the other,‹ self-translation could only imply an alienation towards one's own text in a different language. This ›other‹ text would be, in the words of Homi Bhabha »*almost the same, but not quite*« mine[1]: it would become a displaced hybrid of own as well as other elements, possessing in Schleiermacher's words a »fremde Ähnlichkeit.«[2]

Still, these seemingly outdated notions might bear potential merit for the discussion of self-translations. I would like to argue that this ›strange resemblance‹ is actually at the core of the matter of translating one's own texts, underlying certain translational processes and our theorization of them. I will propose a combination of two concepts, Iser's ›translatability‹ (in II.) and the notion of ›autocommunication‹ by Lotman (III.), to suggest a concept of self-translation that entails three interrelated aspects: a) translation as a rewriting of the text as such, b) translation as continued work on one's argument as well as c) the re-translation back to the original

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[1]  Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture* (1994), London 2010, p. 122.

[2]  Friedrich Schleiermacher: »Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens« (1813), in: Joachim Störig (ed.): *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt 1973, pp. 38–69, here p. 54.

source as a manifestation of a change in one's thought structure – *Ände-rungen der eigenen Denkstruktur*, as one of Werner Heisenberg's papers is entitled, and to which I will come back in my conclusion (IV.). Hence, the focus is mainly systematic and conceptual, however, I will first comment on my example of self- and re-translation and start with a comparison of different versions of Iser's *Der Akt des Lesens* and the shorter texts that led to the actual monograph.[3]

## I. *The Act of Reading* in Translation – Exemplary Observations

Despite the broad range of subjects addressed in his writings, Wolfgang Iser owes much of his academic fame to his groundbreaking work on the phenomenology of reading. This is true especially for his seminal study *The Act of Reading*. It was the most influential of all the contemporary attempts to conceptualize the reader in literary theory,[4] and has been translated into many languages such as Italian, Slovenian, or Chinese.[5] The study was first published in German in 1976, and only two years later in English. It granted Iser a place in the canon of literary theory, but also spurred hefty criticism, of which the dispute with Stanley Fish received notable attention.[6] Yet, this criticism, and this is vital to my argu-ment, left no apparent mark on his later German – or English – editions. Reasoning that this criticism and the dialogic disputes (esp. with Fish) were well documented, Iser writes in the preface to the fourth edition of *Akt* from 1994,

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3    I will use short titles for the following of Iser's works: »The Reading Process. A Phenome-nological Approach,« in: *New Literary History* 3 (1971), vol. 2, pp. 279–299 [»Reading Process«]; »Der Lesevorgang. Eine phänomenologische Perspektive,« in: Rainer Warning (ed.): *Rezeptionsästhetik. Theorie und Praxis*, München 1975, pp. 253–275 [»Lesevor-gang«]; *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1976), München ⁴1994 [*Akt*]; *The Act of Reading. Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore/London 1978 [*Act*].

4    Others were Rainer Warning and Hans Robert Jauß from the *Poetik und Hermeneutik* group, see Warning (ed.): *Rezeptionsästhetik* (fn. 3).

5    The University of California at Irvine, where Iser was teaching last, offers a comprehen-sive overview of the different editions as well as translations of his works (http://www. lib.uci.edu/about/publications/wellek/iser/, last accessed 2 April 2020). Though this has been helpful on a more general level, no information is provided on different versions of a text, let alone a discussion spurred about the different intertextual genesis and the consequences for Iser's thought and development of ideas. The following will make an attempt to provide one example of this. However, these aspects might be rewarding to discuss beyond the notion of self-translation.

6    The best-known polemical texts of that dispute were Stanley Fish: *Is there a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Mass. 1980, and Wolfgang Iser: »Talk like Whales. A Reply to Stanley Fish,« in: *Diacritics* 11 (1981), no. 3, pp. 82–87.

> Durch sie [die kritischen Diskussionen] ist manches verdeutlicht, manches auch auf die Voraussetzungen zugespitzt worden, so daß ich […] darauf verzichtet habe, die mir durch die Kritik vermittelten Anstöße in den Text einzuarbeiten. Deshalb wurden nur wenige Passagen verändert, um die Neuauflage jener Textfassung anzugleichen, die den verschiedenen Übersetzungen zugrundegelegen hatte. (*Akt*, vii–viii)

Beyond the »so daß«, which does not seem to follow logically, it is an interesting way to phrase the matter – given that the fourth edition is exactly the same, down to each single printed page layout and the pagination. The question remains whether »jene Textfassung« refers to the first edition of *Akt*, or whether there is there a different prototype, or even several prototypes that the text was based on? In the following I will trace the textual genesis of *Akt* to answer this question, and to discuss the second crucial implication of this passage: the new edition is not catering to international criticism and critical feedback, but is oriented towards a textual version intricately linked to translation. Thus, the comparison of the two book versions alone will not suffice, but we need to take into account the genesis of the German and English editions as both books originated from several lectures, essays and other books in both German and English. To trace the translational oscillation between the texts will help to excavate the process of Iser's self-translations.

Before a comparison of the different precursors, it might be helpful to recall the most important lines of argument of the book. In a, as de Bruyn puts it, »spirited reaction against contemporary pro- and anti-reader critics, this book introduces a new model of […] the reading process.«[7] It draws on many theories above all phenomenology, but also speech act theory and performativity, communication and information theory. It references a wide range of thinkers, from Husserl, to Ingarden, Austin, Sartre, Cassirer, and also Lotman. Iser's literary examples are equally diverse, ranging from »Bunyan to Beckett,« as the subtitle of his previous book *The Implied Reader* tells us.[8]

He argues that literary works implicitly convey critical approaches to contemporary problems by modifying a particular, selected set of existing discourses or practices. This modification is presented to the reader – that is, the implied reader, a concept he coined – in a carefully arranged sequence. This sequence is the so-called ›repertoire‹ and structure of the text which prompts through its quasi-performative statements and strate-

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7   Ben de Bruyn: *Wolfgang Iser. A Companion*, Berlin 2012, p. 95.
8   Wolfgang Iser: *Der implizite Leser. Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett*, München 1972; *The Implied Reader. Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction form Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore/London 1974.

gies the reader's response and orchestrates the reader's comprehension. This comprehension is based on the given information, or rather on the information not given, so through negativity or in negations of the gaps and inconsistencies. The reader processes this information, or lack thereof, by an operation Iser phenomenologically terms ›protention and retention‹ (owing to Husserl's terms for temporal experience): The information just given makes us adjust what we have read and makes us come up with a prognosis for the following, thus changing and adjusting constantly our comprehension and regulating our expectations in the reading process. This also accounts for the fact that the first reading of a novel differs from all the following. As the reader already knows what to expect, she is not only comparing the information to what she just read, but also to the text as a whole which helps her, according to Iser, to grasp more details and arrive at a more in-depth understanding.

Hence the relationship between texts and readers is marked by interaction. This means that Iser attributes an active role to readers, who participate in the meaning-making process of textual creation by ›actualization‹ of the written text. The interactions are only in part determined by the text, in part determined by the subjectivity of the reader. The ›subjective‹ element, however, cannot overdetermine this interaction and Iser is careful to frequently warn against assuming that reading leads to purely subjective, idiosyncratic interpretations. What is meant by subjectivity is that the reading process is intricately linked to the formation of the reader as subject. The reader is constituted as a reading subject, and is consolidated in her subjectivity, but also challenged constantly by the textual strategies. While the interplay of horizon and repertoire through the actualization of the reader and in dialogue with her horizon leads to a potentially heightened self-awareness, these challenging, at times disrupting textual effects might influence the reader's subjective constructs and additionally account for a different reading experience every time.

The three aspects of protention and retention, of first and second reading experience, of subject-formation and self-knowledge will be a useful framework to understand the processes of Iser's self-translation. I will discuss this from an editorial and philological perspective, and will take a closer look at the motivations, the methods and the particular differences occurring in several precursory texts.

There might have been several very pragmatic, academic and political reasons to make his studies available to Anglophone scientific communities. The academic context at the time, the late 1960s to mid-1970s, was receptive for reader response notions. There was competitive work in progress, especially in Iser's own community, the *Poetik und Hermeneutik*

group. This does not only account for the almost parallel publication of *Akt/Act*, since this had already happened before with other texts: Right after Iser delivered his programmatic inaugural lecture at the University of Constance, *Die Appellstruktur der Texte* (1969/1970),[9] he introduced these notions in an *almost, but not quite* identical paper presented to the Yale Critics J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man and others only a year later (1970/1971).[10] It was also Hillis Miller, one reads in the introduction to *The Implied Reader* (1974), who encouraged Iser to publish *Der implizite Leser* (1972) in English shortly after its German publication. Furthermore, parts of *Akt* had already been translated, which provides some explanation for the quick release of *Act*. In addition to playing a part in the international, Anglophone academic context of *literary theory*, Iser was a professor of English and it was probably an additional incentive to contribute to the debates of his Anglophone peers. Additionally, he was able to write in, and translate into, English without relying on a translator, and the examples were all taken from English literature.

Apart from these more speculative notions about the ›why,‹ concerning the ›how‹ and ›what,‹ matters get far more complex, albeit more palpable. At a first cursory glance, the 1978 English version *Act* seems to be, following Jungs's terminology, an »aided« and »delayed« translation to Iser's »second language« that is »homoscopic« as far as quotations go and »heteroscopic« with regard to academic jargon of the targeted communities.[11] I will comment on the notion of ›aid‹ further below, so suffice it to say at this point that the extent of assistance should not be overestimated. Furthermore, the relation between the German and the English version is certainly not one between ›original‹ and ›translation,‹ suggesting a monodirectional and monocausal vector. The textual genesis is far more intricate than this, and was often based on working simultaneously on German and English texts interfering with one another.[12] This bears consequences on both of the authorized versions, and a comparative reading of both prefaces to *Akt/Act*, the bibliographical account in *Der*

9   Wolfgang Iser: *Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa*, Konstanz 1970 (Konstanzer Universitätsreden, vol. 28), reprinted in: Warning (ed.): *Rezeptionsästhetik* (fn. 3), pp. 228–252.

10  Wolfgang Iser: »Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction,« in: J. Hillis Miller (ed.): *Aspects of Narrative. Selected Papers from the English Institute*, New York/London 1971, pp. 1–45.

11  Verena Jung: *English-German Self-Translation of Academic Texts and its Relevance for Translation Theory and Practice*, Frankfurt a.M. et al. 2002, pp. 22–31.

12  Examples, among many, would be the interference of the »Appellstruktur« lecture and the »Indeterminacy« paper (1969–1971, see fn. 9 and 10) with the chapters on Thackeray and on »Generic Control« (written between 1969 and 1972) in *Der implizite Leser* resp. *The Implied Reader* (see fn. 22).

*implizite Leser* as well as several disclaimers in single articles reveal at least a bigger, if not the whole, picture of his self-translations.[13]

As Iser explicitly points out in the German preface of *Akt*, his published lecture *Die Appellstruktur der Texte* was an initial sketch (»Problem-skizze«, *Akt*, 9) for this book.[14] The collection of essays *Der implizite Leser* is not exactly mentioned as the precursory study it turned out to be, but only in connection with the examples given (the selection being restricted to the texts discussed and contextualized in greater depth in the collection, see *Akt*, 10). Both texts and their English translations are mentioned in the almost identical English preface as they were already available at the time of publication. And finally, the reader of the German preface is informed that the beginning of part II.A as well as a preliminary study (»Vorstudie«) of part III were already published as single essays.

And this is when things get messy. The *almost* identical English preface differs significantly in two respects. The first, less relevant diversion is a ›test-case scenario‹ for the book that took place in Toronto and happened after the German publication which might have influenced the English translation in parts. In this context it is interesting to bear in mind that in the German preface, Iser stresses two research visits during which he basically wrote the book, both of which were at Anglophone research facilities. This also might have helped with the simultaneous conception of parts. It is important to stress that self-translation is an ›early-Iser‹ phenomenon as several books and articles were later translated by some-body else (Henry David Wilson), others he wrote in English and were translated to German, again, not by himself. It seems that his ›scholarly language‹ shifted from German to English, as one of his books indicates: *The Range of Interpretation* (2000) so far only exists in an English ver-sion. The fact that Iser became an American professor at the University of California, Irvine consolidated a trend to write in English.

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13  If this was possible at all, one would at least have to consult other textual evidence such as manuscripts, corrected typescripts, etc. For the scope of this essay this seems neither feasible, nor necessary. The following observations are based on published authorized versions of the texts.

14  With the term »Problemskizze,« Iser probably assumed that the book would shed light on clipped arguments or misleading phrases. However, both *Appellstruktur* and *Akt* were apparently still »creating some erroneous impressions« (Wolfgang Iser: *Prospecting. From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore/London 1989, p. 30) so that Iser felt compelled to add a »Retrospective Note (1988)« (ibid., p. 3) to a reprint of the English version of *Appellstruktur*, and additionally change some statements. As he explains in the note, the response is neither purely »subjective,« nor was he suggesting that a text would have an »intention« (ibid.). Clearly this is a matter of ›translation,‹ from one academic context to the other, at least as far as the German *Intentionalität* in its phenomenological slant is concerned. On the problem of translating ›Germanic phenomenology‹, see below.

The second difference between the prefaces of *Akt* and *Act* is connected to the previous publications and studies. We learn from the English preface that in addition to *Appellstruktur*, the »first part of Chapter 3 [i.e. German II.A] has been published under the title ›The Reality of Fiction […‹] and is reproduced here, with slight alterations […]« (*Act*, xii).[15] The alterations are indeed so slight (in fact almost indetectable down to identical subheadings and italics of single words) that a comparison offers no further insight. Interesting, however, is the fact that there were already parts in English that Iser drew on when working on the translation, moreover, that the English article appeared before the publication of German *Akt*. The first disclaimer lets us know that »[t]his essay is an extract […] from a manuscript provisionally entitled *The Performance of Reading* […].«[16]

This indication of a parallel translation is coupled with another aspect. The German book chapter *Die Wirklichkeit der Fiktion*,[17] published previous to *The Reality of Fiction*, is the basis for the German edition part II.A, though allegedly »mit in paar verdeutlichenden Korrekturen« (*Akt,* 10). Again, those are hard to detect, a comparison rather shows a close, »homoscopic« translation (in Jung's terms). Iser does not seem to understand *The Reality of Fiction* as a different text, as the word-by-word translation of the German footnote 1 illustrates.[18] And yet, the few existing differences are telling. In addition to a more conversational style in English, that leads most often to a shortened text, especially one conceptual difference seems relevant. While the German version explains in some detail the idea of Norbert Wiener's cybernetic concepts, such as servo-mechanisms, the English version sums up a whole page (and a footnote on Wiener) basically in one sentence:

> Thus the reader´s communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates signifieds which he must then continually modify. It is cybernetic in nature as it involves a feedback of effects and information throughout a sequence of changing situational frames […].[19]

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15  See Wolfgang Iser: »The Reality of Fiction. A Functionalist Approach to Literature,« in: *New Literary History* 7 (1975), vol. 1, pp. 7–38.

16  Ibid., p. 35.

17  Wolfgang Iser: »Die Wirklichkeit der Fiktion. Elemente eines funktionsgeschichtlichen Textmodells der Literatur,« in: Warning (ed.): *Rezeptionsästhetik* (fn. 3), pp. 277–324.

18  »Nach der Niederschrift des vorliegenden Beitrags (1972) fand ich eine sehr verwandte Ansicht zum Fiktionsbegriff in dem Buch von Johannes Anderegg […].« (»Die Wirklichkeit der Fiktion« (fn. 17), p. 321.) – »After completing this essay (1972), I came across a similar view of literature in Johannes Anderegg's book […].« (»The Reality of Fiction« (fn. 15), p. 36.)

19  Ibid., p. 20.

This appears to be a »heteroscopic« matter, as the English version assumes that the reader is familiar with Wiener (the footnote is dropped, as well) and knows what cybernetics is. Connected to this example, another difference permeates the whole book. It is related to the German version's prolific use of visual metaphors. ›Hohlform,‹ ›Kippfigur,‹ ›stereoskopische Qualität‹ (or as in II.A ›Sammellinse‹) can be translated, but those translations wouldn't work as well as in German. Accordingly, all of the passages are dropped or glossed over (›intersecting point‹ instead of ›Sammellinse,‹ for instance). At the same time, in the English *Act* as well as other shorter texts which shaped the book, the ›imagistic‹ character of the reading experience becomes more pronounced.[20]

This is the first indicator of how a self-translation feeds into a revised thought process as shall be illustrated by the second text mentioned in the German preface, the »Vorstudie« to part III. The editorial evidence is important because the ›original‹ version was written and published in English. Thus, it is exceptional because it was translated ›back‹ to the first language, German, and this translation subsequently influenced both the German and the English translations of *Akt/Act*. The German version *Der Lesevorgang* (1975) starts with the following note:

> Die vorliegende Fassung ist eine Übersetzung des ursprünglich englisch er-schienenen Aufsatzes »The Reading Process. A Phenomenological Approach« […]. Da es sich bei dem vorliegenden Aufsatz um eine Problemskizze handelte, wurde auf notwendige Zusätze verzichtet und der Sachverhalt lediglich an ein paar Stellen präzisiert. Das hier angeschnittene Thema habe ich in einem inzwischen nahezu abgeschlossenen Manuskript mit dem Arbeitstitel: *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* zu entfalten versucht. (»Lesevorgang,« 253, asterisk note)

Two aspects are of interest here: the comment on the differences between the English and German text, as well as on the relation to the later *Akt*. Firstly, in stark contrast to the examples above, in which the ›minor‹ corrections and ›slight‹ alterations are almost non-existent,[21] in this case

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20   I first came across some of the differences in Iser's translations while working on a model of reader response aesthetics to conceptualize readerly visualizations. I was interested specifically in the ›visual‹ elements in Iser's theory. Although the quote central to my study, »Sinn hat Bildcharakter« (*Akt*, 20) was translated into »meaning is imagistic in character« (*Act*, 8), many optical similes or metaphors were dropped in the translation. However, also the English version stresses the ›imagistic‹ quality of the reading experience, only without relying on metaphors. This consolidated my argument as it suggests a literally imagistic, or iconic, quality of reading beyond a mere figural use. See Ronja Tripp: *Mirroring the Lamp. Literary Visuality, Strategies of Visualizations, and Scenes of Observation in Interwar Narratives*, Trier 2013.

21   Despite Iser's elaborate self-categorization of stages of revision (see *Der implizite Leser* (fn. 8), pp. 414–415), there are many examples in which the text remains a remarkably stable entity despite its translations. Nonetheless, the bibliographical information in the collection of essays, *Der implizite Leser,* Iser distinguishes between original essays (one

the ›minimal precisions‹ mentioned in the previous quote is a blatant understatement. These texts differ above all in scope and in register. Furthermore, passages are left out, others are added. Focusing first just on the two early articles, linguistically and stylistically the English version, *The Reading Process*, possesses a more casual tone. *Der Lesevorgang* shows a formal, if not almost frozen register, making the matter appear more complex and complicated. At the same time, some phrases and whole sentences in the English version seem to be rather derived from German complex constructions, such as: »This is of especial importance in literary texts in view of the fact that they do not correspond to any objective reality outside themselves.« (»Reading Process,« 281) While the phenomenological approach needs to be legitimized against psychological approaches (see ibid.), this aspect is left out in the German text. When both texts continue to talk about the lacking denotation of literary sentences, the German version in addition offers a convoluted explanation that is missing from the English version (»und wo immer dies geschieht – daß die Denotationsabschwächung zugunsten eines Konnotationsaufbaus ihre Zielrichtung bildet,« »Lesevorgang,« 255). It seems as though these examples are indeed just a matter of the usual difference between German and English academic texts and of shifts in research communities. And yet, a comparative reading of both early articles with both the German and English edition of *Akt/Act* shows more of a continuous change of ideas and thoughts rather than a mere shift in academic context, language or scope. Taking a closer look at a single example from *Act* and its precursors (bear in mind that the preface to *Act* does not mention any text as precursor to this passage), we get a differentiated result.

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|---|---|
| The unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes, and the unspoken dialogue within the »turns and twists,« not only draw the reader into the action, but also lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations, so that these take on a reality of their own. But as the reader's imagination animates these »outlines,« they in turn will influence the effect of the written part of the text. Thus begins the whole dynamic process: the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, | Das Verschwiegene in scheinbar trivialen Szenen und die Leerstellen in den Gelenken des Dialogs ziehen den Leser nicht nur in das Geschehen hinein, sondern verleiten ihn dazu, die vielen Abschattungen der formulierten Situation so zu beleben, daß diese – wie es scheint – eine ganz neue Dimension erhalten. Je mehr solche Abschattungen von der Phantasie des Lesers erfüllt werden, desto unverkennbarer beginnt ihre ursprüngliche Schattenhaftigkeit auf das tatsächlich Gesagte zurückzuwirken. Daraus entspringt ein dynamischer Vorgang, denn das Gesagte |

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case), »stark überarbeitete Fassungen« (three cases), »überarbeitete Fassungen« (five cases) and »redigierte Fassungen« (one case). Only a comprehensive comparison of all the different versions would reveal the underlying criteria in full, which could help trace certain developments of ideas in Iser's writing.

but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own. In this way, trivial scenes suddenly take on the shape of an »enduring form of life.« [Woolf] What constitutes this form is never named, let alone explained, in the text, although in fact it is the end product of the interaction between text and reader. (»Reading Process,« 280–281)

scheint erst dann wirklich zu sprechen, wenn es auf das verweist, was es verschweigt. Da aber das Verschwiegene nur die Kehrseite des Gesagten ist, gewinnt es gerade dadurch seine Konturen. Zugleich aber bringt es das Gesagte vor einen Hintergrund, der es – wie Virginia Woolf meint – nun eigntlich bedeutsamer erscheinen läßt, als es die bloße Gegebenheit des Gesagten je vermuten ließe. Es entsteht ein Spielraum der Suggestionen, durch den nun triviale Szenen plötzlich den Umriß einer ›enduring form of life‹ gewinnen. Diese ist im Text selbst nicht benannt, geschweige denn ausgeführt; vielmehr ergibt sie sich als das Produkt aus der Verschränkung von Text und Leser. (»Lesevorgang,« 254–255)

Das Verschwiegene in scheinbar trivialen Szenen und die Leerstellen in den Gelenken des Dialogs stimulieren den Leser zu einer projektiven Besetzung des Ausgesparten. Sie ziehen den Leser in das Geschehen hinein und veranlassen ihn, sich das Nicht-Gesagte als das Gemeinte vorzustellen. Daraus entspringt ein dynamischer Vorgang, denn das Gesagte scheint erst dann wirklich zu sprechen, wenn es auf das verweist, was es verschweigt. Da aber das Verschwiegene die Implikation des Gesagten ist, gewinnt es dadurch seine Kontur. Gelingt es, das Verschwiegene in der Vorstellung zu verlebendigen, dann bringt es das Gesagte vor einen Hintergrund, der es nun – wie Virginia Woolf meint – ungleich bedeutsamer erscheinen läßt, als es das im Gesagten Bezeichnete vermuten ließe. Dadurch erscheinen dann triviale Szenen als Ausdruck einer überraschenden Lebensmächtigkeit (enduring form of life). *Diese ist im Text selbst sprachlich nicht manifestiert*, sondern stellt sich als Produkt ein, das aus der Verschränkung von Text und Leser entsteht. (*Akt*, 264–265)

What is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue – this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What is said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said »expands« to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound. The »enduring form of life« which Virginia Woolf speaks of is not manifested on the printed page; it is a product arising out of the interaction between text and reader. (*Act*, 168–169)

In the *Act* version, Iser does not just use the original English article, or translate the German *Akt* into English. Nor is the passage from *Act* just a blend, although it contains parts of both the two German texts as well as the English precursor. Rather, *Act* is the result of a continuous development of thought. For instance, the »unwritten« and »das Verschwiegene« merge into more media-neutral, famous »gaps« and »blanks.« Most importantly though, since such a development is always manifest in revision or re-edition of texts, it is the translation itself that spurs a shift in thought. To highlight another aspect from this passage, this is most noticeable in

the translation of the »outlines« and the reader's »shading in,« which in *The Reading Process* is directed to counteract the »blurred and hazy« indeterminacies. By »animat[ing]« those rough sketches, those outlines develop a »reality of their own.« This turns into something slightly different in *Der Lesevorgang*, as the focus shifts from imagining something in more concreteness or even vivacity (after all, it is about the »enduring form of life«), to »Abschattungen« and »neue Dimensionen« both concerned with a more distinguished view on things, tracing the subtle nuances to arrive at a completely new aspect. This is in both versions of *Akt/Act* turned into »projektive[ ] Besetzung« or »projections« which is both the vivid imagination of elements as well as an additional surplus realization through actualizations of the blanks.

One last comparative example – again from all four texts – shows this progression of thought in a nutshell:

> The question now arises as to how far such a process can be adequately described. (»Reading Process,« 281)
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> Es fragt sich nun, inwieweit ein solcher Vorgang der Beschreibung überhaupt zugänglich ist. (»Lesevorgang,« 255)
>
> Es fragt sich nun, inwieweit dieser Vorgang eine der Beschreibung zugängliche intersubjektive Struktur besitzt. (*Akt*, 177)
>
> In our attempt to describe the intersubjective structure of the process through which a text is transferred and translated [...] (*Act*, 108)

From the tentative questions of adequacy via observability to the logically consequent question of intersubjectivity, finally the question turns into a statement. There are many other examples of self- and re-translations that show a clear development of thought, as is most blatantly indicated in a singular example of a shift in title.[22] Both *Reading Process* and *Lese-*

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22    In Iser's article on Smollett, the original German title »Wirklichkeit und Form in Smolletts *Humphry Clinker*« (in: *Europäische Aufklärung. Herbert Dieckmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, München 1967, pp. 87–115) is ›translated‹ into »Generic Control of the Aesthetic Response. An Examination of Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*« (in: *Southern Humanities Review* 3 (1969), pp. 243–257). The reason for this shift is probably the context in which the text was delivered. While the English title just highlights the generic aspects of the reader response argument in the text, another ›slightly altered‹ German version, published after the English, is now entitled »Realitätsvermittlung und Leserlenkung [...]« (in: *Der implizite Leser* (fn. 8), pp. 94–131). The comparison of these texts, including the fourth version *in The Implied Reader*, reveal other, minor aspects in which change in thought might become manifest, for example the introduction of structuring devices (second German and first English version). Also, there is a change from the first English version of a European »ae« to an American »e« in spelling the title »a/esthetic« in the Johns Hopkins edition of »Generic Control« in *Implied Reader*. The latter was not only being edited, but also revised by the translator Wilson whose »assistance« helped Iser »to give an English shape to a German book« (*The Implied Reader* (fn. 8), p. ix).

*vorgang* are seen as a ›Problemskizze‹ that do not need further revisions (just like the *Appellstruktur* mentioned above) because the following texts will actually do this: elaborate, revise and make more poignant. The comparison of the four texts shows thought process in the making. Every text, even the simplest translation, bears revisions that actually affect the way of thinking about the issues at stake.

Finally, let me comment on the actual monographs as a whole. A comparative reading shows missing passages, inversions of paragraphs, central terms that are dropped or dissolve into alternative syntactic arrangements. Apart from these differences based on the ›natural‹ code switch involved, there are differences in style due to conventions of the specific scientific community.

An example for the latter would be different outlines: Being written in 1976, the German version has more levels of ordering – not as many as contemporary structuralist studies, but it is nonetheless notably simplified in the English translation. Also subtitles were added to the English version to provide at a glance an understanding of what the parts were about, probably for readers outside of a particular scientific collective familiar with the traditional theories and used to hearing a certain strand of arguments (that is in Iser's case especially the Constance academic context as well as the *Poetik und Hermeneutik* group).

Some of the most drastic changes can be observed when comparing a passage entitled »The functional structure of the blanks.« Some aspects, central and vital to the German original, are dropped in the translation just to mainly get the argument across. Those passages clipped are primarily concerned with phenomenological thought. Just like in the comparison of *Reading Process*, *Lesevorgang* and other examples it is »Germanic phenomenology« of the 1970s that needs to be translated into an English form, as the following statement in the preface to the first translation of *Act* indicates:

> [T]his English version would never have been possible without the patience and linguistic ingenuity of David Henry Wilson, to whom I am […] indebted for giving an Anglicized form to a book of Germanic phenomenology. (*Act*, xii)[23]

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23    There is no indication that Wilson ›translated‹ this book or *Der implizite Leser*, no reference is provided either in the copyright of the English translation, in the accounts of the publishing house or in the state libraries' accounts. He assisted Iser by re-working and re-vising his ›Germanic‹ style, but did not translate ›from scratch‹ in these cases. This can be inferred from the phrasing which Iser uses in both prefaces to the English editions. More importantly, this is evident in the editorial histories of the books (and their single textual components) as well as in the fact that Wilson later on is clearly marked as a translator.

But there are other transformations, as I argued above, that can only in part be explained by foreign writing conventions or styles of thinking. I would like to argue that those changes point to a specific phenomenon at work in the act of self-translation: while Iser later abandoned the interest in ›Germanic phenomenology,‹ in contrast to that another school of thought was cut from *Act* that became of vital importance in his later writing. Here the reason was neither a willful detachment, nor certainly a concession to an Anglophone market, because the concepts skipped were derived from cybernetics in the tradition of Norbert Wiener, such as recursivity, looping and feedback. And this takes us to Iser's notion of translatability.

## II. »On Translatability« – The ›Recursive Looping‹ in Cultural Processes

It would be hard to discern whether Iser's later interest in issues of translation as one of the key concepts in the humanities is grounded to some extent in his experiences with self-translation and translational practices. His concept of ›translatability‹ offers insights into translational processes that reflect also on the findings outlined above. This concept is based on a cybernetic notion of recursive looping. It conceptualizes translational practices beyond hegemonial ones such as *appropriation* or *assimilation*, beyond monodirectional processes like *transformation* and beyond relative results as expressed in concepts like *imitation*. To put it differently, he is not interested in coming up with a concept for the product of such an endeavor. He focuses instead on the potentially open process of an interaction by discussing the operational mode at work in translation. What is more, it reflects on the role translation plays for cultural communication in general.[24]

In a paper from 1994[25] and subsequent publications on the matter,[26] Iser wants to conceptualize cultural interactions, that is interactions between cultures as well as between cultural sub-systems. The guiding question is how this interaction can be thought of in a non-hierarchical manner. To avoid subsumption, assimilation, or appropriation of one cultural

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[24]  Iser's approach has been discussed with regard to concrete, actual translational practices by Dalai Wang: »Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response. Strategies on Compensation for Cultural Default in Translation,« in: *Perspectives* 19 (2011), pp. 339–352.

[25]  Wolfgang Iser: »On Translatability,« in: *Surfaces* 4 (1994), no. 307, p. 1–13.

[26]  Wolfgang Iser: »On Translatability. Variables of Interpretation,« in: *The European English Messenger* 4 (1995), pp. 30–38; Sanford Budick/Wolfgang Iser (eds.): *The Translatability of Cultures. Figurations of the Space Between*, Stanford 1996.

system into one's own, and to ensure the comprehension of the other system, a new approach is needed. To understand the other culture in its otherness, we need translatability that »implies translation of otherness without subsuming it under preconceived notions.«[27] But how does this work and what are the effects of such a practice? Simply put, it works by a frame adjustment. The foreign culture is not simply subsumed into one's own frame of references, e.g. familiar codes, but instead, I have to adjust my own frames in order to integrate what does not fit. This inherently ethical basis clearly marks it as an anti-hegemonial concept that is involved in exposing the covert cultural politics at work. The consequence is far-reaching, as Iser makes clear by comparing different modes of translation:

> [I]ncorporating the other aims at assimilation, which leads to a politics of cultural relationships; appropriating the other highlights goals of utilization that are meant to remedy existing deficiencies; reflecting oneself in the other entails heightened self-awareness, which leads to self-confrontation.[28]

And it is this notion of self-confrontation and eventual change of one's own frames that is »a difference that makes a difference.«[29] In order to pin down how both systems interact and how a change occurs through »self-confrontation,« Iser introduces the cybernetic concept of recursive re-entry loops. Translatability »requires construing a discourse that allows for transposing a foreign culture into one's own.«[30] This discourse would provide the frame for a continual looping: that means the output of the known into the unknown allows to tie the unknown back to the known. This interchange, this ›communication‹ between output and input changes the known output. »Consequently,« writes Iser, »a dual correction occurs: the ›feed forward‹ returns as an altered feedback loop which, in turn, feeds into a revised output.«[31]

This, in terms of Norbert Wiener's cybernetics, is a recursive loop: the machine adjusts future projections to past performances – basically protention and retention –, and the intelligent machine in addition learns from previous operations of this kind. On the basis of the cybernetic distinction between ›negative‹ and ›positive‹ feedback loops (negative being minimally affecting, and thus stabilizing the system, positive loops on the other hand providing far-reaching repercussions on the system that triggered the recur-

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27  Iser: »On Translatability« (fn. 25), p. 1.
28  Ibid., p. 10.
29  Gregory Bateson: *Steps to An Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, New Jersey 1972, p. 459.
30  Iser: »On Translatability« (fn. 25), p. 11.
31  Ibid., p. 9.

sion), Iser continues to claim that in an interaction with another culture in which grasping of otherness is predominant, a positive feedback loop will inform the operations. But »[w]hatever the direction will be recursive looping as the mechanics of a cross-cultural discourse allows for a mutual translatability of cultures, which by far outstrips cross-cultural interchange in terms of assimilation, appropriation, and incorporation.«[32]

In this view, translatability changes my preconceived notions of the other. What is more, it changes notions concerning the self, one's own culture and language as well as systems of order and knowledge. Thus, it might also provide new insights into one's own academic work. But is this already *self*-translation? There is another hint in Iser's text which marks the implications more clearly. The key term here is autopoiesis, when Iser takes this notion of cross-cultural discourse to an intra-cultural level. Culture understood in terms of general systems theory is an autopoetic complex system that can be described

> as a network of interlinking processes which, in turn, produce the very components that set the process in motion. The relationship between process and components is one of a continual recursive looping, in the course of which components structure a process, and the latter yields further components that are fed back into such a network through which a culture gains its salience of even its identity. If a culture is conceived as an autopoetic system that generates its own organization, then a cybernetically operating cross-cultural discourse is a direct offshoot of the ongoing self-organization of cultures.[33]

From this follows for Iser that the operational mode for translating in form of recursive re-entry is at the core of all cultural dynamics, including subject formation and self-identity. Iser is not interested in a concept for the product of self-translation, but focuses instead on the potentially open process. He reflects on the role that ubiquitous translation plays for cultural communication in general, and more particularly for changes in the notions of self and other as the recursive re-entry loop influences both interacting systems.

## III. Autocommunication and the Emergence of Cultures

So how are we to grasp the specificity of *self*-translations? Bearing Iser's categories in mind, this time it is not a communication between self and other, but between self and self. Not only is the meaning of the words fa-

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miliar, but the text is nothing but the manifestation of one's own thoughts. No trace, it seems, of otherness here. Does this mean this is not a matter of translatability, after all?

Iser's concept is developed from the perspective of cultural studies, the presupposition being that there is an intricate link between culture, communication and translation. The same is true for the semiotic cultural theory proposed by Yuri Lotman, who speaks of an »organic link« between cultural processes and communication.[34] For him, every cultural process can be traced back to translation in one form or another. The most apparent common ground of Iser's and Lotman's approaches and assumptions thus lies in the notion of translation being essential to cultural processes.[35] According to Lotman, »the elementary act of thinking is translation […], the elementary mechanism of translation is dialogue.«[36] Dialogue is based on the asymmetry of knowledge or information, hence translation – which is a kind of hermeneutic interpretation – is necessary, the feedback loop replacing the hermeneutic circle. The same is true for self-to-self, or ›I-I‹ communication, as Lotman calls it. In autocommunication, the sender and receiver of a message are the same person. According to Lotman, this

> appears paradoxical. Yet it occurs quite frequently and has an important part to play in the general system of culture. […] Addressing oneself in texts, speeches, ruminations – this is a fact not only of psychology, but also of the history of culture.[37]

Examples include shopping lists, diary entries, prayers and a second reading of a text.[38] Here the question of hermeneutics crops up again, but even

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34  Yuri Lotman: *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington 1990, p. 20.

35  As far as their respective theory of cultures is concerned, Iser and Lotman have more in common than what might be expected: For both, translation is the central cultural process. This is rooted in the notion that a culture (in the broadest sense) is a »multi-layered phenomenon in that it consists of diversified levels« (Iser: »On Translatability« (fn. 25), p. 4). These various levels interact constantly intra- and interculturally. Furthermore, translatability ensues at these borders, or rather within border spaces. Yet, those ›in-between spaces‹ are not empty, but characterized by the interacting (sub-)cultural spheres, they are »dually coded« (ibid., p. 10). Translatabilty focuses on the operational mode involved in cross-cultural discourse, or in Iser's own words, it »makes us focus on the space between cultures« (ibid., 9). All of these notions can be found, outlined and detailed, in chapters 8-10 of Lotman's *Universe of the Mind*.

36  Lotman: *Universe of the Mind* (fn. 34), p. 143.

37  Ibid., p. 21.

38  Although clear forms of ›autocommunication‹ in a broader sense, these examples seem to be an incongruent mix of the category ›writings to myself.‹ While diary entries might be the most evident practice of self-expression to foster some kind of information that by externalization is defamiliarized and in retrospect might provide insights about myself, a shopping list perhaps not so much as they do not seem to go beyond their mnemonic function.

more so the question of reader response and textual pragmatics, which foster self-knowledge and subject formation. Lotman describes the common characteristics of those disparate forms of autocommunication from the perspective of information and communication theory. In contrast to communications of the sender-receiver-type, that is ›I-she,‹ in the autocommunicative ›I-I‹ the message, the information obviously is already known. Lotman claims that in the ›I-she‹ variant, new information is added to my previous knowledge, while in autocommunication no new information is received. However, this communication results in a *change* of knowledge. Or to phrase it differently: the difference between ›I-she‹ and ›I-I‹ is one between a *transfer* of knowledge and the *production* of knowledge.[39] So, auto-communication is the production of new knowledge based on what I already knew. How is this possible?

Under certain circumstances my message might appear as an alien text, like a text by another person. This causes the recipient's focus to shift from message to code or semiology, the effect being that the words of the message »tend to become signs of words, indices of signs.«[40] This kind of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) happens, for instance, if there is a medial change. This can be a shift from voice to writing, or from handwriting to a publication in print, from inner dialogue to external speech, from thoughts to words. In this case, as Lotman puts it, »if it is translated into a new system of […] signs […] it acquires supplementary value.«[41]

In the ›I-she‹ interaction, the given information does not change and the codes remain constant throughout the communicative act. In auto-communication, information is increased, there is a »transformation, [a] reformulation and with the introduction not of new messages but of new codes.«[42] To actually hold surplus information, the prerequisite is the aforementioned change – but what change exactly? In addition to a medial change, there is a shift in context involved. For instance, from private to official, inner thoughts are being spoken aloud. This shift leads to a reformulation of the message during the communication process. This process is not self-contained, but is »caused by the intrusion of supplementary codes from outside, and by external stimuli which alter the contextual situation,«[43] such as those brought about by a shift in the

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[39]   This paraphrase brings the problematic aspects of Lotman's systematic, analytical categories to the fore: rather than being either the one or other ›kind‹ of communication, it could be argued that every act of communication is situated on a scale between those two poles, which are functional rather than ontological.

[40]   Lotman: *Universe of the Mind* (fn. 34), p. 26.

[41]   Ibid., p. 21.

[42]   Ibid., p. 29.

[43]   Ibid., p. 22.

academic context or scientific community. This causes a tension between
the original message and the secondary code. The effect of this tension
is the tendency to interpret the elements of the original text as if they
were included in the supplementary construction that have acquired new,
*relational* meanings from this interaction. Accordingly, the text bears a

> three-fold semantic value: the primary general linguistic semantic value, the
> secondary semantic value, which arises from the syntagmatic reorganization
> of the text and from juxtaposition with the primary values, and thirdly, values
> that arise from the introduction into the message of extra-textual associations.[44]

To sum up and apply these notions to self-translation: an already known
information is transformed through the change in codes as well as shifts
in contexts. It is ›made strange‹ and provides new insight. The knowledge
produced in the process has a certain epistemological effect which will help
to connect the dots. Getting back to Iser: While the ›I-she‹ system allows
one merely to transmit a constant quantity of information, the ›I-I‹ system
qualitatively transforms the information. And this might lead to a restruc-
turing of the actual ›I‹ itself. Or as Lotman puts it explicitly, »the actual
person is reformed and this process is connected with a very wide range
of cultural functions,«[45] the most notable being the traditional Freudian
psychoanalytical practice. »[H]uman culture,« Lotman concludes, »is a
vast example of autocommunication«[46] – precisely because it is a herme-
neutic operation, a translation of the cybernetic recursive looping type.


## IV. Conclusion – From Self-Translation to Translating Selves

Translatability and autocommunication are part and parcel of the same
phenomenon. Both draw on two aspects, combined also by Hayden
White in view of cross-cultural translational practice: autopoesis and
»transcodation.«[47] What is more, however, both concepts include a notion
of translation of the self through a translation of an alien – or alienated –
text. The overlapping features and complementary elements of Iser's and
Lotman's concepts lead to an idea about self-translation that reflects on
the operational mode involved in the process as well as on its cultural
and epistemological consequences. More than that, self-translation appears

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44   Ibid., p. 29.
45   Ibid.
46   Ibid., p. 33.
47   Hayden White: »Afterword,« in: Victoria Bonnell/Lynn Hunt (eds.): *Beyond the Cultural
     Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Berkeley 1999, pp. 315–324,
     here p. 321.

to be involved not only in the transfer and production of knowledge, but also accounts for the fact that one's own research develops and progresses beyond external input, experimental findings, or criticism.

Simply put: any transfer of knowledge includes a very basal form of translation, any production a form of self-translation. This is backed up even by reflections on science of a more conservative slant. In 1969, in a paper entitled *Änderungen in der Denkstruktur im Fortschritt der Wissenschaft* (›Changes in Thought Structure in the Progress of Science‹), Werner Heisenberg considered the epistemological challenges of revolutionary discoveries which demanded changes in methodologies as well as in the mode of speaking about the observations made. One consequence of quantum physics was acknowledging the observer as being part of what is described. Heisenberg concludes: »The meanings of old words have lost precision.«[48] Especially the notion of indeterminacies demands a new kind of language, or transfer of knowledge from one realm to the other. As »the object and the observer are as a rule described in different languages, […] consequently the problem of translation is a universal scientific task,« Lotman comments on the crux of the observer.[49] And this act of translation, this oscillation and reciprocal interaction between change of thought and change of text propels further scientific insight. Heisenberg continues:

> To make a broad generalization […], we might say that the change in the structure of thought is outwardly manifest in the fact that the words have acquired other meanings than the ones they had before and that other questions are being raised than previously.[50]

The argument put forward in this article inverts Heisenberg's cause-and-effect: a change in words leads to the reflection on our previous thought-processes because our structures of thought (*Denkstrukturen*) have ›lost precision‹ and need subsequent adjustment. Moreover, this re-evaluation of our own preconceived notions is inherent in acts of self-translations and is encapsulated in Iser's own notion of ›Problemskizzen‹ as I have discussed above. To discuss Iser's concept of translatability together with examples of his own translations illustrated that self-translation is not only a transfer of knowledge, but also a *production* of knowledge. It provides

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48   Werner Heisenberg: »Änderungen in der Denkstruktur im Fortschritt der Wissenschaft,« in: *Schritte über Grenzen. Gesammelte Reden und Aufsätze*, München 1971, pp. 275–287, here p. 278 (my translation).

49   Lotman: *Universe of the Mind* (fn. 34), p. 269.

50   Heisenberg: »Änderungen in der Denkstruktur im Fortschritt der Wissenschaft« (fn. 48), p. 278.

insight that reflects back on one's own theories and thoughts, potentially even more than any critical comment by peers.

As one's own text changes, does the subject change too? The academic persona ›Wolfgang Iser' certainly changed continually. From Comic Theory and Modernism over Reception Aesthetics to Literary Anthropology and Cultural Theory, he left a body of work that seems as wide ranging as disparate, yet not incongruent. It is a manifestation of constant re-evaluation and reformulation of his own ideas. »Iser's musings on recursion and related notions such as iteration, feedback an translation might be most perspicuous in his late works, but they are anticipated […] in many of his earlier writings,« de Bruyn concludes.[51] Indeed, coming back once again to *Akt*, the reading process is not only compared to »cybernetic recursivity« and »servo-mechanism« (*Akt*, 110–111). In this context, Lotman is explicitly mentioned as someone who describes the text-reader relationship as a »feedback system.« Additionally, as Iser states in *How to Do Theory*, his last book that was published in 2006, »literary theory has one overriding aim, namely to translate the surprising experience of reading into a cognitive framework. Hence, what unites (these) literary theories is their concern for *translatability*.«[52]

As de Bruyn puts it with regard to Iser's body of work, »the study of reception is not the final destination of literary studies, but is just one stop on the way to a broader theory of intercultural interpretation.«[53] His penultimate and lesser known book, *The Range of Interpretation* (2000), makes this evident, since it draws a trajectory from his early take on hermeneutics to a cybernetic notion of cultural recursivity which both boil down to modes of translating. In both Iser's work and his progressive thinking, the ceaseless dynamics of autocommunication and self-translation manifest themselves by constantly changing questions to ask of the same phenomena. Or as it says on Iser's headstone, in a quote from Dryden: *never ending, still beginning.*

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[51]   De Bruyn: *Wolfgang Iser* (fn. 7), p. 211.
[52]   Wolfgang Iser: *How to Do Theory*, London et al. 2006, p. 14.
[53]   De Bruyn: *Wolfgang Iser* (fn. 7), p. 213.