

EUGEN GOMRINGER/ERIC ELLINGSEN

This Also Doesn't Mean That Too

entropie ist schön

On May 17, 2011, a cashier at a café says *this means beautiful. I do not know this. This is a word from a book I know. Wait, no. No, it's not now. I do not know where you got this. Maybe this means transformation. Maybe? No. Not transformation, but when you change. Maybe this means a density of information that has physics. Maybe it just means entropy like in physics. Like the loss of something. Like energy.*

das gegenteil ist schön

An hour later an architecture student at a technical university says what this means, says *this means the opposite is nice. The opposite is nice, or beautiful. Yes, the opposite is beautiful or nice.*

wachstum ist schön

Later, a woman next to me on a bus, carrying a child, says *growth is nice. But I think there is something nicer than growth going on here.*

veränderung ist schön

During lunch the dean of the university says *this means the state of change, or a something which changes. It's reflexive. The whole thing means then that change is beautiful. It's an important thing, change, more active. More like changing is beautiful, the change in motion, not just passive change, abstract, is beautiful.*

dasein ist schön

May 18, 2011, at a botanical garden near the zoo, I am with the landscape architect who designed the garden. We are under a tree shipped from New Zealand to Berlin as a gecko scurries between us and a group of artists. He says *if you write this with a capital letter then it's subjective, which means that it means being or existing is great. But if you separate the words into two words, it means being here is great. I think it means the big kind of being, because they are together, but it must mean both somehow, big being here is great. It's not playing correctly, the grammar is not by the rules. Big being is great, beautiful, nice, but it's not playing correctly in the line.*

ordnung ist schön

May 18, 2011, two landscape architects waiting for a lecture say *order is nice. To order. Something ordered.*

das gegenteil ist schön

Later that night during a dinner and after a lecture, a Latin American architect who researches urban drift says *this means this: To counterpart is beauty. To duplicate.*

materie ist schön

Material, material, this means material, like you know, material, just material. Material is beautiful says a woman who runs a research institute in Russia, but lives in Rotterdam, sitting next to me in Zürich at a French restaurant.

energie ist schön

On May 19, 2011, a Turkish guy selling slices of pizza says *this means energy is beautiful. Energy is energy. Energy is beautiful.*

botanik ist schön

Later that day I am introducing myself to a group of thirty-one young artists and architects. We are sitting in a group together in a park saying where we come from and what possesses us to do what we do. I ask them to *help me do the meaning of this one thing* as an example of what I do, and they agree *this means botanic is beautiful. Botanic like flowers, like trees, like plants live, like from all over, like to study living things from all over. Botanic is beautiful, very beautiful.*

sanskrit ist schön

On May 20, 2011, a guy fishing for trout on a bridge in the center of the city says *Sanskrit is nice, beautiful, like the writing, and nice can mean nice, like casual, or nice can mean beautiful, like beautiful beautiful beautiful.*

das Gegenteil ist schön

Later, two giddy Swiss geezers laugh while waiting for the tram, say *this means the opposite is nice. But there's another way, not only is the opposite of the thing nice, it's also good for you.*

verzicht ist schön

To disappear is nice, a landscape architect says as we stand beside a stuffed owl in a large studio spread out over four cities.

irrtum ist schön

The sausage vendor says *it means if you think something wrong, it's this, but not wrong like a mistake. It's beautiful to think the wrong things. But why do you do this? Is this very important for your life? I have ideas* he says *I have ideas.*

bedeutung ist schön

On the way to the university, I ask an ice-cream vendor if he speaks English after he has been talking to me in English. We laugh at my stupid question, then he tells me what this means. *This means meaning is beautiful. But why is meaning beautiful?* he asks me. And I feel licked.

wahrheit ist schön

On May 21, 2011, around the corner from Café Voltaire, close to a yarn store, an Indian man, after telling me what this means, says *I like what this says; I really like what this says: truth is beautiful. But it could also mean reality is beautiful. It means something more philosophical, or a legal clarity of truth, not just big T truth, but something argued, or proven true, true because we proved it by talking about it.*

das Gegenteil ist schön

This means the opposite is beautiful, but this also doesn't mean that too, a gallerist in an empty gallery just killing time says, while curating a performance where one hundred miner's hats are launched at the same time like fountains into the air.

Near the gate, a man in his late fifties working Information tells me *this means something is beautiful, this is beautiful. I don't know this exactly, it's floated. But I think this says the same thing.*

“entropie ist schön” by Eugen Gomringer, variations by Eric Ellingsen

Translator's Note

I see these translations as little performances, ones I create when traveling or simply when moving to and from my home. The experiments add small space eddies to a stream of daily patterns. They invite introductions and personal contact without building the trust confiding in others requires. I first research a poet vested in translation and experimentation, then set up constraints to nudge an original text around a living boxing ring in which an assortment of people can rain down blows. The experiment creates chance encounters in public places between people and poetry, little speed bumps slipped into a day to practice being in slow motion.

Through these conversations I create connections that allow others to drop their guard and simultaneously profit from the vulnerability of thought with a stranger. For a moment we become unnumb to each other.

I also use these translations to think about what translators are and might be, and because I think poems are enacted and performed, and must be un-Pinocchioed. Poems un-Pinocchio in a pack of people when lines are spoken together, thought about, moved from a fixed place as we drift together through a city. They map a moment of where we are in a place that doesn't stick to us, and then invite it to stick. They connect our thoughts to our feet, language to the way we flow through the day physically, psychogeographically, and emotionally.

After I collect the translation material I reconstruct it, working with a cobbler to stitch the pieces of paper together, at the same time re-viewing the raw material and working it into a translation. This puts the kite back into the sky without cutting the string from the original, lets it catch the turbulence, dive-bomb the unanticipating day. But this also doesn't mean that too.