

from *Let it Percolate: A Manifesto for Reading*

Sophie Seita



Sophie Seita *Emilia Galotti's Colouring Book of Feelings* 2019 performance Kunsthalle Darmstadt
Image credit: Laura Cobb Courtesy of the artist

“To translate is to surpass the source”—these are some words I put into the mouth of a character in *My Little Enlightenment Plays*, a performance project in which I rewrote, translated, responded to and, one could say, *corresponded with* some Enlightenment thinkers and writers.

(Isn't translation always the putting of words into someone's mouth, that someone sometimes being you?)



Sophie Seita *Emilia Galotti's Colouring Book of Feelings* 2019 performance Art Night London
Image credit: Laura Cobb Courtesy of the artist

Words can contextualise, embellish, explain. They can be raw, they can be tender, they can be violent. They can be matter of fact or they can translate matter into something else. Words force us to be nuanced.

While translation trades in words, it also encompasses, for me, the moving of material from one place to another. Which is admittedly a broad delineation. But capaciousness can be a generosity. So. Translation might mean moving a language, an idea, an image, a material (like paper, Tippex, or clay) to a known or unknown elsewhere, or it might mean transforming it into another form, genre, medium, or context.

Like a manifesto, I see translation as a deeply pedagogical form. Because it teaches you to read. So here's my manifesto for reading.



Sophie Seita *Don Carlos, or, Royal Jelly* 2017 performance Arnolfini, Bristol
Image credit: Lúa Ribeira Courtesy of the artist

Principle 1: No to verticality. Languages and art forms don't exist on a slope of significance.

Principle 2. No to valorizing originals. Which is an old hat in its critique but bears repeating. Yes to old hats.

Principle 3: We will view translation as a process for transformation.

Principle 4: We will remain open to our own translation.

Principle 5: A translational pedagogy is a playful pedagogy.

Principle 6: A playful pedagogy is unpredictable; we won't know where the ball will land or who, if anyone, will catch it.

Principle 7: Scratch the house style.



Sophie Seita *Don Carlos, or, Royal Jelly* 2019 video still [SPACE], London
Camera: Katarzyna Perlak Courtesy of the artist

These almost-wise and not-quite-adamant demands serve a pragmatic truth. Which is provisional. And admits to not knowing. “[Not] knowing,” as Jack Halberstam suggests in *The Queer Art of Failure*, “may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative [and] surprising ways of being in the world.” Translation, like a manifesto, like pedagogy, is of a delayed futurity. If this were a proper manifesto, or a classroom, I would invoke a “we,” a call for action.

What action is reading? Taking a shower is an activity. Taking a bath professes not-doing. To write in the bath is to enter the jurisdiction of floating. Of idleness. Lisa Robertson’s she-dandy allows herself to pursue her thoughts languorously. What knowledge does leisure afford?

Working on a translation you do figure eights of reading. “To rush it breathlessly through does very well for a beginning. But that is not the way to read finally.” Virginia Woolf is speaking about the need to reread a novel here, but her comment also resonates with our critical desire to extract, to unearth, as a means to an end.



Sophie Seita *Don Carlos, or, Royal Jelly* 2017 performance Arnolfini, Bristol
Image credit: Lúa Ribeira Courtesy of the artist

Is parsing always in cahoots with parsimony?

Avoid finality! Etc.

A non-extractive reading might be one that answers in kind: not by translation into a different discourse, but by using a creative circuitry of aesthetic kinship.

Writing-through-reading can mean taking it in, chewing it. Letting it percolate.

I WANT A PEDAGOGY OF PERCOLATION.