

Sophie Seita

Experimental Translation and Translingual Traces Across Borders and Media,  
undergraduate seminar at Boston University (2019-2020)

This seminar works to expand the concept of “translation” and “borders” in art, writing, and performance, over the last 50 years with a focus on the present. We will experiment with various translational techniques of writing and making—asking about the political and ethical potential or pitfalls of these practices along the way. No prior knowledge of a second language is required. In this course, we will argue that translation does not just describe the movement from one language to another, but also from one medium or material to another, as well as the messy movement between languages and the many forms of rewriting and dialogue with other texts and voices. Crucially, we will think of translation as *a movement across borders*—and reflect on issues of migration and belonging, and how contemporary art and literature respond to or exist within sites of conflict and resistance.

In all of this, our aim is to develop a feminist, queer, anti-racist, and intersectional approach to translation. We will be in dialogue with: Mirtha Dermisache’s asemic writing, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s translingual book *Dictée* as well as her mail art and performances, Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy*, Anne Carson’s *Nox*, the anthology to *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*; M. Nourbese Philip’s *Zong!*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “The Politics of Translation,” Coco Fusco’s lecture performance *A Room of One’s Own* alongside Kabe Wilson’s “Olivia N’Gowfri—Of One Woman Or So,” another performative “translation” of Virginia Woolf’s work; Cecilia Vicuña’s textile quipu works and ritual videos, John Keene’s essay “Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness,” Antena Collective’s Manifesto for Ultratranslation; Sawako Nakayasu’s translingual performances and anti-translations, and various intermedia works and essays by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Rosmarie Waldrop, Walter Benjamin, Caroline Bergvall, Carlos Soto-Román, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, and many others.

The course will be complemented by a number of class visits from writers, translators, and editors. Assignments will include several creative exercises and students will collaboratively publish a zine of experimental translations and essays on language and borders.