

# “In Case of Misunderständig, Read On!” Pop as Translation

*Eckhard Schumacher*

In an essay with the strange, ostensibly misspelled title “Wort Auf!” Diederich Diederichsen, one of the most influential pop music critics since the early 1980s, relates an anecdote that could be regarded as a prototypical model for the self-guided introduction of German-speaking youngsters to a foreign language:

When my brother and I were four and six respectively, we met in front of the radio every Sunday to listen to the hit parade, as if it were a revelation, even though, of course, we couldn’t understand a word the Beatles sang. Still, we had to give the songs names, had to get our lips and tongues to form something when we sang them. So a kind of English came into being that had absolutely no meaning whatsoever, or at least, it consisted of a few intelligible words—after all, you learn pretty quickly at that age—and lots of nonsense words. Sometime later, when we started learning English as a totally normal foreign language, we couldn’t get rid of our own version; we could already speak a kind of English, which a second one could never equal. At some point, I could translate a Dylan song, but I already knew it by heart and enjoyed the linguistic effects, which I loaded with half-knowledge, paranoid interpretation, and desire.<sup>1</sup>

Diederichsen’s anecdote precisely points out “the great advantage and the great peculiarity”<sup>2</sup> Germans experience when they hear Anglo-American pop music and its lyrics. When they are first confronted with foreign pop music, the problem is one of more or less complete incomprehensibility. In hindsight, however, not understanding the new, strange, yet, at the same time, oddly familiar and exceedingly attractive language does not appear to be a deficiency. Instead, this incompre-

hension opens up a form of understanding and a way of dealing with what you can call a foreign language—in this case, one named “pop,” which owes its productivity to the aspect of incomprehension, inscrutability, or, at least, misunderstanding. Appropriating the foreign language is like “speaking in tongues,” writes Diederichsen, and produces “endless chains of digressions occurring at every second somewhat clear-cut word.”<sup>3</sup> This happens because the appropriation is overdetermined by pop-specific coding and laden with meanings that “totally normal English”<sup>4</sup> can never attain. We are thus speaking about a way of receiving pop music that is not about learning English, as Andreas Neumeister writes, in order to “listen to T. Rex in the original.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, when you listen to pop music, you learn a language that seems to be a foreign language in a dual sense. It is as different from the so-called mother tongue as it is from the foreign language that you later learn in school as “totally normal English.” Yet nevertheless it seems astonishingly close to both.

These thoughts refer to a way of dealing with pop that was characteristic for certain German magazines in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Sounds*, *Mode & Verzweiflung*, and *Spex*, and for different German bands such as The 39 Clocks and Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle (FSK). Around 1980, The 39 Clocks, a band from Hanover, invented an American-English dialect earmarked by a penetrating German accent, deliberately dilettantish imitations of American role models like The Velvet Underground, and apparently misspelled song titles like “Pain It Dark” or “Twisted and Shouts.”<sup>6</sup> In contrast, members of FSK, the Munich band started by Thomas Meinecke and others, have been singing in German since 1980. However, they sing in a German constituted of “transatlantically misinterpreted Americanisms,”<sup>7</sup> of linguistic deformations, mixtures, and hybrids, recognizable in song titles such as “(I Wish I Could) Sprechen Sie Deutsch,” “Pennsylvanisch Schnitzelbank,” or “Mein Funky Ballantine’s.”<sup>8</sup> Meinecke, who is responsible for the lyrics, comments on FSK’s use of the German language: “We don’t discover our identity in the lyrics of our mother tongue, but our difference; we don’t write songs in German because it is understandable, but to constructively create friction in the language.”<sup>9</sup>

If we are talking about examining and appropriating American pop phenomena from a German and German-speaking perspective, then this friction can be as productive as Diederichsen’s mixture of “half-knowledge, paranoid interpretation, and desire.”<sup>10</sup> In both cases, one simultaneously understands too little and too much. One literally

sticks to the words and cares little for the possibly correct meaning; one adapts found material—newly processed or newly discovered—and aims to de-form, to mix languages, to produce effects without worrying about which convention, essence, or identity might be present. One not only then realizes that one's distance to what is supposedly strange is shrinking but also comprehends the distance to one's own familiar mother tongue. Thus pop can be understood as a form of entertainment that is also a form of dissidence, since it culls a "chance to be different," as Meinecke writes regarding Diederichsen, from an "incorrect remake," by trusting to "productive misunderstandings . . . to renew genres and exceed identities."<sup>11</sup> When dealing in this way with what is regarded as either one's own or a foreign language, one can produce a particular form of "ambivalence" that, says Diederichsen, makes "dissidence" possible when "misunderstandings hover in the air" and "essences are deconstructed."<sup>12</sup> All of this, I would suggest, can be understood by means of the anecdote cited previously as well as through the title of Diederichsen's essay—"Wort Auf!"—which can only be translated improperly as "Word Up!" In the German original, the title is already an almost literal, interlinear, and thus incorrect (in terms of conventional standards) translation of the phrase prominent in the Anglo-American and African-American pop discourse, "Word Up!"<sup>13</sup> In other words, "Wort Auf!" can be read as a form of translation that not only points out the difficulties of understanding the idiom of the foreign language called "pop" but also presents possible ways of productively appropriating it—ways that are in no small part constituted by misreadings, purposeful or not, and "fruitful misunderstandings."<sup>14</sup>

As I will show, those different strategies of dealing with pop not only open up connections to concepts like "resignification" or "signifyin(g)," popularized by Judith Butler and Henry Louis Gates Jr.,<sup>15</sup> that have increasingly become part of the discussions over the past years in the pop discourse.<sup>16</sup> They also recall Rolf Dieter Brinkmann's earlier approach, which can be seen as a blueprint for the popularization of Anglo-American pop culture in Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In retrospect we can even say that it also prefigured some of those writing strategies that came up in the wake of punk and new wave music in the late 1970s and early 1980s, for instance, Diederichsen's and Meinecke's. And in the context of the rise of "pop literature" in the late 1990s, several writers and critics again referred to Brinkmann as a historical role model for trash aesthetics and subversive pop literature.<sup>17</sup> From this perspective, despite their differences,

Diederichsen's and Meinecke's concepts of "pop" can also be understood as references to Brinkmann's attitudes and his ways of writing—as an adjusted citation, as a repetition with a difference, as a form of shifting translations.

"Misunderstandings are not," Brinkmann writes in 1969 in his "Notizen" for the anthology *Silver Screen*, which contains translations of new American poetry, "instead, they expand the understanding of something that is 'incorrectly' understood—they're guided digressions, they blast holes through the usual associations (it's so cool to read: 'Über allen Gipfeln zieht es!')." <sup>18</sup> This plea for misunderstandings and errors is a tactic guiding Brinkmann's perception and translation of what he calls the "new American scene." At the end of the 1960s, Brinkmann published translations in the anthologies *Silver Screen* and *ACID*,<sup>19</sup> as well as the volume *Lunch Poems*,<sup>20</sup> a collection of poems by Frank O'Hara—all of which were received with great acclaim in Germany. According to Ralf Rainer Rygulla, the co-editor of *ACID*, it was through new American literature—that is, through translating it<sup>21</sup>—that Brinkmann first discovered a type of English beyond school English. Supporting this claim is the fact that, in this case, Brinkmann's appropriation of a foreign language also led to a recognizable change in his own style of writing. The poetological essays, which Brinkmann added to the anthologies as prefaces, are much more than mere introductions to the new American literature scene. Brinkmann unfolds what turns out to be a literary program, which he himself attempts to carry out in a different form in his poems, prose, and essays. As Agnes C. Mueller writes in *Lyrik "made in USA,"* Brinkmann did not seek out American poetry "because it fit into an already existing program or concept, but rather, his program developed from the inspiration he received from the American poets' new techniques of writing."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, a significant instigation for Brinkmann's excitement about the "new American scene" is his polemic turn against those German-speaking "poets," who, as "living dead," claim "the cultural words for themselves."<sup>23</sup> Brinkmann opposed what he called the "spooky German cultural business," turned against skeptical cultural criticism, against abstraction, theory, and any type of cultural politics that—as in the 1968 *Kursbuch*—called for the "death of literature."<sup>24</sup> So the starting point for his euphoric approach to America is his distance to his own context, to his own language. This distance also leads to a skepticism toward the usual methods of producing meaning, to mistrust of the "feedback system of words and meanings in the com-

mon order of grammatics," which, according to Brinkmann, "has for a long time had nothing to do with daily sensory experience."<sup>25</sup> Yet it is exactly sensory experience and "ordinary details" that are the decisive aspects of Frank O'Hara's poetry, says Brinkmann. In his poetry, "the only real time is the present."<sup>26</sup> This sensibility, oriented toward the present, has "no previous, settled, internalized pattern, no cosy, much-loved prejudices to lose when it gets involved with the present."<sup>27</sup> And this is precisely what Brinkmann attempted to carry out in his own texts, as, for example, in the 1968 volume of poetry *Die Piloten*.<sup>28</sup> He made an issue of the tense relation between subjectivity and the world of objects, since he did not merely attempt to reproduce so-called reality in the sense of a "pure copy."<sup>29</sup> As Karl Heinz Bohrer writes, he was a "skeptical phenomenologist," "an observer attracted to objects," who set reality in motion in and through language.<sup>30</sup> "The surprising aspect," writes Brinkmann, "lies in the unusual collection of details that have not lost all reference to reality, as the conventions of the avant-garde will have it, yet have not been abandoned to reality or slipped into musty preoccupation with the inner self."<sup>31</sup> Beyond the triple dissociation from the conventional avant-garde, tautological realism, and musty preoccupation with the inner self, Brinkmann created space for his own work, where it became possible for him to do exactly what he ascribed to the American literary scene: "to take what is at hand and do something with it, other than what was intended . . . to spread out, to scatter—to break through existing patterns of associations."<sup>32</sup> Only in this way, and not through political content, writes Brinkmann, can literature also become a political issue that opens up a free space in which "possibility becomes concrete," where "a bit of liberated reality" can be created.<sup>33</sup> Starting with Ted Berrigan's suggestion to "redo it and sign your name to it," Brinkmann summarized in his "Notizen" for *Silver Screen* some of the central writing methods in the American scene, which he reports upon and simultaneously uses as a program for his own writing:

To make one out of several existing, written texts (poems), to "polish up" old poems . . . surprisingly, one's own poem emerges by putting together several foreign texts, through *surface translation*, etc. One's own expression lies in the way the ready-made pieces are arranged, as long as the arranger's psychic dimension is kept! These procedures *empty* the given meaning, long accepted as "natural," which binds one and leads the individual away from himself. Moreover, through such methods, we become conscious that we live in

the *age of photocopy* (Xerox), the time of unlimited possibilities of reproduction, which qualitatively alters the copied object.<sup>34</sup>

From these lines, it is possible to almost effortlessly discern methods and paradigms that, to this day, are still associated with the concept of “pop”: the work with ready-made material that uses repetition to dissolve the previously existing structures of meaning and, through this repetition, simultaneously shifts, alters, and resignifies. According to Brinkmann, at the end of the 1960s, a “general style” emerged from this procedure, for which, as he writes in 1968, “the term ‘POP’ is only valid for the time being.” It is about a “sensibility that refuses to accept cheap, intellectual alternatives for creative products of every kind of art—writing, painting, filmmaking, playing music.”<sup>35</sup> Replacing those established cultural dichotomies, which Brinkmann calls “cheap, intellectual alternatives,” is a “mixture of various fields and categories,”<sup>36</sup> which avoids categorization: “the new products don’t allow themselves to be annexed to what already exists. . . . they have left behind the old categories of understanding.”<sup>37</sup>

Like many other writers and theorists at the end of the 1960s,<sup>38</sup> Brinkmann is repeatedly involved in “*dismantling the cultural definitions of ‘author’ and ‘reader,’*” in “dissolving the strict definition of the *work*” and “of a unified style.”<sup>39</sup> The dissolution of the “existing systems of reference and interpretation,”<sup>40</sup> which Brinkmann not only demanded but also pursued, corresponded to the “dissolution of hitherto accepted rigid divisions of genre,” which have to be “seen in the context of the dissolution of inflexible roles of sexual behavior.” Brinkmann writes that the structures of existing *Gattungen* (genres, gender, or genus) must be “taken apart and rearranged,” so that “the clichéd roles of sexual behavior” can no longer have an effect. “And it is precisely the degree to which things are taken apart and rearranged that also changes the good old question about the ‘meaning’ of a poem, a novel, etc.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, as Brinkmann writes, matters have gone beyond the topic of whether it’s “a joke when someone asks if Shakespeare was a woman.”<sup>42</sup> New literature is concerned with producing an “order, which can no longer understand itself in the traditional patterns of expression”; it’s about mixtures, in which “the entire text becomes a stream of voices flowing into each other—voices that cannot be clearly distinguished according to their gender.”<sup>43</sup>

It is not only the process of distinguishing genre and gender but also the strict division of thinking in terms of national poetry and national poets that is, for Brinkmann, one of the “categories of understanding”

undermined by the new American scene. At the end of the 1960s, in the pop as well as the student movement, Brinkmann noted what he called a "unified sensibility," a "global sensitivity" in place of the "isolation, which began with the molding of a literature bound to a particular language and nation."<sup>44</sup> One of Brinkmann's examples for this development has to do with the problem that is nowadays once again a topic in the debate about the protection of the German language.<sup>45</sup> Brinkmann writes: "Take all of the Americanisms that were in the German language in 1955 and compare them with the Americanisms in the language today, in 1968. Today's share will be incomparably higher." Even though Brinkmann leaves the question open, the consequences he sees are significantly different from those seen by the language defenders of today. "Nowadays, we can deal with 'American' material and the signals it contains more confidently than we did ten years ago. The question is, can there still be rigid national divisions?"<sup>46</sup> However, the reason for Brinkmann's insistence upon pursuing this question is based not just in the writing methods of the American role models. Their attitude comes close to Brinkmann's disposition, which he still emphasized in the mid-1970s, a few years after his pop phase: "Again and again, it did me good to forget my own origins. I've felt this freedom physically every time, as soon as I left the border—which was at the same time the ordained border of language and comprehension."<sup>47</sup> In the poem "Westwärts, Teil 2," Brinkmann describes another way to leave behind the systems of order and categories of understanding. Being distant to what is supposed to be one's own language opens up space to play—and this space can be expanded even further by the confrontation with a foreign language. "It's good that I don't understand everything when I'm in Italian surroundings"<sup>48</sup>—that was Brinkmann's comment on his decision not to learn Italian during his sojourn in Rome at the beginning of the 1970s. And on his stay in the United States, described in *Westwärts*, he says: "the less I understood the language, the clearer the things at hand became in my consciousness."<sup>49</sup> A few lines later, in his description of his return to the borders of his own language, Brinkmann countered the possibilities (and not just the linguistic ones) opened up by the double distance from his own and the foreign language: "Einsteigen bitte! ı Befehlston / in deutsch. War das einmal / meine Sprache? Das ist noch nie / meine Sprache gewesen! Die / Sprache hat immer anderen gehört."<sup>50</sup>

As Hans-Thies Lehmann writes, Brinkmann's texts escape "monolingualism, the linguistic determination" through "polylingualism."<sup>51</sup> This polylingualism can be regarded as a consequence of the dissolu-

tion of national boundaries, as are his various experiments with translations. While translating Frank O'Hara's poetry, Brinkmann rather cautiously attempts to keep the syntax, form, and rhythm of the American, and in his own poems he radicalized the process of interlinear translation in a peculiar way: "Roll über, Beethoven! Die Jungen / sind richtig gewesen. Sie haben Kilo / Meterweit gesehen."<sup>52</sup> In this poem, Brinkmann lines up titles from the pop music canon next to each other: "Roll Over Beethoven" (Chuck Berry), "The Kids Are Alright" (The Who), and "I Can See for Miles" (The Who). As in the case of "und wie fällt man in / die Liebe,"<sup>53</sup> this interlinear translation seems to be incorrect, at least according to conventional standards. Yet it is actually the starting point for a new tone, for new styles and writing procedures, which are hallmarks of Brinkmann's poetry, even when he is not directly, obviously translating. Repeatedly, Brinkmann uses or invents words that sop up foreign as well as German particles and phonetic structures but do not belong entirely to one language or the other.

The so-called surface translations produce similar effects. Brinkmann strewed these throughout his texts or used them as a writing strategy in his collaborations with Ralf Rainer Rygulla. They can be understood not only as another consequence of crossing the language borders but also in other ways, as transposition or translation of inspirations from American literature. Inspired "by a writing method especially popular in the New York poetry scene," the poem "Der joviale Russe," for instance, was an "incorrect" translation of Apollinaire's "La jolie russe." It was the attempt to convey the "surface understanding" of a poem a moment after reading it, "without knowing the foreign language (in this case, French)."<sup>54</sup> Brinkmann used a similar method with comparable effects in his poem "Fragment zu einigen populären Songs." In a letter, Brinkmann explained the lines "Wer reitet auf / der Schnecke?"<sup>55</sup> this way: "'Who rides on the snail': a totally incorrect translation of a line from a Doors' song called 'The End,' which says: ride this lane. But from the way it sounds, it could also be 'ride this snake.' Transposed via a surface translation into the German language, just using the sound, that is, the sound of a word, the word changes from snake to snail [*Schnecke*] (after all, we aren't very familiar with snakes here any more)."<sup>56</sup>

In another kind of translation, one he refers to in *Rom, Blicke* by (mis)quoting a phrase taken from Alfred Korzybski, this method of mixing languages appears to be part of Brinkmann's reading program at the same time: "In case of Misverständlich, read on! (Korzybski)."<sup>57</sup> This reading program is not only a plea for productive misun-

derstandings but also a method of writing that lastingly marks Brinkmann's poetology. Neither his attention to ordinary things nor his ceaseless emphasis on directness and simplicity should lead to the impression that the texts are also easy to understand. Turning the "existing categories of understanding" into an issue can easily produce false conclusions, as Brinkmann shows in the "Notiz" to *Die Piloten*: "The people to whom I show my things often say that they're actually not poems any more. . . . They say everything's easy, you can understand it, and that, in turn, makes my poems incomprehensible to them."<sup>58</sup> Despite his polemic opposition to the equalization of poetry and obscurity, which was canonized in the 1950s and early 1960s,<sup>59</sup> Brinkmann doesn't simply sign up with the other side, doesn't wager without further ado on accessibility and simple comprehensibility. In Brinkmann's texts, there is more of that characteristic of pop art that, in the 1960s, art theorist Max Imdahl called the "dismantling of the self-evident"—"Entselbstverständlichung des Selbstverständlichen."<sup>60</sup> Just as supposedly obvious things suddenly can seem incomprehensible when removed from their "musty context" and deprived of "the usual interpretations,"<sup>61</sup> so can mass compatibility and hermetics, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, make direct contact with each other or collapse into each other. "*When a disturbance appears* on the scene, it is possible for a moment to see through what is familiar and therefore what has not been transparent for a long time."<sup>62</sup> When Brinkmann writes, "This disturbance *is* the American poem,"<sup>63</sup> he refers to the methods of mixing genres, categories, and languages in American poetry as well as to those perturbations that first arise from his perspective, that is, out of his confrontation with a foreign language. The emphasis on the aspect of disturbance underscores that the concern here is not to replace obscurity with clarity in the name of directness and simplicity. Even in Brinkmann's own texts, the opposite seems to be the case. In the process of writing, even the most familiar things are removed for moments from the "existing categories of understanding": "the surroundings / become, as I look up, look around, / incomprehensible."<sup>64</sup> In reverting to American role models, Brinkmann replaces hermetics not with undisguised clarity or another phantasma of comprehensibility, but instead by disturbingly deleting the opposition between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility. "The question of meaning is superfluous—the narrative is simply 'there.' It is its own argument," writes Brinkmann about a story by Ron Padgett.<sup>65</sup> Brinkmann's goal is to eliminate the predominant category of hermeneutic-oriented understanding, a logic fixated on sense

and meaning. Just as Padgett's story makes the question of meaning irrelevant for Brinkmann, in his own writing he tries to distance himself from an attitude that always requires and forces comprehensibility: "it would be great if you didn't understand it. That also goes for the attempt to understand a poem."<sup>66</sup> Brinkmann does not take so much a position against comprehension as he questions its premises: "Why do you want to understand poetry? Why do you want to understand? Doesn't that mean the triumph of the belief in a compulsory order?"<sup>67</sup>

Overall correlations of meaning do not appear to be unavoidable standards for orientation but are a totalitarian system of order that artificially, compulsively makes a scheme out of what is "*simply just there*."<sup>68</sup> Brinkmann questions the assumption that contexts can comprehensively and sensibly be established by understanding. "Comprehension in general is a very snappy thing! What gets cut off there?"<sup>69</sup> Comprehension does not appear to provide the possibility of restoring a lost fullness of sense. Instead, it is assumed that comprehension is dominated by logical editing and cutting, which determine daily perception—"after all, gazes are constantly producing cut-ups!"<sup>70</sup>—as well as Brinkmann's ways of writing. Even if a phantasma of sensory totality permeates Brinkmann's texts, he defends himself against every attempt to completely grasp reality and language. From this perspective, Brinkmann develops the demand that poets should write in protest against the formulations of "those who believe, madly enough, that they have totally understood the terms and the language."<sup>71</sup> With this, he also opposes an attitude that desires clarity without any residue: "How I hate the apparent clarity of language, and how I like things to line up, as they are right here,"<sup>72</sup> he writes in a text in which he has—"right here"—directly lined up quotations from lyrics, song titles, descriptions of everyday life, biographical details, and poetological thoughts, without any hierarchical order. In this case, too, genres, styles, and language levels are intertwined; here, too, that "mixture" takes place, which leaves behind the "existing categories of understanding." Precisely because of the apparent self-evidence of the objects, this form of writing differentiates itself from an environment where everything has always already been and is always already supposed to be understood. "Why quotations? Because I don't understand them! Why a poem? Because after writing it, I don't understand it any more."<sup>73</sup> This "dismantling of the self-evident" is seen again in Brinkmann's desire to dissolve the words from their functional contexts and thus to protect them from "clear, univocal interpretation."<sup>74</sup>

"I'd like to use words that / can't be used, I thought. I'd like to speak to those, whom I / love, / . . . I like simply / just simply to be without explanation."<sup>75</sup>

Although there are many similarities between Brinkmann's texts and Diederichsen's or Meinecke's, this quote also shows the equally clear (and not solely historical) differences that separate their texts. Both Diederichsen and Meinecke, I guess, would seldom like to be "without explanation." At least both are far from joining in with Brinkmann's furor against abstraction and theory. But these differences should not overshadow potential similarities. Diederichsen's and Meinecke's concepts of "mixture" and their way of dealing with "misunderstandings" and "ambivalences" can be read as references to Brinkmann as well as to their approach to American pop culture. Diederichsen writes that Brinkmann had, "on a literary level, given the injection of North American culture that made life in the FRG tolerable (and because of this double foreignness, he made more of this American culture than they did in the USA)."<sup>76</sup> In this sense, Diederichsen describes Brinkmann as one of those authors for whom "the German language was also a means to escape from themselves" and who accordingly "created a German literature that was on the run from the German and the Germans."<sup>77</sup>

The question of how "American" German pop culture is will not be answered this way. Rather, because of this double foreignness, Brinkmann's methods of writing open up the possibility of discussing the relationship in other ways. Because Brinkmann understood "pop" to be a form of translation with a difference, a method of "reproduction that qualitatively alters the copied object,"<sup>78</sup> he undermines the possibility of clearly differentiating between "German" and "American." From a position of cultural pessimism, one could attempt to denounce this kind of mixture as a symptom of "Americanization." But one could just as well view it as part of an equally esthetic and political project, whose aim is to dissolve assigned identities, conventional categories of understanding, and outdated language barriers—and thus to produce a constellation in which the question posed in the title of the present volume can no longer be answered: German pop culture: how "American" is it? On the other hand, this title could be regarded as a possible answer. If we take the quotation marks around the word "American" seriously, then the "America" we talk about is already a quotation—or, in Brinkmann's words, a "reproduction that qualitatively alters the copied object." What I have tried to show here

is that, at least from the perspectives of Brinkmann, Diederichsen, and Meinecke, we should add quotation marks to the word “German” as well.

Translated by Allison Plath-Moseley

## NOTES

1. Diederich Diederichsen, “Wort Auf!” *Spex* 9 (1988): 34: “Als mein Bruder und ich im Alter von 4 bzw. 6 Jahren anfangen, uns Sonntag für Sonntag vorm Radio einzufinden, um wie eine Offenbarung die Hitparade entgegenzunehmen, konnten wir natürlich kein einziges Wort der Beatles verstehen. Dennoch mußten wir die Titel bezeichnen, mußten unsere Lippen und Gaumen zu irgendwas formen, wenn wir die Songs sangen. So entstand ein Englisch, das keinerlei Bedeutung hatte, bzw. das aus wenigen bedeutenden, man lernt ja ziemlich schnell in dem Alter, und vielen nicht-bedeutenden Wörtern bestand. Als wir Englisch irgendwann auch als ganz normale Fremdsprache lernten, war das schon nicht mehr wegzukriegen, wir konnten bereits ein Englisch, das sich mit diesem zweiten niemals decken würde. Ich konnte irgendwann einen Dylan-Song übersetzen, aber ich konnte ihn immer schon vorher auswendig und mich an den sprachlichen Effekten freuen, diese zusätzlich mit Halbwissen, paranoischer Interpretation und Begehren . . . aufladen.” (All translations are by Allison Plath-Moseley; in case of longer quotations and significant phrases, the original German will be added in the footnote.)

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Andreas Neumeister, “Pop als Wille und Vorstellung,” in *Sound Signatures: Pop-Splitter*, ed. Jochen Bonz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), here 20: “Englisch gelernt, um T.Rex im Original hören zu können.”

6. The 39 Clocks, *Pain It Dark* (Hannover: No Fun Records, 1981).

7. Thomas Meinecke, “Alles Mist,” *Spiegel Spezial* 2 (1994): 83: “transatlantisch fehlinterpretierte Amerikanismen.”

8. See Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle, *American Sector* (York: Ediesta Records, 1987); *FSK in Dixieland* (Hamburg: ZickZack, 1987); *Original Gasman Band* (Hamburg: ZickZack, 1989).

9. Meinecke, “Alles Mist,” 83: “Nicht unsere Identität finden wir in den muttersprachlichen Texten, sondern unsere Abweichung, nicht ihrer Verständlichkeit, sondern der konstruktiven Reibung am Formalen halber schreiben wir Songtexte auf deutsch.”

10. Diederichsen: “Wort Auf!” 34.

11. Meinecke, “Alles Mist,” 83.

12. Diederich Diederichsen, *Freiheit macht arm: Das Leben nach Rock’n’Roll, 1990–93* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1993), 89–90.

13. In *Black American English*, a glossary for German students of English, one reads: “word or word up—affirmative response: ‘Really!’ ‘Right!’ ‘I’m telling you!’ /—response asking confirmation: ‘Really?’ ‘Is that right?’” Ed. Herbert Graf et al. (Straelen: Straelener Manuskripte, 1994), 165.

14. Diederichsen, *Freiheit macht arm*, 62: “fruchtbare Mißverständnisse.”

15. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

16. For further references, see my essay “‘Re-make/Re-model’—Zitat und Performativität im Pop-Diskurs,” in *Zitier-Fähigkeit*, ed. Andrea Gutenberg and Ralph Poole (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2001), 271–91.

17. See, for example, Heiner Link, ed., *Trash-Piloten: Texte für die 90er* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1997); Johannes Ullmaier, *Von Acid nach Adlon und zurück: Eine Reise durch die deutschsprachige Popliteratur* (Mainz: Ventil, 2001).

18. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, “Notizen 1969 zu amerikanischen Gedichten und zu der Anthologie ‘Silverscreen,’” *Der Film in Worten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982), 262–63: “Mißverständnisse sind keine, sondern erweitern das Verständnis einer Sache, die ‘falsch’ verstanden worden ist—es sind gesteuerte Abweichungen, ein Durchschlagen gängiger Assoziationen (wie schön irre ist es zu lesen: ‘Über allen Gipfeln zieht es!’).”

19. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and Ralf-Rainer Rygulla, eds., *ACID: Neue amerikanische Szene* (Frankfurt am Main: März, 1969); Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, ed., *Silver Screen: Neue amerikanische Lyrik* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969).

20. Frank O’Hara, *Lunch Poems und andere Gedichte*, ed. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969).

21. See Gunter Geduldig and Marco Sagurna, “‘Es genügten ihm seine Empfindungen der Welt gegenüber’: Ein Gespräch mit Ralf-Rainer Rygulla,” in *100 much: Das lange Leben des Rolf Dieter Brinkmann*, ed. Geduldig and Sagurna (Aachen: Alano, 1994), 99.

22. Agnes C. Mueller, *Lyrik “made in USA”: Vermittlung und Rezeption in der Bundesrepublik* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 138.

23. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, *Standphotos: Gedichte, 1962–1970* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1980), 185: “jetzt halten sie die Kulturellen Wörter besetzt . . . , lebende Tote.”

24. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend,” *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968): 187–97; and Mueller, *Lyrik “made in USA,”* 129–31.

25. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, “Der Film in Worten,” in *Der Film in Worten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982), 223: “Das Rückkopplungssystem der Wörter, das in gewohnten grammatikalischen Ordnungen wirksam ist, entspricht längst nicht mehr tagtäglich zu machender sinnlicher Erfahrung.”

26. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, “Die Lyrik Frank O’Haras,” in *Der Film in Worten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982), 211, 213: “daß für Literatur die einzig reale Zeit die Gegenwart sei.”

27. Brinkmann, "Der Film in Worten," 224: "keine alteingestalteten, verinnerlichten Muster, keine heimeligen, liebgewonnenen Vorurteile zu verlieren, wenn sie sich auf Gegenwart einläßt."

28. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, *Die Piloten* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1968), rpt. in Brinkmann, *Standphotos*.

29. Brinkmann, "Die Lyrik Frank O'Haras," 213.

30. Karl Heinz Bohrer, "Was alles fraglich ist: Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns erster Gedichtband," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 11, 1967.

31. Brinkmann, "Die Lyrik Frank O'Haras," 215: "Das überraschende Moment liegt in der ungewohnten Zusammenstellung der Details, die trotzdem nicht jeden Bezug zur Realität verloren haben, wie es die Konvention des Avantgardistischen will, andererseits sich aber auch nicht der Realität ausliefert oder ausgleitet in muffige Innerlichkeit."

32. Brinkmann, "Der Film in Worten," 231: "mit Vorhandenem etwas anderes als das Intendierte zu machen . . . sich auszubreiten, zu verstreuen—vorhandene Assoziationsmuster zu durchbrechen."

33. *Ibid.*, 231, 228: "ein Stückchen befreite Realität."

34. Brinkmann, "Notizen 1969," 265: "Aus mehreren vorhandenen, aus-geschriebenen Texten (Gedichten) einen zu machen, alte Gedichte 'aufzumöbeln' . . . das eigene Gedicht ergibt sich überraschend aus dem Zusammenführen mehrerer fremder Texte, aus *Oberflächenübersetzungen* etc.: die Möglichkeit des eigenen Ausdrucks liegt im Arrangement der Fertigteile, sobald die psychische Dimension dessen, der das macht, darin enthalten ist! Diese Vorgänge *entleeren* den vorgegebenen und längst als 'natürlich' hingenommenen Bedeutungsgehalt, der unfrei macht und den Einzelnen nur von sich wegführt. Darüber hinaus wirkt sich in solchen Methoden konkret das Bewußtsein aus, im *Zeitalter der Ablichtungen* (Xerox) zu leben, der unbegrenzten Vervielfältigungsmöglichkeit, die den abgelichteten Gegenstand qualitativ verändert."

35. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, "Angriff aufs Monopol. Ich hasse alte Dichter," in *Roman oder Leben: Postmoderne in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Uwe Wittstock (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1994), 71: "jene Sensibilität, die den schöpferischen Produkten jeder Kunst—Schreiben, Malen, Filmen, Musizieren—die billigen gedanklichen Alternativen verweigert." Brinkmann's connection to American pop art is analyzed by Gerd Gemünden, "The Depth of the Surface, or, What Rolf Dieter Brinkmann Learned from Andy Warhol," *German Quarterly* 68 (1995): 235–50.

36. Brinkmann, "Der Film in Worten," 228, 232.

37. *Ibid.*, 228: "die neuen Produkte lassen sich nicht mehr ohne weiteres dem Bestehenden zuschlagen . . . —sie haben die bestehenden Verständniskategorien hinter sich gelassen."

38. See, for example, Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–48; and Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" In *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141–60.

39. Brinkmann, "Notizen 1969," 255, 257: "*Abbau der kulturellen Definition*

'Autor' und 'Leser'," "Auflösung des strengen *Werk*-Begriffs," "Auflösung eines einheitlichen Stils."

40. Ibid., 253: "die vorgegebenen Bezugs- und Interpretationssysteme."

41. Brinkmann, "Der Film in Worten," 241–42: "von einem Autor zerlegt und neu arrangiert werden muß, so daß das Klischee sexuellen Rollenverhaltens . . . sich nicht mehr auswirken kann—und genau das, der Grad des Zerlegens und Arrangierens, verändert auch die alte, hübsche Frage nach dem 'Sinn' eines Gedichts, Romans etc."

42. Ibid., 241: "ist es eben kein Witz, wenn gefragt wird: War Shakespeare eine Frau?"

43. Ibid., 243–44: "Ordnung, die in tradierten Ausdrucksmustern sich nicht mehr verstehen kann . . . so daß der Gesamttext zu dem Ineinandergerinnen von Stimmen wird, die sich nicht in ihrer Geschlechtszugehörigkeit eindeutig herausheben lassen."

44. Brinkmann, "Notizen 1969," 250: "Isolation, die mit der Ausprägung einer an eine bestimmte Sprache und Nation gebundenen Literatur begonnen hat."

45. See, for example, Eckart Werthebach, "Die deutsche Sprache braucht gesetzlichen Schutz," *Berliner Morgenpost*, December 31, 2000; Ulrich Noller, "'Man muss das Deutsche stark machen': Interview mit Georg Klein," *die tageszeitung*, March 22, 2001; Jens Jessen, "Schicksal Denglisch: Gegen Hege- monie hilft kein Sprachgesetz," *Die Zeit*, March 8, 2001.

46. Brinkmann, "Angriff aufs Monopol," 72: "Man nehme einmal nur die Amerikanismen in der deutschen Sprache im Jahr 1955 zusammen und vergleiche sie mit den Amerikanismen, die heute, 1968, aufgefunden werden können. Der heutige Anteil wird ungleich höher sein. . . . Man geht mit 'amerikanischem' Material und den darin eingelagerten Signalen heute selbstverständlicher um als noch vor zehn Jahren. Die Frage ist, ob es noch starre nationale Einteilungen geben kann?"

47. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, "Westwärts, Teil 2," *Westwärts 1 & 2: Gedichte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1974), 52: "Gut tat, immer von neuem die eigene Herkunft zu vergessen. Diese Freiheit habe ich jedesmal körperlich gespürt, sobald ich die Grenze, die zugleich die Grenze der Sprache und des Verständnisses war, das verordnet wurde, verließ."

48. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, *Rom, Blicke* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1979), 193: "Sehr gut ist, daß ich nicht alles in der italienischen Umgebung verstehe."

49. Brinkmann, "Westwärts, Teil 2," 52: "je weniger ich in der Sprache verstanden habe, desto klarer sind mir die vorhandenen Dinge in das Bewußtsein getreten."

50. Ibid., 53 (in English): "'All aboard, please!' 1 peremptory tone / in German. Was that once / my language? That was never / my language! This / language has always belonged to others."

51. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, "SCHRIFT / BILD / SCHNITT: Graphismus und die Erkundung der Sprachgrenzen bei Rolf Dieter Brinkmann," in *Rolf Dieter Brinkmann: Literaturmagazin Sonderheft 36*, ed. Maleen Brinkmann (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1995), 196.

52. Brinkmann, "Im Voyageurs Apt. 311 East 31st Street, Austin," *Westwärts 1 & 2*, 76.

53. Brinkmann, "Westwärts," 42; since there is no exact German equivalent for the idiomatic expression "to fall in love," Brinkmann's "und wie fällt man in / die Liebe" sounds as strange as FSK's "Wenn Du einmal in Liebe fällst." See FSK, "Venus im Pelz # 2," *Goes Underground* (Hamburg: ZickZack, 1984).

54. Ralf Rainer Rygulla and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, "Der joviale Russe," in *Mammut: März Texte 1 & 2, 1969–1984*, ed. Jörg Schröder (Herbstein: März, 1984), 304: "ohne Kenntnis der Fremdsprache (in diesem Fall des Französischen) ein Gedicht zu übertragen nach dem im Augenblick des Lesens sich einstellenden Oberflächenverständnis."

55. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, "Fragment zu einigen populären Songs," *Literaturmagazin 2* (1975): 116.

56. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, *Briefe an Hartmut, 1974–1975* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), 198: "Wer reitet auf der Schnecke: eine total falsch übersetzte Zeile aus einem Doors-Song, Titel The End, wo es heißt: ride this lane, aber vom oberflächlichen Gehör her könnte das auch heißen, ride this snake—und weiter oberflächlich umgesetzt in die deutsche Sprache, und zwar nur über den Klang, also vom Laut eines Wortes her, geht die Übertragung von snake zuerst zu Schnecke (Schlangen kennt man ja hier kaum noch)."

57. Brinkmann, *Rom, Blicke*, 199 (deliberately misspelled English/German!); in a letter to Harmut Schnell, Brinkmann drops another quotation from Korzybski: "when in perplexity, read on" (Brinkmann, *Briefe an Hartmut*, 142). Presumably, Brinkmann here refers to Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 4th ed. (1933; reprint, Lakeville, CT: International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing, 1958), xxv.

58. Brinkmann, *Standphotos*, 186: "Häufig höre ich von Leuten, denen ich meine Sachen zeige, daß dies nun eigentlich keine Gedichte mehr seien. . . . Sie sagen, das hier sei ja alles einfach, man könne es ja verstehen, und das wiederum macht ihnen meine Gedichte unverständlich."

59. See my chapter, "The Wake of Modernism: Paradigmen der Unverständlichkeit," in *Die Ironie der Unverständlichkeit: Johann Georg Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 57–81.

60. Max Imdahl, "'Op', 'Pop' oder die immer zu Ende gehende Geschichte der Kunst," in *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen* [= Poetik und Hermeneutik 3], ed. Hans Robert Jauß (Munich: Fink, 1968), 697.

61. Brinkmann, "Notizen 1969," 251.

62. *Ibid.*, 258: "Für einen Augenblick wird durchschaubar, was vertraut und daher längst nicht mehr durchschaubar ist, wenn Irritation eintritt."

63. *Ibid.*: "Diese Irritation ist das amerikanische Gedicht."

64. Brinkmann, "Rolltreppen im August," *Westwärts 1 & 2*, 71: "die Umgebung / wird, als ich aufblicke, um mich schaue, / unverständlich."

65. Brinkmann, "Der Film in Worten," 236: "Die Frage nach der Bedeutung erübrigt sich—die Erzählung ist einfach 'da', sie ist ihr eigenes Argument."

66. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, "Ein unkontrolliertes Nachwort zu meinen Gedichten," *Literaturmagazin 5* (1976): 232: "am besten ist, du verstehst das nicht.' Das gilt auch für die Versuche, ein Gedicht zu verstehen."

67. Ibid., 244: “Warum wollen Sie Dichtung verstehen? Warum wollen Sie verstehen? Schlägt da nicht ein Glaube durch, daß eine verbindliche Ordnung besteht?”

68. Brinkmann, “Notizen 1969,” 248: “*einfach nur da.*”

69. Brinkmann, *Rom, Blicke*, 193: “Überhaupt ist das Verstehen eine sehr schnittige Sache! Was wird da abgeschnitten?”

70. Ibid., 93: “die Blicke machen ja ständig cut ups!”

71. Brinkmann, “Ein unkontrolliertes Nachwort,” 246: “denen, die glauben, wahnhaft, sie hätten die Formulierungen und die Sprache restlos begriffen.”

72. Ibid., 247: “Wie hasse ich die scheinbare Klarheit der Sprache, und ich mag das Nebeneinander wie hier, an dieser Stelle.”

73. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, “Anmerkungen zu meinem Gedicht ‘Vanille’,” in *Mammut: März Texte 1 & 2*, 144: “Warum Zitate? Weil ich sie nicht verstehe! Warum ein Gedicht? Weil ich es nach dem Schreiben nicht mehr verstehe.”

74. Brinkmann, “Der Film in Worten,” 239.

75. Brinkmann, “Westwärts, Teil 2,” 50: “Ich möchte Wörter benutzen, die / nicht zu benutzen sind, dachte ich. Ich möchte sprechen zu denen, die ich / liebe, / . . . ich möchte einfach / nur einfach nur ohne Erklärung sein.”

76. Diederichsen, *Freiheit macht arm*, 151: “auf literarischer Ebene die Spritze nordamerikanische Kultur injiziert, die das Leben in der BRD erträglich gemacht hat (und teilweise aus amerikanischer Kultur wegen doppelter Fremdheit mehr machte als die USA).”

77. Ibid.: “für die die deutsche Sprache auch ein Mittel war, ihr selbst zu entkommen . . . und die entsprechend eine deutsche Literatur auf der Flucht vor dem und den Deutschen entwarfen.”

78. Brinkmann, “Notizen 1969,” 265: “Vervielfältigungsmöglichkeit, die den . . . Gegenstand qualitativ verändert.”