

# Material translation: How do variations in form and materiality influence the ways we read translated editions of a book?

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This article proposes the term *material translation* as a concept to encompass the transfer of a book's materiality in translation processes and its influence on meaning-making in translated editions. Even though the importance of the materiality of literary works has been generally acknowledged, it continually plays a diminutive role in the field of literary Translation Studies, as well as in the practical handling of translation processes as performed by translators and publishing houses. The transfer of form and materiality, so the article argues, becomes especially significant when it comes to photo-texts in which interactions between words, pictures, and layout impact strongly on meaning-making processes. By comparing book spreads from German, English/American and Danish editions of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) and *Austerlitz* (2001), the article shows how variations in materiality and formal composition influence possible interpretations in different languages. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with experts related to the analysed works, the article discusses the causes of variations in materiality, ranging from practical decisions to varying conceptions of what exactly constitutes the object of translation. Whatever the underlying reasons, the article concludes that shifts in materiality occurring in translation processes generate vital shifts in meaning-making, thereby significantly influencing readings in different languages.

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## KEYWORDS

book design and literary translation, captions, layout, material translation, the materiality of literature, photo-texts

## 1 | LITERARY TRANSLATION AND MATERIALITY

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the rise of the e-book and other digital literary forms has resulted in a growing interest in the materiality of literature.<sup>1</sup> This literary practice in transition has led scholars to turn their attention to the influence of the so-called *bibliographical codes* on reading, in addition to considering the linguistic content of books, thereby challenging dominant assumptions about what literary works are and how they should be read. Jerome McGann defines the bibliographical codes in *The Textual Condition* (1991) as those elements that accompany the *linguistic codes* of a book, such as format, layout, typefaces, ‘and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to “poetry” or “the text as such”’ (McGann, 1991, 12–13). In addition to the ‘peripheral’ material phenomena explicitly mentioned by McGann one might add formal elements like typography, which also play a decisive role for meaning-making in literary works.<sup>2</sup> Despite the growing interest in materiality in comparative literature in general, the research field of literary Translation Studies continually focuses primarily on linguistic issues of translation processes.<sup>3</sup> In handbooks and introductions central to the field, the transfer of a book’s materiality is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years there have been significant advances in the area of multimodality and Translation Studies, often investigated through the study of translated children’s literature, thus initiating discussions of the translation processes of different semiotic modes when multimodal literature is translated.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the influence of materiality on the process of publishing new editions of a translated literary work, which I argue plays a decisive role for meaning-making in different translated editions of multimodal as well as other forms of literature, has not yet been thoroughly investigated.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as my interviews with different actors of the German and Danish publishing industry have shown, it seems that the practitioners of translation processes—translators, editors, art directors, graphic designers and typesetters—only view the non-linguistic signs of a multimodal (or any other) work of literature as part of what is to be translated in varying degrees.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the materiality and layout of a literary work is neither usually protected by copyright laws nor mentioned in translation contracts.<sup>8</sup>

However, not only the linguistic codes need to find an equivalent when a literary work is translated. The book’s material form undergoes a transformation as well which I propose to term *material translation*.<sup>9</sup> The term ‘translation’ is used in this article in the sense of the conversion of a literary source text into a target text, including its linguistic, formal and bibliographical characteristics. This process is frequently studied in accordance with Roman Jakobson’s second category ‘interlingual translation’ or ‘translation proper’, as presented in his seminal essay ‘On linguistic aspects of translation’ (1959). Jakobson describes this typical translation process as ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language’ (Jakobson, [2000] 2021, 157). I suggest expanding the idea of translation in Jakobson’s approach which is concerned with linguistic aspects of translation, as the title implies, to include the formal and material aspects of books.<sup>10</sup> When reading across languages it becomes clear that the different material editions of a book influence the ways in which it can be read. The translated edition is a result of the interpretation of verbal as well as non-verbal signs carried out by those who are concerned with the linguistic codes, that is to say, the translator and the editor, as well as by those concerned with the bibliographical codes, that is, designers and typesetters.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the transfer of non-linguistic parts of books, so I argue, should be taken into consideration in literary translation processes.

Questions of formal and bibliographical characteristics of different editions of a literary work and their influence on meaning-making are central to the research fields of book history, bibliography and scholarly editing and have played a vital role in the study of medieval literature.<sup>12</sup> As expressed by Kristina Lundblad in her article

‘Återge eller återskapa?’, book history operates at the ‘intersection’ of the material document, content and context (Lundblad, 2014, 81). This point of view has however gained little attention when it comes to the field of literary Translation Studies.<sup>13</sup> Inspired by such positions this article seeks to combine theories of literary translation with fields that treat book design and publishing in order to analyse the translation process of the book as a whole, including the linguistic as well as the bibliographical codes.

Moreover, this aspect of translation processes seems to have been mostly neglected when it comes specifically to literary translation. In other areas of Translation Studies more holistic views on the transfer process of the entire object of translation are prominent. The term *localisation* is for instance used in marketing translation to describe the modification of a certain product (physical or digital) to a new market, including textual translation as well as other forms of visual modification.<sup>14</sup> This extended view of what exactly constitutes the object of a translation process in commercial translation could be inspirational to literary Translation Studies as well—given that a work of literature, besides being an artistic entity, also constitutes a commodity that is adapted to the target culture for commercial purposes. Material translation is especially important when translating multimodal literary works such as *photo-texts*,<sup>15</sup> since material elements such as format influence the interplay of photography, text and layout, which strongly impacts the meaning-making of each edition.

To analyse this phenomenon it is necessary to consider the question of how readers read the book spread of a photo-text in its entirety. They will need a set of skills that go beyond traditional linguistic literacy, what you could term *visual or material literacy*, meaning the ability to decode not only written language but also such elements as images, format, typography and layout.<sup>16</sup> This skill-set is required in order to interact with the literary work as a whole, including the linguistic as well as the bibliographical codes. It is crucial not only to readers but also to translators and other professionals involved in the publishing process such as editors, designers and typesetters, since they take part in the process of transferring the book from one language and cultural sphere to another.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, formal questions of layout and typography are influenced by decisions regarding the book’s materiality. Such issues of form play a vital role for possible interpretations of photo-texts since the interplay of words and pictures in the layout of the book spread is essential. Questions of form are generally considered important when it comes to the translation of poetry, however they seem to be given less attention in regard to the translation of prose. Yet, the linguistic, material and formal aspects of a book are interlinked and influence each other in prose as well. The translators interviewed accordingly highlight the length of the translated text as decisive for the placement of photographs in the layout of the book. Moreover, the size of the text block, which is dependent on the book’s format, also affects the layout of each book spread.

I will investigate this line of enquiry further in the following analysis by comparing examples of material translation from the two photo-texts *Austerlitz* (2001) by the German author W. G. Sebald and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) by the American author Jonathan Safran Foer. Through a juxtaposition of book spreads from German, English/American and Danish editions I will show the impact of the changes in form and materiality on their meaning-making and hence on possible readings. Finally, I will discuss the term *material translation* as a theoretical framework within which the reading of literary translations and the practical handling of translation processes by translators and publishing houses can be evolved.

## 2 | LAYOUT, DECIPHERABILITY AND READERS’ EMPATHY

Looking at the photo-texts of W. G. Sebald and Jonathan Safran Foer it soon becomes clear that these literary works use additional modes of signification compared to classical word-based novels. A striking example of the different interpretations available to readers of American English, German and Danish from Foer’s *Extremely Loud*<sup>18</sup> appears at a crucial point in the narrative. The story is focalised through three protagonists: first, Oskar Schell, who is dealing with the grief resulting from the tragic loss of his father, Thomas Schell Jr, during the September 11 terror attacks; second, Oskar’s grandmother, who tells her life story beginning with the loss of her family in the Allied

bombing of Dresden during the Second World War, moving on to her migration to the USA, meeting and marrying Oskar's grandfather, giving birth to their son, and losing him as well.

Finally, the third protagonist is Oskar's grandfather Thomas Schell Sr, who narrates the story of his traumatic past and resulting muteness in the form of letters addressed to his child. At a crucial point in the story after Oskar has met and befriended his estranged grandfather (not knowing their familial relation) the two of them decide to dig up the empty grave of Oskar's father and fill it with the grandfather's unsent letters. The scene is focalised through the grandfather and, on the intradiegetic level, he describes how he is running out of space to write down the scene in his notebook through which he communicates with his surroundings. This running out of space is marked on a typographical level as well: the lines of the text become increasingly dense resulting in palimpsestic text layers which are impossible for the reader to decipher, thereby marking the ultimate inability to narrate trauma.<sup>19</sup>

Of specific interest to the topic of this paper is the question of how much of the scene readers of different languages are able to read; or rather at what point reading, understood as the decoding of letters and words, stops functioning. At this point the meaning-making becomes a result of exactly this inability to decode words in the usual way. As the lines grow closer and the text becomes a layered palimpsest, the pages mark themselves as the visual incarnation of the grandfather's notebook and turn into a pure surface in the reader's mind. An apparent interpretation of this use of typography is that at this point the grandfather's recollection becomes so traumatic that he is unable to communicate it to anyone else in a decipherable manner. Accordingly, the formal element of typography is used to convey meaning.

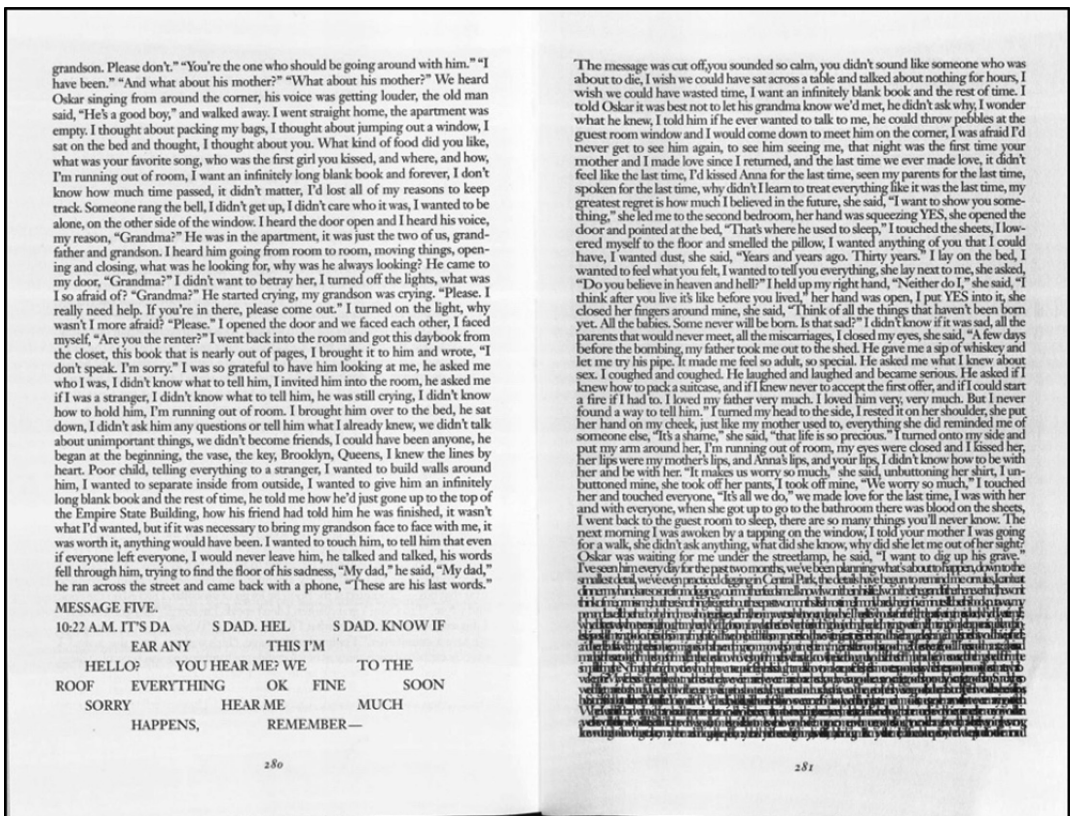


FIGURE 1: From *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (pp. 280–281) by Jonathan Safran Foer, © 2005 Houghton Mifflin Company, New York



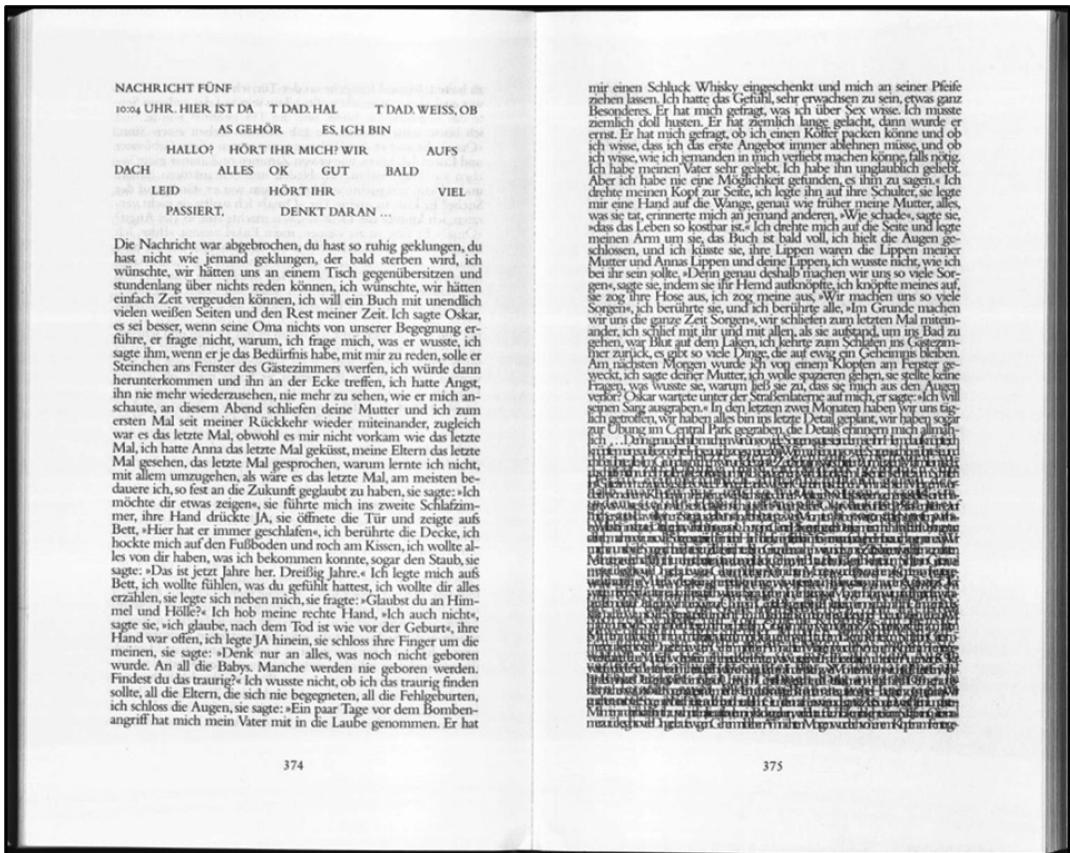


FIGURE 2: From *Extrem laut & unglaublich nah* (pp. 374–375) by Jonathan Safran Foer, trans. Henning Ahrens, © 2005 Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln

Crucially, the point at which the text becomes illegible happens at different stages in the narrative in the American original (fig. 1) and the German (fig. 2) and Danish (fig. 3) translations respectively.<sup>20</sup> In the American original as well as the Danish translation there is a total of three indecipherable pages plus a few lines, whereas the pages with palimpsest have been expanded to six pages plus a few lines in the German translation. The palimpsest in the American original and the Danish translation end with an almost completely black page, as opposed to the German translation in which readers are able to decode words like ‘Central Park’ and ‘Geheim’ occasionally throughout the entire palimpsestic passage (Foer, 2005b, 376–377).<sup>21</sup>

In the American edition the words remain easily decipherable until the following passage: ‘I’ve seen him every day for the past two months, we’ve been planning what’s about to happen, down to the smallest detail, we’ve even practiced digging in Central Park, the details have begun to remind me orrules [sic!], I can’t eat [...]’ (Foer, 2005c, 281). After this quote, the letters are so dense that reading becomes increasingly difficult and at the end impossible. In comparison, readers of the German translation can easily read one additional sentence: ‘In den letzten zwei Monaten haben wir uns täglich getroffen, wir haben alles bin [sic!] ins letzte Detail geplant, wir haben sogar zur Übung im Central Park gegraben, die Details erinnern mich allmählich...Denn genau deshalb machen wir uns so viele Sorgen [...]’ (Foer, 2005b, 375). Strikingly, the equivalent passage in the Danish translation includes a pivotal quote which either must be hidden behind the layered text of the American and German editions or might not even exist in these editions at all.<sup>22</sup>

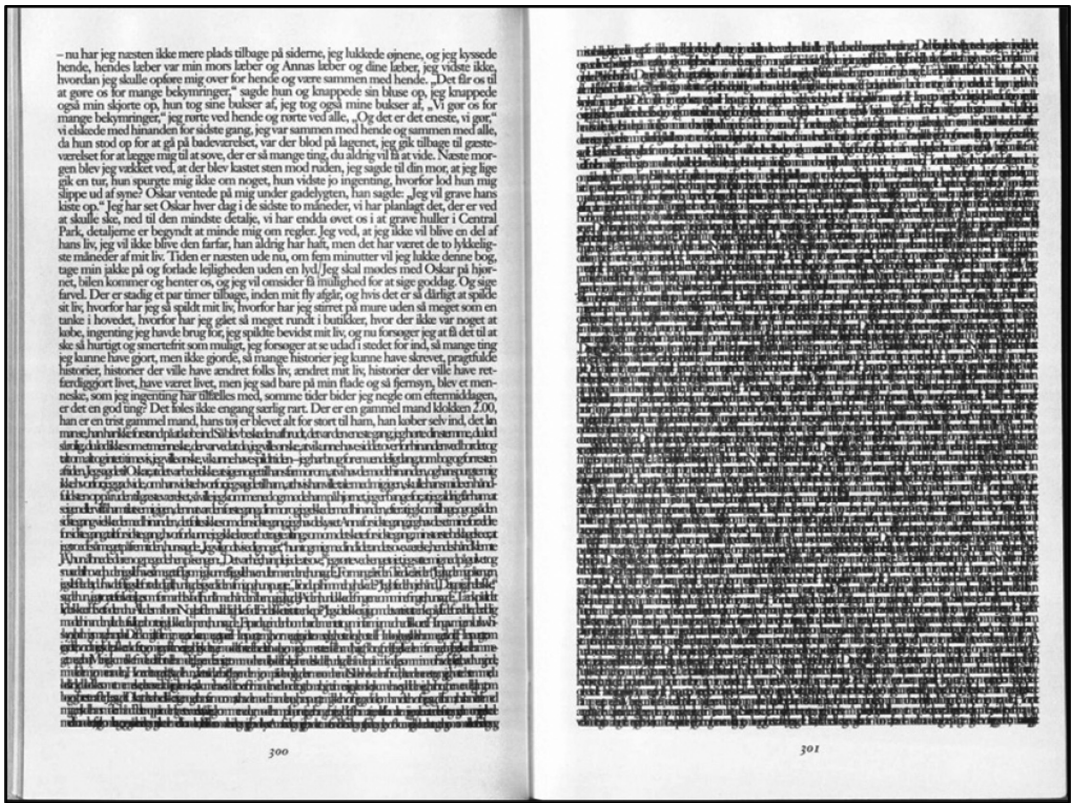


FIGURE 3: From *Ekstremt højt & utrolig tæt på* (pp. 300–301) by Jonathan Safran Foer, trans. Jan Hansen, © 2005 Tiderne Skifter, København (now part of the Gyldendal group)

The depicted extended readable passage of the Danish translation contains the following quote:

Jeg har set Oskar hver dag i de sidste to måneder, vi har planlagt det, der er ved at skulle ske, ned til den mindste detalje, vi har endda øvet os i at grave huller i Central Park, detaljerne er begyndt at minde mig om regler. Jeg ved, at jeg ikke vil blive en del af hans liv, jeg vil ikke blive den farfar, han aldrig har haft, men det har været de to lykkeligste måneder af mit liv. Tiden er næsten ude nu, om fem minutter vil jeg lukke denne bog, tage min jakke på og forlade lejligheden uden en lyd. Jeg skal mødes med Oskar på hjørnet, bilen kommer og henter os, og jeg vil omsider få mulighed for at sige goddag. Og sige farvel. Der er stadig et par timer tilbage, inden mit fly afgår, og hvis det er så dårligt at spilde sit liv, hvorfor har jeg så spildt mit liv, hvorfor har jeg stirret på mure uden så meget som en tanke i hovedet, hvorfor har jeg gået så meget rundt i butikker, hvor der ikke var noget at købe, ingenting jeg havde brug for, jeg spildte bevidst mit liv, og nu forsøger jeg at få det til at ske så hurtigt og smertefrit som muligt, jeg forsøger at se udad i stedet for ind, så mange ting jeg kunne have gjort, men ikke gjorde, så mange historier jeg kunne have skrevet, pragtfulde historier, historier der ville have ændret folks liv, ændret mit liv, historier der ville have retfærdiggjort livet, men jeg sad bare på min flade og så fjernsyn, blev et menneske, som jeg ingenting har til fælles med, somme tider bider jeg negle om eftermiddagen, er det en god ting? Det føles ikke engang særlig rart. Der er en gammel mand kl. 2.00, han er en trist gammel mand, hans tøj er blevet alt for stort til ham, han køber selv ind, det kan man se, han har ikke forstand på at købe ind [...]

(Foer, 2005a, 300)<sup>23</sup>

The passage supplies an important new layer to the character of Thomas Schell Sr; it highlights his sense of survivor's guilt after experiencing the bombing of Dresden and losing his parents, first love and unborn child on this occasion, for instance by showing his need for a 'justification' of his life, which is a typical reaction in traumatised victims of violence and terror.<sup>24</sup> It becomes clear that the grandfather has not suppressed his past as it would seem up until this point in the narrative. On the contrary, he is aware of his trauma—'I have deliberately wasted my life'—and is now trying to process it. Thereby, the Danish translation of this passage not only emphasises the impossibility of narrating trauma through the use of palimpsest in the typography but additionally accentuates an insight into Thomas Schell Sr's mentality and the motives for his (lacking) actions in the past which remain relatively covert throughout the rest of the narrative. Consequently, the otherwise closed character of the grandfather is shown in a different light in the Danish translation, thereby evoking a new sense of empathy towards him in the Danish readers, which does not occur to the same extent in the American and German editions as a result of the formal use of typography and layout in this passage. The characterisation of one of the three main protagonists is thus changed decisively as a result of the variation in the book's formal composition in the American, German and Danish editions.

### 3 | PHOTOGRAPHS AND IMITATED CAPTIONS

Whereas Foer uses a variation of typographical signifiers (other than the layering of text, it includes colourful handwriting, red markings, and pages consisting solely of numbers) as well as imitations of realia (imitated business and index cards, pages from the grandfather's notebook), Sebald on the other hand utilises the page layout as a way of questioning how text and photography should be related to one another. The former publisher Michael Krüger and editor Wolfgang Matz at Carl Hanser Verlag, where *Austerlitz* was originally published, describe how Sebald would plan the layout of the book by counting out the lines of each page, including the placement and size of integrated photographs and other visual aspects before handing in his manuscript. Wolfgang Matz describes this detailed designing of the layout in Sebald's works, especially in *Austerlitz*, as the book's 'magical square', thereby denoting that the page format and layout of each book spread had to fit with the manuscript. A small shift in the layout would impact the rest of the book. Therefore, Sebald would scrutinise each spread together with the art director at Carl Hanser Verlag to attain exactly the layout he wanted—even cutting words if they stood in the way of his layout idea.<sup>25</sup>

In the book spread seen in figure 4, the page has been arranged so that two images depicting the exposed roots of a chestnut tree to the left and flowering anemones to the right are placed in the same size exactly opposite each other in the German original. The eye-catching layout of this book spread does not follow the standards of book design which would have the two images placed at the bottom of the pages. Instead, there is a single line of text under each photograph which is part of the continuous narrative. The placement of these two single lines underneath the photos and the wording of them, for example, 'schneeweißen Märzblüte der Anemone Nemorosa' (Sebald, 2001a, 235), have a strong resemblance to captions that traditionally accompany a photographic image.<sup>26</sup> The placement of the single lines in the book's layout thereby creates a visual effect of captions even though the lines are actually part of the running text.<sup>27</sup> This imitating effect seems to comment on the role of captioning and its relation to the photographic image which follows the assumption that photographs can document reality, and that the motif can be determined in a caption.<sup>28</sup> Since the photographs are integrated into a fictional narrative, readers might however already be suspicious of references to documentation. The insertion of photographs in Sebald's works seems among other things to be a way of destabilising readers' assumptions about the two modes, narrative text and photography, as well as their concomitant fictional and referential discourses.



ren. Sein Anblick erinnerte mich daran, auf den Spaziergängen mit Věra oft solche alte Damen gesehen zu haben mit griesgrämigen kleinen Hunden, die fast alle einen Maulkorb aus Draht trugen und vielleicht deshalb so verstummt und böse gewesen sind. Bis gegen Mittag bin ich dann auf einer Bank in der Sonne gesessen und habe über die Häuser der Kleienseite und die Moldau hinweg auf das Panorama der Stadt geschaut, das mir, genau wie der Firnis auf einem gemalten Bild, durchzogen schien von den krummen Rissen und Sprüngen der vergangenen Zeit. Ein zweites dieser nach keinem erkennbaren Gesetz entstehenden Muster, sagte Austerlitz, fand ich wenig später in dem verschlungenen Wurzelwerk



einer an einem stark abschüssigen Platz sich einhal-

– 234 –

tenden Kastanie, in dem ich, wie ich von Věra weiß, sagte Austerlitz, mit Vorliebe herumgeklettert bin als Kind. Auch die schwarzgrünen Eiben, die unter den hohen Bäumen wuchsen, waren mir vertraut, so vertraut wie die kühle Luft, die mich auf dem Grund des Tobels umfing, und wie die jetzt, im April, bereits verblühten, in endloser Zahl den Waldboden bedeckenden Buschwindrosen, und ich begriff nun, warum mir vor Jahren auf einer meiner Landhausexpeditionen mit Hilary die Stimme versagte, als wir in einem dem Schönborngarten in seiner ganzen Anlage sehr ähnlichen Park in Gloucestershire unversehens vor einem nordseitigen Abhang standen, der überzogen war von den feingefiederten Blättern und der



schneeweißen Märzblüte der Anemone nemorosa.

– 235 –

FIGURE 4: From *Austerlitz* (pp. 234–235), by W. G. Sebald, © 2001 Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, München

In the English translation, which has been the basis for many Anglo-Saxon research contributions on Sebald,<sup>29</sup> and in the Danish translation of *Austerlitz*, the layout has not been transferred to the equivalent book spread as seen in figures 5, 6 and 7. Instead of sticking to Sebald's magical square by copying the layout of the German original, the pictures in both the English and Danish translations have been placed at the bottom of the page, thereby waiving the reference to captioning. In the English translation, the equivalent sentences to the ones placed where a caption would have been in the German original are placed directly above the image. This allows readers to perceive image and accompanying text subsequently, even if not as imitated captions. In the Danish translation however, the equivalent text is placed further up on the page, thereby not permitting a direct association between words and image. It has furthermore not been possible to place the two visually interacting images opposite each other on the same book spread in the Danish edition. By contrast, readers will have to turn the page between the pictures. Consequently, the lucid juxtaposition of the two images does not occur in the Danish edition.

The variation in page layout in translated editions is sometimes a result of different text lengths between languages, as emphasised by the translators and publishers who were interviewed in relation to my research.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, such shifts in layout can be caused by variations in spacing as well as book and page format. Even though the formats of the three editions of *Austerlitz* are diverse, the area of the text block hardly differs.<sup>31</sup> It



overfed, reddish-brown dachshund which was not very good on its legs and stopped now and then, staring with its brow furrowed at the ground ahead of it. The sight of it reminded me that on my walks with Vera I often used to see old ladies of this kind with bad-tempered little dogs, almost always wearing wire muzzles, which may have been the reason for their mute ill-will. Then I sat on a bench in the sun until nearly midday, looking out over the buildings of the Lesser Quarter and the River Vltava at the panorama of the city, which seemed to be veined with the curving cracks and rifts of past time, like the varnish on a painting. A little later, said Austerlitz, I discovered another such pattern created by no discernible law in the



— 230 —

entwined roots of a chestnut tree clinging to a steep slope, through which Vera had told me, said Austerlitz, I liked to climb as a child. And the dark-green yews growing under the taller trees were familiar to me too, as familiar as the cool air which enveloped me at the bottom of the ravine and the countless windflowers covering the woodland floor, faded now in April, and I understood why, on one of my visits to a Gloucestershire country house with Hilary years ago, my voice failed me when, in the park which was laid out very much like the Schönborn gardens, we unexpectedly came upon a north-facing slope covered by the finely cut leaves and snow-white blooms of the March-flowering *Anemone nemorosa*.



— 231 —

FIGURE 5: From *Austerlitz* (pp. 230–231) by W. G. Sebald, trans. Anthea Bell, © 2001, Hamish Hamilton, London (published by the Penguin Group). Translation copyright © 2001 Anthea Bell

seems that the format of the text block has in fact been taken into account in the translation process, even though the magical square of Sebald's manuscript has not been decisive for the layout of each book spread in the translated editions.

I argue that this typically 'Sebaldian' way of generating the effect of captions through layout is a deliberately deceptive reference to the traditional documentary discourse of photographic captions.<sup>32</sup> The imitation of captioning accentuates the readers' expectations of photographs and their ability to document reality. However, in the two translated editions the encounter of photo and text in the layout of the book spread conveys a different sense of meaning compared to the German original. They do not in the same way enhance a questioning of documentary photographic discourse.

This probing of the concept of documentary representation is also connected to the central themes of history and authenticity throughout *Austerlitz*. As Mats Dahlström states in his article 'Copies and facsimiles': 'Our concept of authenticity is different in the case of digital photographs than in the case of analogue photos. Or perhaps digitization has meant that our entire "truth contract" towards images has been renegotiated' (Dahlström, 2019, 199). On the one hand, the photographs in Sebald's books are analogue and therefore might at first glance appear to adhere to the 'truth contract', as Dahlström puts it, but Sebald's works were mostly published in the 1990s, a decade that experienced a rapid development in the prevalence of digital photography and therefore also a growing awareness of photographs' ability to manipulate. Accordingly, Sebald's works can be considered as part of a

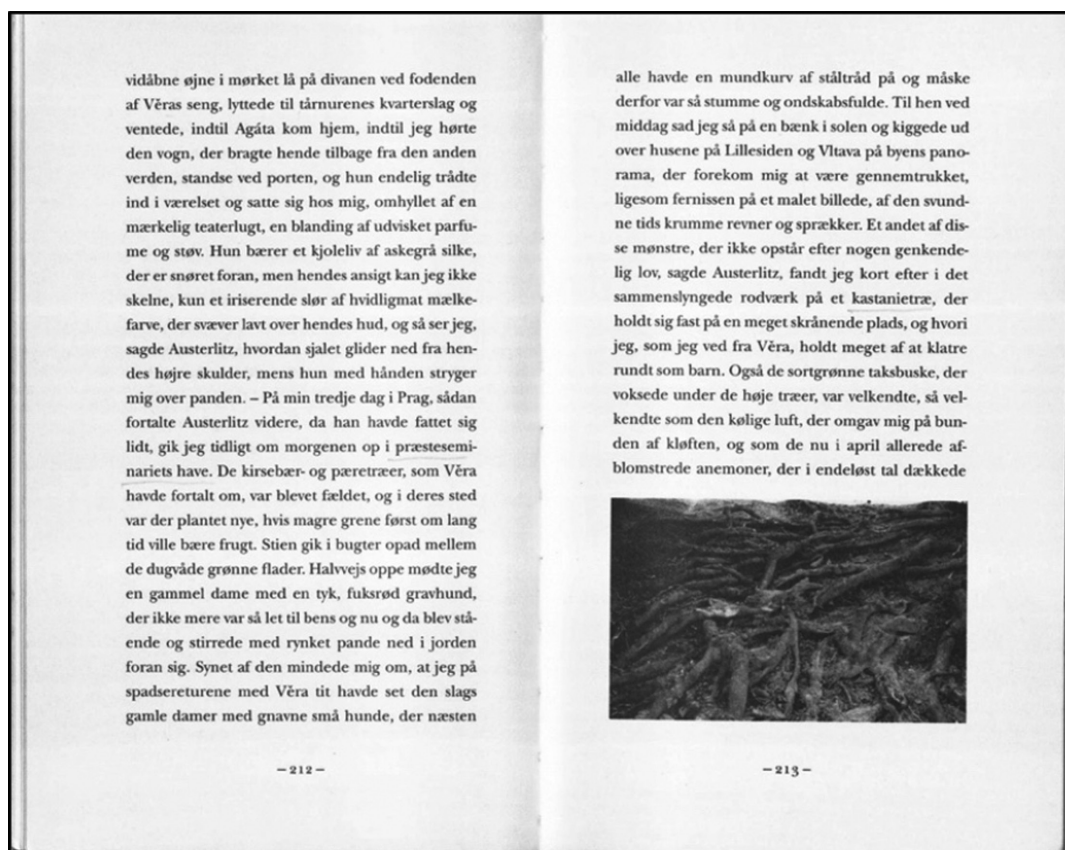


FIGURE 6: From *Austerlitz* (pp. 212–213) by W. G. Sebald, trans. Niels Brunse, © 2003 Tiderne Skifter, København (now part of the Gyldendal group)

development towards a growing critical awareness concerning photography, both digital and analogue, since not only digital programmes like Photoshop but also the darkroom offer possibilities of manipulation. Instead of appealing to readers to question the documentary value of photographic images, the layout of especially the English translation seems to accentuate the squareness of the text block above, resulting in a visual clash between the two elements.<sup>33</sup>

The book spreads of the editions analysed show how linguistic, formal and material elements are interconnected and therefore all three elements should be taken into consideration in translation processes.<sup>34</sup> It might have been possible for designers and typesetters of the translating publishing houses Hamish Hamilton and Tiderne Skifter to adjust the placement of the photographs according to the original German edition. This would however require a higher degree of cooperation between the different professions that take part in the translation and publishing processes as well as communication between original and foreign publishing house. Furthermore, according to Sebald's German publisher, there was no mention of the layout in contracts with foreign publishing houses. Since adhering to the layout of the original manuscript was not required in the contracts, it is not surprising that the Danish and English publishing houses did not choose to complicate the translation process further. Yet, it seems that it would have been possible to follow the layout principles of the German original in instances like these if designers and typesetters were instructed to do so.

skovbunden, og jeg forstod nu, hvorfor stemmen havde svigtet mig på en af mine landsteds ekspeditioner sammen med Hilary for mange år siden, da vi i en park i Gloucestershire, der i hele sit anlæg mindede meget om Schönbornhaven, pludselig stod over for en nordvendt skråning, som var oversæet med de fintfligede blade og snehvide martsblomster af *Anemone nemorosa*. – Således, med det botaniske navn på de skyggerige anemoner, havde Austerlitz den senvinterlige aften i 1997, da vi sad i huset i Alderney Street, omgivet af en, forekom det mig, uudgrundelig stilhed, fuldført endnu et afsnit af sin fortælling. Et kvarter eller måske en halv time svandt yderligere hen i de blå, regelmæssigt flakende flammer i gaskaminen, før Austerlitz rejste sig og sagde, at det nok var bedst, hvis jeg ville tilbringe natten under hans tag, og dermed gik han



- 214 -

straks foran mig op ad trappen og førte mig ind i et værelse, der ligesom rummene i stueetagen var næsten helt tomt. Kun ved den ene væg stod der opslået en slags felt seng, der havde bæregreb i begge ender og altså lignede en bære. Ved siden af sengen stod en trækasse fra Château Gruaud-Larose med et sort indbrændt våbenskjold, og på kassen, i det milde skær fra en bordlampe, stod et drikkeglas, en vandkaraffel og en gammeldags radio i et kabinet af mørkebrunt bakelit. Austerlitz ønskede mig en god søvn og trak forsigtigt døren i efter sig. Jeg gik hen til vinduet, kiggede ud på den mennesketomme Alderney Street, vendte mig om mod værelset igen, satte mig på sengen, snørede mine snørebånd op, tænkte over Austerlitz, som jeg nu hørte gå rundt i værelset ved siden af, og så derefter, da jeg endnu en gang kiggede op, i halvmørket på kaminhylden den lille samling af syv forskelligt formede, ikke mere end to-tre tommer høje bakelitdåser, der hver indeholdt, som det viste sig, da jeg åbnede den ene efter den anden og stillede dem under lampelyset, de jordiske rester af en af de nat-sværmere, der – det havde Austerlitz jo fortalt mig – var kommet af dage her i huset. En af dem, et vægtløst, elfenbensfarvet væsen med sammenfoldede vinger af et hvem ved hvorledes vævet stof, lod jeg falde ud af bakelitbeholderen og ned på min op-

- 215 -

FIGURE 7: From *Austerlitz* (pp. 214–215) by W. G. Sebald, trans. Niels Brunse, © 2003 Tiderne Skifter, København (now part of the Gyldendal group)

#### 4 | HOW COULD THE CONCEPT OF MATERIAL TRANSLATION INFLUENCE PUBLISHING PRACTICES?

The handling of layout and typography in book spreads from different editions of *Austerlitz* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are part of what I propose to term the *material translation* of literary works. I have shown how the layout and material decisions regarding two particular examples can influence possible interpretations for readers of different languages. In addition to the examples discussed here, many other factors could be included in discussions of material translation processes of literary works, such as paper quality, affecting the tactile contact between reader and book, as well as the graininess of printed photographs or cover design resulting in varying assumptions about translated editions. As my interviews with translators, publishers and editors have shown, changes in materiality and form are partly caused by a lacking conception of the materiality as an integrated part of a literary work as well as of form as decisive when it comes to the translation of prose and not only in regard to poetry or obvious form experiments.

The translation process is divided between different professions. Translators are responsible for translating the linguistic code of the source text. They are only sometimes asked for advice on formal or material aspects of a book. The transfer of bibliographical codes and formal aspects like typography is assigned to the

art department of publishing houses and sometimes decisions are even made by externally commissioned typesetters. Consequently, alterations of the bibliographical code between original and translation might be caused by a too strict division of labour between the different professions that take part in the transfer process of a literary work. It could therefore be beneficial to enhance the level of cooperation between those professions who are responsible for the linguistic translation and those determining the translated edition's formal and bibliographical elements, especially when it comes to translations of such multifaceted literary works as photo-texts. Since the responsibility of the translated edition as a whole ultimately belongs to the editor, as my interviewees have accentuated, it seems evident that the person filling this role should encourage and assist in such an increased cooperation.<sup>35</sup>

However, some publishers and translators do regard the form and materiality of a (prose) book as part of the literary expression and try to transfer it according to the same standard as the linguistic translation, that is to say, 'adequately in regard to content and style'.<sup>36</sup> In these cases, changes are often a result of complications such as different lengths of languages which cause shifts in layout. By facilitating a higher degree of cooperation between different professions the material translation of books might be able to play a bigger role in the practical handling of literary translation by publishing houses. Whatever perceptions or practical reasons underlie these decisions, it is central to acknowledge that the shifts in form and materiality generate shifts in meaning-making, thereby influencing how different translated editions of a book can be read.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I define the materiality of literature in accordance with Jerome McGann's 'materialist hermeneutics' from *The Textual Condition* (1991): 'We must attend to textual materials which are not regularly studied by those interested in "poetry": to typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format [...]' (see McGann, 1991, 13). See also Andersen (2013, 110–142, here p. 111), Kondrup (2011, 38) and Chartier (1992, 49–61, here p. 53). This line of enquiry has not only gained attention with the rise of new (digital) carrier mediums of literature but also as a result of the increasing amount of multimodal literary works being published today. Yet, there have been some precursors to this trend. One could mention the experimental literature of the 1970s or, related to the topic of this paper, early photo-texts such as Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892). However, the novelty lies in the expansion of multimodal works to the sphere of popular literature. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* constitutes a striking example, which has not only reached global bestseller status but was also adapted into a Hollywood movie.

<sup>2</sup> As Karin Littau formulates it in her article 'Translation and the materialities of communication': '[...] all forms of written communication bring into play *content, form and matter*' (Littau, 2016, 88).

<sup>3</sup> See Dicerto (2018, 4). The subject has however been discussed in the *Journal Translation Studies* (2016, 9.1), where Karin Littau's article 'Translation and the materialities of communication' initiated a debate with responses from prominent researchers of Translation Studies such as Susan Bassnett and Norbert Bachleitner.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Gambier and van Doorslaer (2010), Venuti ([2000] 2021) or Munday (2012).

<sup>5</sup> This topic has been most prominently and recently highlighted in Boria et al. (2020). Cf. also Bermann and Porter (2014), here especially the article by Luis Pérez Gonzáles (2014): 'Multimodality in translation and interpreting studies: Theoretical and methodological perspectives'. Cf. further Dicerto (2018) and Kaindl (2013). Specifically on translating multimodal children's literature, cf. Oittinen, Ketola and Garavini (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, multimodality has been considered a category that encompasses types of communication which contain two or more distinct semiotic modes, i.e. sound and visuals in film or drawings and text in comics. However, some studies define multimodality in a broader sense as applicable to all kinds of communication, since parameters such as layout or colour are considered to be an individual mode (see Kaindl, 2013). When following such a broad definition, all works of literature could be considered multimodal. In this paper I am referring to multimodal literature in the narrower sense as a type of literature that differs from word-based prose or poetry. A similar argument concerning the importance of materiality and visual aspects when it comes to "'ordinary" prose' is presented by Pristed (2017, 8–9).

<sup>7</sup> The interviews referred to in this paper were conducted as part of my PhD research according to the principle of the semi-structured interview (cf. Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The interviews were structured around a prepared



collection of themes of interest and held either as online video calls (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) or as personal meetings. In the interview with the Danish translator of W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Niels Brunse, it became clear that he does acknowledge the importance of the placement of photographs in the layout of the book. He suggests the practical premise of varying text lengths in German and Danish as the main reason for differences in layout (interview conducted on 10 December 2020).

- <sup>8</sup> In contrast, most translation contracts, for instance the Danish standard contract, require the translator to translate the text 'adequately in regard to content and style' (Dansk Oversætterforbund, 2020, my translation), but mentions nothing about visuals, layout or materiality of the literary work. I will not get into the large issue of adequacy in translation here, which has been a main focus of texts on translation since Antiquity. In British copyright law there is an exemption of the so-called published editions in which the typographical arrangements are also protected under copyright law. Here, the copyright protects 'the overall appearance of the page or pages' and 'prohibits the reproduction of the layout (but not the work itself)' (Bently & Sherman, 2014, 90).
- <sup>9</sup> This term has been used in other research fields, such as textual design or informatics. However, in these contributions the concept of translation is used in a very different sense, meaning for instance a transfer of methods between disparate research fields (see Ribul & de la Motte, 2018, 66–88). The 'translation' (perennially used with quotation marks by the authors) taking place in this case is between methods of the two fields textile design and materials science. In a conference paper from the field of informatics, the term 'material translation' is used to describe a form of digital image manipulation, where the content of an image is merged with another image of a certain material (foliage, fabric, metal, etc.). See Benitez-Garcia, Shimoda and Yanai (2020). To my knowledge, the term has not yet been used in relation to book design and literary translation processes.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Littau (2016, 89).
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Kondrup (2011, 27–28).
- <sup>12</sup> For contributions from the fields of scholarly editing, bibliography and book history see for instance: Kondrup (2011), Chartier (1992), Tanselle (1998), Darnton ([2002] 2006, 9–26), McKenzie ([2002] 2006, 35–46), Lundblad (2014, 79–102) and Brown (2010, 24–28). For a contribution from Medieval Studies see for instance Perkins (2015).
- <sup>13</sup> Karin Littau's article 'Translation and the materialities of communication' (2016) and the debates it inspired constitute an important exemption.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Munday (2012, 288).
- <sup>15</sup> I understand photo-texts as a literary genre, in which photo and text are both materially present, thereby omitting phenomena like ekphrasis, and can be considered to be mutually dependent. I am using the hyphenated term to mark the interplay of the modes. I understand the two literary works discussed in this article as examples of the genre photo-text, even though they both contain other visual material as well as photographs, such as imitated business cards or architectural drawings. However, photographs (or rather, the photocopies of printed analogue photographs in Sebald's case and prints of digital photographs in Foer's) constitute the dominating visual mode. For further investigations on this topic, also in relation to Sebald, see von Steinaecker (2007) and Horstkotte (2009).
- <sup>16</sup> On visual literacy see Kress and van Leeuwen (2005). Cf. also Rutschmann and von Stockar (1997).
- <sup>17</sup> As Chartier puts it: 'Upon these determining factors, which govern practice, depend the ways in which texts can be read—and read differently by readers who are equipped with different intellectual tools and maintain quite different relations to writing' (Chartier, 1992, 51).
- <sup>18</sup> I will use this abbreviation for the American edition. The German and Danish translations will be referred to with the shortened titles *Extrem laut* and *Ekstremt højt*. All references in this article are to the first editions of the book in the respective languages.
- <sup>19</sup> The processing of trauma in Foer's photo-text as well as this particular example in the American original have been a recurring theme in central research contributions, cf.: Hayles (2008), Uytterschout (2008), Müller (2017) and Linkis (2019).
- <sup>20</sup> I use the term 'original' in the sense of the first edition in the source language. I am not thereby supporting the ideal of the original as the only authentic version of a book. The discussion of originality has permeated Translation Studies (as well as comparative literature) since the rise of the discipline. I will not go further into it here.
- <sup>21</sup> The blackened page marks an intertextual reference to the blackening of a page in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767). The question of whether this visual element should be integrated in translated editions constitutes a well-known example that I would also categorise as material translation. For a detailed reading of the function of the black pages cf. Schmitz-Emans (2020). Cf. also Müller (2017, 92).
- <sup>22</sup> The publisher of the Danish translation, Claus Clausen (Tiderne Skifter), was not able to explain where this passage of text came from. He suggests that Foer himself might have asked the Danish translator, Jan Hansen, to add the

passage (interview conducted on 3 September 2020). This hypothesis could be supported by the paratextual disclaimer of the Danish edition, which highlights that Foer has made small changes to the Danish translation compared to the original. That an author wishes for changes to be made in translated editions of his/her book is not uncommon, but this does not explain why the German translation, which was published in the same year as the Danish, does not reveal the extended passage.

<sup>23</sup> Since the passage is not decipherable in the English edition, I have included the following translation of the passage for those not fluent in Danish: 'I've seen Oskar every day for the past two months, we've been planning what's about to happen, down to the smallest detail, we've even practiced digging in Central Park, the details have begun to remind me of rules. I know that I won't be a part of his life, I'll never be the grandfather he never had, but it has been the two happiest months of my life. Time is almost up now, in five minutes I will close this book, put on my coat and leave the apartment without a sound. I am meeting Oskar on the corner, the car is coming and picking us up, and I will finally get the chance to say hello. And to say goodbye. There are still a few hours until my flight leaves, and if it is so bad to waste your life, why have I wasted mine, why have I stared at walls without a thought in my head, why have I walked around in shops with nothing to buy, nothing I needed, I have deliberately wasted my life, and now I am trying to make everything happen as quickly and painlessly as possible, I am trying to look out instead of in, so many things I could have done but didn't, so many stories I could have written, magnificent stories, stories that would have changed people's lives, changed my life, stories that would have justified life, but I just sat on my behind and watched television, became a person with whom I have nothing in common, sometimes I bite my nails in the afternoon, is that a good thing? It doesn't even feel very good. There is an old man at 2 AM, he is a sad old man, his clothes have gotten way too big for him, he shops for himself, you can tell, he doesn't know how to shop' (my translation).

<sup>24</sup> For a further investigation, see Uytterschout (2008, 67–68).

<sup>25</sup> Information from my interviews with Michael Krüger, Sebald's publisher at Carl Hanser Verlag (conducted on 19 April 2021) and with Wolfgang Matz, editor of Sebald's manuscripts at Hanser (conducted on 12 May 2021). Cf. also Honickel (2021, 249).

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of Sebald's reference to captions, primarily in *Die Ausgewanderten*, see Linkis (2019, 82ff.). Cf. also Elcott (2004), Long (2007) and Horstkotte (2008, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> This has also been noted by Lise Patt (2007, 51–52). Her introduction to *Searching for Sebald* offers an elaborate comparison of different editions of Sebald's works in the German language and in English translation.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Sontag, among many others, has described the typical documentary discourse of captions (cf. Sontag, 2003, 41).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Long (2007).

<sup>30</sup> As emphasised by Danish translator Niels Brunse (interview conducted on 10 December 2020) and Danish publisher Claus Clausen (interview conducted on 3 September 2020). The German (412 pages) and English (415 pages) editions hardly differ in page number, but the Danish edition is significantly shorter (375 pages).

<sup>31</sup> The text block of the German original has an area of 132 cm<sup>2</sup>, the Danish and English translations come very close to this with their areas of 131,9 cm<sup>2</sup> and 131,8 cm<sup>2</sup>. Yet, there seems to be more space between the lines of the English edition compared to the German and the Danish, which would also result in a shift in layout.

<sup>32</sup> This effect is also used frequently in Sebald's other works (see Sebald, 1992 and 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Linkis (2019).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Littau (2016).

<sup>35</sup> As accentuated by Claus Clausen (interview conducted on 3 September 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from the Danish standard translation contract, Dansk Oversætterforbund: 'Oversættelsesaftale'.

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