

# Translation Matters

Special Issue: Experiential Translation  
Vol. 5 No. 1, Spring 2023



# TRANSLATION MATTERS

Volume 5, Issue 1, Spring 2023  
Special Issue: Experiential Translation

## **Editor**

Karen Bennett  
Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS)  
NOVA-FCSH, Lisbon, Portugal

## **Cover Design**

Mariana Selas

## **Publisher**

Faculty of Letters, University of Porto, Portugal

ISSN 2184-4585



## **Editorial Team**

*Editor-in-Chief:* Karen Bennett (NOVA University of Lisbon / CETAPS, Portugal)

*Associate Editors:*

Elena Galvão (U. Porto / CETAPS, Portugal)

Hanna Pieta (NOVA University of Lisbon / CETAPS, Portugal)

Imren Gökce (NOVA University of Lisbon / CETAPS, Portugal)

Marco Neves (NOVA University of Lisbon / CETAPS, Portugal)

Margarita Savchenkova (U. Salamanca, Spain)

*Editorial Board:*

Alexandra Assis Rosa (U. Lisbon, Portugal)

Alexandra Lopes (Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal)

Cornelia Plag (U. Coimbra)

Gabriela Gândara (NOVA University of Lisbon/CETAPS, Portugal)

Guilherme da Silva Braga (CETAPS, Portugal)

Iolanda Ramos (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal)

Isabel Branco (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal)

João Ferreira Duarte (NOVA Lisbon, Portugal)

Jorge Almeida e Pinho (U. Coimbra/CETAPS, Portugal)

Jorge Bastos da Silva (U. Porto/CETAPS, Portugal)

Maria Zulmira Castanheira (NOVA University of Lisbon/CETAPS, Portugal)

Miguel Ramalhete (U. Lisbon, Portugal)

Rita Bueno Maia (Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal)

Rita Queiroz de Barros (U. Lisbon, Portugal)

Rui Carvalho Homem (U. Porto/CETAPS, Portugal)

Rute Costa (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal)

Teresa Seruya (U. Lisbon, Portugal)

*Copyeditors / Assistentes Editoriais:*

Diogo Lourenço Domingos (Nova University of Lisbon)

Mathilde Olivia Sampaio da Silva (Nova University of Lisbon)

*International Advisory Board:*

Christian Olalla Soler (U. Bologna, Italy)

Douglas Robinson (Hong Kong Baptist University, China)

Francesca Billiani (U. Manchester, United Kingdom)

John Milton (U. São Paulo, Brazil)

Maeve Olohan (U. Manchester, United Kingdom)

Maria Cármen África Vidal Claramonte (U. Salamanca, Spain)

Michael Cronin (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland)

Ozlem Berk Albachten (Boğaziçi University, Turkey)

Piotr Blumczynski (Queens University, Belfast, United Kingdom)

Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar (Boğaziçi University, Turkey)

Teresa Caneda (U. Vigo, Spain)

Yan Ying (U. Leicester, United Kingdom)

Yasmine Motawy (American University of Cairo, Egypt)

**Copyright**

The articles published in this volume are covered by the Creative Commons “AttributionNonCommercial-NoDerivs” license (see <http://creativecommons.org>). They may be reproduced in its entirety as long as *Translation Matters* is credited, a link to the journal’s web page is provided, and no charge is imposed. The articles may not be reproduced in part or altered in form, or a fee charged, without the journal’s permission. Copyright remains solely with individual authors. The authors should let the journal *Translation Matters* know if they wish to republish.

*Translation Matters* is a free, exclusively online peer-reviewed journal published twice a year. It is available on the website of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto <http://ler.letras.up.pt>. All articles should be submitted by email to the journal email address ([translationality@gmail.com](mailto:translationality@gmail.com)). See the guidelines for submission at the end of this issue. Requests for book reviews should be sent to [translationality@gmail.com](mailto:translationality@gmail.com).

PUBLISHED BIANNUALLY ONLINE

**THE ARTICLES ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THEIR AUTHORS.  
THE ARTICLES WERE PEER REVIEWED**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Editor's Introduction

#### Translation as springboard for artistic creation

*Karen Bennett*

1-6

### EPIGRAPH

#### The Typewriter

*África Vidal Claramonte and Sofía Lacasta Millera*

7-8

### ARTICLES

#### On Performing Philosophy *through* Translation

*Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal*

9-28

#### Livestreaming Islamic Arts: Digitization as Translation in Shi'i depictions of Karbala

*Rhys Sparey*

29-56

#### "It's no fault of yours if your life songs are bigger than a continent": Self-Translation, Creativity, and the Specter of Self-Betrayal

*Emily Marie Passos Duffy*

57-69

#### Illustrating *Alice in Wonderland* in the New Millennium: New Meanings for an Evergreen Children's Classic

*Salvatore M. Ciancitto*

70-83

#### Translating Art and Artworks in Picturebooks: Interpictoriality and Experiential Meaning-Making for Young Readers

*Yaxi Wang*

84-101

#### Repetition and Addition as Coherent Devices in Audio Description of Comics: A Case Study of *X: Big Bad*

*Chunwei Liu*

102-120

#### Intersemiotic Translation in the Theatre: Creating a Stage Production

*Raili Lass*

121-131

#### Review article: Translation, Creativity and Experimentalism

*África Vidal Claramonte*

132-142

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Tradição e Novidade: A Tradução Literária em Contexto Ibérico**

Review of *Iberian and Translation Studies: Literary Contact Zones* by Esther Gimeno Ugalde  
*Inês Espada Vieira* 143-145

### **Innovation and Expansion: A New Point of Departure in Corpus-Based Translation Studies**

Review of *Extending the Scope of Corpus-Based Translation Studies*, edited by Sylviane Granger and Marie-Aude Lefer  
*Yuan Tao* 146-149

### **Diálogos entre Poetas, Tradutores e Pensadores: O Caso de Cernuda e Hölderlin**

Review of *Luis Cernuda y Friedrich Hölderlin: traducción, poesía y representación* by Javier Adrada de la Torre  
*Isabel Araújo Branco* 150-152

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### TRANSLATION AS SPRINGBOARD FOR ARTISTIC CREATION

When I first got involved in Translation, back in the late 1980s, it was a much more circumscribed field than it is today. Most people understood it to be essentially an interlingual operation<sup>1</sup> and the debates about it revolved around whether it was better to reproduce the formal aspects of the source text or to reformulate it in the interests of fluency. In short, it was taken for granted that the objective of translation was to try to achieve some kind of equivalence in the target language, with the only disagreements being largely about how best this should be achieved.

Since then, of course, the whole paradigm has changed. Not only has the notion of equivalence been largely abandoned (except, perhaps, in very technical domains), the concept of 'translation' has expanded far beyond the interlingual to take in all kinds of operations, from historiography (Alonzi, 2023a, 2023b; Vidal Claramonte, 2018) to museology (Vald on, 2015; Sturge, 2007), music (Minors, 2012; Vidal Claramonte, 2017) and visual art (Vidal Claramonte, 2022).<sup>2</sup> What is more, this is not a mere metaphorical extension. The broadening of the term beyond the interlingual is in fact a return to how translation was understood in medieval times, when it was deployed for all kinds of spatial and temporal transfers (Watson, 2008; Blumczynski, 2023), with a focus on the process (termed 'translationality' by Robinson, 2017 and Blumczynski, 2023), rather than the product.

In the last year, there has been a new inflection, marked by a spate of books (Lee, 2022; Robinson, 2022; Robert-Foley, 2023; Lukes, forthcoming; Grass, forthcoming; Vidal and Campbell, forthcoming) which focus on translation as a form of embodied creative practice. Whether termed 'experimental', 'avant-garde' or 'experiential', as here, what all these works have in common is their emphasis upon transformativity. With the source text taken as a starting point for a whole new creative work, we find translators now using any of the semiotic modes at their disposal to riff, like jazz musicians, on a theme, glorifying in the creative possibilities of their instrument, sometimes with only the most perfunctory of nods towards the source text.

Above all, these new approaches understand meaning to be embedded, embodied, dynamic and largely performative, an attitude which renders invalid the traditional pursuit of equivalence. To a large extent, this is a natural corollary of the so-called 'material turn' (Littau, 2011, 2016; Bennett, 2022), which challenged the assumption of transcendentalism inherent in western translation theory by pointing out the inseparability of form and meaning in most semiotic events. But in some cases (e.g. Robert-Foley, 2023; Sparey, this issue), it also has to do with the new possibilities afforded by digital technologies and the emphasis upon

---

<sup>1</sup> Even Roman Jakobson, who famously extended the term in 1959 to include the intralingual and the intersemiotic, effectively marginalized those activities by referring to interlingual translation as 'translation proper'.

<sup>2</sup> See also Blumczynski (2017), Robinson (2017) and Marais (2023) on how the concept of translation is used in other disciplines.

multimodality that these entail. Indeed, the dethroning of the verbal code as the primary form of meaning-making is another of the consequences.

This special issue has its origins in a grouping of scholars and artists with expertise in areas as diverse as theatre & performance studies, cultural & literary studies, curatorial studies, education, modern languages, teacher & translator training, music and the fine arts, as well as translation studies. Known as the *Experiential Translation Network* (ETN), this was set up by Ricarda Vidal and Madeleine Campbell in March 2021 with funding from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, and aims to develop a holistic understanding of intersemiotic translation as a method not only of creation and communication but also of learning and teaching, collaboration and participation within multilingual, multicultural and multimodal settings. Hence, the network's outputs to date have included not only conventional academic papers<sup>3</sup> but also artworks and performances, many of which have been presented at exhibitions or online events.<sup>4</sup>

The Epigraph which opens the issue is in fact the product of one such event. **África Vidal Claramonte** and **Sofia Lacasta Millera's** visual poem, 'The Typewriter', was created in the context of the *Soundscapes* course, organized online in the Spring of 2022 under the auspices of the ETN,<sup>5</sup> and is essentially an intersemiotic translation of Leroy Anderson's orchestral work of the same name. As the authors explain in the short text that accompanies their piece,<sup>6</sup> they have attempted to translate elements of the form of the original work through an evocation of the mechanical typewriter's percussive sound (through the repetition of the letter 't'), reproduction of its traditional font, and careful attention to the distribution of words, symbols and blank spaces across the page, as well as the presence of strikethroughs, punctuation marks and different typefaces. Just as Anderson's music subverts traditional concert hall expectations with its inclusion of an 'inappropriate' instrument, this translation breaks down normative modes of syntax by including signs and forms which are not part of a traditional poem. In doing so, it reproduces the disruptive effect of Anderson's piece in a different medium, resulting in a typed text that can be read in many different ways.

The first article of this special issue by **Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal** argues for a holistic reappraisal of the philosophical premises and rhetoric surrounding (intersemiotic) translation research in the light of the experiential and performative tendencies of contemporary translation practice. Understanding translation as a kind of centrifugal practice (Scott, 2010), in which meanings proliferate ad infinitum through endless retellings in different media and modalities, they discuss how philosophy can be done through

---

<sup>3</sup> A number of these were presented at the conference *Performative & Experiential Translation – Meaning-Making through Language, Art and Media* held in King's College in July 2022, and some will be published in the forthcoming volume *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*. (Vidal and Campbell, eds).

<sup>4</sup> For a full list of outputs, see <https://experientialtranslation.net/events/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Soundscapes: Translating from Music* was designed to explore the meaning-making potential of music and resulted in the production of intersemiotic translations into other media, such as drawing, poetry, and dance. More information about its aims, procedures and outcomes can be found on the website (<https://soundscapestranslatingfrommusic.wordpress.com/>) and in Bennett (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://soundscapestranslatingfrommusic.wordpress.com/gallery/>

translation ('thinking through translation' or 'translation philosophy') with reference to Anne Carson's *Antigonick / Sophokles* (2012) and Caroline Bergvall's *Via* (2004). The emic perspective is actively incorporated into the article through the presence of some of their own experimental translations (in internet slang, multilingual dialogue, morse code and collage) of Kurt Schwitters' iconic poem 'An Anna Blum' (1919, 1922 ff) – a collaborative endeavour aiming at the creation of a *Gesamttranslation* (total work of translation), inspired by Schwitters' own performative aspiration to '*Gesamtkunstwerk*'.

The next article, by **Rhys Sparey**, explores the digitization of Islamic arts in the commemorations of the Battle of Karbala (61 AH/680 CE), focusing on video livestreams of mourning ceremonies (*majālis*) held at the Imam Husain Islamic Centre (IHIC) in Earlwood, Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. For Sparey, the livestreaming of what had once been a 'presential' event is a translational process in the sense that it involves transferring symbolic forms from one 'milieu' to another. Directly challenging post-humanist constructions of the digital subject, he argues that these digitally mediated *majlis* display all of the 'emotional texture, eschatological significance, and visceral intercorporeality' as their spatially compresent counterparts, and that this is in part because the digital affordances enable immaterial figures and absences to be treated 'as actors alongside humans', with matter approached as 'performance or process'. Analysing twenty-one livestreamed *majālis* which he attended on Facebook at different stages of the pandemic, Sparey observes that COVID-19 was appropriated by mourners as a new symbolic milieu, in which experiences of inequality, isolation, loss, and restriction were all concomitant with the Karbala narrative.

**Emily Duffy's** article, which follows, remains in the same broad cultural-linguistic space, but turns the attention to self-translation as a way that some multilingual authors find to grapple with questions of identity, resistance, and their place in the global system of literature. Through the analysis of essays compiled and edited by Wiam El-Tamamin in a special section of *ArabLit Quarterly*, it considers the experiential aspects of literary self-translation and argues that the self-translated text should be understood as part of a 'linguistically hybrid bricolage whole', or indeed an 'original-in-flux' – a perspective not unlike that of Walter Benjamin, or indeed Kurt Schwitters, as explored by Campbell and Vidal (above).

The next three articles shift decisively to the visual domain with a focus on picturebooks, explored from different translational perspectives. **Salvatore Ciancitto** is concerned with contemporary Italian illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland*, understood as retranslations of the canonical illustrations by John Tenniel that accompanied Lewis Carroll's first published edition of 1865. However, contrary to the famous 'retranslation hypothesis' (Berman, 1990), according to which translations tend to become more literal and faithful as time goes on, Ciancitto argues that the retranslations of children's literature, and their illustrations above all, are often produced as the result of commercial decisions, and reflect changes in the historical, cultural and social context of the target culture. Particularly in the case of classics like *Alice in Wonderland*, when several translations may be present on the market at the same time, such retranslations seem rather to be concerned with packaging the work for different

niche audiences. Indeed, in the case of these contemporary Italian versions of the tale, the illustrations – categorized as 'realistic', 'comic' or 'gothic' – are clearly designed to appeal to different readerships, entering into dialogue with earlier illustrations as Ciancitto's analysis clearly shows.

Interpictoriality is also the subject of **Yaxi Wang's** article, though this time the emphasis is on the incorporation of artworks into children's picturebooks as a way of helping young readers develop visual literacy and inducting them into the epistemic and aesthetic communities represented by art and culture. Interpictoriality is again viewed as a form of translation, not only in the obvious sense that works of art are reproduced and recontextualized within the pages of the picturebook, but also in the understanding that an experiential translational process is required on the part of the child readers themselves as they incorporate and adapt the new knowledge to their existing subjectivity. Following a short review of the literature on interpictoriality, Wang presents three case-studies which illustrate how original artworks are repurposed in the interests of a new aesthetic or pedagogical agenda. The article closes with a discussion of the factors that might influence the development of children's aesthetic understanding and competence at art translating.

If Ciancitto and Wang were concerned with exclusively visual forms of translation, **Chunwei Liu's** article returns to the intersemiotic domain with a piece about the audio description (AD) of graphic narratives. Though audio description is now a regular practice in the cinema and performing arts, its potential has not yet been fully explored for sequential arts like comics, manga and graphic novels. To help fill this gap, Liu analyses a commercial AD translation of the action comic series *X: Big Bad* (Dark Horse), focusing on coherence and cohesion as a translation goal. It compares the information in the source and target texts in order to identify the strategies used in the audio description, and analyses how they contribute to achieving coherence across the target text as a whole, before attempting to generalise from this to identify potential norms that could be used by the genre in future.

The final research article in this special issue, by **Raili Lass**, returns us to the debate launched by the first one (Campbell and Vidal) in its exploration of the connections between translation and performativity. Understanding the staging of a theatre play as a complex form of intersemiotic translation, Lass sees the playscript as the source text for a series of different translational operations, as well as being a product of an experiential translation process in itself. With sections devoted to the playtext, stage director and actors, this article convincingly argues that all participants in the staging are effectively translators, and that only through an ongoing collaborative effort in the service of a joint goal will they bring the target text (the staged performance) to fruition.

The very last text in this section of the special issue is a review article, a genre that we have not included in *Translation Matters* before, but which is likely to become a regular feature from now on. Given the explosion of publications in the last year about translation as a creative artistic practice, we invited **África Vidal Claramonte** of the University of Salamanca to reflect upon the connections between five of them: Tong-King Lee's *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics* (2022); Douglas Robinson's *The Experimental*

*Translator* (2022); Lily Robert-Foley's *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production* (2023); Alexandra Lukes' (ed.) *Translating the Avant-Garde, Avant-Garde Translation* (forthcoming) and Delphine Grass's *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice* (forthcoming). She points out that although each volume has its own specificity, there are some very interesting similarities, such as a concern with political activism and social justice, a tendency to merge theory and practice, and an understanding of translation as a performative, multisensorial, non-linear creative-critical practice.

Hopefully, this special issue of *Translation Matters*, and its cousin, the forthcoming volume edited by Ricarda Vidal and Madeleine Campbell, will make meaningful contributions to the dialogue that has been launched by these publications, and which look set to transform the translational field in a very significant way.

Karen Bennett

## REFERENCES

- Alonzi, L. (2023a) 'History as Translation/Anachronism as Synchronism. Rethinking History', *The Journal of Theory and Practice*; 27(2) [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2023.2229685>.
- Alonzi, L. (2023b) *Translating the Past: History Time Culture*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bennett, K. (2022) 'The Unsustainable Lightness of Meaning: Reflections on the Material Turn in Translation Studies and Its Intradisciplinary Implications' in Silva, G. and Radicioni, M. (eds.) *Recharting Territories: Intradisciplinary in Translation Studies*, 49–74. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Bennett, K. (forthcoming) 'Translating from music: The *Soundscapes* course and its theoretical and practical outcomes' in Vidal R. and Campbell M. (eds.) *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*. New York: Routledge.
- Berman, A. (1990) 'La retraduction comme espace de la traduction', *Palimpsestes*, 4, pp.1-7.
- Blumczynski, P. (2017) *Ubiquitous Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blumczynski, P. (2023) *Experiencing Translationality: Material and Metaphorical Journeys*. New York: Routledge.
- Grass, D. (forthcoming) *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jakobson, R. ([1959] 2000) 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' in Venuti, L. (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 113-18.
- Lee, T-K. (2022) *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Littau, K. (2011) 'First Steps Towards a Media History of Translation', *Translation Studies*, 4(3), pp. 261–81.
- Littau, K. (2016) 'Translation and the Materialities of Communication', *Translation Studies*, 9(1), pp. 82–96.
- Lukes, A. (ed.) (forthcoming) *Translating the Avant-Garde, Avant-Garde Translation*. Leiden: Brill.
- Marais, K. (2023) *Translation Beyond Translation Studies*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bennett, K. – Editor's Introduction

*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 1-6, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1int](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1int)

Minors, H. J. (ed.) (2013) *Music, Text and Translation*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Robert-Foley, L. (2023) *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production*. London: Goldsmiths Press.

Robinson, D. (2017) *Translationality: Essays in the Translational-Medical Humanities*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Robinson, D. (2022) *The Experimental Translator*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.

Scott, C. (2010) 'Intermediality and Synesthesia: Literary Translation as Centrifugal Practice', *Art in Translation*, 2(2), pp. 153–170.

Sturge, K. (2007) *Representing Others: Translation, Ethnography, and the Museum*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Valdeón, R. A. (2015) 'Colonial museums in the US (un)translated.' *Language and Intercultural Communication* 15(3), 362-375.

Vidal Claramonte, M.C.Á. (2017) "*Dile que le he escrito un blues*": *del texto como partitura a la partitura como traducción en la literatura latinoamericana*. Frankfurt: Veurvert Iberoamericana.

Vidal Claramonte, M.C.Á. (2018) *La Traducción y La(s) Historia(s)*. Granada: Editorial Comares.

Vidal Claramonte, M.C.Á. (2022) *Translation and Contemporary Art: Transdisciplinary Encounters*. Routledge Focus. New York: London.

Vidal, R. and Campbell, M. (eds.) (forthcoming) *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*. New York: Routledge.

Watson, Nicholas (2008) 'Theories of Translation' in Ellis, R. (ed.) *Oxford History of Literary Translation into English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 73-90.

EPIGRAPH

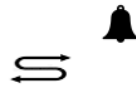
**THE TYPEWRITER**

TRANSLATED BY A.V.C. AND S.L.M.

b b  
b:



t	t	t	t	t	t	t	t	t	t	t	t
i	r	a	a	a	e	r	a	r	e	e	r
e	a	b	b	x	l	a	r	a	r	x	a
m	b	l	u	a	é	n	e	s	m	t	d
p	a	a	r		f	q	a	f	i	o	u
o	j		e		o	u		o	n		c
			t		n	i		r	a		c
			e		o	l		m	r		i
						i		a			ó
						d		r			n
						a					
						d					
						a					
						d					





## ON PERFORMING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH TRANSLATION

Madeleine Campbell\*

University of Edinburgh

Ricarda Vidal\*

King's College London

**ABSTRACT:** This article proposes a 'translation philosophy' commensurate with the immanence of praxis in the authors' collaborative endeavour to create a Gesamttranslation (a total work of translation) of Kurt Schwitters' seminal poem "An Anna Blume" (1919, 1922 ff). Through arts-informed and transformational practices of translation and retranslation, the authors explore their own multimodal translations of the poem and those of others as concrete examples of translating with/through art. Placing this work within the context of Anne Carson's translations of *Antigone* and Caroline Bergvall's *Via*, they focus on the affinity of the practice of translation with the practice of performance. They also examine parallels and synergies between translation, performance philosophy and art practice in a wider sense, exploring common interests such as representation, appropriation, originality and the role of play and creativity. The article is presented as a multimodal document whereby words and images, video files, poetry and prose come together to advance the argument.

**KEYWORDS:** Experiential Translation, Intersemiotic Translation, Performance Philosophy, Translation Philosophy, Arts-Informed Research

### 1. Introduction

In this article, we present our recent exploration of arts-informed and transformational praxes of translation and retranslation in our collaborative endeavour to create a Gesamttranslation (a total work of translation) of Kurt Schwitters' seminal poem "An Anna Blume" (1919, 1922 ff). We discuss our own multimodal translations of the poem and those of others as concrete examples of translating with/through art. Placing this work within the context of Anne Carson's translations of *Antigone* and Caroline Bergvall's *Via*, we focus on the affinity of the practice of translation with the practice of performance. We also examine parallels and synergies between translation, performance philosophy and art practice in a wider sense, exploring common interests such as representation, appropriation, originality and the role of play and creativity.

On the book cover of Rothenberg and Joris' (2002) translations of Kurt Schwitters, emanating from the mouth of the poet and starting from the edge of three concentric circles radiating outwards, is the graphic PPPPPP, itself an eponymous departure from Schwitters' (1923) poem "ppppppppp", created by drawing a thick black line down the middle of a children's picture book and blanking out its right-hand side. This visual expression of the centrifugal force of the six Ps embodies the performative in this assemblage of "poems performance pieces proses plays poetics". The metaphor of translation as "centrifugal practice" (Scott 2010) aptly captures the inexorable but aporetic propulsion in Schwitters' work towards a Gesamtkunstwerk for the Merz stage, "the ultimate, total Merz work...,"

---

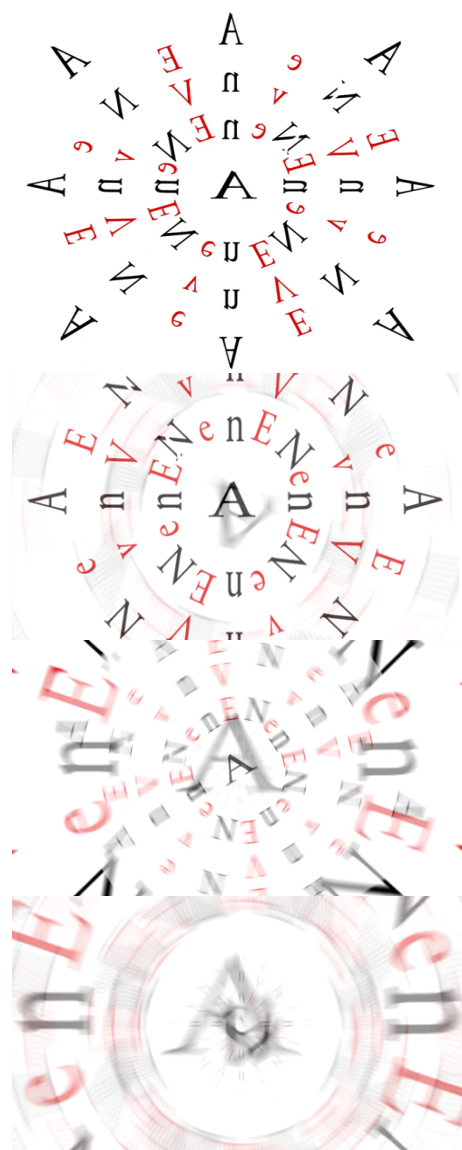
\* madeleine.campbell@ed.ac.uk

\* ricarda.vidal@kcl.ac.uk

distinguished by the fusion of all factors [even people can be included] into a total work of art” (Schwitters ,1920, as cited in Rothenberg and Joris, 2002, pp. xvii). In this paper, we explore Schwitters’ ambition of the Gesamtkunstwerk through translation in the context of a renewed perspective on translation philosophy. In doing so, we aim for a collective Gesamttranslation of Schwitters’ most iconic poem “An Anna Blume”, which takes previous, current and future translations of the poem into diverse languages and media into account – and also includes people.

Charting the centrifugal pathways of Schwitters’ poetry in translation reveals a multimodal journey of self-translation and retranslation where language, typography, image, 2- and 3-D collages of found objects are assembled in multiple configurations (see, for example, Collins, 2016/17 p. 12-16 for a near exhaustive account of the myriad verbal and non-verbal “Manifestations of Anna Blume”). Collins’ argument, following Luke (2014) and others, is that the palindromic A-N-N-A epitomizes an erotic identity poetics of “flux and indefinability” (2016/17, p. 20). In the present paper our interest lies in the arts-informed, transformational praxes of translation and retranslation, as manifested in both lingual and multimodal forms. In the process of our research, we not only collected versions of “An Anna Blume” but also actively contributed to the proliferation of the text in translation by making collages, new linguistic translations (e.g. into slang, multilingual dialogue, morse code, etc.), filmic and performative versions. Some of the work we made is reproduced in this paper in the margins of the text and sometimes in the centre to supplement and/or present our argument. Many of the images we present here are taken from our film collage “Knowing Anna Blume” (2022).<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the paper, we shall return to Schwitters’ performative aspiration for the Gesamtkunstwerk as an illustration of the affinity of the practice of translation with the practice of performance. At the heart of this affinity lies its transformative capacity for individual and collective meaning-making: “Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract ideas of identity and similarity” (Benjamin



*AnnA/eve/EVE – nen/nene/nenA  
pulsating, moving in and out in a  
centrifugal whirr reflecting the  
many translations the poem has  
experienced since Schwitters first  
fly-posted it on lamp-posts around  
his home town Hannover in 1919.*

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://vimeo.com/726064366/c529120630> (Accessed: 11 July 2023)

1994, p. 214). We shall argue that translation, like performance, is a deeply embodied process of meaning-making through dynamic transformative processes, which has the capacity to both inform and be informed by philosophical thought.

## 2. Multimodal becomings: translating in the present

The structuralist semiotic conception of meaning being carried in a sign that could be coded and decoded with any degree of equivalence, intra-, interlingually or across media (Jakobson, 1959) has undergone a paradigm shift in the postmodernist notion of multimodality. Understood as the use of several modes or media in the creation of a single artefact or event, and fuelled by the new modes of digital media, recognition of the materiality of the sign as modal affordance initially developed in the domain of social semiotics (e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; 2021) before attracting the attention of translation and comparative scholars (e.g. Gambier and Gottlieb, 2001; Elleström, 2010; 2016; Littau 2016; O’Sullivan and Jeffcote, 2013; Bennett 2019). In comparison with arts and performance research, however, translation research has tended to rely on a critical approach to contemporary socio-cultural developments, including the cultural turn in the late twentieth century (Lefevere and Bassnett, 1990; Bassnett and Lefevere, 1996), and more recently the outward turn (Bassnett and Johnston, 2019). Such culturally-aware discourse, celebrating difference and diversity and informed by theories of power including Bourdieu’s symbolic capital and Foucault’s theories of societal control nevertheless tends to adopt a principally Hegelian dialectic for its argumentation. In philosophical terms structuralist, empiricist, or hermeneutical principles upheld by Schlegel, Kant, or Schleiermacher tend to continue to value ‘thought’ (logos), embodied in words, as the unit of interpretation in a translation event (a critique partly entertained, for example, by Gentzler (2017)).

While Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy is now germane to the postmodern critical



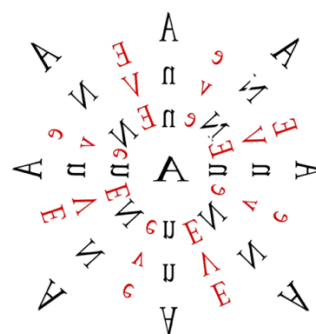
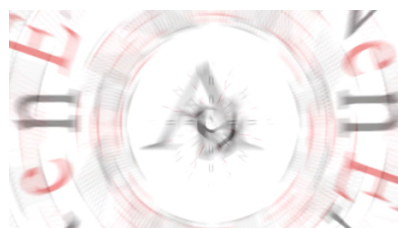
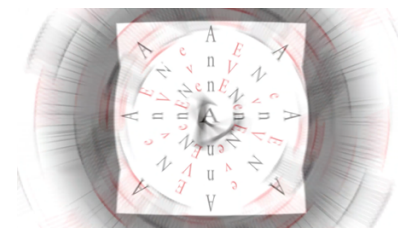
*Looking for Anna Blume, her flowers and her birds.*

*Anna Blume hat ein Vogel.*

*Anna Flor tiene pájaros.*

*Anna Bloom has an eagle – Anna Blume hat ‘nen Igel. “Igel” sounds like “eagle” but means hedgehog –look closely and you can spot a hedgehog in the collage above.*

literary apparatus, a renewed understanding of the emic, creative, multimodal and emergent nature of translation practice also requires a concomitant reappraisal of its ontological premises, one which openly favours change over essence, difference over equivalence, and movement over stasis: “vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 8). The becomings embraced by continental philosophy, adopted for example in the burgeoning field of performance philosophy (Cull, 2009, 2012; Puchner, 2013; Cull and Lagaay, 2014) and expounded in Deleuze’s 1967 “La méthode de dramatization” (On the Method of Dramatization), foster an originary approach that “traces a concept, argument, statement back to a mode of existence that produces it” (as cited in Cull, 2012). Such a philosophical perspective, subordinating meaning to mode, is arguably echoed in Berman’s ‘Translation and the Trials of the Foreign’: “labor on the letter in translation is more originary than restitution of meaning.” ([1985] 2000, p. 297). Citing Antonin Artaud in her argument for a performance philosophy of theatre, Cull noted that “Artaud presents us with the [still radical] idea that performance is its own kind of thinking that cannot be paraphrased in words” (2012). Goulish and Cull further engage with Henri Bergson’s call to rethink philosophy as an embodied perceptual practice in a “Deleuzo-Bergsonian philosophy of time — as duration, memory, the relation between past and future, and the ‘hesitation’ between them that is the present” (2009, p. 133).



### 3. Doing philosophy, doing translation

In parallel with performance philosophy’s stance toward developments in theatre, this paper argues that the experiential, durational and performative quality of intersemiotic translation practice requires a holistic reappraisal of the philosophical premises and rhetoric surrounding intersemiotic translation research. We draw on a range of creative methods to explore the practical application of philosophical debates to intersemiotic translation. These include poetry, performance and visual expression (e.g. drawing, collage, photography, film). As Truman (2016, p. 142) argues, arts-based methods stimulate a different way of knowing, asking us to think about how writing (or painting, dancing, drawing) does, rather than what it

means. With their focus on the process rather than the product, these methods offer an embodied, temporally contingent platform to conduct and present our enquiry.



*Indeed, anyone can do collage.*

Truman writes about creative writing as research-creation, but what she says about the perpetually unfinished process of writing and reading resonates with Benjamin's notion of the "Fortleben" (the "living on") of the text in translation. Quoting McCormack she points to the perpetual presence of the event(s) that gave rise to the creative text "not as image or recollection, but as kind of field of virtual potential that never quite exhausts itself in the process of becoming more than it never (actually) was. (McCormack, 2008, p.8)" (Truman 2016, p. 136). In our approach to Schwitters' "An Anna Blume", we propose to treat the poem as such a field of inexhaustible potential, where translation is situated as a continuous rewriting that is enriched by the (re)readings and (re)writings of others as well as our own.



*Choreographer Tricia Anderson performs “An Anna Blume” in the ‘field of inexhaustible potential’ – later, the performer was joined by a falcon that suddenly appeared in the sky. It will reappear below when we discuss birds in “An Anna Blume”.*

Performance philosophy stems from a critical stance towards a ‘philosophy of performance’. As Cull Ó Maoilearca argues:

...the more important and interesting work is to attempt to do performance philosophy, to produce an understanding of performance philosophy through practicing it. Indeed, as is the case in certain artistic research contexts, there may even be an impatience with the ways in which practices of ‘talking about X’ (be it artistic research or performance philosophy) can seem to take precedence over ‘actually getting on with doing X’ insofar as the latter may well prove more instructive or at least potentially less circular than the former. (2020, p. 3)

Similarly, while much has been written about translation, and much ink has been dispensed on the philosophy of translation, our intention here is to aim for a ‘translation philosophy’ commensurate with the immanence of praxis. In common with contributors to performance philosophy, the field of translation comprises academics and independent researchers, freelance translators, artists, publishers and curators, including many “who produce work that moves across disciplines or otherwise challenges conventional classification” (Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2020, p. 5). In common with performance philosophy, and informed by such an assemblage of researchers and practitioners (see for

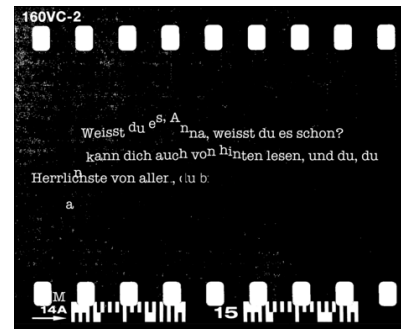


example the Experiential Translation Network)<sup>2</sup>, the present researchers are concerned with a performative model of communication (in translation) and this entails questioning “the relationships between form, content and medium with respect to philosophy, theory and thought” (6). And rather than applying philosophy to translation as an object of study, we seek to understand how translation and philosophy can inform each other on an equal basis, in pursuit of a “radical equality” of thought (Laruelle, 2012) in order to “reinvent our knowledge practices in relation to the forms of thought they tend to devalue, marginalize or exclude – including arts-based knowledge” (Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2020, p. 8).

Performance philosophy is an ongoing inquiry that seeks to understand itself in conversation with common if disparate concerns in any emergent field, including defining key terms and questioning the nature, function and forms of ‘doing philosophy’, with:

the various modalities in which ‘thought’ might be understood to take place – not only as the conscious act in the mind of an intentional human subject, but in terms of a thinking through the body or the doing-thinking of performance practice or a more impersonal idea of thought as that which produces a subject rather than being authored by a pre-existing “I”, and even possibly a nonhuman thinking of the animal or even of so-called inanimate materiality (Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2020, p. 9).

While the notion of, and contested need for, definitions (of originality, performance, translation or philosophy) is an object of inquiry in itself and beyond the scope of this paper, the praxes of theatre and translation often bear the resemblance that a pre-existing “I”, in the form of a pre-existing authored work or source text, is an existential premise, and thus in translation philosophy the question of the ‘nature, function and forms’ of ‘doing translation’ bears reframing as that of “a thinking through the body or the doing-thinking of [translation] practice or a more impersonal idea of thought as that which produces a subject rather than being authored by a pre-existing “I””. And this pre-existing “I” is equally present in the broader field of performance, which includes both product-oriented drama or theatre and process-oriented drama (Stinson and Wilson, 2011), if we take the “world as text” (Geertz, [1973] 2000) as starting point for the latter.



*Deconstructing Anna Blume*

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://experientialtranslation.net> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

Translation as performance is understood primarily in the narrower context of translating for the theatre (see, for example, Johnston 2013). Johnston's approach attends to the hermeneutic dimension or renewed signification of pre-authored scripts in contexts of the "here and now" where "the text itself is subject to processes of reading and interpretation in which the emphasis on meaning as becoming makes the translation of that text a performative constituent of the *mise-en-scène*." (2013: 366). Here Johnston interprets Benjamin's "continua of transformation" in terms of "cultural flows" propelling the source text forward through practice in the contingent present (369) where "hermeneutics [is] a structuring element of translation" (371). In doing so, Johnston elaborates the role of the translator of historically situated texts for the stage, or 'playtexts', as one of conjuring a Heideggerian sense of *dasein* or presence, abandoning the more traditional historiographic approach by adopting, for example, a contemporary vernacular, as well as drawing, along with Gumbrecht (1997), on historically accurate 'arrays', 'codes' and 'frames' to convey a present experience of past times. However, we seek to engage with temporality in a radically contingent manner to instantiate thinking through translation, or translation philosophy. As we shall explore in depth below, Anne Carson's *Antigonick / Sophokles* (2012a) is a pertinent example for the kind of translation philosophy we pursue in our striving for a *Gesamttranslation* of "An Anna Blume".

#### **4. Performing translation: Anne Carson's 'manifestations' of *Antigone***

2015 ushered in a new staging of Sophocles' *Antigone*, premiered at the Barbican in London in a translation by Anne Carson commissioned by Belgian avant-garde director Ivo van Hove with Juliette Binoche in the lead role. The Guardian's critic Charlotte Higgins describes Carson's translation as "deft and elegant", while she refers to her earlier *Antigonick* as a "more personal version" (Higgins, 2015, n.p.). The title page for the 2015 playtext staged by Ivo van Hove simply features ANTIGONE, while the hardcover reads, on three separate lines in different fonts: SOPHOKLES / ANTIGONE / TRANSLATED BY ANNE CARSON.

Noting how translation as both product and practice is "particularly revealing of the ideological constraints of theatrical humanism, its reliance on a mutually stabilizing notion of the literary, the textual, the speakable, the audible, and the performable", Hanna Worthen (2020: 243-4) analyzed the plural manifestations of *Antigone* in Carson's translations. In the context of a critical posthumanism, she argues, the double performative act of translation and adaptation for theatre "refuses to translate the text" in the reductive, domesticating sense of theatre adaptation for a target audience. Worthen characterizes Carson's successive published versions of *Antigonick*, from hardback to paperback of the 2012 and 2015 publications respectively, as an "act of unwriting":

... their meanings multiply from the ways this constellation deterritorializes the Antigones it thematically animates, to address their philosophical and cultural territorializations. An open-ended becoming, this assemblage enacts verbal and performative de-singularizations of the humanist conventions of "the book" as the signifying container of "the work" and of "the character" as the living variable of the ordained center of Being, "the human." Moving beyond

the performance of “the cultural book,” ANTIGO NICK – ANTIGONICK – antigonick – Antigone performs a rhizomatic dramaturgy. (pp. 244-245)

Not unlike Anna Blume’s centrifugal linguistic manifestations in German and in translation, its typographical instantiations spilling into image assemblages in collage and sculpture, “ANTIGO NICK – ANTIGONICK – antigonick – Antigone” performs a transformative fugue. As Worthen (2020) posits, Carson’s manifestations of *Antigone* depart from Sophocles’ original play to quarrel with both academic citation conventions and the “philosophical cultural territorializations” such conventions betray. Authorship is fragmented (Anne Carson is listed as translator and a foreignised Sophokles [sic] is also acknowledged). Books, book titles and performances proliferate: the hardback cover of the 2012 version is titled ANTIGO NICK, followed by SOPHOKLES in brackets, while its inside title page features ANTIGONICK as one word, followed by SOPHOKLES without brackets. In addition, the hardback is interleaved with velum drawings by Bianca Stone, whose lack of apparent relation to the text confounded some critics. George Steiner’s review in the Times Literary Supplement, for example, stated “‘This is not a book’....Rather...an objet trouvé...a postmodern or Dada artefact...a ‘comic-book presentation’” (2012, p. 8). Taking equal issue with the typography (the book’s designer Robert Currie “pencilled the text first, [Carson] went over it in ink” (Carson, 2012b, n.p.)), “embedding the identity of the speaker within the block” and with Stone’s drawings, whose “pertinence to the Sophoclean action, to its intricate intensity, is hard to decipher”, Steiner’s review acknowledges moments of linguistic brilliance in the works but ultimately cannot come to terms with the translator’s “populist” stance towards the complexity of Sophocles’ original tragedy (ibid, pp. 8-9). Hannah Silverblank, in contrast, interprets the text’s typographical rendering as one where “words read like monuments, ... possess a heavy presence, whereas the speakers of the words (the characters) become something...more like ghosts or memories” (2014, p. 355).

The oneiric quality of Stone’s drawings and apparent lack of connection with the storyline is deceptive: A spool of thread, which appears in several drawings, could be suggestive of Ariadne’s thread, for example, or the thread of fate, given the later appearance of what could be the three Moirai with breeze blocks for heads – (or temple columns?). Such artifacts serve to evoke an intertextuality with Greek myths that would have been present then (and arguably now) in the popular psyche, the visual medium affording both a temporal and modal porosity to the text, spilling out its contents from writer/translator to reader to viewer/audience. A multi-layered interpretation would also position this thread as *Antigone’s* way of controlling her own fate: “Your plan is to sew yourself into your own shroud using the tiniest of stitches. How to translate this?”, says Carson in ‘the task of the translator of antigone’ (Carson, 2015a, p. 5).

The thirty-two semi-transparent images in the hardback ANTIGONICK partially reveal underlying text, their individual juxtaposition clarified (and amplified) as we turn the pages and see both text and image side by side. Far from following ‘comic-book’ conventions (there are no speech or thought bubbles, and only one image per page, hence open panels), the

visual grammar of these images, rich in metonymy and metaphor, serves to bridge the said and the unspoken, and although Bianca Stone is listed as the book's 'illustrator' and Robert Currie as 'designer', their contributions would be more accurately described as that of intersemiotic translators collectively engaged in a Gesamttranslation. The design of ANTIGONICK, with the text on the right-hand page, also performs translation, where the gutter is the "channel between two languages", much as it was in Nox (2010), the structure of which Carson explained as originating:

Probably from the structure of the bilingual translation, because I spend a lot of my life looking at books with left-hand-page Greek or Latin, and right-hand-page English, and you get used to it, you get used to thinking in the little channel in between the two languages where the perfect language exists. (2014, n.p.)

In contrast with Steiner, Rebecca Bates in *Guernica* (2012) sees the drawings and text as integral to the modern-day telling of this tragedy: "While the poet and her illustrator stray from the expected narrative, the tragedy of the work isn't lost on anyone... It's hard not to shudder." Bates' embodied 'shudder' aptly evokes how the affective affordances of Carson-Stone-Currie's 'not book' have transformed and transported (translated) Sophocles' tragedy across time and space. Silverblank interprets the visual and textual interplay as a "spectral reading of the body" (2014, p. 4), where "the words are endowed with solidity and the bodies instead float around them, bolting away from them, like shape-shifting spectres" (p. 347).

The paperback published by Oberon (2015b), which refers to itself as "First published clothbound by New Directions in 2012", differs from the hardback in that this edition is paginated, and lacks Stone's drawings. Nevertheless, its cover page also features ANTIGO NICK, followed by (SOPHOKLES), while the title page simply features *antigonick* in lower case. A second title page features *antigonick* followed by (*sophocles*), both in lower case, and a third title page again features *antigonick* in lower case. Aside from the many transformations of *Antigonick's* title through its different editions, there has been much speculation about the meaning and import of the elusive NICK, who turns out to be a character in the play who says nothing but is introduced as "[always on stage, he measures things]" and remains unseen until the last page where "[exeunt omnes except Nick who continues measuring]" (2015a, pp. 5, 44).

Some have speculated on Nick's presence in the title as an act of public mourning for Carson's late brother (see Worthen 2020, p. 246, for example). According to Worthen's interpretation, Carson merges the personal story of the translator and poet with Antigone's loss. Other interpretations place the significance of Nick as a metaphor of time, or the groove occupied by Antigone as an 'inbetween thing': "for I'm a strange kind of inbetween thing aren't I/not at home with the dead nor with the living" (2015a, p. 30). The opaqueness of the title ANTIGO NICK, of its split/merged instantiations, invites the reader/viewer to participate in a multimodal thinking through Carson's translation, through both the gap and the merging of words, and leaves its interpretation open, as unfathomable, perhaps as death and time. From its first instantiation, then, "ANTIGO NICK – ANTIGONICK – *antigonick* – Antigone"

enters into dialogue with its readers and audience, posing ontological and epistemological questions through the sometimes personal and always visible intervention of its translator(s). We posit that such visibility is fundamental to a collective act of thinking through translation that involves not only the ‘translator’ but the reader/viewer in the performance of a Gesamttranslation.

The print versions of *Antigonick* were followed by live reading/performances, including one with Carson as chorus, another with Judith Butler as Kreon<sup>3 4</sup> Together with the series of “not-quite-edition[s]” reviewed above, argues Worthen (2020, p. 48), the performance also repositions theatre, where the poet reads while Nielsen, the actor in the role of King Kreon at the Louisiana Theatre Festival, for example, tends toward enacting the character, resulting in a hybrid performance that resists reduction to the poem, poet or theatrical actor, but where the poetry reading emphasizes both “the material presence of the poem, and of the performer” (Berstein, as cited in Worthen 2020, p. 249). We aim for a similar blend of reading and embodied, emic materialities (through dance, collage, gesture and voice) to be manifest in the collective act of translating the poem “An Anna Blume”.

In the spirit of engaging with the contingent, our proposed approach, like Carson’s, also aims to challenge historicity. Carson’s intertextual assemblage engages, in both the translations and the preface to the (2015) paperback version of *Antigonick* in ‘the task of the translator of antigone’, with its prior translators as well as prior critical and creative interpretations, from Berthold Brecht to Jean Anouilh, Judith Butler to Ingeborg Bachman, Samuel Beckett to Virginia Woolf. Ben Hjorth (2014, p. 135), noting *Antigonick*’s proleptic dialogue with future interlocutors and detractors, highlights how she defies Hegel’s reading of her character as “lacking in self-consciousness” with her statement “Hegel says I’m wrong” (n.p.). Carson’s engagement with sources that post-date Sophocles’ ‘original’ text, argues Hjorth, “traverses and problematizes chronological temporality itself” (2014, p. 135). This act of resistance toward the Hegelian narrative, like the transgressive refusal to allow the series “ANTIGO NICK – ANTIGONICK – antigonick – Antigone” to be categorically attributed and hence cited by the critical academic apparatus (as noted by Worthen, 2020), enacts a transformative translation philosophy. Hjorth’s (2014) reading posits Carson’s thinking through translation in *Antigonick* as twofold: it is both dialectical (for example in its quarrel with Hegel) and ontological. Ontologically, it “brings the temporality of [translation] practice into direct interrogation, in both its form and its content,” challenging the originary authority of the source text but also “the ideal of translation itself, whose conceptual structure is thus displayed in all its moral, political and philosophical significance” (Hjorth, 2014, pp. 134-135).

---

<sup>3</sup> “Anne Carson: Performing *Antigonick*”, YouTube video, 45:27, from a performance recorded at the Louisiana Literature Festival on August 25, 2012, posted by the Louisiana Channel (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art) on 3 February 2013, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEfJKjOg3ZU> (as cited in Worthen, 2020, p. 280) (Accessed 11 July 2023).

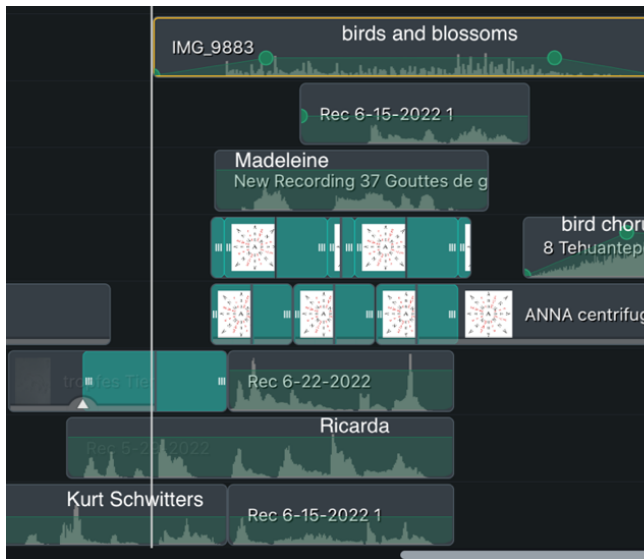
<sup>4</sup> Public reading of *Antigonick* by Anne Carson at Sorbonne University, featuring Judith Butler as Kreon, YouTube video, TPP2014, 1:11:00, curated by Ben Hjorth, 4 September 2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ygeQDu-4EU>. (Accessed 11 July 2023).

Rejecting a conservative philosophy of translation that invests the original with authority and aspires to the faithful through the literal (Lecerclé, as cited in Hjorth, 2014), Carson considers her work a translation and not a ‘re-write’: “a play is (note etymology of ‘drama’ from Greek DRAN to do or act) a collection of actions or doings.” (Carson, 2012b, n.p.).

The temporal paradox of mentioning Hegel on the first page of *Antigonick*, explains Carson, is in keeping with “what happens in the original text”, when Sophocles reminds his audience of the story of Antigone (ibid). Carson’s praxis here is to think through translation, with a lucid orientation towards the drama, not the said, in the ‘original text’. And while the ‘said’ may tend towards signification and invite a hermeneutic approach, the ‘doings’ invite an experiential one, which must engage with the past through the present time and place: “for us, in 2012, the Antigone legend includes Hegel” (ibid). This reading of the past, argues Hjorth after Benjamin’s Theses on the Philosophy of History, acknowledges “its constant return and transformation within the present” (p. 138). And this present in *Antigonick* draws on both personal (in Worthen’s, 2020, reading of her mourning of her own brother) and collective experience in its intertextuality with interlocutors and events (such as WWII) unknown in Sophocles’ time but which are of a piece with contemporary collective memory. In this way the ‘doings’ of tragedy, the necessary “temporal disjunction” (Butler and Crichtley as cited in Hjorth, 2014, p. 138), without which the human psyche could not withstand the horror of the story told, makes the distant past closer, introducing a lens through which to filter the horror of the present. Carson’s *Antigonick*, argues Hjorth, offers a powerful philosophical reflection on temporality through “translation-transformation, reminding us that the past is never truly past” (p. 139).

### **5. A multiplicity of voices: translation as dialogue**

Another instantiation of thinking through translation can be found in performance translation where the starting point was not originally written for the stage, at least not in the conventional sense of a playtext. In her article “Performing Translation” Sandra Bermann references the “play of voices in the translator’s mind” (2014, p. 290) as she prepares to translate a text, “the ‘voice’ of the author, the sounds of the text in her own mind” as well as the sounds of previous translations. This certainly resonates with Carson’s explanations regarding the inclusion of Hegel and references to other more contemporary elements in her translation. While Carson distances herself from the term “re-writing”, Bermann embraces it as a natural aspect of translation when she notes “what we might call a translation history [...] is never a linear continuity but rather a re-writing across chasms of time, in dialogue with others.” (p. 295).



*Audio-collage of voices – our encounter with Schwitters to the background sound of the birds of Tehuantepec and Whitstable was enabled by modern technology: youtube sound sharing, phone recordings and video editing platforms... How would Schwitters have worked with the possibilities open to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century collagist?*

Translation has been theorised as a form of dialogue before (Benjamin, 1923, or also Torop, 2008), but for Bermann the dialogic character of translation is central to her approach of translation as performance. Performance is here understood in the sense of the doing or completion of a task, i.e. the translator undertaking the translation, as well as, and perhaps above all, in the sense of acting, i.e. a “kind of interpretive performance, bearing the same relationship to the original text as the actor’s work does to the script.” (Grossman, quoted in Bermann, 2014, p. 285) Just like the actor, the translator

has the agency to interpret, to inject their own reading and make the script/the text come to life for their audience. And just as an actor does not work in a vacuum, so the translator, too, can situate their performance of the text in relation to previous and future readings. By doing so, as Bermann shows with reference to Caroline Bergvall’s *Via* (2004), the act of translation questions the dominance of the original, of convention, of established hierarchies, of the self.

Bergvall’s poem *Via* bears the subtitle “(48 Dante Variations)” and consists of 47 translations of the first 3 lines of Dante’s *Inferno* into English plus a composition by Ciaran Maher. The translations are in the alphabetical order of their first lines rather than in chronological order. The poem is available both in print and as a sound performance in which Bergvall reads out all the translations including the translators’ surnames and date of publication, with short pauses between each over the stretch of 10 minutes. Listening to the performance is a mesmerising experience of

*Identifying Anna Blume’s bird: The following is a visual translation of the line “Anna Blume hat ein Vogel” – literally: Anna Blume has a bird, but idiomatically “Anna Blume is mad”. The line is followed by a set of questions culminating in the “prize question” “What colour is the bird?”. For us, this also became a search for the nature of the bird.*



repetition, echo and variation. The longer one listens the wider the possibilities of interpretation and reading become. In the process, Dante's original text loses its authority and eventually becomes another version.

While Bergvall has not attempted a literary translation of the tercet herself, her performance of the 47 versions can be understood as an experiential translation of Dante's work, of the history of its translations and, by implication, of Western literary tradition. Given the dominance of white male authors in the Western literary canon as well as the dominance of male translators of said canon, Bermann sees Bergvall's intervention as essentially feminist. Her female voice as well as her anti-chronological ordering break with established conventions and open up each version (including Dante's own) to a myriad of interpretations. As such, *Via* also functions as a translation of the act of translation itself.

In her reading of *Via*, Bermann refers to Barbara Godard's notion of "transformance", an amalgam of performance, translation and transformation, which sees the translator as "an active participant in the creation of meaning, who advances a conditional analysis" (Godard 1989, p. 50, quoted in Bermann, 2014, p. 292). In other words, the translator puts herself and her work firmly in the picture, or, in Bergvall's case, on record. By doing so, she busts the myth of the invisible, uninvolved translator. As Hjorth (2014, p. 138) remarks in defence of the 21st-century contemporality of Carson's *Antigonick*: "The translator cannot disappear. Access to the original can never be direct, unmediated or complete, because the translator's presence, and thus the trace of the present, are ineradicable".

## 6. The Visible, 'inaugural' act of translation

Of course, as Jen Calleja writes, it is not helpful to a literary translator's career to be too overtly present in their translations, but works like Bergvall's, Carson's or indeed Calleja's own experiments with intersemiotic translation (e.g. her feminist translations of Christian



Marclay's photobook *The Clock*, 2019), as well as a focus on translator (instead of translation) studies, all raise the awareness of "what's going on in translation" (Calleja, 2019, p. 368). Making the act of translation visible through a focus on the performance of translation, is an essentially political endeavour, which denies the existence of a neutral translator and exposes the power structures and ideologies within translation. As Calleja writes "[w]ho the translator is matters." (2019, p. 367) And it matters what cultural and social circumstances they find themselves in. It matters how they read and for whom they perform.

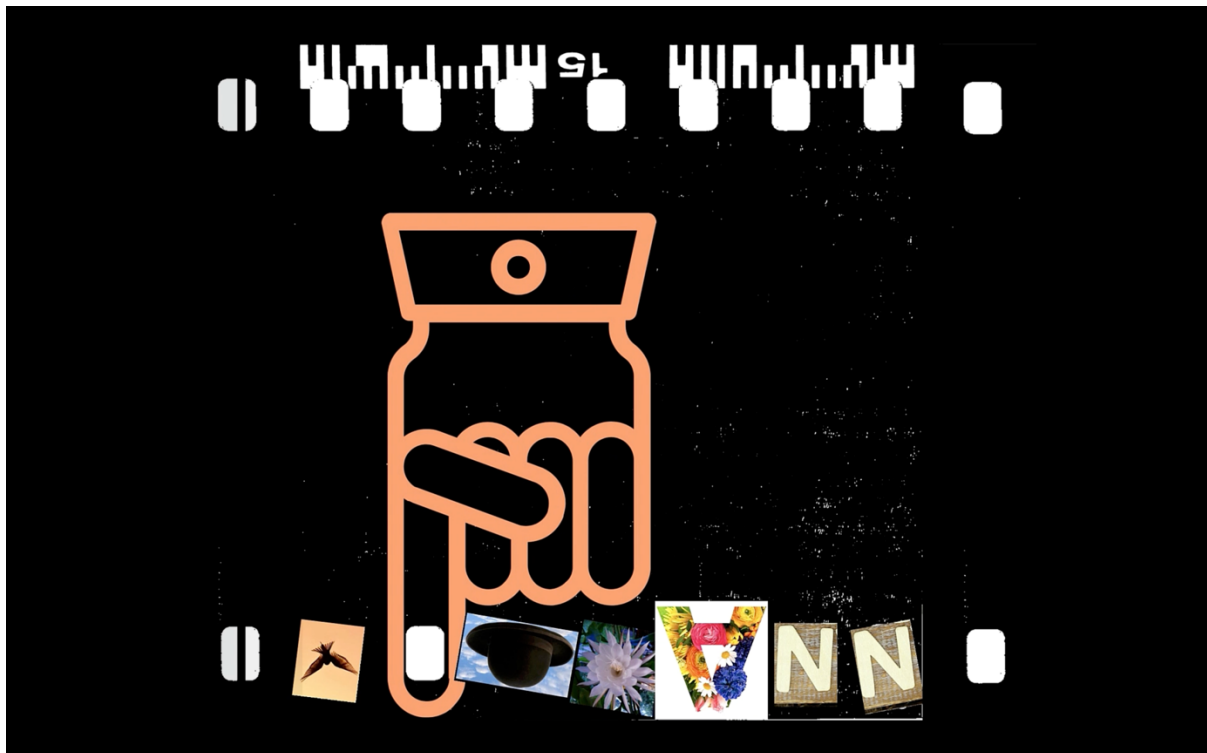
Let's return to Grossman's comparison of the act of translation with the actor's performance of a script. While the actor has the agency to interpret, they are also restrained by the limits of the script and influenced by the actors that have interpreted the script before. Acting is informed by repetition and citation and Bermann makes a similar argument for translation, which she supports with reference to Austin's concept of performative language, Derrida's thoughts on performativity and Butler's notion of gender performance. With recourse to Derrida (1991) she asserts the inaugural power of literature to do something in and to the world by using the citationality of language. She writes:

Just as all literary writing entails an ongoing iterability, along with an array of intertexts and conventions, so does the language of translation. But translation adds to this its reference to a particular prior text. By bringing within its scope the "other text" with its clearly different language(s), conventions and historical context, translation dramatizes the encounter with alterity that exists to a more limited extent in every instance of language use. Moreover, it prompts that frequent reference to the play of voices in the translator's mind [...] At the same time translation's scene-stealing encounter with otherness generates linguistic innovation. (Bermann, 2014, p. 289-290)



*Eventually we suggest that the bird must be a tit:*





*In performing our translation of ‘An Anna Blume’, our encounter with the line “Anna Blume hat ein Vogel” led us to riff on this verse with homophonic intermodal and translanguag play, translating the German verb ‘hat’ or ‘has’ in English, to an image of the English word ‘hat’. Using the image of a bird for the German word Vogel, led us in this instance to settle on the image of a falcon – and then we extended the notion of the palindrome A-N-N-A, to voicing whole words backwards, rather than individual letters, which led to entirely new sentences:*

- *Falconer had blooming ANN-...*
- *Vögelein hat Blume, ANN-...*

Invoking translation’s capacity to “generate linguistic innovation” (Bermann, 2014, pp. 289-290) picks up the argument brought forward by Antoine Berman in his seminal “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” ([1985] 2000). Berman suggested that translation needs to create a new language forged by the collision of the source and target languages which would result in a foreignizing of the target language rather than a “naturalisation” of the foreign text in the new language ([1985] 2000, p. 241). Where Berman focuses on literary translation, Sandra Bermann widens the scope to think about the place of translation in society at large, when she calls for a new politics of translation built around ‘foreignizing strategies’. With reference to Butler’s concept of gender performativity she suggests that translation “can enact a [...] theatrical repetition and questioning of social and historical norms. Using the citational potential of its mode, it can exaggerate, highlight, displace, and queer normative expectations across genders and cultures as well as languages” (Bermann, 2014, p. 292).

## 7. Conclusion: centrifugally projecting Anna Blume into the future

At its best, the language of translation is an in-between language, one that undermines and breaks conventions and eschews ownership of a single group. And in the case of the type of translation practiced by Bergvall or Carson or that referred to by Calleja, it is a language which consciously embraces its multimodal and multisensory qualities. Here we can return to Scott's translation as centrifugal practice, which we quoted at the outset and where Scott advocates the creation of "an eco-centric translational language, a language ideophonically alive, looking to express a multisensory engagement with its environment of reception" which is written "both from the source language, and the target language" (2010, p. 159). As an eco-centric language that is sensitive to its surroundings, it needs to be a language in constant flux that adapts to changing circumstances and underlines what we established earlier, namely that translation is an on-going process that is open to interpretation and change and is never finished.

So in our translations of "An Anna Blume" we are aware that we are merely contributing to something that is on-going and growing as long as there is a reader with an interest in the poem. We aim for our translations not only to produce an "echo of the original" as suggested by Benjamin ([1923] 2000) – because, what is the original in the case of "An Anna Blume", or, in fact, any other piece of writing? – but we want them to echo with the voices of the readers that have gone before us and are coming after us, we want ideally to produce translations that contribute to the resonance of Anna Blume, that swells and ebbs and flows and reverberates in perpetuum. We set out to think through translations which not only perform but also invite ontological and epistemological dialogue on a multisensorial level. Hence, inspired by the work of Carson, Bergvall, Calleja and others, we translate performatively and across media, using collage techniques like Schwitters, but with the modern-day affordances of Photoshop and 21st-century video and sound recording technologies.

We conclude with a link to a Padlet which charts our collected translations of "An Anna Blume" to date and continues to grow as we add to the always unfinished translatorial projection of Schwitters' poem into the future, available at: [https://kings.padlet.org/ricardavidal/knowing\\_an\\_anna\\_blume\\_Gesamttranslation](https://kings.padlet.org/ricardavidal/knowing_an_anna_blume_Gesamttranslation) (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

hallo, ur blush red dress, criss-  
crossed in white, / blushing I <3  
Anna Blume, blush <3 I 2u/u, ur,  
u 2 u, I 2 u, u, 2 moi, — — — —,  
we?

ncidentally it's a fit w/ cold  
incandescent! /Anna Blume,  
Anna Blume blush, how do ppl  
say?

Preis pregunta:

1. Anna Blume hat loco
2. Anna Blume ist blush
3. wha color hat loco?

blau ist da colour of ur yellow  
coiffe/blush ist da colour of yr  
green loco.

*This multilingual, internet slang  
translation of 'An Anna Blume'  
illustrates an eco-centric mode  
of thinking through 21st century  
digital materialism.*

While the Padlet can be seen as a Gesamttranslation in its own right, it also contains a recording of an improvised performance, titled “Gesamttranslation 1”, which was devised in collaboration with participants (artists, translators, students) of the one-hour ‘Knowing An Anna Blume’ Workshop we led during the conference ‘Performative and Experiential Translation’ at King’s College London in July 2022: After sharing examples of prior versions of Schwitters’ poem, the workshop aimed to develop multilingual and/or multimodal versions of “An Anna Blume”, including but not restricted to dialogic poems, which trace participants’ individual readings and associations, collages, drawings, and performative pieces (gesture, sound, spoken word). “Gesamttranslation 1” was performed by volunteer participants (including the audience) in the Inigo Rooms, Somerset House, on the final day of the conference. Since then, new translations have been added, namely collages and a performance by a group of Polish students who took part in an “Anna Blume” workshop in April 2023. By the time you will read this article, the Padlet may well have grown further.

## REFERENCES

- Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (1996) *Constructing Cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bassnett, S. and Johnston, D. (2019) ‘The Outward Turn in Translation Studies’, *Translator*, 25(3), pp. 181–188.
- Bates, R. (2012) ‘Anne Carson’s Collapse of History’, *Guernica* [online]. Available at: <https://www.guernicamag.com/rebecca-bates-anne-carsons-collapse-of-history/> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Benjamin, W., Scholem, G. and Adorno, T. (1994) *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Benjamin, W. ([1923] 2000) ‘The Task of the Translator’, translated by S. Rendall, in Venutti, L. (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Routledge, pp. 75-83.
- Bennett, K. (2019) ‘The New Iconicity: Challenges for Translation Theory and Practice’, *Translation Matters*, 1(2), pp. 1–8.
- Bergvall, C. (2004) *Via (48 Variations of Dante)* [online]. Available at: <https://carolinebergvall.com/work/via-48-dante-variations/> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Berman, A. ([1985] 2000) ‘Translation and the Trials of the Foreign’, translated by L. Venutti, in Venutti, L. (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Routledge, pp. 240-253.
- Bermann, S. (2014) ‘Performing Translation’ in Bermann S. and Porter, C. (eds.) *A Companion to Translation Studies*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Calleja, J. (2019) ‘Life’s too short: on translating Christian Marclay’s photo-book *The Clock*’ in Campbell M. and Vidal R. (eds.) *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys Between Media*. Palgrave, pp. 353-370.
- Carson, A. (2010) *Nox*. New York: New Directions.
- Carson, A. (2012a) *Antigonick (Sophokles)*, translated by A. Carson, illustrated by B. Stone. New York: New Directions.
- Carson, A. (2012b) ‘Interview by Alex Dueben’, *Suicide Girls* [online]. Available at: <https://www.suicidegirls.com/girls/sash/blog/2680448/anne-carson-antigonick/> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Carson, A. (2014) ‘Interview by Eleanor Wachtel’, *Brick*, (89) [online]. Available at: <https://brickmag.com/an-interview-with-anne-carson/> (Accessed: 11 July 2023)
- Carson, A. (2015a) *Antigonick (Sophokles)*, translated by . A. Carson. New York: New Directions.
- Carson, A. (2015b) *Sophokles Antigone*, translated by A. Carson. London: Oberon Books.

- Collins, C. (2016/17) “‘Anna Blume hat ein Vogel’: Madness and Identity Politics in “An Anna Blume””, *The Journal of the Kurt Schwitters Society*, 6, pp. 14-24 [online]. Available at: [https://colescollins.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/cole-collins\\_anna-blume-hat-ein-vogel\\_ksuk-2018-2.pdf](https://colescollins.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/cole-collins_anna-blume-hat-ein-vogel_ksuk-2018-2.pdf) (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Cull, L. and Buchanan, I. (eds.) (2009) *Deleuze and Performance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Cull, L. (2012) *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance*. Springer Link [online]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137291912> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Cull, L. (2013) ‘Philosophy as Drama: Deleuze and Dramatization in the Context of Performance Philosophy’, *Modern Drama*, 56(4), pp. 498–520.
- Cull, L. and Lagaay, A. (eds.) (2014) *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cull Ó Maoilearca, L. (2020) ‘Performance Philosophy: an introduction’, *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença*, (10)1 [online]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2237-266092544> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Deleuze, G. (1967) ‘La Méthode de Dramatisation’, *Société Française de Philosophie*, 61(3), pp. 89.
- Deleuze, G. ([1968] 1994) *Difference and Repetition*, translated by P. Patton. London: Athlone Press.
- Elleström, L. (2010) ‘The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations’ in Elleström, L. (ed.) *Media Border, Multimodality and Intermediality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 11–48.
- Elleström, L. (2016) ‘Visual Iconicity in Poetry: Replacing the Notion of “Visual Poetry”’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 71(6), pp. 437–472.
- Gambier, Y. and Gottlieb, H. (2001) *(Multi) Media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Geertz, C. ([1973] 2000) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gentzler, E. (2017) *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Goulish, M. and Cull, L. (2009) ‘Sub Specie Durationis’ in Cull, L. and Buchanan, I. (eds.) *Deleuze and Performance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. (1997) *In 1926. Living at the Edge of Time*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Higgins, C. (2015) ‘Death Becomes Her: How Juliette Binoche and Ivo van Hove Remade Antigone’, *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/feb/18/juliette-binoche-ivo-van-hove-antigone> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Hjorth, B. (2014) ‘We’re Standing in/the Nick of Time’, *Performance Research*, 19(3), pp. 135-139 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2014.935178> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Jakobson, R. ([1959] 2000) ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’ translated by L. Venuti, in L. Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 113–118.
- Johnston, D. (2013) ‘Professing Translation: The Acts-in-Between’, *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies*, 25(3), pp. 365–384.
- Kress, G. R. and van Leeuwen, T. (2021) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kress, G. R. and van Leeuwen, T. (1996) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Laruelle, F. (2012) “‘I, The Philosopher, Am Lying’: Reply to Deleuze’ in Alkon, G. and Gunjevic, B. (eds.) *The Non-Philosophy Project: Essays by François Laruelle*. New York: Telos Press Publishing, pp. 40-73.
- Lefevere, A. and Bassnett, S. (1990) ‘Introduction. Proust’s Grandmother And The Thousand And One Nights. The “Cultural Turn” in Translation Studies’ in Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (eds.) *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Pinter, pp. 1-13.

- Campbell, M. and Vidal, R. – On Performing Philosophy through Translation  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 9-28, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a1](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a1)
- Littau, K. (2016) 'Translation and the Materialities of Communication.', *Translation Studies*, 9(1), pp. 82–96.
- Luke, M. R. (2014) *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- O'Sullivan, C. and Jeffcote, C. (eds.) (2013) 'Translating Multimodalities', *Special Issue of JoSTrans – The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 20.
- Puchner, M. (2013) 'Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy', *Modern Drama*, 56(4), pp. 540-553.
- Schwitters, K.(2002) 'pppppp. Poems Performance Pieces Proses Plays Poetics' translated by J. Rothenberg and P. Joris (eds.). Philadelphia. Temple University Press.
- Scott, C. (2010) 'Intermediality and Synesthesia: Literary Translation as Centrifugal Practice', *Art in Translation*, 2(2), pp. 153–170 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2752/175613110X12706508989415> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).
- Silverblank, H. (2014) 'Spectral Presences and Absences In Anne Carson's *Antigonick*', *Logeion: Periodiko gia to Archaio Theatro*, 4, pp. 343–363.
- Steiner, G. (2012) 'Marrow Versus Marrow', *Times Literary Supplement*, pp. 8-9.
- Stinson, M. and Winston, J. (2011) 'Drama Education and Second Language Learning: A Growing Field of Practice And Research', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(4), pp. 479-488.
- Torop, P. (2008) 'Translation as Communication and Auto-Communication', *Sign System Studies*, 36(2), pp. 375-397.
- Truman, S. E. (2016) 'Becoming More Than It Never Actually Was: Expressive Writing as Research-Creation', *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 13(2), pp. 136-143.
- Worthen, H. (2020) 'Disassembling Performance' in Worthen, H. (ed.) *Humanism, Drama, and Performance*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 243-291.

**Picture credits:** All images were created by Ricarda Vidal and Madeleine Campbell, with the exception of the photograph of the marsh tit, which was taken by Steffen Hannert - Vogelruf.de, BirdGallery. Available at: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumpfmehse#/media/Datei:Sumpfmehse1.jpg> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

**Funding:** This work was supported in part by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council: grant number AH/V008234/1.

#### **About the authors:**

Madeleine Campbell teaches at Edinburgh University and investigates arts-informed language education, experiential translation and creativity. Her book *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders* (2019), co-edited with Ricarda Vidal, challenges traditional notions of literary translation through the embodied perspective of practitioners working across media. She is Co-Investigator of the AHRC-funded Experiential Translation Network.

Ricarda Vidal is Senior Lecturer at King's College London and Principal Investigator of the AHRC-funded Experiential Translation Network. As researcher, text-maker and curator, she explores the multimodal aspects of communication across perceived cultural and/or linguistic divides. Recent publications include *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders* (2019), *Home on the Move* (2019) and the bookwork series *Revolve:R* (2011-2023).

## LIVESTREAMING ISLAMIC ARTS: DIGITIZATION AS TRANSLATION IN SHI'Ī DEPICTIONS OF KARBALA

Rhys Sparey\*  
King's College London

**ABSTRACT:** At the Battle of Karbala (680 CE), the Umayyad Caliph ordered the deaths of the Prophet's descendants who Shi'ī Muslims believe should inherit leadership of Islam. This article explores the digitization of their commemoration, which has always been transmedial. It analyses livestreams of commemorative recitation to consider incorporation of digital technologies into commemorative arts as embodied translation through which symbolic materiality allows a cultural memory of Karbala to resonate with Shi'ās. It argues, following McLuhan (1964), that technologies are 'ways of translating' the significance of compresent traditions. This article contravenes McLuhan, however, insofar as he finds the electric to 'exceed ourselves' by translating 'our entire lives into the spiritual form of information'. In contrast, this article stresses intimacy and materiality, in which vein it demonstrates that affordances exist in relation to their environment and cultural contingency. Given the prevalence of contrary claims, it highlights the enduring value of ontological pluralism.

**KEYWORDS:** Battle of Karbala, COVID-19 Pandemic, Cultural Memory, Digital Art, Digital Religion, Experiential Translation, Individuation, Islamic Art, Shi'ī Islam, Transmediality.

### 1. Introduction

Out of the martyrdom of those of the *ahl al-bayt* ('family of the house' of the Prophet Muḥammad)<sup>1</sup> and their companions who were killed at the Battle of Karbala (61 AH/680 CE), which took place in a part of the Umayyad Caliphate since incorporated into Iraq, emerged an efflorescence of commemorative arts:<sup>2</sup> chants, dances, immersive artificial intelligence-generated experiences, paintings, poems, stories, talent contests, theatrical performances, videos, and more.<sup>3</sup> These commemorations are embedded in 'the *imām* principle of divinely ordained religious leadership vested in [Imam] 'Alī [bin Abī Ṭālib (c. 23 BH-40 AH/600-661 CE. Henceforth: 'Alī)], fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet' who Shi'ās believe should have inherited leadership of the Ummah (global Muslim community) instead of the first caliph, 'Abū Bakr 'Abdullah 'ibn Uthmān (50 BH-13 AH/573-634 CE) (Qureshi, 1981, p. 43). The interrelatedness of these commemorations surfaces in the *majālis* ('gatherings', sing. *majlis*) of the Imam Husain Islamic Centre (IHIC) in Earlwood, Australia. Its meetings comprise readings of the Holy Qur'an, *khiṭābat* ('oratory', a lecture or sermon), and recitations of poems recalling the Karbala narrative.

IHIC has provided the 'educational, welfare, and religious needs' of local Shi'ās since 1997 but began livestreaming *majālis* in 2009 on Facebook (*Our Objectives*). When the COVID-19 pandemic precluded attendance at *ḥusayniyāt* (spaces dedicated to

---

\* rhys.sparey@kcl.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> Not all *majālis* mourn the Martyrs of Karbala, but this article is concerned with those that do.

<sup>2</sup> 'Arts' here is a term meant to convey the 'transmediality' of the commemorations (see Konzack, 2018) and not their 'aesthetics', whether understood as 'the quest for beauty' (Stokes, 2016, p.41) or as a more 'semiotically oriented aesthetic theory' (Innis, 1985, p. ix).

<sup>3</sup> Transliterations convey Arabic unless otherwise stated.

commemorating the Martyrs of Karbala. Sing.: *ḥusayniyya*), so grew their popularity. Livestreams were not IHIC's first encounter with digitality. Photographs show microphones and speakers amplifying elegists' recitations alongside projected orations (Figure 1). This timeline reveals an important point regarding IHIC's decision to livestream its ceremonies: this was not a decision to digitize its poetic recitation ceremonies, but to expand and enhance access to the already-digital.



Figure 1. Microphones and speakers amplifying elegists' recitations alongside projected orations (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

In this article, I develop the primary argument that livestreaming what was once a non-livestreamed practice is not a process of digitization, but of translation. This process is attached to chronology insofar as it belongs to a tradition rooted in seventh century Karbala when the Shi'i leader of the time and 'Ali's son, Imam Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn (4-61 AH/626-680 CE. Henceforth: Ḥusayn), was killed. However, commemorations of Ḥusayn have been transmedial since his death. It is therefore unproductive to ask how these commemorations traverse media because the question does not apply.<sup>4</sup> I ask instead how they recalibrate to new technological affordances. Like DeNora, I 'borrow the concept of affordance from perceptual psychology', as developed by Gibson, 'where it refers to "what things furnish"'; their 'potential as an organizing medium, as something that helps to structure such things as styles of consciousness... or modes of embodiment' (in Born, 2005, p. 13, emphasis in original). I hereby formulate the secondary argument that there is little

---

<sup>4</sup> Conceptualizing transmediality is therefore equally redundant, but Konzack's chapter points out that, 'if we choose to perceive mediality as the materiality of media, then transmediality becomes a discussion of what happens when a... product is adapted to another... platform, and how this content becomes changed by the [material affordances of the new] medi[um]' (2018).

phenomenologically distinct about digitality in the context of commemorating the Martyrs of Karbala.<sup>5</sup> Exaggerating digitality’s particularity heralds idealist conclusions that deny a pillar of Shi’i Islam: ‘Shi’i Muslims do not just “believe” in the imams from a distance but... sense them in ways that challenge modernist sensory modes’ (Williamson Fa, 2022, p. 627).<sup>6</sup> Thus, if the *ahl al-bayt* are not ‘virtual’, ‘illusory’, or ‘simulated’, nor are their digitally mediated interlocutors (Born 2005, p. 26, p. 29).<sup>7</sup> As Ruffle observes:

The [Shi’i] religious sensorium [is] a symbolically rich socio-religious space where ritual practitioners engage with material objects and the body to produce sense-inflicted cultural memory of Karbala, the Imams and the *ahl-e bayt*” (Urdu form of *ahl al-bayt*, 2021b, p. 282).

Here, Ruffle describes how something ‘explicitly material is “stored away in symbolic forms that... may be transferred from one generation to another”’ (in 2021b, p. 271. See also Schubel, 1991). Therefore, I posit the final tertiary argument that incorporating digital technologies into pre-digital practices, whether through digital amplification or television, is not so substantial a qualitative difference to be worth expressing as digitization. Rather, the lessons imparted by the Martyrs of Karbala are transferred from one ‘milieu’ of symbolic forms to another (Simondon, [2005] 2020, pp. 15-16). They are *translated*, because ‘terms of reference’ within each milieu culminate in a ‘resonant and spiritually meaningful’ language (Ruffle, 2021a, p. 3. See also Eisenlohr, 2022). Readers should consider Simondon’s metaphor of tropism in his explanation of a theory of individuation when reviewing my attempt to portray how the semiotics of its case study’s translation naturally recalibrates to the affordances of digitality in such a way as resembles how plants orient themselves to their natural environment, negotiating minimum resistance and maximum reward. Respectively, the natural environment and hardware-facilitating digital affordances constitutes ‘the framework in which the genesis unfurls’ (Simondon, [2005] 2020, pp. 15-16).

## 2. The Digital Milieu

In Shi’i mourning processions in Mumbai, India, Eisenlohr observes an intercorporeally produced claim to space—produced *between bodies*—that he calls ‘atmospheric citizenship’. In this observation, sounds proceed from ‘persons, objects, or their constellation in events’ and act upon other agents in this ‘urban atmosphere’ who respond by chanting, crying, beating their chests, and hitting drums (2021, p. 371). Yet the *majlis*

---

<sup>5</sup> I mobilize phenomenology to focus on the materiality of experience, encompassing not only affect, but ‘distinct, material entities that bodies... intermingle with’ (Eisenlohr, 2021, p. 371).

<sup>6</sup> Idealism is meant here in the Platonic sense whereby physical Forms merely imitate their non-physical essence. Both subjective and objective idealisms which have emerged from Plato’s theory of Forms submit somehow that the physical character of a Form—its objective materiality—is either inaccessible or not fully accessible to the subjective faculties of human perception. Ibn Sīnā’s thought experiment, *yahwā in an-nafs* (usually titled ‘the flying man’ in English), exemplifies a Muslim viewpoint in which limited or subjective sensory input does not preclude the materiality of the sensed thing.

<sup>7</sup> Born elsewhere recognizes digitality’s ‘material characteristics’ (2022, p. 11).

comprising the corpora constituting the urban atmosphere is established through ‘emotional texture’ (Wolf, 2000, p. 84), which Binder describes as follows:

The production of grief for the martyrs pivots on its juxtaposition with pride in Abbas’ battle heroics, ... pity for Ali Asghar’s helplessness, ... reverence for... Fatima Kubra’s spousal love, ... awe for Zaynab’s courage, ... fortitude in imagining Hurr’s eleventh-hour change of heart, or contrition for one’s own shortcomings in light of all this (2021, p. 286).

This emotionality is ‘encoded’ (sensu Hall [1980] 2005) in the material forms which transfer the cultural memory of Shi’i Islam through time and space. By narrating a cultural history of the becoming-livestreamed of the *majālis* of IHIC, I demonstrate how worshippers translate the means of producing their religious sensoria from one symbolic milieu to another. In other words, Shi’as translate the events of seventh-century Iraq to a milieu more contemporaneous with their experiences. It follows that commemorations of the Martyrs of Karbala individuated within/against a digital milieu propagate ‘digital atmospheres’ (Sparey, in press). Digital atmospheres do not ‘sustain the expectations of a spatially proximate ritual’ but remain ‘functionally intercorporeal’. That is, bodies come together according to ‘the material preconditions of a shared activity’ (Sparey, 2022, p. 284). Hence, it resonates with Campbell and Vidal’s ‘approach to translation which is centered on the translator-practitioner-participant’s embodied experience’ (2019, p. 6). Digitality is necessarily built on binary code. However, this code is not abstract, as it originates in and suits the material potentials and constraints of hardware and perceptive bodies, the former through which digital affordances are accessed and the latter within which the effects of utilizing those affordances are experienced. In this article, the digital milieu involves interlocution of human actors feeling each other through embodied expressions of, and reactions to, the emotions unfurled within it.

This observation of worshippers engaged in digital commemorations of the Martyrs of Karbala challenges post-humanist constructions of the digital subject. These constructions emphasize distance: ‘a digital subject is neither a human being nor its representation but a distance between the two’. In this view, a ‘vast’ and ‘elastic’ void exists between the ‘data profile’ of a person (‘a digital artefact’) and the person whose body or relation to other bodies represents the ‘starting point’ of their profile’s construction (Goriunova, 2019, pp. 128-129).<sup>8</sup> As Goriunova perceives distance between human and datum, so Richardson (2011) perceives distance between human beings on either side of a screen.<sup>9</sup> A cultural history of the becoming-livestreamed of IHIC collapses this distance, as it displays experiences of the digital milieu predicated on the intercorporeality of the Shi’i mourning *majlis* despite a lack of ‘compresence’ (Stallknecht,

---

<sup>8</sup> Goriunova admits this definition reorients scholars’ attention towards its ‘material production’ (2019, p. 129).

<sup>9</sup> Contrariwise, one of Richardson’s more recent articles considers ‘digital intimacy’ (Hardley and Richardson, 2021, p. 625).

1935, p. 324).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, whereas “‘post-human[ism]’ emerged from... the blurring of... boundaries between man and machine’, the guiding question should not be “‘how did we become post-human,” but “‘how was the human always already historically mixed with the non-human?’” (Siegert, 2013, pp. 53,57, emphasis removed). The notion of a milieu stems from Simondon’s theory of individuation, which supposes that the individual is always becoming individual. Individuality, then, exists in relation to that external to the individual, the ensemble of which he terms the ‘milieu’.<sup>11</sup> Simondon believes it possible, however, to perceive:

[A] phase of being which supposes a pre-individual reality prior to it... such that the constituted individual transports along with it a certain associated charge of pre-individual reality that is animated by all the potentials which characterize it ([2005] 2020, pp. 3,8).

This article is a cultural history of this ‘phase-shifting’ between pre-livestreamed (‘pre-individual’) and becoming-livestreamed (‘individual’) (Simondon, [2005] 2020, p. 4); between convening as a *majlis* within IHIC and on Facebook; between ‘the affordances of the [compresent] environment’ and ‘the technological affordances of social media’. Collapsing the distance between them supports Knappett’s view that ‘affordances are relational’ (in Willems, 2021, p. 1680). For this reason, Willems points out that ‘environments and contexts shape the use of technology’, because physical environments contain the potential for every technology, else they could not be realized (Willems, 2021, p. 1680). Implicit in Latour’s (2018) renowned theory of the actor-network is the view that technologies and their affordances also impact the environments from which they are accessed (see also Simondon, [1965] 2014). Findings herein therefore pertain not to a digitized form, individuated and complete, but one generative of a further individuation/translation: the ‘post-digital’. This is not so much what comes after the digital ‘as what comes out of it, ... which inhabits the cracks in the digital dream, ... forging a new aesthetic’ (Thomas, 2004, p. 214). Though beyond the scope of this article, it is foretold in an aside regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, digital commemorations of the Martyrs of Karbala will be translated back, illustrate the source, and provide new ‘grammar’ to subsequent generations of Shi’as (Gumpert and Cathcart, 1985, p. 31). This grammar undertakes a sensorily efficacious symbolism with which mourners resonate with the emotional and eschatological significance of killing Ḥusayn and his companions. This resonance is transferred through time and space, forging, pursuing, and protecting a cultural memory of the Battle of Karbala and ‘a sense of Pan-Shi’i solidarity’ among loyalists to the *ahl al-bayt* (Marei and Shanneik, 2021, p. 69), whose sense of belonging has been predicated on ‘oppression’ and ‘overcoming’ ever since it was attacked by the caliphate (Moghadam, 2007, p. 135, p. 140).

---

<sup>10</sup> This is Stallknecht’s (1935) view of compresence, which was taken up more famously by Russell (1948). Elsewhere I write that ‘compresence is more specific than co-presence. ... In analytic philosophy, compresence implies... a specifically tangible co-existence’ (Sparey, 2022, pp. 286-287).

<sup>11</sup> A conceptual maneuver, Simondon perceives the individual and milieu as thoroughly coalescent.

### 3. Methodology

The central problem is the tension between idealist conceptualizations of digitality and the visceral materialism of commemorating the Martyrs of Karbala. In essence, how can something so embodied, felt, materially transferred, and sensory take place upon a platform the only physicalness of which is ostensibly 'the technical basis of simulacra' (Haraway, 1991, p. 164)? Williamson Fa used anthropology to confront a similar paradox encountered in a non-digital instance of celebrating the posthumous birthday of 'Ali. He asks, if the *ahl al-bayt* are 'immaterial more-than-human beings', how can they 'be literally present in the everyday circumstances of believers' lives'? The benefit of anthropology is that these immaterial figures can be treated 'as actors alongside humans', in which sense the conception—the hermeneutical *result*—of this relationship can be constructed in emic terms (2022, p. 627).<sup>12</sup> Williamson Fa therefore agrees with Ahmed's view, following El-Zain's proposal of a 'native's model of Islam', that one must 'engage closely and attentively with the natives' statements of self-conceptualization' (in Ahmed, 2016, pp. 134, 249). However, the problematic exposes the materiality of these relations in the context of Shi'i mourning. I therefore treat mourners' statements as artefactual, as the hermeneutical *means* of their relationship with the Martyrs of Karbala. Hence, I analyze, not *what* symbolism is stored away, in which case 'supernatural figures' are relegated to 'mere symbols or "social facts,"' but *how* digital forms materialize a cultural memory of the Martyrs of Karbala (Williamson Fa, 2022, p. 628). Developing Merlau-Ponty's seminal definition of intercorporeality, I investigate how symbolic artefacts allow one 'body to annex... the body of another person' in a digital milieu (1964, p. 168). Treating matter as 'performance or process' marks a certain adherence to 'a performative new materialist philosophy', but one that derives more from individuation theory and dialectical materialism than from 'a growing cross-disciplinary effort to challenge longstanding assumptions about humans and the non- or other-than-human material world' (Gamble et al., 2019, p. 111, p. 125). In truth, I am trying to reassert the humanism of digital mediation qua Simondon ([1965] 2014).

There was no interaction with worshippers and content creators during data collection. Participation was limited to sharing an experience of livestreaming. In this sense it is strictly a cultural history, albeit a recent one inclined towards material culture. The data the bulk of this article takes as the subjects of its analysis are screenshots of IHIC *majālis* taken from seven audio-visual samples chosen amidst the twenty-one livestreamed *majālis* I attended on Facebook, one from prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one every day during '*āshūrā*' (the first ten days of the Hijri month of Muḥarram) in 1442 AH (August 20-30, 2020 CE), and another ten during the same period in 1443 AH (August 9-19, 2021 CE). Given the quantity of data, samples will be cited upon first mention.

---

<sup>12</sup> Whereas Williamson Fa proposes a notion of the 'more-than-human' (2022, p. 627), Ali finds that her interlocutors navigate this paradox through 'processes of authentication' (2022, p. 126).

COVID-19 is not the subject of this article, but the pandemic coincided with the research process such that it became one of the principal themes used by elegists, orators, and worshippers to translate Karbala into a digital milieu. This is because, for many, their experience was one of inequality, isolation, loss, and restriction, all concomitant with the Karbala narrative. Many conciliations—e.g. livestreaming—were dependent on digitality. The flipside of this experience is a phenomenology premised on dualistic assumptions that cannot account for the technicity of Shi’i thought.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore vital to highlight prominent tensions between the evidence and *a priori* universalisms philosophized in academia. By historicizing IHIC’s livestreams with a pre-COVID example of their broadcasts, ‘the fight against COVID-19... [becomes] a vivid reminder that concept “religion” does not carve human social behaviors neatly at any joint’ (Wildman et al., 2020, p. 116). Moreover, as echoes of the pains of Karbala resound in lockdown announcements and the threat of illness and death spreads closer to home, mourners appropriate COVID-19 as a new symbolic milieu, one anterior to digitality and a harbinger of the post-digital conjuncture.

#### 4. The Materiality of Martyrdom

Funerals for the Martyrs of Karbala are ubiquitous throughout Shi’ism, especially during ‘*āshūrā*’ and ‘*arba’in*’ (the fortieth day of the Hijri calendar), as pilgrims carry ornately decorated replicas of the tombs of the martyrs and horses follow. The *ma’ātām* gesture responsive to these sights involves its own multifaceted symbolism: on the one hand, Ḥusayn’s sister, Zaynab bint ‘Alī (c. 4-63 AH/626-682 CE. Henceforth: Zaynab), reacted to news of her brother’s martyrdom by beating her chest; on the other hand, ‘lament over the tragedy of the Battle of Karbala... is a strictly gender segregated ritual’ (Halder, 2020, p. 68). For all Shi’as, mourning the Martyrs of Karbala is a journey of gradual emotional ‘intensity’ (Ruffle, 2015, p. 193). Halder writes that the climax of this intensity for women, having been relegated in many places to a ‘second position in the *imāmbārā*’ (Urdu for *ḥusayniyya*) is ‘choking with emotion’ (Halder, 2020, p. 67). If, by contrast, men’s expressions reach more ‘exhausting and demanding’ heights, it is because they are expected to emulate the bravery of Ḥusayn by proving to him that they ‘would have stood with him and shed our blood and died with him’ (Pinault, 1999, pp. 104-105). Women sharing this aspiration may negotiate their desire to exhibit bravery in the fight against oppression with constraints placed upon them, whether by social norms and the threat of violence or legal institutions (Hegland, 1998). By aspiring to the bravery of the Martyrs of Karbala, both Shi’i men and women inhabit the ‘liminality between the transcendental truth of martyrdom and the everyday functioning of that pain in the socio-political dynamic context’ (Halder, 2020, p. 70).

Casci (2002) traces how the architecture of North Indian *ḥusayniyāt* has been influenced by citadels belonging to Rajputs, clans bearing a ‘martial ethos’ (Eaton, 2019, p.

---

<sup>13</sup> ‘Privatization,’ ‘asynchronous consumption’ (Baker et al., 2020, p. 363), ‘spiritual renewal’ (Kowalczyk et al., 2020, p. 2676), ‘collective worship services as instances of dense gatherings’ (Vermeer and Kregting, 2020, p. 3).

129). Similarly, in the Hezbollah-controlled neighborhoods of southern Beirut, Deeb notices that male commemorations 'exhibit military order' (2005, p. 244). In each instance, the Rajput warrior and the Hezbollah soldier are appropriated as a term of reference for resonating with the cultural memory of the Battle of Karbala in a removed spatio-temporal context. As soldiers assert the 'Hezbollah-dominated area[s] of southern suburbs of Beirut' (Deeb, 2005, pp. 242, 253), so do protestor-mourners in Mumbai claim 'their moral right to the city... against the background of... intercommunal violence' (Eisenlohr, 2021, p. 372). Men and women in Mumbai and Beirut both translate the events of Karbala into new symbolic milieus defined by the mobilization of their technological affordances: for example, motorbikes and camouflage in the processions of Hezbollah, drums and bloodletting in Eisenlohr's ethnography, lighting and reverberation in IHIC, and camera angles and commenting in their livestreams.

### 5. The Early Livestreams

Across *'āshūrā'* and *'arba'īn*, 1441 AH (September 1-10 and circa October 17, 2019 CE), IHIC broadcast two livestreams: one on the seventh day of Muḥarram (AV1: Imam Husain Islamic Centre, live broadcast, 12 September 2019) and another in advance of the fortieth day (AV2: Imam Husain Islamic Centre, live broadcast, 17 October 2019). These livestreams did not capture the full program of commemorations offered by the center nor the entirety of any one ritual. Instead, they broadcast only two *'ad'iya* ('supplications', sing. *du'ā'*), prayers recited to invoke the agency of God, such as to request help, demonstrating supplicants' submission. Whereas AV2 was recorded as part of a usual order of service, AV1 records a *madrasa* ('school', pl. *madāris*) aimed at helping the children of the *majlis* understand what transpires during evening rituals in Muḥarram and Ṣafar (the second Hijri month with which *'arba'īn* coincides). During the *madrasa* event, an orator's explanation of the Karbala narrative switched lucidly between *khiṭābat* and *nūḥa* (poems narrating the death of Ḥusayn) before his seated students (Figure 2). Afterwards, two other members of the *majlis* recited a *du'ā'* and encouraged the now standing children to practice *ma'ātam* (Figure 3).



Figure 2. (AV1: Live broadcast, 12 September 2019, 11:14) Orator explaining the Karbala narrative in a *madrasa* on the seventh day of Muḥarram (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

Its endurance as a stream that remains available to view, despite no longer being ‘live’, characterizes it as an educational resource that may be referred to when necessary. On liveness, Auslander sets out to discern ‘clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones’. However, he admits that ‘although my initial arguments may seem to rest on the assumption that there are, ultimately I find that not to be the case’. For this reason, Auslander argues that ‘liveness must be examined, not as a global, undifferentiated phenomenon, but within specific cultural and social contexts’ ([1999] 2008, pp. 3,7).



Figure 3. (AV1, 32:33) Two members of the *majlis* reciting a *du'ā'* in a *madrasa* on the seventh day of Muḥarram (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

It is more apt to ask, therefore, not to what extent two human beings on either side of a screen are contemporaneous with each other, but to what extent the *ahl al-bayt* are contemporaneous with their digital interlocutors. It is not a question of whether the streams are live, so much as how the livestreams make the *ahl al-bayt* live.

AV2 was recorded on the phone of a member of the *majlis* sitting beside the supplicant. Visuals shake without regard for *mise-en-scène* and rattle within the echo chamber of the cameraman's hands or thud as they drop the phone, and it falls to the floor. This second livestream captures the supplicant sat in the center of a large room (Figure 4). The solemnity of their recitation is encapsulated by the indistinguishable boundary between the dull hue of their hoody and the unlit IHIC interior. A figure is perceptible only because of light aimed not at them, but, first, the Holy Qur'an and,



Figure 4. (AV2: Live broadcast, 17 October 2019, 23:47) Supplicant sitting in the center of a large room on *'arba'in* (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

second, the words of their *du'ā'*. Both elegists in AV2 recite into a microphone whose speakers adopt an echo effect, which reverberates around the room and among its congregants. Some digital technologies have been utilized in the events recorded in AV2, in the maintenance of a somber spirit of mourning. The sonically sewn intercorporeality of this atmosphere becomes patent in its unmissable reverberation as the cultural memory of Karbala is not only communicated through words but embodied through sound. The 'temporal thickness' conveyed by this sound submits mourners to an instantaneous past and present of the supplicant's recitation (Simondon, [1982] 2012, p. 4). It mystifies not only temporal boundaries, but also spatial ones, the absence of light precluding distinction of one member of the *majlis* from the next, of listeners from supplicant, and of humans

from the more-than-human Martyrs of Karbala. In this way, IHIC asserts the technicity of mourning with the prominence of digital technologies. As in AV1, supplicants in AV2 may as well have explicated what, why, and how they were grieving, because this semiotic would be legible to one versed in mourning the Martyrs of Karbala. This raising of a consciousness of technological mediation collapses the distance between mourners and mourned and is an affordance of the digital means of the supplicants' recitation.

Given the powerful and worshipful role of digitality in this early livestream, the lack of care given to its recording is jarring. Those inclined towards underscoring the immateriality of digital mediation and the post-humanism of its interlocutors might understand the discrepancy in attention to detail between livestreams before and during the COVID-19 pandemic as evidence that the intercorporeality of the digital atmosphere was compromised by a dependency on livestreaming. They might contend that livestreaming when mourners could not be compresent—within the same room as the elegist, orator, or supplicant—was compensatory. It is true that, before the pandemic, livestreaming was supplementary to IHIC's rituals, whereas during the pandemic it became integral. However, advocates of such denunciations of digitality fail to recognize the unreliable foundations on which they stand: the homogenization of a category of digitality and the fetishization of a spatiotemporal boundary. The presence of the Martyrs of Karbala was facilitated prior to the pandemic by a digital atmosphere knitted together by digital amplification. Not only were the sounds of the recitation and the temporality of the *majlis* already blurred, mourners struggled to see with whom they shared the confines of an unlit room. The mediation of mourners and martyrs with a symbolically efficacious means of cultivating intercorporeality was not reliant on a shared coherent spacetime, but on the translation of the emotional and eschatological significance of the cultural memory of Karbala into the technological affordances of a symbolic milieu that resonates with the IHIC *majlis*. Wounds inflicted upon the martyrs were translated into a means of amplifying poetic recitation that rattles the very bones of its listeners; the tragic falling of the flag was translated into the solidarity that Shi'as felt acutely when their bodies become indistinguishable from their comrades'; the heavenly green of Ḥusayn's robes was translated into vivid poetic imagery, which, perceived so viscerally in a darkened room, became translocative, a 'conceptual bridge... between one event and another' (Wolf, 2014, p. 9). So McMurray writes, 'congregations and individuals mobilize Karbala through sound' in the sense that the eschatological significance of the cultural memory of Karbala is translated into sonic symbols (2021, p. 1883). Elsewhere, Wolf has shown how 'virtual pilgrimage is... central to Muharram rituals, where... the destination of... processions is called... Karbala' (2010, p. 120). By motioning geographically towards somewhere else, mourners feel Karbala wherever they stand.

## 6. Pandemic Pieties

On the first day of Muḥarram the following year, five months after the first person was reported to have died in Australia because of COVID-19, IHIC livestreamed a *majlis* in its

entirety (AV3: Imam Husain Islamic Centre, live broadcast, 20 August 2020). The broadcast begins with two parallel windows, one on the left affixed with a username in the bottom-left corner that reads 'IHIC' and one on the right which reads someone's name (anonymized) (Figure 5). On the left, an orator wears a hoodie and sits between a tapestry and a table. The hoodie, the tapestry, and the table are ornamented with green and red martyrological calligraphy. A row of candles is arranged evenly across the table. On the right, a sign-language interpreter sits before further calligraphy and translates the orations. In the bottom-right corner of the screen is the translucent watermark of the logo of the videoconferencing software used for their livestream.

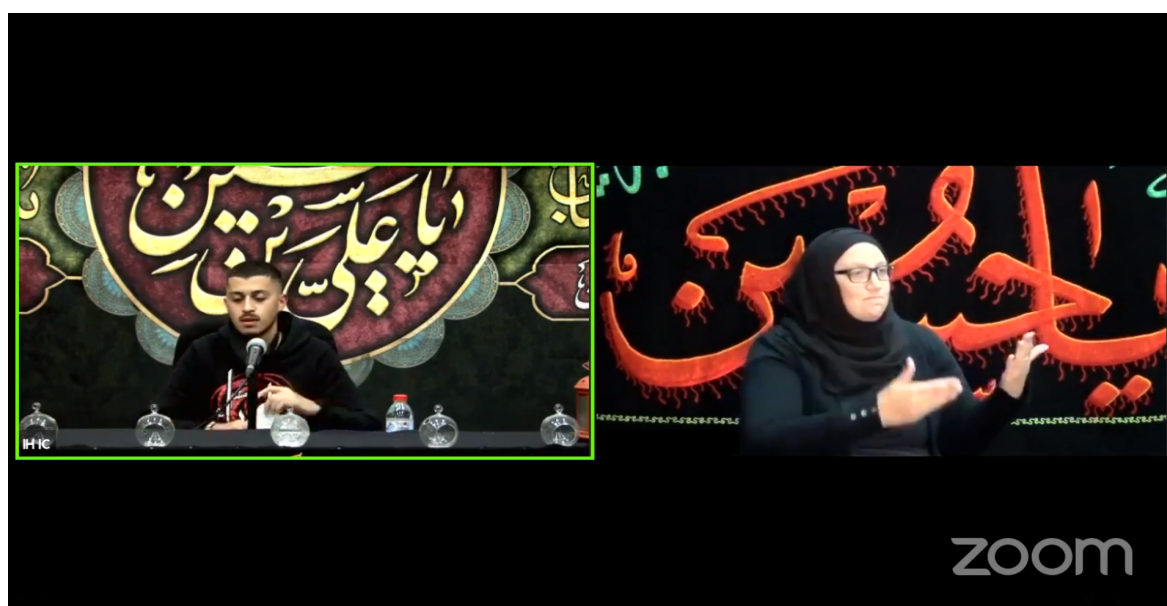


Figure 5. (AV3: Live broadcast, 20 August 2020, 2:03) Opening shots of the *majlis* (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

It is clear in the orator's welcome (Appendix 1) that the inability to gather as is customary is a point of regret. Nevertheless, the orator makes it clear that spatial proximity to other mourners or the center itself does not prevent digital interlocutors from being recognized by God as attendants. They are not the only mourners recognized by the orator as facing difficulties concerning the formation of a *majlis*: those attending in-person must maintain distance from one another and avoid being noisy. Although I advocate a conception of intercorporeality that defies spatial proximity, the orator's decision to bring it to the attention of mourners possibly inhibits the claim to space that characterizes Eisenlohr's analysis of an urban atmosphere. This distance is signaled visually by spots on the floor and the wearing of masks. Not only is physical contact reduced, but any trace of it is removed with sanitizer. The orator's opening remarks are preceded by a reading of the Qur'an, *khiṭābat*, and a poetic recitation. There is much to say about each of these moments, but I will focus on the recitation. Between *khiṭābat* and poetry, digitally mediated mourners are presented with an obscure view of the unlit interior of the *ḥusayniyya* building (Figure 6) and the elegist (Figure 7). As in AV2, the view of mourners

digitally and otherwise in the presence of the elegist is directed towards a dimly lit figure. All is black except for the words of the recitation. A by-product of this illumination is that their chest is visible whereas their face blends into the background. The only clear visual is a hand beating into the chest; the rest is darkness. Mourners are not touching one another. In fact, they are expressly forbidden from doing so. As in AV2, the elegist is digitally amplified, sounds landing upon the ear of all listeners being digitally mediated. The reverberation and volume of this amplification drowns out all other noises.

Both in-person and digitally mediated mourners may as well have been devoid of a sensation of externality were it not for the intercorporeally efficacious symbolic milieu in which these broadcasts and their sensations unfold. As with AV2, listeners embody the emotional and eschatological gravitas of a cultural memory of Karbala. Mourners also hear ‘glitches’ in the elegist’s recitation as they perform *ma’ātam* and struggle to prevent themselves from crying. Mourners may not hear each other directly, but the narratives of solidarity prevalent in the poetry are felt viscerally as mourners’ *ma’ātim* and tearful responses accord with the intermittent falters in the recitation of the elegist. A glitch is here an ‘error’ intended to correspond to the grave ethical mistakenness of attacking the *ahl al-bayt*. Such a ‘creative misuse of technology’ is afforded by the environment in which it occurs and is not limited to ‘digital detritus’, but encompasses emotional texture (Thomas, 2004, p. 214). In the first Muḥarram of the pandemic, presence is fostered through corresponding gestures that are indicated sonically. These sonic gestures are contextualized by a preface, the orator’s opening remarks, which emphasizes and grieves the simultaneous co-presence and absence of digitally mediated mourners. The hardware visible in Figure 1 and AV1, as well as the view of the *majlis* present within the interior of IHIC, demonstrates how digitally mediated mourners are likely indexed to the spatially compresent *majlis* (Figure 6). When mourners commemorate the Martyrs of Karbala while observing the space between attendants or the camera if within the IHIC building, they may as well be incensed by the unoccupied saddle of *dhū al-janāḥ* (Ḥusayn’s horse, often portrayed as bloodied and riderless).



Figure 6. (AV3: Live broadcast, 20 August 2020, 54:34) View of the *husayniyya* from the perspective of the mourners. (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)



Figure 7. (AV3, 1:17:47) View of the elegist from the perspective of the mourners. (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

### 7. Natively Digital Affordances

A year later, no in-person attendees are permitted, and the livestreams (AV4) have become more highly produced (more reliant on postproduction editing):<sup>14</sup> Qur’anic recitations are accompanied by translations and transliterations (Figure 8), *ziyārāt* (‘visitations’, supplications in which Shi’as greet the *ahl al-bayt*. Sing. *ziyāra*) are too (Figures 9 and 10), more of the table and tapestry between which the orator sits is visible during *khiṭābat* (Figure 11), and the angle with which the reciting elegist is recorded changes more frequently (Figure 12). Background displays now frame the recitations. During *ziyārāt*, respondents are presented with a digitally manufactured artwork, the sky red and the sun bright, carving out a silhouette of a grieving Zaynab arched over the arrow-ridden body of her brother. Behind them, their camp is aflame. Before them, soldiers with spears stare on, alert and wielding their weapons, ready to fight, but still amidst Zaynab’s grief. As mourners gaze upon this dreadful sight, they hear poetry (Appendix 2).

---

<sup>14</sup> As I have explained elsewhere (e.g. Sparey, 2022; Sparey, in press), this is the result of an organization capitalizing on its significantly increased popularity, and not of a lacking sophistication of digital technologies within Shi’i art, media, and worship prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The above-given explanation of digital amplification should also evidence this point.



Figure 8. (AV4: Live broadcast, 10 August 2021, 2:31) Qur'anic recitations accompanied by translations and transliterations. (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

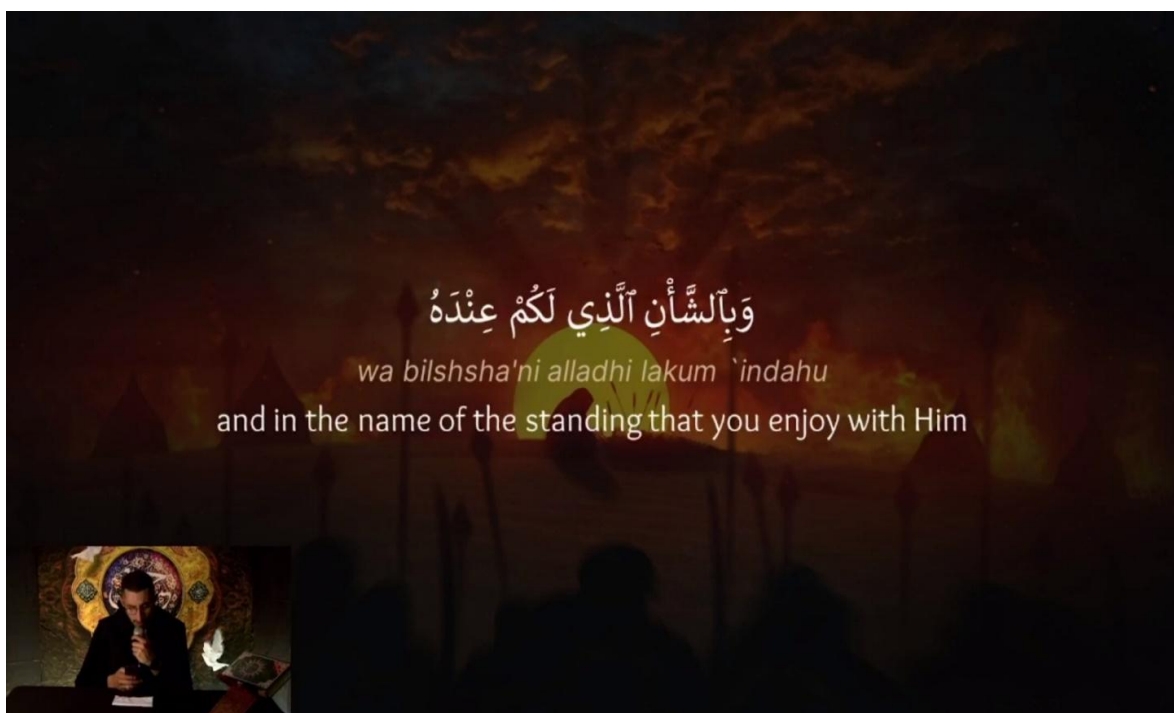


Figure 9. (AV4, 12:55) ziyārāt (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)



Figure 10. (AV4, 21: 53) ziyārāt (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)



Figure 11. (AV4, 27:30) View of orator during *khīṭābat* (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)



Figure 12. (AV4, 1:53:06) View of elegist during *ma'ātam* (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

In the backdrop to Figure 9, swathes of sand separate Zaynab from the viewer and her attackers. Meanwhile, the elegist proclaims on behalf of his respondents that he, and by extension they, seek nearness to Allah, yet the cursed killers are depicted sharing the same perspective as devout worshippers, conflating their sense of space. Mourners are dared to overcome this unpleasant pairing when the elegist, as a vehicle for the piety of the whole *majlis*, beseeches Allah to give him/them the chance to avenge Ḥusayn. They can only reconcile this explicitly insufferable contradiction by entering the void depicted on the screen and help prevent the impending tribulations portrayed in the supplication. However, the contradiction cannot be reconciled this way in a literal sense because of the affordances of the medium, as viewers cannot pass through the screen and overtake the enemy soldiers depicted immediately before them.<sup>15</sup> It is clear from onlookers' distress that the endeavor to approach the material reality of the Battle of Karbala is instantaneously sufficient and insufficient for commemorating its martyrs. This endeavor sits at the heart of the Shi'i logic of bereavement whereby mourners, in their attempt to comprehend the felt presence of a known absence, explore ways of compensating, 'a mimetic process by which the loved one is gradually incorporated, as it were, instead of being searched in vain outside'. When the psychiatrist, Fuchs, interviews people whose relatives have recently passed away, he finds they achieve 'bodily mimesis' through the 'auratic character' of the deceased person's possessions, as if their 'presence condensed in them'. Shi'as have known this for centuries, as they attempt to love in the face of loss and observe the *imām* principle while the ordained Mahdi (the current Imam) is concealed

<sup>15</sup> This limitation is not unique to digital hardware. See al-Hudaid's (2020) article for an analysis of Shi'i sculpture.

from humanity. They pursue, per the final line of the quoted *ziyāra* (Appendix 2), a lifetime of evoking 'embodied [cultural] memory' of Karbala through such 'familiar objects' as musical, painterly, and poetic symbols, "“continuing bonds,” which suggests that in typical grief, ... relationships with the deceased are reshaped and sustained rather than abandoned' (Fuchs, 2018, pp. 53, 57, 60). It is a lifetime of 'overcoming' (Tabar, 2002, p. 297; Moghadam, 2007, p. 135; Fattah, 2020, p. 162).

Pertinent to this analysis are comments expressing Facebook users' difficulty accessing the intersensoriality of the *majlis* (Appendix 3). To those whose experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic inculcated them with a propensity for surmounting technical difficulties through textual contributions either in the comments sections of livestreams or the chat windows of videoconferencing software, this exchange may appear routine. However, it is the very nature of commenting as an 'everyday practice' that makes it 'paradigmatic to explain the relationship between hagiographical texts (stories of saints' lives) and religious performance in the production of culturally meaningful idealized... roles', which, as has been established, allow mourners to traverse the conundrum that arises when feeling and following the presence and edicts of an absent Mahdi (Ruffle 2021a, p. 27). Zoubiada Sakr, recognizing how important it is to experience *khiṭābat* during the holy period of '*āshūrā*', points out there is no sound. Sadeq Hossaini, following suit, seeks not only resolution, but discloses, in the spirit of *naẓar*, that he prays for it (Akkach, 2022). When Sakr announces that all is good the second time the sound falters and is restored, Latifa Karaki implores Allah that IHIC's livestream operators be blessed for their diligence in facilitating the *majlis*. This commentative *majlis* surfaces in all IHIC's livestreams, as in another video wherein Maissa Nasour complains 'sorry the sound is very low'. IHIC reply: 'we apologize for the inconvenience we are working to fix this asap'. After they ask 'is that better', Abdoul Dirani comments: 'sound is back thank [yo]u', their thanks shared by several other commenters. This interruption does not prevent Riyaz Virjee from interpreting the livestream as a 'beautiful presentation' (AV4).

The very existence of this livestream highlights the 'presence in absence' which pervades Shi'i semiotics (Ruffle, 2017, p. 329). That this distance manifests digitally is brought to one's attention by a window in the bottom-left of the screen in which the elegist is viewable. The eschatological contradiction mentioned above is mapped out by the juxtaposition of large painting and small elegist, of the near sound and its far source. Shi'as are pushed to mitigate this distance for which distance is already requisite and felt, to enter the desert by sonically embodying the invocation of Karbala. The elegist, like the Martyrs of Karbala, is felt but not present. This is to say that the screen and speakers are appropriated as a cause of distance as well as a solution to it. The materiality of hardware sews the expressions of various actors into an emotionally interactive and self-perpetuating unit that overwhelms them with grief and a knowingly foolhardy desperation to overcome it, in which sense the digital facilitates what spatial compresence otherwise would: the *majlis*. That this cultivation of a *majlis* is a unique affordance of digitality, is born of the medium and therefore 'natively digital' (Rogers, 2013, p. 13), is highlighted by

the change in backdrop to aerial footage of Karbala (Figure 10). Nevertheless, it is because of the illumination of the body-screen relation that worshippers form a bodily connection with each other and therefore with the *ahl al-bayt*. They may not pass through the screen, but they may feel the bodies of the martyrs and mourners who it 'possesses' and 'manifests' (Ruffle, 2021b, p. 278).

Figures 11 and 12 exhibit a careful consideration of the placement of the recording camera, but for different reasons. In Figure 11, the camera is placed where in-person attendants would ordinarily sit, heightening a sense of being there in spatial compresence. This may well appear compensatory, but to suggest that it is experienced that way disregards the agency of mourners who are aware they are being livestreamed to, having accessed it on a social media platform. Nevertheless, there is a sense they may be able to perceive their intercorporeality with other digitally mediated members of the *majlis* as in the analysis of Figure 7. In Figure 12, constantly changing camera angles keep viewers engaged in the recitation, in a way impossible without digital software, because it is an affordance of transposition, a postproduction effect. The visibility of such tropes as lanterns, calligraphy, black thobes, and the elegist's tears ensures that the result of this engagement is a grief premised on empathy with others and a sense of belonging to the same *majlis*. The affordances of the Facebook interface bring this belonging into sharp relief, as the video is accompanied by fifty reactions and forty-four comments. The reactions extend to liking, crying, loving, and caring indicated by various emoticons such as a thumbs up and heart. These reactions are mere clicks away from revealing the names of their providers. In the attached comment section, further emoticons reside, the most popular depicting praying hands. The efficacy of this translation of the cultural memory of Karbala to the technological affordances of Facebook as an example of the digital milieu is not limited to the provocation of appropriate emotions of bereavement or the desire to achieve closeness with the *ahl al-bayt*. It bears a translocative potential too, as footage of rituals forming the pilgrimage to Karbala are shared during the recitations (Figure 13) and branding signifies the *majlis'* earnest aspiration to convene in communion with one another and in unified opposition to their oppressors (Figure 14).

On branding, Pinault writes that 'impressive public performances of *matam* and *nauhas* increase... [the] prestige' of the guilds responsible for organizing them; 'from this flow invitations to *majālis*, an accrual in membership, and further membership dues and contributions' (1992, p. 126). Readers should not interpret this cynically, as 'a debased and corrupted pretense at piety for capitalistic ends' or 'tribalism'.<sup>16</sup> Rather, as in Lunn and Byl's article (2017, p. 406), societies, guilds, *ḥusayniyāt* such as IHIC, or production companies act upon the principle of *nazar*, 'a unique Arabic-Islamic term/concept that conveys at once "seeing" and "reflecting"', being seen by God commemorating the

---

<sup>16</sup> This is not meant to dismiss the very real 'role in the economy of mass pilgrimage', but to present an understanding of the intersection of capitalism and Commemorations of Karbala such as through branding that derives from an emic Shi'i epistemology (Goodman, 2007, p.59). Following Lunn and Byl (2017), I will elsewhere explore this intersection in more depth (Sparey, in press).

Martyrs of Karbala and reflecting the divinity they believe he attributed to their lineage (Akkach, 2022, ix). IHIC in marking their pious art-offerings (visual arts, poetic recitations, etc.) as theirs give the awakened proselytized a tangible term of reference in the form of a *husayniyya* that they can join digitally or otherwise. In this sense, they pursue the mission of the *ahl al-bayt* by instantaneously honoring the Martyrs of Karbala and expanding the *majlis* of *ash-shi'at*.



Figure 13. (AV6: Live broadcast, 11 August 2021, 4:34) Footage of rituals forming the pilgrimage to Karbala shared during the recitations (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)



Figure 14. (AV7: Live broadcast, 21 August 2021, 0:39) Branding (Source: Imam Husain Islamic Centre)

## 8. Post-Digital Conclusions

Proving that a 'new translation always also affects the source text', highly produced livestreams of IHIC *majālis* continue in the years ahead, even as the threat of COVID-19 wanes (Campbell and Vidal, 2019, p. 7; See also Reynolds, 2013). In this post-digital milieu, the technological affordances of Facebook, including the *majlis*' outreach to a global community of mourners, brings the in-person *majlis* into concert with a digital *majlis*. The compresence of IHIC post-lockdown is infiltrated with natively digital developments, including digitally manufactured artworks and the powerful sense of togetherness that now radiates from the tools of their production. A cultural history of the digitization of commemorating the Martyrs of Karbala during the COVID-19 pandemic is, in this way, a reminder to scholars that digitality and its experiences cannot be conceived of as lacking materiality or destroying human agency and subjectivity. It contrastingly forms the basis of technologies like any other, which humans have appropriated for millennia in the process of becoming human.

Given the materially unclear boundaries between pre-digital, digital, and post-digital, and considering the evident agency of mourners in these milieus, it is more accurate to conceptualize livestreaming as a 'way of translating' one phenomenon to a realm of technological affordances generative of a new symbolic milieu which 'never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them'. The findings of this article contravene McLuhan, however, insofar as he differentiates between 'previous technologies [that] were partial and fragmentary and the electric, [which] is total and inclusive', such that human beings 'exceed ourselves' by translating 'our entire lives into the spiritual form of information' (McLuhan, [1964] 1994, pp. 56-61, p. 158). Digitization and its affordances should be thought of more as a 'transformation' *to*, rather than *of*, consciousness in which relations among humans and between them and their natural environment are revealed as something already 'active and effective' if once 'invisible, illegible, [or] inaudible' (Derrida, [1996] 2002, p. 7). The imposition of the human onto the non-human might be thought of in terms of the Anthropocene, but not a Heideggerian epoch of technicity that in 'enframing' the affordances of the natural world, and therefore the 'exploitation' (Lemmens, 2020, p. 3) and 'distortion of human nature', beckons the end of 'real' inter-human relations and a phenomenological distance from nature (Dreyfus and Spinoza, 2006, p. 268). Evident in the livestreamed *majālis* of IHIC is a viscerally comprehended and intercorporeally constructed community that seeks to observe the *imām* principle by translating the cultural memory of the Battle of Karbala into the semiotic affordances of a digital milieu. This essay concludes, then, as Hui also does, that 'technologies in different cultures are affected by the cosmological understandings of these cultures and have autonomy only within a certain cosmological setting' despite being 'anthropologically universal'. This is a virtue of the individuation of their materiality to the technological affordances of new symbolic milieus and what Hui would prefer to consider: 'cosmotechnics' (2016, p. 19).

### Appendix 1

*“as-salāmu ‘alaykum* [(‘peace be upon you’)] all, my condolences unto you all, and to Imam *sāhib al-zaman* [(‘the master of time’, in reference to Imam al-Mahdi, the unknown leader of Muslims in the present, according to the Twelver branch of Shi’i eschatology)], on entering the month of Muḥarram, the month of the tragedy of *‘āshūrā’*. It is very sad to say that due to COVID-19 there is such a little amount of people actually attending the center this evening. I do know that if it were not for these restrictions, this center and every other center around the world would be flocking with attendees in mourning for Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn. For those watching from home, Allah *subḥānallah wa-ta‘ālā* [(‘praise and exaltations be upon him’)] knows our intentions and knows, if you were able to come, you would... be in attendance, so, *‘in shā’ allāh* [(‘if God wills’)], you will still be written as an attendee for the majālis of Imam Ḥusayn *‘alayhi as-salām* [(‘peace be upon him’)]. For those in attendance at the center, I ask you all to please comply with some of these housekeeping rules: we ask that all your cars are parked legally and not obstructing any of our neighbors’ driveways, your phones are either off or on silent so that they may not disturb our speakers, after the program you do not loiter around and keep the noise to a minimum in order to not disturb our neighbors, and we kindly ask you comply with our COVID safety precaution rules, always keeping your mask, always maintaining a one-point-five social distancing at all times, sanitizing your hands as frequently as possible, and keep physical contact to the bare minimum, and also we have marked spots on the floor, if you can all just sit on the marked spots, and, if you were here for the earlier evening, and you are confirmed for the main program now, we ask that you register [and] let the front desk when you enter know, and we kindly ask you to comply with all instructions given by our volunteers. We thank you all for your cooperation in these difficult times. It is hard on us just as it is hard on you. May Allah *subḥānallah wa-ta‘ālā* bless you all for your efforts *‘in shā’ allāh*. I now ask you to recite three loud *ṣalawāt* [(‘salutation’. Sing. *ṣalā*)] as I ask Sayyid Muhammad to come up and bless this evening with a few verses from the Holy Qur’an” (AV3, 0:00-1:58).

### Appendix 2

*fa-la‘ana allahu ‘ummataan ‘assasat ‘asāsa alzzulmi wa-al-jawri ‘alaykum ahl al-bayt wa-la‘ana allahu ‘ummataan dafa‘atkum ‘an maqāmikum wa-‘azālatkum ‘an marātibikum ‘allatī rattabikum allahu fihā wa-la‘ana allahu ‘ummataan qatalatkum wa-la‘ana allahu al-mumahhidīna lahum bi-al-ttamkīni min qitālikum. bari‘tu ‘ilā allahi wa-‘ilaykum minhum... wa-la‘ana allahu ‘ummataan ‘asrajat wa-al-jamat wa-tanaqqabat li-qitālika bi‘abī ‘anta wa-‘ummī. laqad ‘azuma muṣābī bika fa-‘asāl allaha alladhī ‘akrama maqāmaka wa-‘akramanī bika ‘an yarzuqanī ṭalaba tha‘rika. ... ‘innī ‘ataqarrabu ‘ilā allahi wa-‘ilā rasūlihi wa-‘ilā ‘amīri al-mūminīn wa-‘ilā fātima wa-‘ilā bi-muwālātikum wa-muwālāti wa-liyyikum. ... al-lahumma aj‘al maḥyāyi maḥyā muḥammadin wa-‘ālī muḥammadin* (“may Allah curse the people who laid the basis of persecution and wrongdoing against you, O members of the household. May Allah curse the people who drove you away from your position and isolated you from your ranks that Allah has put you in. May Allah curse the people who slew you. May Allah curse those who paved the way for them to do so and who made it possible for them to fight against you. I repudiate them in the presence of Allah and You. ... May Allah also curse the people who saddled up, gave reins to their horses and masked their faces in preparation for fighting against you. May my father and mother be ransoms for you. Extremely insufferable is my commiserations with you, [Ḥusayn], so I beseech Allah Who has honored your position and honored me because of you, to endue me with the chance to avenge you. ... I do seek nearness to Allah, to His Messenger, to the Commander of the Faithful, to Fatimah, to al-Ḥasan... by means of declaring loyalty to you and to your loyalists. ... O, Allah, please make me live my lifetime in the same way as Muhammad and Muhammad’s household lived”) (AV5, 13:56-19:22).

This is IHIC’s translation. An alternative (my rewriting) might read thus: “May Allah curse the people who laid the foundations of injustice and oppression upon you, the *ahl al-bayt*, and may Allah curse the people who drove you from your position and removed you from the ranks in which

Sparey R. – Livestreaming Islamic Arts: Digitization as Translation in Shi’i depictions of Karbala  
Translation Matters, 5(1), 2023, pp. 29-56, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a2](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a2)

Allah has arranged you and may Allah curse the people who killed you and may Allah curse those who paved the way for them to be able to fight you. I am acquitted before God, and you are among them... and may Allah curse the people who saddled and bridled to fight against you. May my father and mother be yours. I have the pinnacle of my suffering with you, so I ask God who honored your position and honored me with you, to bless my request for your vengeance. ... I seek nearness to Allah and his messenger and to the prince of the faithful and to Fāṭima and to Ḥasan, with your loyalty and [my] loyalty to you and your loyalists. ... O, Allah, make my life the life of Muḥammad and [that of] the family of Muḥammad.”

### Appendix 3

Zoubiada Sakr (26:16): “No sound.”

Sadeq Hossaini (26:55): Folded hands emoji.

Marwa Hijazi (28:43): “Sound is clear.”

Rima Farhat (29:32): “No sound.”

Zoubiada Sakr (30:56): “All good.”

Latifa Karaki (32:03): *‘aḏam allah ajūrکم* (“may Allah make your reward great”) (AV5).

### REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2016) *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Akkach, S. (2022) *Nāẓar: Vision, Belief, and Perception in Islamic Cultures*. Leiden: Brill.
- Al-Hudaid, N. (2020) ‘Karamah (“Marvel”): An Exploration of the Literal and Ethnographic Meaning of Miracles Among Shi’a Female Artists in Kuwait’, *World Art*, 10(1), pp. 145-159.
- Ali, A. Z. (2022) ‘Conjuring Karbala Online and Offline: Experiences of the “Authentic” in Shi’a Majalis’, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 11(1), pp. 124-145.
- Auslander, P. ([1999] 2008) *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Baker, J. O., Martí, G., Braunstein, R., Whitehead, A. L., and Yukich, G. (2020) ‘Religion in the Age of Social Distancing: How COVID-19 Presents New Directions for Research’, *Sociology of Religion*, 81(4), pp. 357-370.
- Binder, S. (2021) ‘Feeling Religious—Feeling Secular? Emotional Style as a Diacritical Category’, *South Asian History and Culture*, 12(2-3), pp. 278-94.
- Born, G. (2005) ‘On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity’, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2(1), pp. 7-36.
- Born, G. (2022) *Music and Digital Media: A Planetary Anthropology*. London: UCL Press.
- Born, G. and Barry, A. ‘Introduction: Music, Mediation, and Actor-Network Theory’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 37(5-6), pp. 443-487.
- Brooklyn Museum. *Battle of Karbala* [online]. Available at: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3054> (Accessed: 17 February 2023).
- Campbell, M. and Vidal, R. (2019) *Translating Across Sensory and Linguistic Borders*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Casci, S. (2002) ‘Lucknow Nawabs: Architecture and Identity’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(36), pp. 3711–3714.

- Deeb, L. (2005) 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura' in Aghaie, K. S. (ed.) *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 241-266.
- Derrida, J. ([1996] 2002). 'Artifactualities' in Bajorek J. (ed.) *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. Translated by J. Bajorek. Cambridge: Polity.
- Dreyfus, H. L. and Spinosa, C. (2006) 'Further Reflections on Heidegger, Technology, and the Everyday' in Kompridis N. (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism*. London: Routledge.
- Eaton, R. (2019) *India in the Persianate Age, 1000-1765*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Eisenlohr, P. (2021) 'Atmospheric Citizenship: Sonic Movement and Public Religion in Shi'i Mumbai', *Public Culture*, 33(3), pp. 371-392.
- Eisenlohr, P. (2022) 'Atmospheric Resonance: Sonic Motion and the Question of Religious Mediation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 28, pp. 613-631.
- El-Zain, A. H. (1977) 'Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 6, pp. 227-254.
- Fattah, K. N. (2020) 'Bihari Muharram Processions in Dhaka City: Religious Performance as a Means of Territorializing Urban Public Space by a Disenfranchised Ethnic Minority', *Visual Studies*, 35(2-3), pp. 161-168.
- Fuchs, T. (2018) 'Presence in Absence: The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 17(1), pp. 43-63.
- Gamble, C. N., Hanan, J. S., and Nail, T. (2019). 'What is New Materialism?', *Angelika*, 24(6), pp. 111-134.
- Goodman, M. (2006) *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*. Leiden: Brill.
- Goriunova, O. (2019) 'The Digital Subject: People as Data as Persons', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 36(6), pp. 125-145.
- Gumpert, G. and Cathcart, R. (1985) 'Media Grammars, Generations, and Media Gaps', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2(1), pp. 23-55.
- Halder, E. (2020) 'Shia Women and Their "Place-Making:" Gendered Agency in the Muharram Gatherings in Kolkata' in Ray P. (ed.) *Women Speak Nation: Gender, Culture, and Politics*. London: Routledge, pp. 59-78.
- Hall, S. [1980] 2005b) 'Encoding/Decoding' in Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, P. (eds.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. New York: Routledge, pp. 117-127.
- Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Hardley, J. and Richardson, I. (2021) 'Digital Placemaking and Networked Corporeality: Embodied Mobile Media Practices in Domestic Space during COVID-19', *Convergence*, 27(3), pp. 625-636.
- Hegland, M. (1998) 'Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (trans)Forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender Through Pakistani Women's Rituals of Mourning', *American Ethnologist*, 25(2), pp. 240-266.
- Hui, Y. (2016) *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*. Falmouth: Urbanomic.
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. *Gallery*. Available at: <https://ihic.org.au/gallery/page/3> (Accessed: 13 February 2023).

- Sparey R. – Livestreaming Islamic Arts: Digitization as Translation in Shi'i depictions of Karbala Translation Matters, 5(1), 2023, pp. 29-56, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a2](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a2)
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. *Our Objectives* [online]. Available at: <https://ihic.org.au/imam-husain-islamic-centre> (Accessed: 9 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (12 September 2019), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/508197556415850> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (17 October 2019), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/410653786498681> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (20 August 2020), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/784736868932905> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (10 August 2021), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/4495386727172650> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (11 August 2021), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/4300143060064747> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Imam Husain Islamic Centre. Live broadcast (21 August 2021), *Facebook* [online]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ImamHusainIslamicCentre/videos/2989684144685877> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Konzack, L. (2018) 'Transmediality' in Wolf, M. J. P. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*. New York: Routledge.
- Kowalczyk, O., Roszkowski, K., Montane, X., Pawliszak, W., Tylkowski, B., and Bajek, A. (2020) 'Religion and Faith Perception in a Pandemic of COVID-19', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(6), 2671-2677.
- Latour, B. (2018) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lemmens, P. (2020) 'Cosmotechnics and the Ontological Turn in the Age of the Anthropocene', *Angelika*, 25(4), pp. 3-8.
- Lunn, D. and Byl, J. (2017) "'One Story Ends and Another Begins": Reading the Syair Tabuk of Encik Ali', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 45(133), pp. 391-420.
- Marei, F. G. and Shanneik, Y. (2021) 'Lamenting Karbala in Europe: Husayni Liturgy and Discourses of Dissent Amongst Diasporic Bahraini and Lebanese Shiis', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 32(1), pp. 53-79.
- McLuhan, H. M. ([1964] 1994) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- McMurray, P. (2021) 'Mobilizing Karbala: Sonic Remediations in Berlin Ashura Processions', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(10), pp. 1864-1885.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *Signs*. Translated by R. C. McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Moghadam, A. (2007) 'Mayhem, Myths, and Martyrdom: The Shi'a Conception of Jihad', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19, pp. 125-143.
- Pinault, D. (1999) *The Shiites*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Qureshi, R. B. (1981) 'Islamic Music in an Indian Environment', *Ethnomusicology*, 25(1), pp. 41-71.
- Reynolds, M. (2013) *Likenesses: Translation, Illustration, Interpretation*. Abingdon: Legenda.

Sparey R. – Livestreaming Islamic Arts: Digitization as Translation in Shi'i depictions of Karbala  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 29-56, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a2](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a2)

- Richardson, I. (2011) 'The Hybrid Ontology of Mobile Gaming', *Convergence*, 17(4), pp. 419-430.
- Rogers, R. (2013) *Digital Methods*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ruffle, K. (2015) 'Wounds of Devotion: Reconceiving Mātām in Shi'i Islam', *History of Religions*, 55(2), pp. 172-195.
- Ruffle. (2017) 'Presence in Absence: The Formation of Reliquary Shi'ism in Qutb Shahi Hyderabad', *Material Religion*, 13(3), pp. 329-53.
- Ruffle. (2021a) *Everyday Shi'ism in South Asia*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Ruffle. (2021b) 'Gazing in the Eyes of Martyrs: Four Theories of South Asian Shi'i Visuality', *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World*, 1, pp. 268-290.
- Russell, B. (1948) *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Schubel, V. (1991) 'The Muharram Majlis: The Role of a Ritual in the Preservation of a Shi'a Identity' in Waugh, E. H., Abu-Laban, S. M. and Qureshi, R. B. (eds.) *Muslim Families in North America*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, pp. 118-131.
- Siegert, B. 'Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 30(6), pp. 48-65.
- Simondon, G. ([1965] 2014). 'Culture and Technics', *Radical Philosophy*, 189, pp. 17-23.
- Simondon, G. ([1982] 2012) 'On Techno Aesthetics', *Parrhesia*, 14, pp. 1-8.
- Simondon, G. ([2005] 2020) *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*. Translated by T. Adkins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sparey, R. T. (2022) '#IAMHUSSEINI: Television and Mourning during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Religion*, 52(2), pp. 284-305.
- Sparey, R. T. (in press) 'Sensing Shi'ism Online: The Intersensoriality of Nauḥah Recitation Videos on YouTube', *Asian Ethnology*.
- Stallknecht, N. P. (1935) 'Awareness of Actuality in the Esthetic Experience', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 32(12), pp. 323-328.
- Stokes, M. (2016) 'Islamic Popular Music Aesthetics in Turkey' in van Nieuwkerk, K., LeVine, M. and Stokes, M. (eds.) *Islam and Popular Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 41-57.
- Tabar, P. (2002) 'Ashura in Sydney: A Transformation of a Religious Ceremony in the Context of a Migrant Society', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 23(3), pp. 285-305.
- Thomas, P. (2004) 'Atoms and Errors: Towards a History and Aesthetics of Microsound', *Organized Sound*, 9(2), pp. 207-18.
- Vermeer, P. and Kregting, J. (2020) 'Religion and the Transmission of COVID-19 in The Netherlands', *Religions*, 11(8), p. 393.
- Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shi'ism, *Plate 44* [online]. Available at: <https://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/plate-44.jpeg> (Accessed: 16 February 2023).
- Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shi'ism. *Plate 46* [online]. Available at: <https://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/plate-46.jpeg> (Accessed: February 16 2023).
- Wildman, W. J., Bulbulia, J., Sosis, R. and Schjoedt, U. (2020), 'Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Religion, Brain and Behavior*, 10, pp. 115-117.
- Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sparey R. – Livestreaming Islamic Arts: Digitization as Translation in Shi'i depictions of Karbala  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 29-56, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a2](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a2)

Williamson Fa, S. (2022) 'Voices of Sorrow and Joy: Cultivating Relations with the Unseen in Muslim Devotion', *Cultural Anthropology*, 37(4), pp. 625-652.

Willems, W. (2021) 'Beyond Platform-Centrism and Digital Universalism: The Relational Affordances of Mobile Social Media Publics', *Information, Communication and Society*, 24(12), pp. 1677-1693.

Wolf, R. K. (2000) 'Embodiment and Ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram Drumming', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 32, pp. 81-116.

Wolf, R. K. (2010) *Music and Translocation in South Asia: Two Case Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wolf, R. K. (2014) *The Voice in the Drum: Music, Language and Emotion in Islamicate South Asia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

World History Encyclopedia, *Battle of Karbala (Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam)* [online]. Available at: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/11462/battle-of-karbala/js> (Accessed: 17 February 2023).

**About the author:** Rhys Thomas Sparey is a PhD Candidate at King's College London and a Cultural Historian of the Digital Islamicate Arabian Sea. His research is based on fieldwork online and throughout South and Southwest Asia in Arabic, English, and Urdu. He teaches in the Creative Industries, Digital Humanities, and Music Departments.

**“IT’S NO FAULT OF YOURS IF YOUR LIFE SONGS ARE BIGGER THAN A CONTINENT”:  
SELF-TRANSLATION, CREATIVITY, AND THE SPECTER OF SELF-BETRAYAL**

**Emily Marie Passos Duffy\***

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**ABSTRACT:** The present paper aims to engage with contemporary conversations on self-translation by writers and translators who grapple with questions of identity, resistance, and their place in the global system of literature as intercultural subjects for whom linguistic hybridity is a fact of their literary production. Through analysis of essays compiled and edited by Wiam El-Tamamin in the special section on self-translation of *ArabLit Quarterly*, it will consider the experiential aspects of self-translation as well as what is at stake when authors self-translate work that reflects their own linguistic hybridity in its form and content. The self-translated text is hybrid, and it always points to an original-in-flux. Whether that source text is published, written in a private journal, or exists orally or in the writer’s imagination or body— it is a necessary and corresponding part of a bricolage whole. **KEYWORDS:** Self-Translation, Linguistic Hybridity, Creativity, Intimacy, Literary Translation, Arabic Literature in Translation.

### **1. Introduction**

For certain writers, irrespective of whether they identify as translators, self-translation and linguistic hybridity are facts of their literary production. Authors who occupy interstitial cultural and linguistic spaces are “living in translation,” and their work often reflects a “contact zone” (Pratt, 1991) where literature is produced against the backdrop of asymmetrical power relations and their aftermath. With this complexity in mind, the present paper aims to circle in on contemporary conversations on self-translation by writers and translators who grapple with questions of identity, resistance, and their place in the global system of literature as intercultural subjects for whom linguistic hybridity is almost an inevitable part of their craft. In order to better understand how living authors grapple with their own linguistic hybridity as it pertains to their work as authors and translators, I will examine essays compiled and edited by Wiam El-Tamamin in the special section on self-translation of *ArabLit & ArabLit Quarterly*, with essays by Mona Kareem, Khalid Lyamlahy, Deena Mohamed, Dunya Mikhail, and Ali Shakir. The authors represented in this special section use metaphoric language to describe the experience of translating their own work, and pose questions such as, “Which self is supposed to do the translation?” (Shakir, 2022). This small corpus of author-translator testimony offers a useful window into the experience of writers for whom self-translation is a manifestation of their own multilingualism and linguistic hybridity. In this paper, I am making the argument that a self-translation is a linguistically hybrid text because it is always tethered to its “other.” The source text and target text are woven together, and they exist as two sides of a coin by nature of the fact that they were both created by the same, multilingual writer.

---

\* eduffy@ucp.pt

Additionally, a self-translation destabilizes the boundaries between source text and target text, among many other categories.

Degrees and types of self-translation have been categorized as naturalizing, decentred, and (re)creative according to Michael Oustinoff (Benabed, 2017, p. 77). These degrees represent different types of adherence to a source text and different strategies for the self-translation in respect to the relationship between the source text and target text. Guldin (2007) writes, “In this unstable context where gender and power-roles have lost their unilateral meaning, one is constantly forced to betray oneself in order to remain true to oneself” (3). This paradox of self-betrayal within the context of self-translation complicates certain traditionally held metaphors of translation relating to fidelity and intimacy. Translation theorists of the 20th and 21st centuries have explored the connections between intimacy, relationship, and translation (Spivak, 1993; Chamberlain, 1988; Basile, 2017; West, 2012; Santaemilia, 2017), with these metaphors most often pertaining to translations that the author of the source text does not perform. What could it mean to apply Spivak’s adage of translation being the most intimate form of reading to self-translation? This paper will analyze the contents of the special issue to examine what is at stake when authors self-translate work that reflects their own linguistic hybridity in its form and content. This paper makes the argument for self-translation as a de facto expression of linguistic hybridity. A self-translated text is always and necessarily hybrid in nature and part of a whole, “like those half heart necklaces in search for the other half” (Mikhail, 2019). Within a composite of possible selves, the shattered glass of a mirror becomes a mosaic—resisting categorization and upending traditionally held notions regarding the divisions between languages, identities, and texts.

To the extent that self-translation is often a highly fraught (and therefore embodied and embedded) creative process, which disrupts the monolingual mindset as well as monodirectional views of translational operations, it can also be considered through the lens of experiential translation.

## **2. Self-translation, multilingualism, and hybridity in the field of translation studies**

Despite the fact that it is a practice with a long and varied history (Hokenson and Munson, 2007), self-translation remains a relatively under-examined area. When framing a contemporary understanding of self-translation, it is necessary to adopt a diachronic view of linguistic hybridity. Self-translators occupy a transcultural position— they have competencies in at least two languages and have lived experience in multiple cultural contexts (Cordingley, 2013; Grutman, 2009). The monolingual mindset, which dominated translation theory for a large part of the twentieth century, has often been criticized for oversimplifying the translation process, as it ignores the complex cultural and linguistic differences between languages that can affect the meaning and impact of a text. Mona Baker (2018), in her book, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, describes the monolingual mindset as “an approach to translation that assumes a one-to-one correspondence between linguistic units in the source and target languages, as well as a

degree of equivalence between the cultures in which the two languages are used" (Baker 2018, p. 15). Self-translation as an expression of linguistic hybridity disrupts the monolingual mindset by highlighting the fact that the boundaries between languages are not always clear-cut and that many languages have been influenced by and borrowed from each other over time. The concept of linguistic hybridity can be seen as an antidote to the monolingual mindset in translation studies, as it challenges the idea of fixed and pure languages and emphasizes the importance of cultural and linguistic mixing and hybridization in the production of translations.

Prior to the reification of written languages in the early modern period, linguistic hybridity was accepted before and during the medieval period due to prevalent linguistic borrowing and mixing. In Renaissance Europe, for example, poets translated their own "Latin musings" as finger exercises (Grutman, 2009, p. 257), pointing to the dexterity and fluidity with which those who were literate moved between languages. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in the siloing of languages associated with the rise of the nation-state (Venuti, 2009; Hokenson and Munson, 2007). And after that, "[...] in the troubled wake of linguistic nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in canon formation as in comparative philology, this peculiar onus on the bilingual writer, as citizen of no language or perhaps traitor to two, has continued to taint critical reception of the bilingual texts – in both languages– and poses a unique problem to translation theory" (Hokenson and Munson, 2007, p. 3).

In the 20th and 21st centuries, a relationship between language precarity and self-translation can be observed. For example, there are cases of writers from outlying republics of the former Soviet Union self-translating their work as well as instances of English/Gaelic bilingual editions (Grutman, 2009). There are also well-known authors of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and George Steiner who have all translated their own work between their various languages. Lebanese-American poet, essayist, and painter, Etel Adnan is another contemporary example who, as Mona Kareem (2022) reminds us, "[wrote] in French then self-translated, but no one can tell unless she told them so." She goes on to reflect on the intimacy of Adnan's self-translation, this hybridity being an aspect of the artist's self and creative process that she is not obligated to make public: "There are texts of Etel where we don't even know whether they were first written in French or English. I giggle at her art of deception. No one is entitled to this knowledge, other than the poet herself" (Kareem, 2022). For translation studies, it is important to understand why a self-translation occurs. Understanding factors such as language precarity and the geopolitical reality of a certain linguistic region is paramount. And, as the authors included in the special section articulate, self-translation can be a delicate endeavor on several valences —as multilingual authors engaged in this work, they reflect on how this particular and hybrid situation points to possibilities for both creative liberation and potentiation as well as the possibility of self-betrayal.

### 3. A case study on *ArabLit Quarterly*

In order to more thoroughly examine contemporary notions of self-translation, as well as their implications for the area of translation theory and translation metaphors, it is important to turn to those doing the work. To this end, I have chosen as a case study corpus a special section from the journal *ArabLit Quarterly* on self-translation, published online in 2022. The section, edited by Egyptian writer, translator, and literary editor, Wiam El-Tamimi, includes six pieces by authors and author-translators Mona Kareem, Khalid Lyamlahy, Deena Mohamed, Dunya Mikhail, and Ali Shakir, reflecting on “what it means to transport their writing from one of their languages to another” (El-Tamami, 2022). The authors come from a range of cultural, linguistic, and artistic backgrounds—their hybridity is not only reflected in their language abilities, but also in the types of work they produce. I will begin with an introduction of each author included in the special section, and then move into a more in-depth look at dominant themes present in the contributions and their significance for considering self-translation as an expression of linguistic hybridity.

Mona Kareem is a Kuwait-born, Bidoon<sup>1</sup> poet, translator, and scholar of literature. She is the author of three poetry collections, and her most recent book, *Femme Ghosts*, is a trilingual chapbook that includes poems in Arabic, English, and Dutch. According to the publisher, “In this series of eight poems, Kareem continues her echoing of women’s voices—the pirate women, busy with their dreams, dwelling on future pasts, indulging in their loneliness” (Publication Studio). In an essay published by The Common, she offers perspectives on growing up as a stateless person in Kuwait. Kareem (2021) writes, “‘What is *Bidun*?’ is a question that I will always struggle to answer—how to define someone by negation. Stateless persons and communities in the Gulf have varied stories and travels, but they were all made stateless by the violence of nation-state building.” As an asylum-seeker in the U.S., her writing was informed by feelings of exile and precarity; “I understood that I was expected to become unrelated to my past being. My life was ‘lagging’ for four years in America, until it was finally allowed to restart when the asylum acceptance letter arrived in the mail” (Kareem, 2021). For Kareem, this liminal sense of “un-belonging,” whether as a stateless person in Kuwait or an asylum-seeker in the U.S., is a key aspect of how she conceives of her own linguistic and cultural hybridity in respect to self-translation. Her contribution to the special section, titled “Self-translation Never Lands” does the work of framing self-translation as an eternal condition and survival tactic.

Khalid Lyamlahy is a Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Chicago, with a varied professional history that includes civil engineering and project management. His research focuses on Francophone North African Literature, and he is also a fiction writer. In a guest post for *Africa in Words* on Moroccan Francophone literature, Lyamlahy writes on the cultural and literary trends in Morocco following the country’s

---

<sup>1</sup> “Bidoon (short for bidoon jinsiya, meaning ‘without nationality’ in Arabic, and alternately spelt as Bedoon, Bidun and Bedun) are a stateless Arab minority in Kuwait who were not included as citizens at the time of the country’s independence or shortly thereafter.” Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/bidoon/> (Accessed: 23 July 2023).

independence in 1956; “Writing in French was not only an attempt at ‘writing back’ to France, but also a multifaceted challenge aimed at reinventing the use of language and exploring new areas of creation and self-critique” (Lyamlahy, 2016). This speaks to the second-generation postcolonial strategy of appropriating a colonial language in order to repurpose it, or, as Homi Bhabha (1985) articulates in the case of English, “the attempt to transform the literatures of English into a counter-language, the attempt to appropriate the power and force of English, its resilience, its elasticity, into a language of resistance against its own imperializing force” (157). Khalid Lyamlahy’s essay in the special section on self-translation also addresses the more technical challenges presented by self-translating his novel. He writes:

Self-translation is no easy work. For me, it was an arduous confrontation not only with the act of re-writing but also with my language practices and preferences. I grew up in Morocco, speaking Moroccan Arabic (“Darija”), and learning Modern Standard Arabic and French before English. Multilingualism has always been an integral part of my everyday life, although I now work mainly in French and tend to use English exclusively for academic work. When I started translating the four excerpts, I quickly realized that the novel was slipping through my fingers. I had to control a distant self who was constantly looking over my shoulder (Lyamlahy, 2022).

The characterization of self-translation as an “arduous confrontation” as well as a negotiation with a “distant self” speaks to both the technical and existential problems faced by multilingual authors who inhabit a hybrid position in their work. For Lyamlahy, self-translation is a mediation of the multiple “selves” that work with different languages in respective contexts, (academic, creative, etc.).

Deena Mohamed is an Egyptian comics artist, writer, and designer. She is the author of *Shubeik Lubeik*, a graphic novel trilogy that depicts a world where wishes are for sale; “In Arabic folktales, Shubeik Lubeik is the first part of the rhyme a genie speaks once released from a lamp. It means ‘Your wish is my command.’” (Mel, 2023). The novel, written in English, draws from Arabic folklore, making it an intercultural (Bandia, 2021) as well as a multimodal text. Her graphic essay for the *ArabLit Quarterly* special section articulates the complexities of moving between languages as well as cultural contexts in the act of self-translating.

Dunya Mikhail is an Iraqi-American poet who was born in Baghdad. Her poetry reflects a reality of exile, although in her own words, she does not see her work as explicitly political in nature. In an interview with Lillian Pearce with MQR, Mikhail shares

My poetry is not political, even though it’s influenced, to some extent, by political issues. As an immigrant writer, it’s natural for me to develop a strong sense of place. I always transfer in my mind between my motherland and my fatherland, like how a child moves between the parents. When the parents fight, the child gets frustrated. But I found that poetry is my homecoming wherever I am. (Pearce, 2023)

Her sense of toggling back and forth between sense of home, of place, and of culture, belies a sensibility I will discuss further in this paper. As a poet who engages in self-translation between English and Arabic, this metaphor of toggling also applies to the written form of the languages she writes in—with English being written left to right and Arabic written right to left. Her contribution to the special section of *ArabLit Quarterly* speaks to the possibility for self-translation as a vehicle for mediation, democracy, and even love.

Ali Shakir (2022) reaffirms the multiplicity of the self and asks, “which self is supposed to do the translation?” His writing on self-translation points to the bifurcations in identity that don’t exclusively fall between linguistic or cultural boundaries. As an architect, author, and translator who was born in Iraq and is based in Auckland, his varied personal and professional experiences give him a singular perspective on what it means to self-translate. He also has articulated the complicated and estranged feelings that an author with multinational ties can feel. In an interview with *Surreal Horizon* (2016), when asked about how he feels when he looks at Iraq now, Shakir responds:

I see it as a foreign country, something happening in a totally foreign country. Just like watching news on Afghanistan. All the pictures I see don’t even relate to what I saw when I was there. I do sympathise with people living there, but it doesn’t feel like it is my country now.

And you know, I feel like Baghdad was sort of like a girl I really loved and she cheated on me. And being cheated on hurts, right? That’s how I feel, looking at it in a different way.

These feelings towards his country of origin as a “foreign country” shows Shakir’s geographical and also emotional distance from Iraq as he watches events unfold from his home in New Zealand. His sense of betrayal, and the metaphor he uses about the infidelity of his home city, Baghdad, points to the complicated relationships that these writers have with space, place, and their own identities.

The themes present in these pieces of writing from the special section of *ArabLit Quarterly*, which range from commentary on craft, to reflections on identity, echo many of the current debates on self-translation and the complications it presents for an author-translator. For these multilingual writers, self-translation is a fact of their literary production, and each one has a different relationship to it, as unique as their writing style itself. I will highlight examples from each and comment on some threads of continuity as they pertain to relevant debates on self-translation. A textual analysis and close reading of the six pieces reveal a multiplicity of attitudes towards the craft of self-translation. The authors describe self-translation as a fraught process, both on a craft level and on an identity level. They are acutely aware of what is at stake in the process of translating their own work—particularly when translating into English. These works speak to both the challenges and possibilities for liberation present in self-translation, affirming Guldin’s (2007) articulation of the “inner tension” and “duality, division, discord” that the task brings up for multilingual writers; “a hazardous, but fundamentally creative endeavor.” For the

multilingual author, there is always both risk and possibility involved. These risks carry implications across the continuum of personal to political.

#### 4. Self-translation and sociopolitics

Illustrator and author, Deena Mohamed offers graphic representations of what self-translation feels like and the complex socio-political implications of conveying oneself, not only in a different language, but to a different audience. In her visual essay, “On Drawing Self-Translation” (2022), she uses text and images to communicate the complexities of moving between linguistic contexts and presenting her work in English.



Figure 1. Deena Mohamed, “On Drawing Self-Translation” *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* (2022)

In the above comic, we can observe the need to address Islamophobia when she speaks and writes in English. In Arabic, she notes that she feels she can speak about the issue of feminism with more liberty. This shows an attentiveness to the target audience, as well as an awareness of stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslim women through the Western gaze. In her book *Feminist Accountability*, Ann Russo (2018) critically points out how the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and later Iraq has impacted the way that Western feminists view Muslim women, noting how imperialism can be recast in a feminist way; “the United States must act in order to ‘save Afghan women’ and to support women’s human rights” (p. 185). Deena Mohamed’s comic shows that she is aware of this narrative

and cautious of perpetuating the idea that Muslim women are engaged in a feminist struggle to a Western audience, lest it is co-opted by the logics of imperialism. In a way, this strategy could be read as engaged with Oustinoff's notion of a "naturalizing" self-translation which, "bends the text to the standards of the target language by eradicating any interference from the source language [...] erasing all the traces of the source language and culture" (Benabed, 2017, p. 77). While, in the above example, Mohamed does not erase all the traces of the source language and culture in representing how she translates her work, she does modify both visual and textual elements with a Western audience as a target culture in mind.

This self-awareness points back to a larger issue related to self-translation in situations of linguistic hybridity that necessarily include contact zones, struggle, conflict, and asymmetrical power relations. Resisting easy categorization can be seen as a life-affirming survival strategy for authors who engage in the act of self-translating, reifying their agile multiplicities in the texts they produce. Mona Kareem writes, "It's no fault of yours if your life songs are bigger than a continent, if literature has been oppressively labelled and organized into a Walmart. All you can do for now is to pass your hand over the shelves, aisle to aisle—and, whenever possible, fuck up their inventory" (Kareem, 2022). Here, self-translation is also seen as a way to disrupt sociopolitical and linguistic hegemony.

Mohamed's reflection on how she produces different work for English-speaking audiences, exercising caution about opening the door for narratives about Muslim women needing to be saved to be projected onto her work, shows an awareness of what is at stake in the act of self-translation. Kareem's comment about literature being "oppressively labelled and organized into a Walmart" offers a critique of a global literary capitalism that wants authors or works to be just one thing—or, only exist in one language.

## **5. Self-translation and the mirrored self**

As the authors represented in this special section point out, the notion of a stable "self" is difficult to sustain when examined in the context of self-translation. Khalid Lyamlahy (2022) refers to a critical self that is always "looking over the shoulder" when he is translating his own work. These other selves could also be seen as a kind of mirror—a funhouse hall of reflection with each fragment offering a slightly different image of the self. The mirroring, or doubling present in Deena Mohamed's comic, this notion that a different self is present in the work depending on the language, is also articulated by poet Dunya Mikhail (2022), who self-translates her poetry between Arabic and English. She writes, "To capture the poem in two lives is to mirror my exile, with all of its possibilities and risks." Mikhail also observes how it feels to switch directions in self-translation—the bi-directionality of moving between Arabic and English causes her to physically move from left to right to right to left, a constant motion reflecting a larger theme of uprooting and displacement:

It was annoying to me in the beginning when my poem pulled me right and left, but just as people say to "follow your heart," I always follow my poetry. Well, to justify my choice, I

would claim that allowing such a dialogue between the two texts is democratic, and I'm even hopeful that East and West may meet in that crossing line between two languages. But this is not to say that I've achieved linguistic utopia. To produce a text in two languages is to always hold a mirror to the first text while the mirror behaves as if that text is actually her mirror. The poet is at home in both texts, yet she remains a stranger. (Mikhail, 2022)

The sense of possibility and estrangement articulated here shows a hope for self-translation as a kind of mediation for the fractured self—a way to reconcile the linguistic and cultural hybridity present within the poet, and also across cultural and geographical lines. This mirrored belonging represents the potential for generative relationships across differences.

The notion of multiple selves, represented through mirror or mosaic, is also present in Ali Shakir's meditation on self-translation. He asks, "What does the 'self' in 'self-translator' stand for?" (Shakir, 2022). Shakir reaffirms the multiplicity of the self and further inquires about which 'self' is supposed to perform the translation:

A hand that slices a bilingual author's entity in half, yielding pieces where different tongues are spoken?

Or is it a bridge that links the terrains on their opposite shores?

Is it a buffer zone, a messenger, a part of some un-holy trinity?

What is the self anyway?

A two-dimensional plane, or an uncontainable organism?

The child self, the adult self. The happy self, the not-so happy self, the miserable self. The foolish self, the wise self, etc. ...Which self is supposed to do the translation? (Shakir, 2022).

This panoply of metaphors and naming of different possible states of being offered by Shakir highlight the bifurcations in identity that don't exclusively fall between linguistic or cultural boundaries. The self, here, is an unstable entity with many possible expressions. In the article, "I believe that my two tongues love each other *cela ne m'étonnerait pas*": Self-Translation and the Construction of Sexual Identity" Rainer Guldin (2007) follows Lori Chamberlain and Rosemary Arrojo and notes how the phenomenon of self-translation disrupts those metaphors for translation that reinforce binaries across gendered and colonial divides. These metaphors include fidelity and references to motherland, with the translator seen as feminine—performing a kind of reproductive labor that is ultimately devalued. Guldin (2008) argues that self-translation destabilizes these binaries: "these clear-cut divisions break down as author and translator happen to be the same person. In this unstable context where gender and power-roles have lost their unilateral meaning one is constantly forced to betray oneself in order to remain true to oneself." In the next section I will examine how notions of intimacy and fidelity are complicated through linguistic hybridity and self-translation.

## 6. Self-translation and intimacy

Following Spivak's (1993) adage that "translation is the most intimate form of reading," what could it mean for an author to cultivate that intimacy with themselves?

Returning to the essay from Iraqi-American poet, Dunya Mikhail, her view offers an acknowledgement of the technical challenges of self-translation, as well as the perspective that her two languages are in intimate concert with one another: "I do faithful translation when I translate someone else, but with my own work I feel free to make changes as I see fit. I feel that the relationship between the two texts (the Arabic and the English, in this case) is something like true love. I mean that the two texts develop together without imposing too much on each other." (Mikhail, 2022). Here, she acknowledges the liberty and the intimate possibility that self-translation offers for her as a writer. Betrayal and love are two sides of the same coin; the "infidelity" to the self, or rather, the self that wrote the first text does, in fact, make it beautiful. And yet, the two texts coexist and potentiate one another. Self-translation is seen as an artistically challenging endeavor, and also one that presents freedom and possibility. There is also resentment and the specter of self-betrayal. Mona Kareem (2022) further speaks to this fraught relationship with the self, as well as the task of self-translation when she mentions "The anxiety, guilt, alienation, displacement, but also the fluidity, worldliness, and awkward freshness." These are all words that could apply to situations of both intimacy and exile.

Mikhail (2022), for her part, sees her languages, English and Arabic, as lovers. And the act of self-translation facilitates their co-mingling. The poetic meeting of the two languages destabilizes the boundaries between them. In an interview, she offers agency to her texts, allowing them to find their way away from and back towards each other: "I just simply found that my poem had a dialogue (sometimes an argument) with its other self, and I allowed it, feeling good about my 'democracy.' The poem was not demanding changes from its companion other; rather, the two versions enriched each other and developed together like true lovers" (Mikhail, 2019). This romantic view of the self-translation process offers an example of Spivak's intimacy in practice. This intimacy offers transformation when the rigidity of linguistic and cultural boundaries are loosened and the author allows herself to be "unfaithful" (Mikhail, 2022). This perspective on self-translation could be seen as a form of Oustinoff's (re)creative self-translation, which "involves another creation. The author allows themselves considerable liberty in rewriting the text." (Oustinoff, in Benabed 2017, p. 77). In Mikhail's (2019) own words, in the preface to the English version of her collection of poems published simultaneously as *الغريبة بتائها المربوطة* and *In Her Feminine Sign*, "I didn't translate [the poems]; I only wrote them twice."

The atomic intimacy present in self-translation for writers who are multilingual and intercultural reminds us of the shaky and porous nature of imposed boundaries between languages, cultures, texts, and bodies. The self-translated text is often liberated from the notion of an original, yet also remains tethered to it. It is hybrid, and it always points to an original in-flux. Whether that source text is published, written in a private journal, or exists

orally or in the writer's imagination or body – it is a necessary and corresponding part of a bricolage whole.

## 7. Conclusion and further research questions

For the writers represented in the special section on self-translation in *ArabLit Quarterly*, betraying oneself vis-a-vis self-translation can open up aesthetic, literary, and strategic possibilities. That is, the possibility for self-betrayal is always looming and immanent. However, it seems important to be clear about the role of the self in literary production—as well as which “self” is doing the translation. The authors describe self-translation as a fraught process, both on a craft level and on an identity level. They are acutely aware of their positionality and what is at stake in the process of translating their own work, especially into English. This corpus affirmed for me the importance of reading translator interviews and testimonies—as all the author contributions to this special section illuminated or exemplified something about translation theory. Each had something to say about their work on the craft and/ or identity-based or theoretical level.

As for applying Spivak's hypothesis to self-translation, that translation is the most intimate form of reading, I found it noteworthy that the author who most explicitly mentioned love and intimacy in respect to the self-translation process is a poet (Mikhail, 2022). Perhaps there is something about the medium of poetry that allows for more freedom, experimentation, and intimacy on a craft level than something like a novel does. This could be an area of further inquiry: examining self-translation and author testimonies comparatively by genre. However, this research question could be further problematized by arguing that genre itself is also an unstable category. There are multimodal works, and hybrid-genre works, for example. Still, this could be a question taken up by future research.

Overall, these contributions to the special section speak to both the experiential challenges and possibilities for liberation present in self-translation, affirming Guldin's (2008) articulation of the “inner tension” and “duality, division, discord” that the task brings up for multilingual writers; “a hazardous, but fundamentally creative endeavor.” A self-translated work can “reflect exile with all of its chances and risks” (Mikhail, 2019). There is danger and possibility present in this task—with the potential for new horizons. On the future of self-translation, Mona Kareem (2022) articulates a possibility: “I can see that this mode, this condition, is slowly becoming second nature to me. I sometimes remind myself to stop questioning it, or to at least accept that the answers will continue to change, or even be shuffled around. I can also see how, in a world where mass displacement is the new norm, self-translation will reach a point of no-question.” If we are to heed this prediction, vocabulary and theoretical frameworks for self-translation as an expression of multilingualism and linguistic hybridity will reflect the transient, fluctuating, and ever-evolving nature of the bodies and subjectivities that produce these texts.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, M. (2018) *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge.
- Benabed, F. (2017) 'Ethnotextual Mental Translation And Self-Translation In African Literature', *De Gruyter Open* [online]. Available at: <https://sciendo.com/pdf/10.1515/aa-2017-0010> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1985) 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), pp. 144-165.
- Chamberlain, L. (1988) 'Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation', *Signs*, 13(3), pp. 454–472 [online]. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174168> ((Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Cordingley, A. (ed.) (2013) *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*. London: Continuum.
- Grutman, R. (2009) 'Self-Translation' in Baker, M. and Saldanha, G. (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 257–260.
- Guldin, R. (2007) "'I believe that my two tongues love each other cela ne m'étonnerait pas": Self-Translation and the Construction of Sexual Identity', *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 20(1), p. 193 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7202/018503AR> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Hokenson, J. and Munson, M. (2007) *The Bilingual Text: History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome Pub.
- Kareem, M. (2019) *Femme Ghosts* [online]. Available at: <https://www.publicationstudio.biz/books/femme-ghosts/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Kareem, M. (2021) *The Common* [online]. Available at: <https://www.thecommononline.org/mapping-exile-a-writers-story-of-growing-up-stateless-in-post-gulf-war-kuwait/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Kareem, M. (2022) 'Self-Translation Never Lands', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2022/01/24/self-translation-never-lands/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Lyamlahty, K. (2022) 'On Self-Translating "a Foreign Novel"', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2022/01/24/on-self-translating-a-foreign-novel/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Lyamlahty, K. (2016) *Africa in Words* [online]. Available at: <https://africanwords.com/2016/02/26/souffles-turns-50-remembering-the-breath-of-moroccan-francophone-literature/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Mel (2023) 'Review: Shubeik Lubeik by Deena Mohamed' [online]. Available at: <https://equalopportunityreader.com/2023/01/23/review-shubeik-lubeik-by-deena-mohamed/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Mikhail, D. (2019) 'Writing it Twice is my new original', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2019/07/08/dunya-mikhail-writing-it-twice-is-my-new-original/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Mikhail, D. (2022) 'Writing It Twice Is the New Original', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2022/01/24/writing-it-twice-is-the-new-original/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Minority Rights Group International. "Bidoon." [Online]. Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/bidoon/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Mohamed, D. (2022) 'On Drawing Self-Translation', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2022/01/24/on-drawing-self-translation/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

18 July 2023).

- Pearce, L. (2023) 'Aesthetic Enthusiasm: An Interview with Dunya Mikhail', *MQR* [online]. Available at: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2021/05/aesthetic-enthusiasm-an-interview-with-dunya-mikhail/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Pratt, M. L. (1991) 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession*, pp. 33–40 [online]. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Russo, A. (2018) 'Disentangling U.S. Feminism from U.S. Imperialism', *Feminist Accountability*. NYU Press.
- Santaemilia, J. (2017) 'Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners? Toward a Queer Turn in Rewriting Identities and Desires' in Braer, B.J. and Kaindl, K. (eds.) *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer*. New York: Routledge, pp. 11-25.
- Spivak, G. (1993) *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 179–200.
- Surreal Horizon (2016) 'An interview with Ali Shakir' [online]. Available at: <https://surrealhorizon.wordpress.com/interview-with-ali-shakir/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Shakir, A. (2022) 'What Is the Self in Self-Translation?', *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <https://arablit.org/2022/01/24/what-is-the-self-in-self-translation/> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).
- Venuti, L. (2009) 'Translation Studies in the USA and Canada' in Munday, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 203-218.

**About the author:** Emily Marie Passos Duffy is a poet, writer, researcher, and performing artist. She is a doctoral student in Translation Studies at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, a member of the CECC research center and a proofreader for *Diffractions: A Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture*.

## ILLUSTRATING *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: NEW MEANINGS FOR AN EVERGREEN CHILDREN'S CLASSIC

Salvatore M. Ciancitto\*  
University of Catania

**ABSTRACT:** The link between words and pictures is an internal feature of children's literature. This bundle of meanings can be a real challenge for the translator, who has to work both on words and on the pictures and their relation to the words. All this is particularly important when a text has been originated with pictures as an integral part of it, with continuous inter-referential connections between words and pictures and whose illustrations were decided by the author of the book, as it is the case for "*Alice in Wonderland*" by Lewis Carroll, a text which had been re-translated and re-edited several times, by providing it with new sets of images. Thus, the aim of this paper is to show the visual representations of Alice in the last decade, comparing the original drawings by Tenniel with the pictures used in Italian publications, in the attempt to unveil new ways in which Carroll's character and her world have moved from a Victorian fantasy in order to gain eventually new cultural meanings.

**KEYWORDS:** *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Children's Literature in Translation, Illustrated Books, Intersemiotic Translation, Intrasemiotic Translation

### 1. Introduction

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll is one of the most popular children's books of all time, famous not only for its plot and characters, but also for the illustrations made by John Tenniel (1820-1914). There have been a great many re-editions and translations since its publication in 1865, but not all of them have reproduced Tenniel's drawings. Some have commissioned new drawings in order to appeal to a new readership or fulfil a new *skopos*.

When a story for children is re-illustrated, the illustrators can decide to add or omit material, render certain themes more or less explicit, or condense sections into a single image in order to adapt the text to contemporary tastes and ideology. When this is done with reference to a previous or canonical illustration, it becomes a process not unlike that of retranslation.

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse some of the visual representations of *Alice in Wonderland* that have appeared in Italian publications over the last decade, comparing them with Tenniel's original drawings in an attempt to assess the new cultural meanings that have been accrued in the process. This will then be used to shed some light on the issue of visual retranslation and the reasons for it.

### 2. Illustrations in children's books

Illustrations are important features of children's literature but they do not always function in the same way in every work. According to Gregersen (Nikolajeva, 2006, p. 7), four types

---

\* ciancitto@unict.it

of illustrated books and picture books can be distinguished according to the nature of the relationship between the words and pictures: the *exhibit* book, where the verbal element is absent; the *picture narrative*, where there are a few or scattered words in the narrative; the *picture book* or *picture storybook*, where the words and pictures act together in a complementary fashion to create a meaningful story; and the *illustrated book*, where the pictures are subordinated to the narrative (that is to say, the story can work independently of the pictures, as in the case of *Alice in Wonderland*).

Illustrations help children to make sense of the story and to remember the plot when they are reading or flipping through the pages on their own. They can also complement the text and expand the contents of the story, providing more detail about episodes that are not described at length. However, as Nodelman (2005) has remarked, pictures and illustrations only communicate within a network of conventions and assumptions; hence, there is need for prior knowledge of the communicative code that children sometimes lack. Visual information is also firmly set in the context of the specific culture that produces and receives it (Mirzoeff, 1999), which means that it is not always readily translatable either.

Line, colour, action and movement, size, location, and symbolism are among the key features of the visual image in illustrated books (Lewis, 2001, pp. 103-123). The quality of the line is important and can be used, amongst other things, to give a hint of movement (through dashes, streaks and shadowing, for example). Colour is likewise important, even though not all books for children are necessarily coloured (Tenniel's illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* were famously in black and white); one of its various functions is cohesive, in the sense that it can connect or separate important characters or objects in the tale. As far as movement is concerned, characters interact with each other within a space and their actions are figuratively represented. Finally, all of the above elements can interact with one another to produce more complex forms, conveying a particular symbolism which might not be easily interpreted by children, due to their age and inexperience.

The composition of the picture as a whole activates representational and interactive meanings through three interlocking systems: information value, framing and salience (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 181-182). The placement of a particular element (at the top or bottom, in the centre or at the side) will affect the significance attributed to it within the economy of the overall image, and different aspects can be foregrounded or backgrounded through manipulation of size and proportion. Framing devices can also be used to disconnect elements from the rest, indicating that they might be viewed separately.

### **3. Visual retranslation**

To the extent that illustrations are translations into visual form of textual elements, they can clearly be considered as intersemiotic translations, defined by Jakobson (1959, p. 233) as 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems'. According to Pereira (2008, pp. 105-106), the methodologies employed by illustrators are mostly the same as those used in translation, since illustration is possible only through the re-creation of the textual elements in the light of artistic currents of the age. Thus, it should

be possible to theorize new illustrations of a canonical work as forms of visual (or intrasemiotic) retranslation, thereby opening them up to analysis using the concepts and tools supplied by Retranslation Studies.

A retranslation, in the verbal sense, is generally understood to be a new translation into the same target language of a previously translated text (Koskinen and Paloposki, 2010). Traditionally the process of retranslation was considered to be linear or chronological, with retranslations occurring after a first translation had taken place, usually to update or modernize the language or to correct mistakes or misinterpretations in the first translation (Gürçağlar, 2009, p. 235). However, the concept of aging as the main driving force is not enough to explain the presence of several translations on the market at the same time (*Alice in Wonderland* has had about 300 editions in Italy, and many of them still in print today). Such retranslations fall into the category of ‘active retranslation’, the term used for translations competing for the same audiences within a single market (Pym, 1998, p. 82).

According to the famous ‘retranslation hypothesis’ (Berman, 1990; Bensimon, 1990; Chesterman, 2000), the more time elapses between the original and the translated text, the more literal and faithful the translation is likely to be. However, a retranslation is often produced as the result of a commercial decision, reflecting changes in the historical, cultural and social context of the target text (Cadera and Walsh, 2017). Studies on the retranslation of children’s literature from English, Italian, German, and Dutch into Hebrew (Du-Nour, 1995) and into German and Dutch from Swedish (Desmidt, 2009) suggest that, contrary to the retranslation hypothesis, priority is often given to the target-culture norms of readability. Koskinen (2004, p. 3), studying retranslations of *Alice in Wonderland* in Finnish, remarks that, although the earliest retranslations fit the idea of a closer approximation to the source text, more recent versions have adopted a domesticating strategy instead. This seems to be in line with the idea that retranslations tend to justify themselves by establishing their differences from one or more previous versions (Venuti, 2004, p. 25), something that is especially true in the case of classics that are long established in the target culture and will therefore be recognisable to broad audiences even when they are far removed from their original form.

#### **4. The genesis and illustration of *Alice in Wonderland***

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* stems from a short story, entitled *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, written by Lewis Carroll for the ten-year-old Alice Liddell and her sisters as a Christmas gift in 1862, after a short boat trip when he had spontaneously invented it to amuse the three girls. From this, the manuscript underwent several changes, including the idea of adding pictures to illustrate the story. At first Carroll intended to use his own illustrations but later changed his mind and decided to contract a professional illustrator, John Tenniel (who was later knighted for his artistic achievements).

Although Carroll had added a portrait of Alice Liddell on the last page of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* (1862), it seems that the model for the other drawings was

probably her younger sister Edith, for, in the final version of the book, it was an iconic blond girl in a pinafore dress who inspired Tenniel. The novel went through three editions in Carroll's lifetime, each time enriched with chapters, characters and riddles and many other details which nowadays are part of the known plot. Compared to the version that has become canonical, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* is much shorter, since it does not contain the chapters about "Pig and Pepper" and the "The Mad Hatter's Tea Party".

*Alice in Wonderland* is a complex text – a masterpiece of fantasy and nonsense, with a taste for paradox and puns – and unsurprisingly it has been interpreted in many different ways over the years. For Beseghi (2017, p.41), it is an exploration of the dream world and unconscious, with the search for identity tackled through striking metaphors like the mirror, the double and the shadow, as well as through the changes that Alice undergoes through the story (idem, 43-45); for this author, the paradox of being too big or too small represents not only a metaphor of growing up but also a narrative device that allows the child to play with reality by enlarging or shrinking it in order to relive it in a more controllable form.

On the other hand, Alison Lurie (1990) approaches *Alice in Wonderland* as a politically subversive text, full of utopian ideas and caricatures of political personalities of the time, while Masolino D'Amico (1990, p. 129) points out that the apparently whimsical rhymes and verses (which often start from songs, proverbs etc common to Victorian culture, usually with the aim of twisting them) actually mock people that were well known to the children of the time. We can also detect a truly merciless criticism of the educational system of the time and its teaching methods, as supposedly uplifting poems that were painstakingly memorized in the nursery are reduced to nonsense through brilliant parody. Indeed, in the Victorian era, when the child was considered as an imperfect being that had to be educated into adulthood as quickly as possible, this text is unusual for being written totally from the child's viewpoint (Citati, 1987, p. 8). Its plot seems to develop to satisfy a curiosity arising from dissatisfaction with existing explanations of reality, and a desire to explore alternative possibilities (or to peek "behind the scenes" of what a direct look would not grasp) (Faeti, 2010, p. 59-60).

As regards the accompanying visuals, the manuscript version of *Alice's Adventures Underground* was illustrated by Lewis Carroll himself before Tenniel was recruited to produce his famous pictures, and in both depictions, a pre-Raphaelite inspiration can be detected in the blond wavy hair of the girl and her serious expression. Indeed, Carroll's own pictures strongly influenced Tenniel's final drawings<sup>1</sup> to the extent that the illustrations became an integral part of the story, creating a tight bond between the pictures and words within a multimodal narration.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hancer (1985) informs us that about three-quarters of Tenniel's illustrations were based on Carroll's drawings, and that Carroll had given him a complete list of the subjects to be illustrated, noting also their dimensions and positions within the book (see also Jaques and Giddens, 2016). Consequently, any changes that were subsequently made to Tenniel's artwork tended to be minor.

<sup>2</sup> In the original book, there were some optical effects: in one scene the Cheshire Cat vanishes, for example, as when, turning the page, in the same place the reader finds a faint image of the animal (Clayton, 2011, pp. 11-12).

Carroll's interventions did not stop there, however. He actively participated in the design and the aesthetics of *Alice in Wonderland* and carefully studied the placement of the illustrations within the narrative. He also closely monitored the publishing process, inspecting and correcting the various versions, giving importance to page layout and paper quality, and the inclusion of features such as handwriting (Castellani, 2017, p. 104).

The result of this collaboration was a unique book; everything that Carroll had verbally hinted at was translated into a world of images, from the dangers around Alice (which Tenniel creatively depicted so that the events appear to be emerging from the surrounding darkness) to the theatrical quality of the dialogue, echoed by Tenniel in a set of deliberately stiff postures that made the characters look as if they were periodically freezing in a series of tableaux (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2015, p. 144). When the book was finally published in 1865, it was widely reviewed and praised, with *The Guardian* declaring that the illustrations to be "still better than the story" (Cohen and Wakeling, 2003, pp. 5-7).

## 5. Illustrating *Alice* in Italy between 2010 and 2021

As a classic for children and part of the literary canon, *Alice in Wonderland* has been re-published and re-translated many times around the globe. In Italy alone, there have been about 377 editions. Re-translating a book that is as rich in detail as this one often entails the retranslation of the illustrations in order to ensure that they are in keeping with the new purpose and readership. In this section we are going to analyse the visual retranslations in five editions published in Italy over the course of a ten-year period. Not all the images of the books will be analysed, but only samples which depict specific episodes from the story or the most famous characters. They will be compared to Tenniel's original drawings, according to parameters such as scene and character selection, composition and style (Rybicka-Tomala, 2020, p. 194).

In the analysis, the verbal translation will not be taken into account, beyond a brief outline of its overall purpose and readership. Instead, we will be examining the illustrations as retranslations of Tenniel's original pictures, identifying three different modes: realistic, humorous or comic, and dark or gothic.

### 5.1 Realistic *Alice*

a) 2010: *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie* (De Agostini), illustrated by Massimiliano Longo.

This edition, by the De Agostini publishing company, was produced as part of a relaunch of a historic book series (La Scala D'Oro), famous in Italy during the 1950s, and is explicitly presented as a revised and updated translation. Illustrated by Massimiliano Longo, the story, as revealed by the landscapes and characters' clothing, is still firmly located in Victorian England, but now the mode is realism, very different from Tenniel's satirical treatment. In an interview,<sup>3</sup> Longo claims to have been influenced by the 1907 pen-and-ink drawings of *Alice* by Arthur Rackham, and to some extent, the relationship can be

---

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <http://wonderlandbookseng.blogspot.com/2013/04/massimiliano-longo-alice-nel-paese.html> (Accessed: 17 June 23).

seen if we juxtapose the three versions (Tenniel's, Rackham's and Longo's), as in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Compared to Tenniel's, Longo's Alice is more mature, and the sharp contrast that he had drawn between her persona (as an embodiment of rationality) and the rest of the Wonderland characters (representing the indeterminacy and the freedom of creativity) disappears. For example, in the episode of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party (Fig. 1), both Alice and the Mad Hatter look like real people. While in Tenniel, the Mad Hatter's big nose and hat, and comically disproportionate traits were indicative of his mental status (historically those who used to work in hat factories often went on to develop mental illness due to the chemicals used), now, the only symbol of madness is the straw on the March Hare's head. In fact, Alice and the Mad Hatter look more like a young couple on a date in the English countryside (recognisable through the cottage in the background).



Figure 1. The Mad Hatter's tea party by (left) Tenniel (1865) (centre) Rackham (1907) and (right) Longo (2010)

Even in the scene where Alice meets the Blue Caterpillar (Fig. 2), the surroundings are quite realistic, though the caterpillar shares some of Tenniel's anthropomorphised and orientalised traits. While Tenniel depicted the Caterpillar shown from behind and framed by a spiral formed by the hose of the hookah pipe (perhaps to recall the effect of hallucination [Castellani, p. 108]), Longo's is more like a real caterpillar and is positioned in profile, though it continues to have human hands and face.



Figure 2. Alice and the Blue Caterpillar by (left) Tenniel (1865), (centre) Rackham (1907) and (right) Longo (2010)

In these two examples, everything seems to guide the readers towards a real world, though with some hints of estrangement.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that this new set of illustrations is aimed at an adult audience that is familiar with the story, and who are accompanying the commercial relaunch of an old collection.

## 5.2 Comic Alice

b) 2012: *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie* (Einaudi Ragazzi) illustrated by Nicoletta Costa.

The Einaudi Ragazzi edition of *Alice* is presented as a new translation (first published in 2006), adapted for a very young audience by the translator, Roberto Piumini, who is also a poet and a writer. The illustrator, Nicoletta Costa, has also adapted the images to the young readership, in simple clear lines with no nuances or three-dimensionality. The style of the illustrations is more cartoon- or comic-like, and the characters are drawn in an (unthreatening) curved rounded style. All of them lack realistic traits, though some of the scenes attempt to represent movement. For example, in the scene in which Alice falls into the rabbit hole, which has been transported to the interior of a house, her hair and apron are shown streaming upwards to indicate falling, while around her, the two cupboards create a sort of tunnel (Fig. 5). There is no equivalent to this scene in Tenniel's version as neither he nor Carroll portrayed Alice falling into the rabbit hole, presumably because the scene is described at length within the pages of the story.

In Figure 6 (the tea party scene), there are no traces of any imaginary land in the background and the scene could be taking place in a contemporary kitchen. Nor does the hatter show any sign of craziness and is smiling affably at Alice. Alice is also smiling (unlike in Tenniel's version where she generally has a sulky expression) and seems to happily accept everything that is happening instead of questioning all the time.



Figure 5. Alice falling into the rabbit hole (Costa, 2012) Figure 6. The mad hatter's tea party (Costa, 2012)

Thus, the simplifications implemented in the translation are reflected in the illustrations, making them suitable for very young children.

<sup>4</sup> This is despite the fact that the Italian illustrator, in the same interview, declared that a classic must be respected in all aspects.

c) 2018: *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie* (Crescere), illustrated by L.D. Festa.

As in the previous example, the illustrations in the Crescere's 2018 edition are in a style reminiscent of comics. This is an abridged version of the book (just 24 pages in total) aimed at toddlers and very young children, and the book itself is a handleable object made of cardboard.

The scene depicted on the cover is the one where Alice falls into the Rabbit hole (Fig. 7). It is full of colour and movement, and Alice looks neither worried nor annoyed by the experience. Although she is blonde and has pigtails, she does not retain any behavioural aspects of Carroll's Alice and is happily floating on air. She is also presented surrounded by objects that the reader will recognise later on, such as a teacup, key, book, and playing cards.



Figure 7. Alice falling into the rabbit hole (Festa, 2018)

As in the previous example, these illustrations, with their simple lines and bright colours, are clearly addressing very young readership. The aim is to appeal young children and to present an adapted version of Alice in a toy-format, where the pictures decorate and simplify the plot.

### 5.3 Dark or Gothic Alice

d) 2012 – *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie* (Renoir), illustrated by Xavier Collette.

Dark colours and grotesque characters characterize the style of Collette's illustrations in the Renoir edition, a graphic novel published in France by Drugstore (2010) and translated into Italian two years later. Alice is now brunette and wearing a dark dress. A feature of the illustrator's style is his use of light and the way it creates shadows around the characters, exacerbating the dark dreamy atmosphere of Wonderland. For example, in the playing-card scene (Fig. 8), Alice seems to emerge from the darkness, with a light illuminating her from behind, creating a twilight atmosphere. The composition clearly evokes Tenniel's picture, in which she is shown running for cover, with her arms raised and the cards swirling around her, but now Alice is at the centre of the scene and seems to be controlling the cards, almost like a magician.



Figure 8. Alice and the playing cards by (*left*) Tenniel (1865) and (*right*) Collette (2012)

In Figures 9 and 10, the two characters emerging from the darkness are grotesque in appearance. The White Rabbit is rather menacing with his red eyes pointing directly at the reader, and instead of carrying a fan and a pair of gloves, he is holding a cigar and a cup of tea.



Figure 9. The White Rabbit by (*left*) Tenniel (1865) and (*right*) Collette (2012)

As for the caterpillar (Fig. 10), this creature has a sort of human appearance, and we can just about discern its features in the dark. It seems to be floating on its own smoke, which creates a sort of frame around it. There is no background and the mushroom on which it sits (so important for its magical effects on Alice's height) is not clearly distinguishable as such.



Figure 10. The Blue Caterpillar (Collette, 2021)

As in Tenniel's drawings, these characters all strike a theatrical pose as if they were on a stage with no physical references around them. To interpret them, the reader has to know the story in advance. This version of Wonderland is not a crazy colourful world, but one that is dark and sombre. The style and the composition are tied to the graphic novel genre which targets (young) adults, a readership that will probably be already familiar with the plot and the characters of *Alice in Wonderland*.

e) 2021: *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie* (L'Ippocampo), illustrated by Benjamin Lacombe.

Benjamin Lacombe is a French illustrator who produced pictures of Alice in Wonderland purposely for the Italian publishing house, L'Ippocampo. Lacombe wanted to depict an Alice that Carroll would have loved, so he took inspiration from the photographs of Alice Liddell taken by Carroll and created a young girl with an enigmatic gaze who takes on womanly connotations while nevertheless remaining a child.<sup>5</sup> In this set of illustrations, Alice is blonde and has wavy hair as in the original, but her expression is not so much sulky as scared or uncertain as she peers down into the rabbit hole (Fig. 11). Lacombe has chosen to depict the moment preceding the fall into the hole rather than the fall itself, and in it, Alice's cat is present (in the book Alice names her cat Dinah several times, though it is never depicted by Tenniel). The atmosphere is not magical, but rather sombre and mysterious, and the figure of Alice is light in sharp contrast, with a very pale skin and big eyes. If what appears at the bottom of an image represents reality, while what is at the top is ideal, as Kress and van Leuween (2021, p. 191) propose, then Alice seems to be an angelic being looking down into a dark Wonderland from above – a significant inversion of the dynamics at work in the original novel.

---

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.mangialibri.com/interviste/intervista-benjamin-lacombe> (Accessed: 17 June 2023).



Figure 11. Alice and the Rabbit hole (Lacombe, 2021)

As for the Blue Caterpillar (Fig. 12), this is quite similar in composition to Tenniel's, though the perspective is different, as the reader is now observing the scene from beneath. This brings implications not only for size and proportionality but also for how we read the relationship between them. We can clearly see the Caterpillar's fat human face beneath its turban, contrasting sharply with its fat insect-like body, yielding a sort of monstrous hybrid; and although the image is coloured, the tone is rather dark and conveys a feeling of uncertainty and dread.



Figure 12. The Blue Caterpillar (Lacombe, 2021)

This Gothic atmosphere is reinforced in a picture where Alice is sitting on a Victorian armchair in the rabbit's den, surrounded by four or five white rabbits. As a strikingly pale figure in the middle of a dark composition, she has acquired a ghostly, or even zombie-like, demeanour (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Alice in the rabbit's den (Lacombe, 2021)

As in the previous example, the atmosphere and the style of Lacombe's illustrations seem to aim at a more mature readership.

## 6. Conclusion

The Alice depicted in the Carroll/Tenniel collaboration is a child of her time in her appearance and expression and represents the strictness of Victorian order in sharp contrast with the fantasy of Wonderland. The three groups of illustrations described here all deviate from this image, differing markedly in tone, symbolism or intention from the original drawings. To the extent that they accompany similar adaptations in the verbal narrative, they may be considered as intersemiotic translations of new versions of the Carroll's text. But the fact that they also build on or subvert Tenniel's illustrations (and in some cases other intervening versions, as we have seen), they are also intrasemiotic retranslations in the visual medium.

Though the illustrations presented here are all from the same cultural space and produced within a timespan of nearly ten years, there is apparently no common trend between them. This confirms the idea that a retranslation may be carried out with the aim of introducing a new interpretation of the source text, addressing a different readership or creating a completely new one (Gurcağlar, 2020, p. 487). All of them, to different degrees, seem to be addressing specific readers: while the illustrations in the "comic" Alices are directed at a very young audience, simplifying details and colours, and attenuating the potentially disturbing aspects of the story, the others are clearly aimed at a more mature or adult audience, who may appreciate seeing Alice reworked in gothic or realist mode.

In short, these pictorial retranslations of *Alice in Wonderland* offer examples of inter- and intra-cultural transformations, intertextual interaction and intergenerational

transmission, interacting through the conjoint enterprise of adapting translating, re-translating and transmediating children's literature (Kèrchy and Sundmark, 2020, p. 7).

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Carroll, L. ([1865] 1993) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, illustrated by J. Tenniel. New York: Dover Books
- Carroll, L. (2010) *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*, illustrated by M. Longo. Novara: DeAgostini.
- Carroll, L. (2012) *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*, illustrated by N. Costa. Milano: Einaudi Ragazzi.
- Carroll, L. (2012) *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*, illustrated by X. Collette. Milano: ReNoir.
- Carroll, L. (2013 [1907]) *Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland* - Illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Read Books Limited (Ebook).
- Carroll, L. (2018) *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*, illustrated by L.D. Festa. Varese: Edizioni Crescere.
- Carroll, L. (2021) *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*, illustrated by B. Lacombe. Milano: L'Ippocampo.

### Secondary Sources

- Bensimon, P. (1990) 'Presentation', *Palimpsestes*, 4, pp. ix – xiii.
- Berman, A. (1990) 'La Retraduction Comme Espace de la Traduction', *Palimpsestes*, 4, pp.1-7.
- Beseghi, E. (2017) 'Il Sogno di Alice. I 150 Anni di Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', *Studi sulla Formazione*, 20(2), pp.37-50.
- Cadera, S.M. and Walsh, A.S. (eds.) (2017) *Literary Retranslation in Context*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Castellani, C. (2017) 'Carroll e Tenniel: Le Immagini di Alice', *Studi sulla Formazione*, 20(2), pp. 103-117.
- Chesterman, A. (2000) 'A Causal Model for Translation Studies' in Olohan, M. (ed.) *Intercultural Faultlines*, Manchester: St Jerome, pp. 15-28.
- Citati, P. (1987) 'Dietro lo Specchio' in Carroll L., *Alice nel paese delle meraviglie*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Clayton, E. (2011) *Alice in Wonderland Through the Visual Arts*. London: Tate Publishing.
- Cohen, M. N. and Wakeling, E. (2003) *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators. Collaborations and Correspondence, 1865-1898*. New York: Cornell University.
- D'Amico, M. (1990) *Lewis Carroll. Attraverso lo Specchio*. Pordenone: Studio Tesi.
- Desmidt, I. (2009) '(Re)translation Revisited', *Meta*, 54(4), pp. 669–683.
- Douglas-Fairhurst, R. (2015) *The Story of Alice. Lewis Carroll and the Secret Story of Wonderland*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press.
- Du-Nour, M. (1995) 'Retranslations of Children's Books as Evidence of Changes of Norms', *Target*, 7(2), pp. 327-346.
- Faeti, A. (2010) *Gli Amici Ritrovati. Tra le Righe dei Grandi Romanzi per Ragazzi*. Milano: Rizzoli.

- Ciancitto, S. M. – Illustrating *Alice in Wonderland* in the New Millennium  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 70-83, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a4](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a4)
- Gürçağlar, S. T. (2009) 'Retranslation' in Baker, M. and Saldanha, G. (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 233-236.
- Hancer, M. (1985) *The Tenniel illustrations to the Alice Books*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press.
- Jakobson, R. (1959) *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Jaques, Z. and Giddens, E. (2016) *Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass: A Publishing History*. London: Routledge.
- Kérchy, A and Sundmark, B. (eds.) (2020) *Translating and Transmediating Children's Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Koskinen, K. and Paloposki, O. (2004) 'Thousand and One Translations: Revisiting Retranslation' in Hansen, G., Malmkjaer, K. and Gile, D. (eds.) *Claims, Changes and Challenges*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 27-38.
- Koskinen, K., and Paloposki, O. (2010) 'Reprocessing Texts. The Fine Line Between Retranslating and Revising', *Across Languages and Cultures*, 11, pp.29-49.
- Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2021) *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: Routledge.
- Lewis, D. (2001) *Reading Contemporary Picture Books. Picturing Text*. London: Routledge.
- Lurie, A. (1990) *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Mirzoeff, N. (1999) *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Nikolajeva, M. (2006) *How Picturebooks Work*. London: Routledge.
- Nodelman, P. (2005) 'Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work' in Hunt, P. (ed.) *Understanding Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge, pp. 128-139.
- Pereira, N. M. (2008) 'Book Illustration as (Intersemiotic) Translation: Pictures Translating Words', *Meta*, 53(1), pp. 104–119 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7202/017977ar> (Accessed: 8 March 2023).
- Pym, A. (1998) *Methods in Translation History*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Rybicka-Tomala, K. (2020) 'Discovering the Traces of Tenniel's Wonderland in Olga Siemaszko's *Vision of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*' in Kérchy, A. and Sundmark, B. (eds) *Translating and Transmediating Children's Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 189-209.
- Venuti, L. (2004) 'Retranslation: The Creation of Value' in Faull, M. K. (ed.) *Translation and Culture*. Special Issue of *Bucknell Review*, 47(1), pp. 25-38.

**About the author:** Salvatore M. Ciancitto is currently Junior Researcher in English Language and Translation at the Department of Humanities of the University of Catania, with a research project focused on the use of digital learning environments. His main research fields are Translation Studies, and TEFL. He has published several articles in international academic journals and book on Translating Children's Literature. For Eliot Edizioni (Rome) he translated a series of books by K. R. G. Browne (author) and Heath W. Robinson (illustrator).

# TRANSLATING ART AND ARTWORKS IN PICTUREBOOKS: INTERPICTORIALITY AND EXPERIENTIAL MEANING MAKING FOR YOUNG READERS

Yaxi Wang\*

China Jiliang University

**ABSTRACT:** As a popular platform for young readers, picturebooks have been used to invoke various artistic forms, enabling the development of artistic knowledge and visual literacy in children. This study examines the properties of three inter pictorial picturebooks and discusses how they mediate art for children with differing levels of aesthetic awareness, framed by a discussion of inter pictoriality more generally.

**KEYWORDS:** Inter pictoriality, Picturebooks, Visual Translation, Aesthetics, Art and Artwork

## 1. Introduction

For Kiefer (1995), a picturebook is an artistic communication platform that provides children with an aesthetic reading experience. Picturebooks that quote or re-create artworks in their pages offer especially acute examples of this. Indeed, many scholars (e.g. Beckett, 2010; Serafini, 2015; Hoster Cabo et al., 2018) believe that such inter pictoriality helps children develop visual literacy and inducts them into epistemic and aesthetic communities, such as the world of art and culture.

This paper approaches inter pictoriality as a form of translation, not only on the part of the artist that reproduces the work in the pages of the picturebook, but also receptively, as the (child) reader learns how to experience and process this particular semiotic code. With reference to three works in particular, it examines how children's picturebooks repurpose original artworks in the interests of a new aesthetic agenda, and how these contribute to the development of children's visual processing. It also provides several complementary threads concerning the meanings that inter pictoriality might have for the children who encounter it in picturebooks.

## 2. Inter pictoriality in picturebooks

Some scholars have extended the scope of "intertextuality" to include multiple media forms, such as visual subjects, rather than just literature (Meinhof and Smith, 2000; Rayner et al., 2004; Allen, 2011). Art critic Margaret Rose (2011) suggests that the term "inter pictoriality" be used by art historians to distinguish the concept from intertextuality. Hoster Cabo et al. (2018) have extended Rose's idea of the concept by defining it as a process of pictorial referencing, in other words, an image referring to another image. The concept can cover a broad range of cultural artefacts, including paintings, illustrations, or even film scenes. This suggests that inter pictorial images are works not only of translation but also of re-creation, since illustrators use works of art as references and produce derivatives of them in different forms.

---

\*sissi\_wangyaxi@163.com

The term is also usually used about a picturebook image that is inspired by a preceding image, especially an artistic one. However, the pictorial inspiration is not restricted to the field of fine art. The inspiration might come in the form of a derivative image or from other images that have some aesthetic dimension while not generally considered to be “art”.

When reviewing existing theories on interpictureoriality, it becomes apparent that the most prominent scholars in the field (e.g. Beckett, 2012; Serafini, 2015; Hoster Cabo et al., 2018) tend to limit their focus to illustrations. However, my PhD research on interpictureoriality (Wang, 2021)<sup>1</sup> has found that although illustrations are the most common places in which interpictureoriality emerges, it can also appear in other parts of a picturebook, such as the endpaper and cover page, as well as in the overall visual aesthetic of the book. There are various reasons why illustrators adopt interpictureoriality in their works. Over the course of my study, the following were identified as possible purposes:

- To illustrate the geographic and temporal context of the picturebook’s narrative;
- To introduce artworks, artists, and artistic concepts to young readers;
- To interact aesthetically with other components in the picturebook;
- To create points of recognition for mature readers who have advanced artistic knowledge background;
- To create a “playful atmosphere” by parodying works of art;
- To develop the illustrator’s own aesthetic preferences;
- To express the illustrator’s own interpretation of an interpictureorial image;

The study found, in keeping with other scholars (e.g. Beckett, 2012, Serafini, 2015, Hoster Cabo et al., 2018), that the most common reason for adopting interpictureoriality in a picturebook is to illustrate aspects of the context of its narrative. However, whether the interpictureorial image appears as a reproduction or in a modified form, new meanings will be infused into it by virtue of the recontextualization and reframing that inevitably takes place. In this respect, the process is very similar to that involved in translating a verbal text into a new linguistic and cultural context.

Diverse modes of interpictureorial reference have been identified in picturebook studies. Most scholars categorise patterns of interpictureoriality based on the aesthetic or narrative meanings they hold. For instance, Beckett (2012) identifies several different ways of referencing of artworks in picturebooks: *scavenging of styles*,<sup>2</sup> *art fantasy*,<sup>3</sup> *direct allusions*

---

<sup>1</sup> Research carried out within the scope of my PhD thesis entitled *An Exploration of Interpictureoriality: The Relationship between Original Artworks, Children’s Picturebooks, and Meaning-Making* (2021) carried out at the University of Glasgow.

<sup>2</sup> This involves allusions to the style of an artist or artistic movement, without direct reference to a specific work of art.

<sup>3</sup> Picturebooks in which the characters enter into illustrations, or in which paintings come to life.

to specific works of art,<sup>4</sup> parodic play,<sup>5</sup> references to artists' studios and museums, and multi-level parodies.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Hoster Cabo et al. (2018) have analysed Liliana Louvel's (2011) theory of pictorial references and selected several genres as particularly relevant to picturebooks. They suggest that Louvel's *interpictoriality* indicates a relationship between two images that is either explicit or alluded to. *Parapictoriality*, as Louvel interprets it, is "the image around the text" (p. 68), with the verbal or pictorial texts labelled "paratexts" (these can take various forms, such as a dust cover, a picture frame, or a chapter heading, associating parapictorial relationships with texts). *Metapictoriality* refers to one system commenting upon another system, such as an image commenting on a text (it is worth noting that Louvel believes this relationship to be invertible, i.e. a text can also comment on an image). Finally, *mnemopictoriality* refers to the memory or imagining of pictorial impressions, i.e. the image evoked in an audience's mind when encountering a text.

However, a picture's contributions can be very diverse, including decorative, representational, organisational, interpretational, or transformational functions, which are not necessarily included in the above taxonomy. Moreover, some picturebook images might carry more than one aesthetic or narrative meaning. Hence, classifying interpictorial images by their aesthetic/narrative meaning is likely to result in a multiplicity of modes of pictorial representation in picturebook illustrations with overlaps between them.

Serafini (2015), for his part, identifies three forms of artistic appropriation (*reproduction*, *transfiguration*, and *stylisation*). As these are the most useful for this research, they will be described in more detail here. *Reproduction* refers to interpictorial images that attempt to faithfully translate original works of art as references, and includes the illustrating techniques of realistic sketching, photography, and digital rendering. Nevertheless, Serafini (2015) recognises that even though illustrators may try to faithfully reproduce works of art, there are limitations to this process, due to the different dimensions, materials, and means of exhibiting. As for *transfiguration*, this implies that a fundamental change has been made to the artwork in question. Serafini (2015, p. 446) further divides transfiguration into two types: 1) 'coming to life', which suggests that the figures in the artwork come alive and begin to move; and 2) 'parodic transformation', which refers to the practice of referencing figures from works of art and modifying their appearance to fit the characters in picturebook stories. The process is not limited to human figures. The allusions contained in landscape paintings, still lifes, and abstract patterns can also be transfigured when appropriated by illustrators. Serafini does not mention sheared or collaged images of artwork in his analysis but each of these techniques inevitably introduces alterations in relation to the source work. On the other hand, the book designer

---

<sup>4</sup> These involve the reproduction or adaptation of a well-known motif or figure from an artwork within the picturebook.

<sup>5</sup> Usually involving framed paintings displayed on the wall, the aim is to engage humorously with the artistic allusions contained therein.

<sup>6</sup> These references parody more than one work of art, artist, or artistic movement, often combining different styles and genres in a single picturebook.

does not intentionally alter any detail in these partial presentations of works of art. Hence, we might ask whether shearing and collaging belongs to the category of reproduction or to transfiguration. As for *stylisation*, this is viewed as a form of pictorial reference that forms connections with a broader collection of artworks, such as an artistic movement, a school of art, a particular artist's style, or even the visual characteristics of a particular artwork. Serafini (2015) identifies four different forms of stylisation that can be found in picturebooks: 1) picturebooks that clearly state in their texts or in the peritextual information that their inspirations derive from a specific artistic style or movement; 2) picturebooks in which the illustrations relate to fictional narratives about an artist, an artistic movement, or a particular artistic style; 3) picturebooks that depict the history or painting skills of an artist or a collection of art; 4) picturebooks that incorporate more than one artistic movement in their designs.

Although Serafini's analysis is certainly useful, my own research suggests that it is possible to go beyond his four stylisation types, since an illustration can merge multiple artistic movements, schools of art, and artists' works within it. Additionally, the contents of such picturebooks that feature stylisation can go beyond stories about the artistic subject. Illustrators sometimes select one or more element from a work of art and represent them repeatedly in the picturebook. The study has found two reasons why this might happen: either the element might be used metonymically to convey significant meanings about the contexts of the book; or it might carry certain meanings for the illustrator him/herself. To illustrate these two cases, we might consider, as an example, the image of the black bowler hat in René Magritte's paintings which appears in several of Anthony Browne's picturebooks, such as *A Walk in the Park* (1988) and *Voices in the Park* (1997). In Browne's picturebooks, Magritte's bowler hat serves as a visual indicator of a character's interior state (Hateley, 2009), to suggest the character's social status, personality, or feelings at a precise moment in the narrative. The illustrator intends to convey the message, as Magritte suggested in his own work, that the person wearing the bowler hat possesses the personal characteristic of ordinariness, while at the same time giving rein to Browne's own aesthetic preferences (he once said in an interview that his favourite artistic style refers to Surrealism [TeachingBooks, 2004]).

In some picturebooks, illustrators depict not only works of art but also images of the artist who created the art. These picturebooks usually aim to introduce readers to the artists or their works. Many illustrators also seem to enjoy depicting images of themselves in their picturebooks, either to raise their own profiles (Kiefer, 2013) or to create a metatextual game that breaches the communicative boundaries between the illustrator and readers. Examples of the latter can be found in Anthony Browne's *One Gorilla: A Counting Book* (2013) and Maurice Sendak's *Nutcracker* (2002), in which the illustrators have broken through the dimensional limitations of the form to interact as participants or observers in the narratives.

The practice of illustrating artists or referencing illustrators themselves in picturebooks brings the topic back to the discussion of a broader conception of art within

inter pictorial referencing. The illustrating strategy of depicting images of artists or of including illustrators' images in their own picturebooks resists classification as the "referencing of works of fine arts". It relates to the search for inspiration in other places, such as the image of a picturebook-related person, images relating to a well-known event, or even impressions from daily life. The inter pictoriality derived from these meaningful images can provide both literary and connotative information that stimulates readers' curiosity to look for symbolic and cultural meanings in the images. Although these images might not yet be considered "real art", they nevertheless merit the artist's attention. Hence, it would appear that the "art-not-art" identification of an inter pictorial image is fluid and uncertain.

Finally, some picturebooks also feature metadiscourse<sup>7</sup> on the arts. As Beckett (2012) points out, this is particularly common in picturebooks about children visiting museums and galleries, and frequently appears at points when characters "walk into" a world depicted by a work of art, or when characters in the artwork "come out" of the depicted art world. However, it can appear in other kinds of picturebooks as well, such as biographical picturebooks about an artist or a group of artists' lives and works of arts. For example, in Robert Andrew Parker's *Action Jackson* (2007) and Gee Fan Eng's *Frida Kahlo* (2017), the illustrators extract salient artistic traits from the works of the featured artists and infuse them into their own illustrations to enable readers to share the artistic experiences of these artists.

### 3. Translating art in three selected picturebooks

To gain a better understanding of what inter pictorial images look like and how they function in picturebook illustrations, the next section will focus on three books, *Katie and the British Artists* (2008) by James Mayhew, *The Goddess of Luo River* (2019) by Luying Ye, and *Art & Max* (2010) by David Wiesner.

*Katie and the British Artists* (Figure 1) was selected because the book deals directly with the topic of introducing the arts and works of art to children. The picturebook

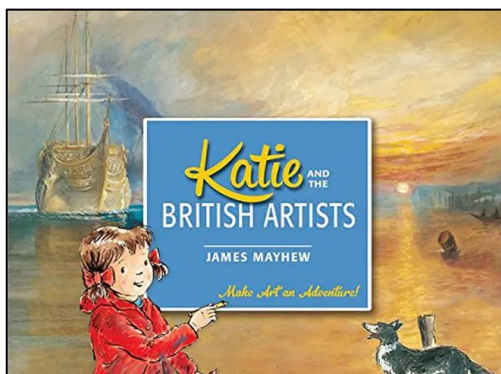


Figure 1. Book Cover of *Katie and the British Artists* by James Mayhew (2008)

---

<sup>7</sup> Metadiscourse refers to a discussion about a discussion, a commentary made by a writer or speaker about certain oral or written text or texts (Hyland, 2017). In this paper, it suggests those arts which can be used to implicate the referred arts or artworks.

combines various forms of interpictureoriality in its narration. Each form offers different visual meanings with which to interpret the selected paintings and how Katie engages with those paintings. *Katie and the British Artists* is the only one of the selected picturebooks that involves a child visiting art galleries and museums. By analysing the interpictureoriality emerging in *Katie and the British Artists*, this research intends to explore the connections between the works exhibited in art galleries and museums and the interpictureorial images in picturebook illustrations.

Ye's *The Goddess of Luo River* was selected because it involves combinations of Oriental and Western arts in its illustrations (Figure 2). The illustrator visualises a classic Chinese ode



Figure 2. Book cover of *The Goddess of Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019)

along with other verbal and visual descriptions of ancient mythical creatures in her illustrations. Additionally, the book appears to present interpictureorial components beyond its illustrations, in terms of its bookbinding and page layout.

*Art & Max* (Figure 3) was selected because the interpictureorial images in the book do more than merely present the arts in the illustrations. The illustrator cleverly blends his exploration of artistic media with experiments that involve breaking down dimensional walls using different artistic styles. The illustrator's mixed use of interpictureoriality highlights the playful air throughout the picturebook. Instead of directly pointing to the referenced

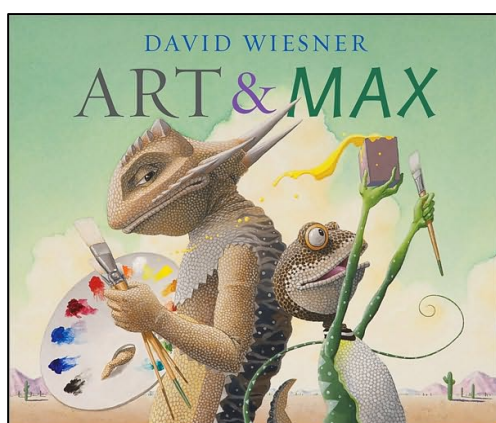


Figure 3. Book cover of *Art & Max* by David Wiesner (2010).

works of art, Wiesner disturbs the air of reality in the storytelling by fusing diverse artistic styles in the picturebook's visual narratives.

#### 4. Picturebook One: *Katie and the British Artists* by James Mayhew

*Katie and the British Artist* tells the story of the day Katie and her grandmother go to The National Gallery. When her grandmother is snoozing, she magically walks into John Constable's oil painting *The Cornfield* (1862) and starts to talk with the character Ben in the picture. In what follows, Katie, Ben, and Ben's dog enter several paintings, including Joseph Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844) and *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839); George Stubbs' *Whistlejacket* (1762); and Thomas Gainsborough's *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly* (1756). Inside the worlds depicted in these artworks, Katie and Ben engage with the characters, animals, or objects in each painting. At the end of the story, Katie bids farewell to Ben and the dog and comes back to the real world. *Katie and the British Artists* is an example of what Beckett (2012) calls "art fantasy", showing how this little girl interacts with five British paintings.

Most of the interictorialities in *Katie and the British Artists* involve images of original paintings actually visible in the National Gallery of London. Compared with the other two picturebooks analysed in this article, this book incorporates various forms of interictoriality as the illustrator presents different meanings at different stages of the narrative. When the painting is first presented, it is usually rendered in realistic mode (reproduction). However, as Katie enters the painting, the interictorial technique becomes transfiguration. For example, in the first such scene, Constable's *Cornfield* (1826) is a recognisable reproduction of the painting, but as she enters it, the illustration zooms in and focuses on only a part of the painting (Figure 4).

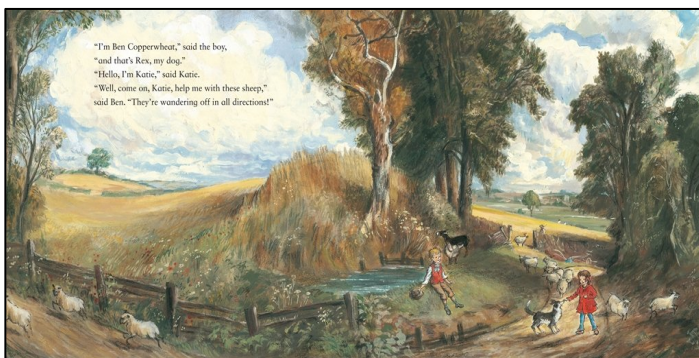


Figure 4. Illustration in *Katie and the British Artists* by James Mayhew (2008)

If the faithfully reproduced images of the paintings suggest the "noumenon" of the referenced artworks, then the transformed images of the paintings can be considered "phaenomena", that is to say, Katie's perceptions of the artwork. The visual elements selected from the paintings are different in each case. Their appearance can be considered a signal that draws the reader's attention and threads the plot episodes together from the beginning to the end. With their varying appearances, the different interictorial forms function diversely to develop the narrative of the picturebook.

As the story progresses, Katie walks into other paintings. To form connections between the different scenes, Mayhew selected a specific element, the images of sheep from *The Cornfield*, and inserts them in many different places throughout the picturebook's pages.

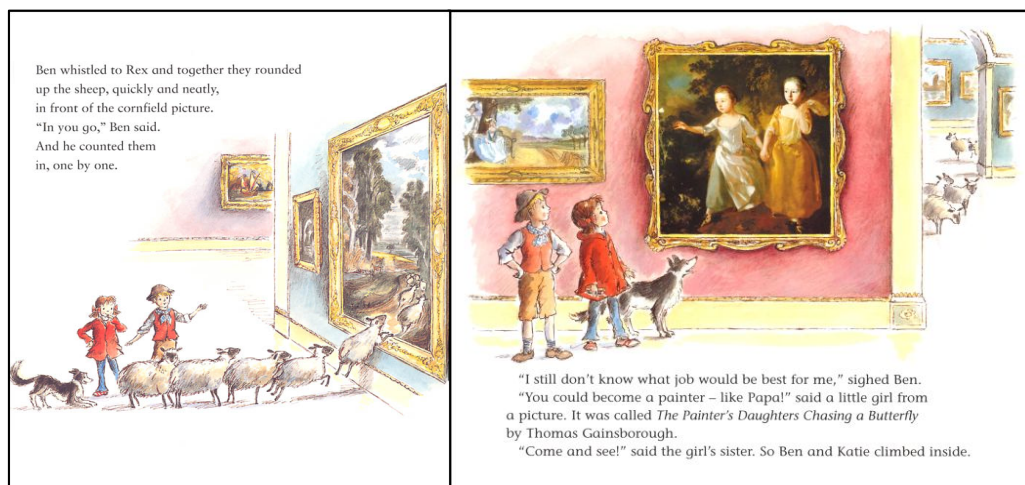


Figure 5. Illustrations in *Katie and the British Artists* by James Mayhew (2008)

The images of sheep constitute a kind of thread that ties together the story and their periodic appearance weaves the scenes together and connects the story episodes (Figure 5).

*Katie and the British Artists* also includes an amount of artistic metadiscourse in its illustrations which narrate the origins of the artworks depicted in the picturebook. For example, the thumbnail illustration page at the end of the picturebook provides basic information about the selected paintings and the artists who created them (Figure 6). The page seems to have a purpose, namely, not simply to use the arts to enrich the visual effects of the illustrations but also to send readers messages about the book's contexts. Like the closing credits roll of a film, these thumbnail images present the "cast" of the picturebook in the "epilogue" to supplement the story. In fact, the whole book could be considered an extended metadiscourse on the arts, as Katie and Ben engage with the characters, animals, or objects in the depicted paintings.

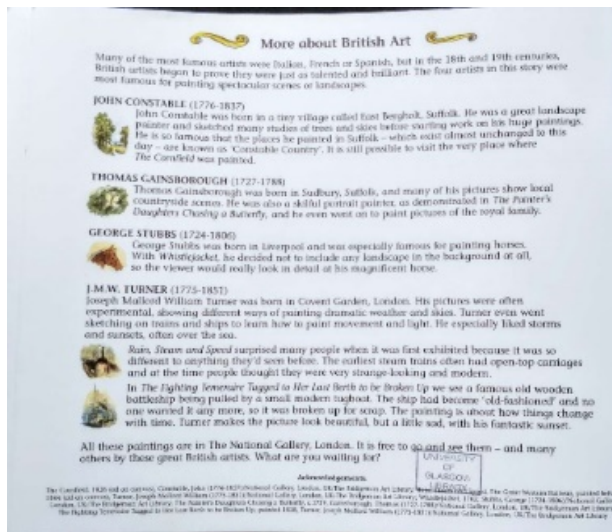


Figure 6. The thumbnail image page in *Katie and the British Artists* by James Mayhew (2009)

As it can be hard for young readers to recognise the origins of a work of art in a picturebook illustration, Beckett (2012) argues that this kind of inter pictoriality is more appropriate for older children with some prior knowledge of the artwork; the images tend to be hidden within the illustrations and can be hard to notice. However, while this might apply to picturebooks that do not provide enough foreshadowing of or introduction to the referenced artwork,<sup>8</sup> in *Katie and the British Artists*, Mayhew provides sufficient basic information about the referenced paintings in both the illustrations and the texts to enable comprehension.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he seems to have little intention of challenging his readers' background knowledge about the referenced works of art. Even though it still requires effort on the part of young readers to identify the paintings in the illustrations, this should not present insurmountable problems as they have enough time to realise that the worlds Katie enters are scenes from the paintings.

## 5. Picturebook Two: *The Goddess of Luo River* by Luying Ye

*The Goddess of Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019) is a picturebook based on an ancient Chinese ode by Cao Zhi, who lived in the third century CE. The book was published by Zhong Xin Press in 2019 and is part of a series called *Chinese Culture Classics for Children*, which introduces traditional Chinese culture and literature to young readers. The book tells the story of Cao Zhi's encounter with the beautiful goddess of Luo River. The book has 32 pages and combines historical facts, literary imagination, and artistic expression to present this romantic and tragic legend.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Browne's *Willy's Pictures* (2000) or *The Voices in the Park* (1997), or Wiesner's *Art & Max* (2010) provide little basic information about the referenced arts and artworks and involve artistic styles in the visual context of the story.

<sup>9</sup> The thumbnail images at the end of the book provides basic information about the selected paintings and the artists who created them.

Although *The Goddess of Luo River* is inspired by an ancient Chinese story, its illustrations contain a mix of both Eastern and Western art. The book references numerous works of art, including illustrations featuring transfigured Chinese paintings, sculptures, and ancient frescoes. When representing the female character's grace, the illustrator was inspired by the Apsaras from the Dunhuang frescoes (Figure 7).<sup>10</sup> She also draws inspiration from traditional Japanese art as well. In her illustrations of seascapes, for example, *ukiyo-es*<sup>11</sup> can be recognised, especially those by Hokusai (Figure 8).



Figure 7. (Left) Illustration in *The Goddess of the Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019)  
(Right) The image of Apsaras from the Dunhuang frescoes



Figure 8. (Left Top & Left Bottom) Illustrations from *The Goddess of the Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019)  
(Right Top & Right Bottom) Japanese Ukiyo-es by Katsushika Hokusai. [Colour Woodblock].  
Location: Numerous.

Ye also integrates Western art into her illustrations. In a personal conversation with the author (2019), Ye confirmed that she was paying homage to Gustav Klimt's works and referencing his decorative golden colours in her illustrations to convey the story's dreamy atmosphere (Figure 9). With her broad range of references to works of art, Ye creates a visual form of multicultural presentation.

<sup>10</sup> Apsaras are celestial beings in Hindu and Buddhist mythology who are associated with music, dance, and beauty. They are often depicted as female dancers or musicians who fly in the sky or accompany gods and goddesses.

<sup>11</sup> Ukiyo-e are a genre of Japanese art that flourished from the 17th to the 19th centuries. They are woodblock prints and paintings that depict various aspects of the "floating world" during the Tokugawa period.

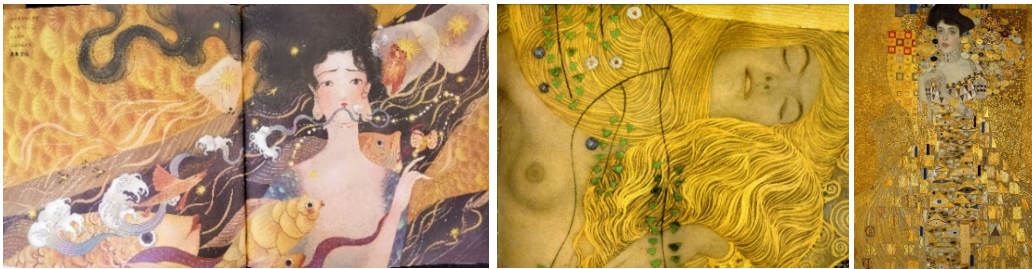


Figure 9. (Left) Illustration in *The Goddess of the Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019)  
(Middle) Partial image of *Water Serpents* by Gustav Klimt (1904-1907).  
[Tempera and watercolour on parchment]. Private collection.  
(Right) *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* by Gustav Klimt (1907).  
[Oil, silver and gold on canvas]. New York: Neue Galerie New York.

One unique feature that Ye incorporates in her picturebook is a page in concertina form between the flyleaf and the frontispiece (Figure 10). Included on this page are essential details about the narrative setting, such as the story's background, location, and leading characters. Thus, this page is like a prelude to the overall story, setting the tone for the narrative mode of the picturebook. It can be considered a substitute for or extension of an endpaper because it works in a similar way, offering readers basic information regarding both the verbal and visual discourses before they enter the main body of the story. This not only increases the diversity of the picturebook's components but also serves as a kind of invitation, by foreshadowing the story and welcoming readers to Ye's fictional world. Since this prelude page is the first interior matter to be seen when readers open Ye's picturebook, it acts as an intermediary agent and mediates readers' transition from the real world in which they live to the fictional world contained in the story. Sipe and McGuire (2006, p. 293) note that endpapers can serve as an 'orienting experience' for readers. In the case of *The Goddess of Luo River*, Ye's special arrangement of the prelude page provides this orienting experience, offering information to guide the reader. In the same way that stage curtains sometimes do, this endpaper provides a taster for the audience before the story begins.



Figure 10. Illustration page in *The Goddess of Luo River* by Luying Ye (2019)

The prelude page as well as several other pages in the book are longer than most and are folded back and forth alternately to give a concertina-like appearance. In accordance with the context of the story, the illustrator seems to be attempting to evoke Chinese orihons, which are ancient forms of oriental bookbinding (Korbel and Katz, 2005).

Besides adding to the depth of meaning in the picturebook story, Ye's mixed use of artistic references also provides her young readers with a greater understanding of the arts. In her illustrations, Ye's mixed use of Western and Eastern arts constructs a network of cross-cultural communication between the narrative and its visual expression, which expands the metaphorical space between the picturebook's inter pictorial images and its narratives. Thus, this Chinese story is no longer limited to interpretation exclusively in terms of Chinese arts for, as we have seen, artwork from other cultures, such as Japan (the *ukiyo-es*) and Austria (Klimt's works), are also adopted to present the picturebook's narratives in a visual form. This mixed use of cross-cultural art references in the story challenges readers that are capable of identifying the origins of the artwork to think further and connect the illustrator's adoption of these works, especially from Western art, within a new context. Hence, a more critical analysis emerges in the reading experience.

Sipe suggests that the experience of picturebook reading can help readers to capture 'the power of seeing and feeling' intensely, and further enhance their capacity to enjoy their wanderings through the worlds created by picturebooks (2001, p. 39). The inter pictorial images in picturebook illustrations engage the reader's critical thinking faculties as they make sense of the visual narrative and its contextual connections with works of art. Ye's crossover adoption of both Western and Eastern arts blends multiple cultures. It is an open and exploratory process for both the reader and the illustrator. Although Ye does not explicitly mention any of the cross-cultural appropriations in her texts, *The Goddess of Luo River* is a good example of the artistic and educational potential of the multicultural picturebook.

## **6. Picturebook Three: *Art & Max* by David Wiesner**

*Art & Max* is a picture book by David Wiesner, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2010. It is about two lizard friends who have different levels of skill and experience at painting. When Max "accidentally" paints on Arthur's body by misunderstanding his words "Well...you could paint me", the two friends are launched on a trip through different artistic media. The book has 40 pages and explores various artistic media, such as acrylic, watercolor, and line sketching, and shows how they can create different effects and challenges.

In this picturebook, Pointillism and Expressionism are used to provide contrasts with the realistic or representational art<sup>12</sup> used in the first half of the story, when Max has not yet started to paint on Arthur's body. In the latter half of the book, other art styles, such as

---

<sup>12</sup> Cianciolo (1997) defines realistic or representational art as an artist's realistic interpretation of visual characteristics. In other words, these forms of artistic expression are used to represent how objects "should" appear in reality.

Abstraction, Expressionism, and Pointillism, start to emerge to add a greater sense of illusion to the visual narratives. For example, the lizard's skin is covered with scales, which look like brushstrokes when depicted on paper. When the scales are filled in with numerous bright colours, the lizard's skin resembles a Pointillist painting (Figure 11). When Arthur gets angry at Max for painting colours on his body and starts to shout, the colours on his body crack (Figure 12).



Figure 11. Partial illustration page in *Art & Max* by David Wiesner (2010)



Figure 12. Illustration page in *Art & Max* by David Wiesner (2010)

Over the next few pages, Arthur's skin turns into a surface covered with pastels or chalks, which can even be blown off by an electric fan (Figure 13). Then, the illustrator changes his painting materials to watercolours and now, instead of being blown off, the colours on Arthur's body become desaturated when Arthur drinks a glass of water (Figure 14).



Figure 13. Illustration page in *Art & Max* by David Wiesner (2010)



Figure 14. Illustration page in *Art & Max* by David Wiesner (2010)

This contrast between Abstract and Representational art forms in the same picturebook can inspire readers to jump between illusion and reality in the narrative. This process, in turn, can also challenge readers to reconsider the certainty of what is happening in *Art & Max*. The strategy may therefore provide great pleasure for readers as they engage in interpreting the meanings of the scenarios containing different artistic styles.

When reading a picturebook, readers tend to embrace the tacit belief that what is narrated in the story is “true”. For example, in *Art & Max*, it is considered self-evident that Arthur and Max can communicate their understandings of the arts and draw pictures. This sort of “truth” forms the metanarrative of the story and builds up an internal environmental system. This “internal reality” guarantees the certainty and resolution of the story and drives the narratives forward. However, on top of this “internal reality”, Wiesner “teases” the metanarrative on several occasions to disturb the inherent stability of the narrative dimension. Blurring the boundary between the story’s “internal reality” and its “fictional events” by playfully invading the “internal reality”, Wiesner challenges readers’ understandings of reading conventions, inspiring suspension of disbelief.<sup>13</sup>

Wiesner’s violation of the boundaries between artistic styles confirms that the “suspension of disbelief” in picturebooks can be temporary. This uncertainty challenges the narrative frame of the picturebook story. In this sense, the metanarrative, whether it be textual or visual, never directly represents reality. Therefore, it constitutes a kind of unreliable narrator. In *Art & Max*, Wiesner represents this uncertainty by engaging in several different artistic styles in the same picturebook for visual comparisons. In this way, the illustrator builds up a multi-dimensional world. By juxtaposing several artistic styles in *Art & Max*, Wiesner enriches the visual aesthetics of his illustrations while also challenging readers to rethink their conventional beliefs about whether their reading materials can reflect the real world.

---

<sup>13</sup> Term first introduced by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

### **7. Interpictoriality as experiential translation: developing interpretational competence**

When illustrators create interpictoriality with a mature readership in mind, it can be challenging for youngsters, who do not yet have the necessary knowledge base and visual literacy, to process. This interpretative ability in itself is a kind of experiential translation, since it involves transporting prior knowledge of artworks into the new subjective context. There are several factors that might influence the development of children's aesthetic understanding and competence at art translating. One crucial influence is age. This is a critical determinant of their capacity to respond to art, since children acquire a more comprehensive understanding of what an interpictorial image represents as they get older. Aesthetic understandings are also fused with their cultural awareness. Children might find it difficult to recognise, let alone interpret, certain cultural symbols if they are from a different cultural group, and indeed, the public's judgement of beauty is also tied up with their living environment, culture, and the era in which they live (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1987).

There is currently a digital revolution taking place among illustrators (Zeegen, 2009), since many illustrators are now choosing to use digital painting tools to produce picturebooks, preferring digital pens and tablets to ink, brush, and paper. Consequently, some picturebooks also integrate multiple forms of media in story-telling, such as sound, music, moving images, and even haptic experiences. Although the adoption of digital media in picturebook representation is still in a developmental stage, it is already changing readers' understanding of visual and written texts and their reading experiences (Meyers et al., 2014). This suggests that children's aesthetic experience could be affected by society's communicative orientations.

Art education also affects children's aesthetic perceptions and ability to translate art. By assimilating ideas relating to certain artistic criteria into their aesthetic understandings, children may overcome cultural and geographic limitations to make more comprehensive sense of art and artwork. Therefore, education, especially artistic education, should also be viewed as a factor that impacts children's aesthetic judgment.

To sum up, it appears that children's understanding of interpictoriality emerges as part of the development process. It develops from an initial stage of making simple and concrete observations to a critical and comprehensive response to picturebooks. Despite differences in children's aesthetic responses, offering children art education and the opportunity to develop visual literacy is clearly important for their development, and picturebooks with interpictoriality can play a significant role in this process.

### **8. Conclusions and Implications**

This research aims to contribute to the research on children's experiences of visual translation of interpictoriality in picturebooks by analysing three picturebooks with high levels of interpictoriality.

The findings suggest that a greater level of interaction and communication among creators, readers, and scholars of picturebooks would be valuable for research and practice

related to the subject of intertextuality in picturebooks. Sharing perspectives among the different professionals in this field could help to produce better works so that young readers may obtain a better understanding of how picturebooks tell stories visually.

The findings from this study could also be of benefit to teachers who use picturebooks with their children in the classroom. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting children's development of visual literacy and art interpreting and can do so by providing diverse ways of seeing, comprehending, and creating (Noble, 2016). A better understanding of the concept of intertextuality could help teachers create lessons that involve both the narrative and the aesthetic dimensions of picturebooks, along with the artistic knowledge necessary to interpret intertextuality in greater depth and thus encourage children's aesthetic development and growing knowledge of art. The vast variety and volume of picturebooks that present intertextuality provide unique opportunities to achieve these goals.

Ultimately, as the readers of picturebooks, it is children who encounter the aesthetic objects and the artwork within them. In the process of looking, talking, learning, and translating the artwork involved, children's awareness of the aesthetics of artwork and sense-making skills may be trained and enriched, perhaps leading them to create their own artwork.

Intertextuality in children's picturebooks is a topic that offers many potential levels for research and for contributing to our understanding of images, arts, picturebooks, creators, and readers. As the great English illustrator, James Mayhew, put it in personal communication with the author (2019): 'We all need [intertextuality] to help us make sense of the cultural history of the world!'

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Browne, A. (1988) *A Walk in the Park*. London: Puffin.
- Browne, A. (1997) *Voices in the Park*. New York: Dk Publishing, Inc.
- Browne, A. (2000) *Willy's Pictures*. Boston: Walker Books.
- Browne, A. (2013) *One Gorilla: A Counting Book*. London: Walker Books Ltd.
- Hoffmann, E.T.A. and Sendak, M. (2002) *Nutcracker*. New York: Random House USA Inc.
- Mayhew, J. (2008) *Katie and the British Artists*. Sydney: Orchard Books.
- Wiesner, D. (2010) *Art & Max*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Ye, L. (2019) *The Goddess of Luo River*. Beijing: Zhong Xin Press.

### Secondary Sources

- Allen, G. (2011) *Intertextuality*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Beckett, S. L. (2010) 'Artistic Allusions in Picturebooks' in Colomer, T., Kümmerling-Meibauer, B., and Silva-Díaz, C. (eds.) *New Directions in Picturebook Research*. New York: Routledge, pp. 83–98.
- Beckett, S. L. (2012) *Crossover Picturebooks: A Genre for All Ages*. New York: Routledge.

- Cianciolo, P. J. (1997) *Picture Books for Children*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. London: American Library Association.
- Coleridge, S. T. (2009) *Biographia Literaria [1817]*. Watson, G. (ed.). Auckland: Floating Press.
- Eng, G. and Sánchez Vegara, M. (2017) *Frida Kahlo*. London: Frances Lincoln Publishers Ltd.
- Hateley, E. (2009) 'Magritte and Cultural Capital: The Surreal World of Anthony Browne', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 33(3), pp. 324–348.
- Hoster Cabo, B., Lobato Suero, M. J. and Ruiz Campos, A. M. (2018) 'Interpictoriality in Picturebooks' in Kümmerling-Meibauer, B. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks*. New York: Routledge, pp. 91–102.
- Hyland, K. (2017) 'Metadiscourse: What is it and where is it going?' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113, pp. 16–29.
- Kiefer, B. (1995) *The Potential of Picturebooks: From Visual Literacy to Aesthetic Understanding*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Merrill.
- Kiefer, B. (2013) 'What is a Picturebook? Across the Borders of History' in Arizpe, E., Farrell, M., and McAdam, J. (eds.) *Beyond the Borders of Art, Narrative and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 6–22.
- Korbel, B. and Katz, J. (2005) 'Binding Beauty: Conserving a Collection of Japanese Printed Books', *The Art Institute of Chicago*, 31(2), pp. 16-23, 105.
- Lowenfeld, V. and Brittain, W. L. (1987) *Creative and Mental Growth*. 8<sup>th</sup> edn. New York: Macmillan.
- Meinhof, U. H. and Smith, J. (2000) 'The Media and Their Audience: Intertextuality as Paradigm' in Meinhof, U. H. and Smith, J. (eds.) *Intertextuality and the Media: From Genre to Everyday Life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 1–17.
- Meyers, E. M., Zaminpaima, E. and Frederico, A. (2014) 'The Future of Children's Texts: Evaluating Book Apps as Multimodal Reading Experiences', *iConference 2014 Proceedings* [online]. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/47386> (Accessed 31 April 2021).
- Noble, K. (2016) 'Picture Thinking: The Development of Visual Literacy in Young Children'. *Engage*, 38 [online]. Available at: <https://engage.org/engage-journal> (Accessed: 12 July 2020).
- Parker, R. A., Jordan, S. and Greenberg, J. (2007) *Action Jackson*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Rayner, P., Wall, P. and Kruger, S. (2004) *Media Studies: The Essential Resource*. London: Routledge.
- Rose, M. A. (2011) *Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Interpictoriality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag.
- Serafini, F. (2015) 'The Appropriation of Fine Art into Contemporary Narrative Picturebooks', *Children's Literature in Education*, 46(4), pp. 438–453.
- Sipe, L. R. (2001) 'Picturebooks as Aesthetical Objects', *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), pp. 23–42.
- Sipe, L. R. and McGuire, C. E. (2006) 'Picturebook Endpapers: Resources for Literary and Aesthetical interpretation', *Children's Literature in Education*, 37(4), pp. 291–304.
- TeachingBooks (2004) 'Author Program In-depth Interview Insights Beyond the Slide Shows' [online]. Available at: [https://www.teachingbooks.net/content/interviews/Browne\\_qu.pdf](https://www.teachingbooks.net/content/interviews/Browne_qu.pdf) (Accessed: 27 March 2019).

Wang, Y. – Translating Art and Artworks in Picturebooks

Translation Matters, 5(1), 2023, pp. 84-101, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a5](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a5)

Wang, Y. (2021) 'An Exploration of Interpictoriality: The Relationship between Original Artworks, Children's Picturebooks, and Meaning-Making', PhD diss., University of Glasgow.

Zeegen, L. (2009) *What is Illustration?* Suisse: RotoVision SA.

**About the author:** Yaxi Wang is an illustrator and art teacher who works in the higher education system. She received her PhD from the University of Glasgow and is currently teaching at China Jiliang University. Since starting her academic study, she has focused on academic research on picturebooks and illustrations.

# REPETITION AND ADDITION AS COHERENT DEVICES IN AUDIO DESCRIPTION OF COMICS: A CASE STUDY OF *X: BIG BAD*

Chunwei Liu\*  
University of Glasgow

**ABSTRACT:** Audio Description (AD) translation is an important translational practice that promotes the accessibility of visual texts for the visually impaired audience. Although AD translation has been developed to be a regular practice in performing arts and entertainment, its potential has not been fully explored for visual-verbal sequential arts such as comics to meet the demand of the audience. To fill in such a gap, this article performs a case study on a commercial AD translation of an action comic series *X: Big Bad* to explore translation strategies as norms that specifically facilitate achieving coherence and are unique to the cross-modal translation of comics, aiming at providing theorised guidelines for future practices. Based on visual language and narratology analysis, three types of visible interventions in AD comics translation are identified, challenging the notion of neutrality in AD and arguing that reasonable additions and adaptations can facilitate the target text's accessibility.

**KEYWORDS:** Multimodal translation; Audio description for comics; Accessible aids for visually impaired readers; Coherence

## 1. Introduction

Audio description (AD) refers to audio tracks that use verbal descriptions and other types of audible techniques to make visually based materials accessible to visually impaired readers and audiences (Kleege, 2016, p. 89). It is one of the key methods of promoting the accessibility of visual or verbal-visual materials for blind or visually impaired readers. Its popularity and necessity have been widely accepted in audible-visual practises, and relatively matured methodologies, regulations and production guidance in relevant fields have been developed to facilitate practitioners and researchers (Packer et al., 2015). However, compared to the thriving development of AD translation for movies, TV shows and theatres (Kruger and Orero, 2010), AD translation for comics remains under-explored, both practically and academically, despite a vast potential readership.

Guy Hasson, an advocate for accessible comics and the founder of an AD comic production company called Comics Empower, expresses concern about the lack of resources for visually impaired comic readers:

“There are literally tens of thousands of kids, teens, and adults out there who would love to read the same comic books their sighted friends are reading and to talk to them about it” (Hasson cited in Kingett, 2016).

In response to this demand, several important AD translation projects have been carried out using different approaches. Hasson focuses on developing AD scripts unique to comics

---

\*2431662C@student.gla.ac.uk

as a visual genre, and his translational approach recreates a visual-like reading experience for the target audience (ibid.). Although his business has now unfortunately ceased to operate, the comic-based approach has been taken up by Rachel Osolen and Leah Brochu in their project of audio-describing *The Walking Dead* (2018), accompanied by a comprehensive translation report (2020). As well as making an effort to rationalise and standardise scriptwriting for comics AD (Osolen and Brochu, 2020, p. 110), the production team also argues for the importance of objectivity. As a part of their practical research project, Osolen and Brochu reviewed commonly accepted AD guides and found a shared emphasis on objectivity, ‘as it is not the job of the describer to give their interpretation of the situation’ (ibid.).

Brandon Christopher, on the other hand, argues that visual-to-non-visual translation is ‘bound to result in a certain amount of signal loss’ (2018), which means that adaptation is almost inevitable in audio comic translation. Similar observations about adaptation can be found in practitioners’ reports, which note features such as the tolerance of repetitions (McGee-Tubb, 2017), consideration of colouring and background (ibid.), and an emphasis on key details and time/spatial references (Hasson cited in Osolen and Brochu, 2020, p. 111).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the multimodal nature of both STs and TTs determines the need for interpretation of the TT. As Christopher Taylor observes, with regard to the AD translation of narrations: ‘[a]ll translations involve some level of reformulation from a source text’ (2016, p. 224). Considering the prevalence of the notion that the AD translator should remain invisible, the need for adaptation raises further questions: if a key detail or reference is not directly depicted in one panel but either implied in relevant visual elements or provided in contextual panels, to what extent are interpretations and adaptations acceptable for ensuring coherence in the TT? What translation strategies and aural devices can be applied to build cohesion and consistency?

As the level of interpretation is far less theorized in AD comics research—with relevant practical experience only vaguely referred to as ‘striking a balance’ (McGee-Tubb, 2017)—it is worth mentioning another approach, which aims to create a ‘movie experience’. This, according to Hasson (cited in Kingett, 2016), is a more common target for larger commercial productions. For example, an audio version of the first issue of *DareDevil* released by Marvel Comics in 2011 (unfortunately no longer accessible on the official website) derives directly from the original script of the source text (ST) rather than the visual text itself to create seamless narrative that is almost similar to an audio drama, while ignoring the panel divisions and gutters of the typical comic. Given the significant discrepancies that this approach produces in relation to the visual source text, it has led to frequent criticism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, most of the first-hand materials related to Hasson’s work, such as his company, translations and podcasts gradually become unavailable after his business stopped operating in 2017 (<https://twitter.com/ComicsEmpower/status/972369143516327936>). Consequently, the quotations about his work in this article have been extracted from secondary sources.

On the other hand, GraphicAudio (an AD comic and e-book company that works more closely with verbal-visual STs and produces descriptions by translating and adapting popular comics comparatively, in large quantities and with stable quality control) applies cohesive devices and aural mechanisms such as background music and sound effects to create coherently organised and commercially matured TTs (their slogan is ‘a movie in your mind’), even if these may appear inaccurate at times. In general, although the company has never systematically explained their working procedures, the presence of intermodal translation is more noticeable in GraphicAudio’s TTs, while their productions also exhibit a relatively high level of coherence.

This article focuses on coherence and cohesion as a translation goal of AD comics and attempts to generalise from one successful production in order to identify potential norms that could be used by the genre in future. It compares the information in the ST and TT in order to identify the strategies used in the audiodescription and analyse how they contribute to achieving coherence across the target text as a whole. It concludes that the interpretation of visual elements and their interaction with verbal texts is unavoidable for AD comic translation, and to achieve a coherent target text, it is reasonable to apply relatively visible strategies such as highlighting specific objects or adding additional narrative perspectives and transitioning movements.

## 2. The Case Study

*X: Big Bad*, initially released by Dark Horse (Swierczynski et al., 2014), is an action comic featuring a vigilante called X and a freelance reporter Leigh, depicting their quest for revenge against Berkshire, a local oligarch. It is a typical superhero comic with an intensive narrative arc and characters with distinguishable visual designs, which employs complex techniques to express motion and time duration through static means. However, its visuals occasionally lack some of the features that we have come to expect from an action comic, such as consistent recurring details or strong visual connections between panels – the result of conscious artistic choices, one supposes. These raise some challenges for audiodescription, as we shall see.

As for the TT, this was produced by GraphicAudio (Messner, 2021) and officially published in collaboration with the ST publisher Dark Horse, which implies a certain level of quality control, authority, and acceptance. In what follows, the 134-page (covers and section covers included) comic and 1:56:06 audio track are manually compared in order to identify noticeable discrepancies in content, specifically focusing on potential additions and adaptations.

As for the analytical framework used, this relies extensively on visual language and narrative theories, including McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994) and *Making Comics* (2006) for visual and formatting norms in comics, Groensteen’s theory of narratology in comics (2013), Gavalier’s categorisation of non-narrative panel transitions (2017), and Cohn’s visual language grammar for narrative cohesion (2013).



Figure 1. X's costume design on the issues' cover and in the artist's notes (Swierczynski et al., 2014, cover page + p. 126)

### 3. Findings and Evaluation

#### 3.1 In-panel challenges: background information and recurring items

A common practice for developing narrative threads in comics is the use of recurring items (Groensteen and Miller, 2013, p. 12). In the source text, the repetition of visual representations is frequently used for purposes such as character-building or narrative development. For instance, specific visual elements, such as the lock or cape on X's superhero outfit are consistently and meticulously portrayed. These recurring visuals serve multiple purposes within the narrative, such as advancing the plot or building suspense around X's identity (see Figure 1). On the front page, X's cape takes up around 1/3 of the composition in a dramatic and dynamic manner, promoting the protagonist's signature attire as identifiable, visually attractive gear with his name branded at the centre. Similarly, the artist's note in the second image also confirms the importance of this 'tangled mass of fabric' (Swierczynski et al., 2014, p. 126), as it implies the protagonist's personality traits of being practical and realistic. Failure to acknowledge the significance of repetition during translation may result in a less coherent and consequently less accessible description.

To address this issue, the audiodescription of *X: Big Bad* employs two main strategies: intentionally increasing the frequency of recurring visuals, and incorporating contextual background information to provide additional context.

As mentioned earlier, X's vigilante costume is a key symbol of his strength and anonymity, as, in superhero comics, 'the superhero costume is a kind of mask, allowing him to masquerade within a constructed identity' (Brownie and Graydon, 2016, p. 27). The cape in particular contributes to the plot development in X's fight with Berkshire and the police on pages 47 to 55. As the first scene of this narrative arc, the first panel on Page 47 shows X standing on the rooftop of a skyscraper (Figure 2: Swierczynski et al., 2014). By comparing this panel with the cover art (Swierczynski et al., 2014, cover) and the character design sketch (ibid., p. 126) in Figure 1, the cape as part of his costume stays consistent from the initial draft to the final visualised production.

As the artist's note suggests, 'X's wardrobe is dictated by desperate necessity' (ibid.), as exemplified by the scene in Panel 2, page 54, where X utilizes his cape to shield himself



Figure 2. Page 47 as an example for consistency in describing key items (Swierczynski et al., 2014)

from an explosion (Swierczynski et al., 2014). In this panel (reproduced in Figure 3), X covers his head and body with the cape before he ignites a fuse. Because the subsequent panel

depicts him being propelled by an explosion, yet overall unharmed, a subtle cause and effect relationship is created between the protection offered by the cape and X's survival. In this regard, X's cape as a recurring item is both an inseparable part of the character's image and a necessary plot device in the narrative arc.

To transmit the importance of this gear in audiodescription, the TT repeats the term 'cape' almost to the point of appearing repetitive and cumbersome. For Panel 1 (page 47), the audiodescription reports 'the wind fluttered X's tattered cape' (Messner, 2021, 39:46-39:49), and only around ten seconds later, for Panel 2, his costume is again highlighted with 'the torn cape billowed out behind him (Messner, 2021, 40:00-40:01). Both 'tattered'<sup>2</sup> and 'torn'<sup>3</sup>, two synonyms for 'ragged', helps the TT's audience to visualise the condition of X's cape and develop awareness of his character image, which prepares for the cape's utility on page 54. Another effort the TT makes is to introduce additional information about the cape's function, which directs the audience's attention beyond its symbolic significance. Referring to the costume again as 'tattered and torn', the TT describes Panel 2 (page 54) as follows:

In the fire tower, X crouched over the wire he's pulled out. He covered himself with his cape. Though tattered and torn, the cape was reinforced with Kavalier and would offer him a little protection. He struck a match \*male voice groaning\*, lit the end of the wire and ran (Messner, 2021, 44:09-44:24).

In this extract, not only is the cape and its condition reiterated using the exact same wording as employed approximately four minutes prior, but a detailed explanation is also given as to why this cape would help X survive the explosion. Since the material of the cape cannot be read either from this panel, from previous or following story arcs or from the character designs in the appendix, this background information about the cape's details is clearly a TT addition. It draws the audience's attention to X's protective equipment and prepares them for his safe escape, successfully achieved in the description of Panel 3: 'a caped figure plunged through the air' (Messner, 2021, 44: 40-44:43). Again, coherence is developed by mentioning the cape to make sure this scene does not sound abrupt and unexpected to the audience.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tattered> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/torn> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).



Figure 3. Page 54 as an example for consistency in describing key items (Swierczynski et al., 2014)

Other cases of recurrence can be found throughout this excerpt, even in less dramatic scenes. For example, ‘dumpsters’ is repeated three times within 20 seconds (Messner, 2021, 43:52, 43:57, 44:06) to help the audience imagine the relation between Leigh and the back alley where she accidentally rescues X. The ‘heavily armed’ police officer’s ‘walkie-talkies’ and ‘machine guns’ also appear multiple times (Messner, 2021, 41:12-43: 12) to constantly remind the audience that the antagonist threatens X with force. X’s tactic belt is also described on two occasions, the first time for page 47 Panel 2 (Swierczynski et al., 2014) and the second for page 53 Panel 1 (ibid.), with both descriptions explaining where X’s weapons come from (Messner, 2021, 39:55, 43:18). For the later repetition, the panel it describes is a close-up shot of X’s hand so the belt is clearly not a part of the ST visual; however, in the next panel, X’s crouched position means that his belt cannot be seen by the ST’s readers. The TT addition, while not strictly corresponding to the visuals, maintains the coherence established by the previous description of X’s attire and reinforces the image of a heavily armed superhero.

Overall, it is evident that the TT displays a notable tendency to repeat items by consistently employing the same wording, particularly when the item's significance extends to subsequent narrative developments. The TT also tends to add information about the following panels to develop a semantic correlation between the descriptions of one panel to another and thus build a strong context. Under such circumstances, a reasonable level of interpretation and addition is clearly deemed acceptable. As stated by Georgina Kleege (2016, p. 96), without interpretation of this kind, 'audio description often withholds information in a way that can draw undue attention to the absent information'.

### **3.2 Multiple non-narrative panels: Constructing the narrative perspective**

The narrative perspective is the angle from which a storyline is presented, a feature shared by both comics and ADs. Perspectives can be primarily categorized into first-, second- and third-person; however, comics are unique in that the perspectives they offer can be further categorised into those of the *narrator* who controls the storytelling (who may be invisible), the *reciter* who offers the visual perspective, and the *monstrator* who verbally narrates the story (Groensteen, 2013, pp. 79-86). The latter category can complement the basic categorisation for a more precise description of the perspective (for example, the first-person narrator or the third-person narrator).

In the visuals of this ST, there is a tendency to alternate between a third-person omniscient narrator and the third-person reciters, which include characters such as Leigh, X, and the villains, along with occasional first-person reciters in fighting scenes. The verbal textboxes, on the other hand, are presented by both the first-person monstrator and the third-person narrator, which complicates the overall perspective and poses challenges for audiodescription. For instance, a visual drawn from the third-person narrator's perspective may be accompanied by a first-person narration or train of thought, presented in square boxes. The multimodality of these perspectives contributes to the cohesion of the whole, and when such verbal hints are subtle or even missing, the textual narrations intervene and build the connection between one panel and another. In the TT, however, the lack of visuals makes it impossible to provide scene changes and verbal ties at the same time. Transitioning between independent scenes or from current events to flashbacks needs to be supported with additional contextual information, in many cases, reference to perspectives.

Even in narrative comics, a small number of panels may be connected through non-narrative relations or arranged in an unordered manner (Gavaler, 2017, pp. 19-23), raising challenges for clarity and cohesion in audiodescription. Figure 4 depicts how Leigh collects information from newspapers, providing an example of weakly-linked visuals which have to be represented using sign-postings (especially movements) in AD to reinforce a coherent perspective of a specific character. The initial four panels adopt a third-person perspective to show Leigh's discoveries, but, without the verbal texts building cohesion, they cannot form a coherent narrative arc. Depicting respectively a party scene, an election campaign, a construction site and a headshot of a man drinking wine (Swierczynski et al., 2014, p. 64), Panels 1-4 exemplify what Gavaler classifies as a representational arrangement, meaning



Figure 4. Page 64 as an example for adding narrative perspectives (Swierczynski et al., 2014)

that their connections are achieved by their logical relationships instead of through sequential or narrative coherence (ibid.). Moreover, the four panels are not consistent as regards the presence of recurring images: although Panels 1, 2 and 4 all feature Berkshire (referred to as 'Mr. Juicy' in the texts), Panel 3 does not, which breaks the coherence.<sup>4</sup> And even though these panels all have a different colour palette to the main narration arc (mainly greens, blues, purples, and greys versus a variety of reds and yellows, which gives them a colder tone), implying that they represent an interpolation that is independent of the major storyline,<sup>5</sup> it does not give further translatable information to help with the description. Thus, if the panels were to be described as they are without intervention, the logical progression in the TT would appear arbitrary and be difficult to understand.

<sup>4</sup> See Steiner (2004) and Eisner (2008) on the significance of recurring images in maintaining coherence in comics.

<sup>5</sup> See Groensteen (2013, p. 153) on the use of colour variations to mark different sections and paces.

To address this lack of connection, the verbal texts (enclosed in square boxes) in Panels 1-4 do suggest a logical context for the arrangement of the visuals, providing background information about a local political and economic oligarch. Here, the use of square boxes<sup>6</sup> means that the texts are not actual dialogues happening between two characters but in fact monologues, more specifically a blog article written by Leigh (the female figure in Panel 5) as the first-person monstrator.


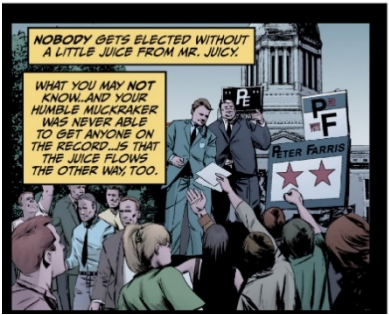
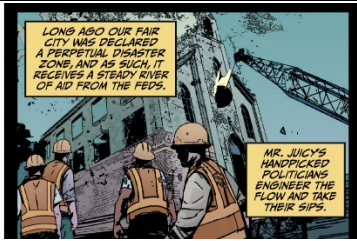
McCloud identifies six types of text-image combination, of which one is termed ‘text-specific’, in that the visuals rely heavily on verbal-based explanations (McCloud, 2006, p. 130). This is the type that best fits Panels 1-4, as, in these panels, the visuals merely serve to complement the detailed verbal texts. In Panel 2 the verbal text reads ‘NOBODY GETS ELECTED WITHOUT A LITTLE JUICE FROM MR. JUICY’, while the visual provides additional information about Berkshire, who is shown standing behind a politician as if in a supporting role. Something similar occurs in Panel 1 (‘KINGMAKER’, showing a social occasion), Panel 3 (‘DISASTER ZONE’, a shabby construction site) and Panel 4 (‘CHUG’, a man drinking). This complementarity between the two types of text indicates a synergistic collaboration between modalities, so that, in order to convert the visuals into audible verbal texts, the audiodescriber needs first to extract the key information from the accompanying verbal texts of the ST and then develop them as standalone descriptions.


The TT's strategy is to guide readers' attention from one panel to another by developing the existing monologues with movements that indicate a consistent perspective. Table 1 below presents a comparison of the ST and the TT to illustrate the additions made in the TT. It can be observed that the delivery of additional movements, description of the visuals and the verbal text from the ST takes a sequential pattern, with every description led by a movement of the same character, Leigh. Thus, readers follow Leigh's motions and focus of attention focus (as in Entry 4, ‘She held up a clipping’) and develop a comprehensive understanding of the contextual connection of all the visuals (e.g. AD Entries 2, 5, 8, 11), thereby positioning Leigh as a third-person reciter who guides readers through the key scenes without directly contributing to the background story of Berkshire's illegal profiting from political engagements. In this way, even though the visual descriptions are not tied to the verbal read-along as closely as juxtaposed images and texts are, they can regain coherence through their association with Leigh's narrative perspective.

Table 1. Comparison between Page 64 and its audio description

AD entries	Time Stamps	TT	Reference to ST
1	52:25-52:29	Leigh rifled through a pile of clippings, finding mentions of Berkshire in various places. Some of the clippings had pictures.	None

<sup>6</sup> See Eisner (2008, p. 44) on how the shapes of boxes convey information about tense, text types, tones, and other elements.

2	52:30-52:38	Berkshire sitting at a trendy bar, red-hued martini at hand, surrounded by hangers-on and suits and cocktail dresses.	
3	52:38-52:49	You know Mr. Juicy. His Fingers are in every pie in this burg. Even the one yo' mama baked last night. Mr. Juicy is also the city's unofficial kingmaker.	YOU KNOW MR. JUICY. HIS FINGERS ARE IN EVERY PIE IN THIS BURG. EVEN THE ONE YO' MAMA BAKED LAST NIGHT. MR. JUICY IS ALSO THE CITY'S UNOFFICIAL KINGMAKER.
4	52:49	She held up a clipping	None
5	52:50-53:08	that seems to be a victory Party for state representative, Peter Farris. There were huge campaign signs with the name Farris everywhere in the photo along with confetti and balloons. Peter Farris stood next to a podium as Berkshire looked on from the back, arms crossed and pleased with himself.	
6	53:08-53:21	Nobody gets elected without a little juicy from Mr. Juicy. What you may not know, and your humble muckraker was never able to get anyone on the record, is that the juice flows the other way, too.	NOBODY GETS ELECTED WITHOUT A LITTLE JUCY FROM MR. JUICY. WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW, AND YOUR HUMBLE MUCKRAKER WAS NEVER ABLE TO GET ANYONE ON THE RECORD, IS THAT THE JUICE FLOWS THE OTHER WAY, TOO.
7	53:21	Another clipping	None
8	53:21-53:31	Another clipping showed a ruined street in Arcadia as a wrecking ball smashed into a beautiful old church, sending bricks everywhere. Bored construction workers watched.	
9	52:32-53:45	Long ago our fair city was declared a perpetual disaster zone, and as such, it receives a steady river of aid from the feds. Mr. Juicy's handpicked politicians engineer the flow and take their sips.	LONG AGO OUR FAIR CITY WAS DECLARED A PERPETUAL DISASTER ZONE, AND AS SUCH, IT RECEIVES A STEADY RIVER OF AID FROM THE FEDS. MR. JUICY'S HANDPICKED POLITICIANS ENGINEER THE FLOW AND TAKE THEIR SIPS.

10	53:46-53:49	Leigh picked up the first clipping and looks more closely at it now.	None
11	53:50-53:54	Berkshire and his hangers-on sipped martini in highballs that look as dark as blood.	
12	53:55-54:02	Mr. Juicy? He practically chugs it. Millions of dollars' worth. Allegedly, of course.	MR. JUICY? HE PRACTICALLY <b>CHUGS</b> IT. MILLIONS OF DOLLARS' WORTH. <b>ALLEGEDLY</b> , OF COURSE.

Similar examples can be found in the translation of the three juxtaposed mugshots on ST page 9, the flashbacks on page 80, and so on (Swierczynski, 2014), suggesting that this strategy is a frequent way of dealing with non-narrative panels when contextual implication in the ST makes it possible for the TT to present a clear one-character perspective. To establish connections between visually unrelated images, a narrative context is created by including additional descriptions that track a character's movements. As a result, the target audience perceives the TT through the filter of the character's perspective, rather than observing the panels from an objective viewpoint. To be more specific, by changing the perspective of the third-person narrator to present that of Leigh, as both the third-person monstrator and reciter in audio, the different narration perspectives in the ST are unified under the same character in the TT. In this way, the AD can effectively establish connections between seemingly random visuals due to the consistent presence of the same character, even if there are sometimes discrepancies between the two versions. For example, Berkshire holds a glass of martini in AD Entry 2 but his hands are empty in the ST. The purpose of such in-panel adaptations would seem to be to add recurring elements for coherence (as mentioned above).

### **3.3 Multiple narrative panels: Additional scenes as cohesive devices**

Apart from non-narrative transitions, the lack of strong panel-level semantic connections can also be found within narrative transitions. In contrast with the dynamic flow of audio description, narrative in comics has to be conveyed through a static series of images, requiring readers to fill in the gaps between panels (McCloud, 1994, pp. 62-68). Apart from location-setting panels (*orienters*) and time-prolongation panels (*prolongations*), a typical narrative arc in comics consists of four types of conjunctions: *establishers*, *initials*, *peaks* and *releases* (Cohn, 2013, pp. 70-77, see Table 2 below). Switching or omitting such key scenes can lead to a breach of the cohesive narration chain to various degrees (Cohn, 2012), although for artistic reasons (such as composition or pace control) such practices are considered legitimate in narrative comics. Another type of weak link between panels may

occur between one complete narrative arc and another (for example, two sequential causal results or double narrative threads, no matter whether they belong to the same major arc or not). In *X: Big Bad*, both types of weak transition are common, often used to accelerate a fight scene or other action scene with a small number of finely divided panels to indicate a very brief time duration and to form a contrast to larger close-ups. Additionally, as the entire issue consists of four chapters, each with multiple fight scenes and shifts in perspective, minor narrative arcs are consistently embedded within major arcs to enhance the complexity of the narration. Describing these transitions presents a challenge for AD.

The following discussion will present two examples for each type of weak panel transition, arguing that, when it is difficult to achieve cohesion by simply adding recurring items or contextualising with a consistent perspective, adding full transitioning scenes that include motions, settings, sound effects and even verbal lines is acceptable. When used appropriately, this strategy can enhance accessibility without disrupting the TT's narration.

Table 2. Narrative categories and conceptual structures (Cohn, 2013, p. 96)

Narrative Category	Conceptual Structure
Orienters	Superordinate context Location of event
Establishers	Introduction of referential relationship Passive state of being
Initials	Preparatory action Process Departing a Source of a path
Prolongations	Position on trajectory of a path Sustainment of a process Passive state (delaying)
Peaks	Culmination of event Termination of a process Interruption of event or process Reaching a Goal of a path
Releases	Wrap-up of narrative sequence Outcome of an event Reaction to an event Passive state of being

The first example is taken from pages 86 to 87 in the ST (Swierczynski, 2014) and the corresponding TT from 1:13:23 to 1:15:08 (Messner, 2021, Table 3 below). It demonstrates how the narrative arc, which was slightly fragmented in the ST due to the lack of transitions, is completed in the TT with additional elements. The two pages depict Leigh's attempt to escape from mobsters, creating an overall coherent narrative but with only a few key scenes missing. For clear reference, the panels in Figure 5 are marked with page numbers plus sequential numbers. P86-1 to 2 (*initial*: getting caught—*peak*: fighting back) and 3 to 5

(*establisher*: running into a crowd—*initial*: being targeted—*peak*: getting caught) form two minor narrative arcs with consistent cohesion respectively.





Figure 5. Pages 86-87 as an example for adding narrative structures within an arc (Swierczynski et al., 2014)

When placed within the larger arc of Leigh's escape from the scene, P86-1 to 2 together serve as an *establisher* for the following panels (3 to 5), as they form the starting-point of Leigh's escape by preparing background information about from where and whom she flees. However, when examining the transition between 2 to 3, there is a gap when Leigh makes her way out of the room with bookshelves and runs into a hall-like space with unpleasant-looking people surrounding her. In other words, there is a key scene missing from the narration that would support the *establisher*. In the comic version, the cohesion is compensated by the recurrence of the character Leigh and a consistent colour scheme (see Figure 5). The choice of similar deep greyish blue and green colours implies that the scenes represented in the two panels may not be taking place in the same room but certainly within the same building, while the character's running pose confirms that she is moving from one room to another but is yet to escape. While readers of the ST rely on these visual elements subconsciously to complete the narrative arc, the TT must compensate for this by utilizing auditory channels to provide the necessary information to its audience.

What the TT chooses to do is to add transitional scenes that function almost in the same way as the panels do. The descriptions of P86 2-3 and their matching STs are as follows:

Table 3. Comparison between page 86 and its audio description

AD entries	Time Stamps	TT	Reference to ST
1	1:13:42- 1:13:45	[s]he turned and swung the hard-cover book right into his face.	
2	1:13:45	*Female voice yelling*	None
3	1:13:46	*Male voice groaning*	GAK
4	1:13:46- 1:13:50	The edge of the book nailed Field Mouse right in the mouth. His mouth popped open, and blood flew.	
5	1:13:51- 1:13:53	Yeah. A real blockbuster.	YEAH. A REAL BLOCKBUSTER.
6	1:13:54- 1:13:57	*Female voice panting* Leigh dropped the book and spurred back into the dark hallway.	None
7	1:13:58- 1:14:01	She raced through a gauntlet of homeless who were curious about all the noise.	

By comparing the ST and the TT, we can see that AD Entry 6 serves the function of an establisher, as it not only provides transitioning moves, from Leigh hitting the mobster with a book to her running into a crowd, but also establishes the change in settings by specifically pointing out ‘the dark hallway’. As this addition focuses on tracing Leigh's movement rather than guiding the reader's attention to specific objects through her perspective, it can be considered an added scene rather than a perspective reinforcement. Additionally, the TT incorporates the sound effect of panting to make Leigh's actions audible.

This practice is similar to AD Entry 3, where the onomatopoeia in the ST is translated into non-verbal sounds to describe Field Mouse being hit. Thus, if back-translated, AD Entry 6 would require at least one transitional panel (possibly two panels for the two movements) that would clearly depict the consecutive movements and the change of scene, alongside possibly graphic onomatopoeic words. The translation of P86-5 to P87-1 also applies the same strategy, where the transition between ‘homeless people approaching Leigh’ and ‘the mobsters re-capturing Leigh’ is strengthened by ‘Field Mouse emerged from the bookstore behind her’ and ‘The other members of the Rat Squad ran up to Leigh and stopped’. Both examples illustrate the need for addition in this situation.

As for the transition between narrative arcs, the addition between pages 62 to 63 is another typical example of adding establishers. As seen in Figure 3, P62-1 to 5 is a very typical full narrative arc that contains a building setting (the *establisher*, 1),<sup>7</sup> two men talking (the *initial*, 2), one man pointing at the other and chastising him (the *peak*, 3), and the other man leaving with X's shadowy figure staring from above (the *release*, 4) and *prolongation* (5). Directly moving out of this narrative arc, P63-1 switches to Leigh taking off her shoes without giving contextualisation as P62-1 does, which makes it an initial instead of an establisher. Even though P63-1 does provide hints that help make readers aware of the new setting (for example, furniture in a studio apartment and a warm, bright sky outside the window), these hints rely heavily on visual interpretations and must be organised for contextualisation. To fill in this gap, the TT prepares the target audience for the new arc by adding more movements of Leigh's arrival back home:

\*Door opening sound effect\* Leigh opened the front door of her shabby apartment. It was noon. She was dirty, banged up, and exhausted’ (Messner, 2021, 51:19-51:26).

These are all reasonable deductions, given that the next line in the script is ‘Leigh took off her shoes’ (ibid., 51:27-51:28). In other words, the TT gathers background information from the initial panel, and uses a movement to organise it into an establish panel-like description.

---

<sup>7</sup> This is a very interesting panel for function categorization. Its visual depicts only the location, so it appears to be an orienter. However, since its dialogue boxes imply characters and their actions, such a referential relationship makes it an establisher instead of orienter.



Figure 6. Pages 62-63 as an example for adding narrative

### 3. Conclusion

Through visual language analysis and a comparative case study of *X: Big Bad* (a commercial AD comic which adopts a ‘movie-like’ approach and achieves a highly coherent target text), this article has identified patterns in the translation methods used and concluded that certain norms exist that could contribute to comic AD translation in future. The findings suggest that, contrary to the assumption that AD comics must be utterly objective and that describers should refrain from interpretations, the TT’s coherence is achieved precisely by mediating the discrepancy between the two types of multimodal texts, namely the verbal-visual ST and the audio-verbal TT.

Firstly, the TT emphasises important clues and recurring visual items with fixed, repetitive expressions and tends to add additional information for contextualization. When necessary, it also makes deductions about the existence of a certain item and repeats it, based on the contextual implications, even if it is not directly visible in the ST images. Secondly, for a few panels that are relevant to the main story arc but are not juxtaposed to form a narrative among themselves (a procedure which exists even in very typical narrative comics like this one), the TT turns to addition and creates a consistent character-as-narrator perspective that links the panels with the same context. Thirdly, for narrative panels that are weakly linked due to transitions between minor story arcs or for artistic reasons, the TT

fills in missing scenes with background introductions, character movements and sound effects. Combined, these added elements in the TT serve similar functions to the missing panel. By evaluating their contributions to the quality of the TT, it can be argued that even though such strategies could make the describers' mediation visible, the TT is made more accessible by providing a clearer logical chain; this would seem to make these interventions more acceptable.

This study is limited to a very defined translation goal and only examines the adaptations that are relevant to coherence. Thus, it intends merely to inspire solutions for dealing with certain challenges in comics AD, and in no way aims to fully respond to broader debates, such as whether the movie-like approach or the comic-like approach is generally a more acceptable choice. Notably, the adaptations in the TT are not limited to the categories mentioned in this essay, and the lack of translators' notes and readers' responses also limits its conclusions. Nonetheless, these limitations could provide a direction for future research into (for example) whether such norms develop through the influence of the ADs of more popular genres such as TV series or movies, or as a result of target audience responses to such marked interventions.

## REFERENCES

- Brownie, B. and Danny Graydon (2016) *Bloomsbury Fashion Central - The Superhero Costume: Identity and disguise in fact and fiction* [online]. Available at: <http://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/bfccoll/encyclopedia> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).
- Christopher, B. (2018) 'Rethinking Comics and Visuality, from the Audio Daredevil to Philipp Meyer's Life', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 38(3) [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v38i3.6477>.
- Cohn, N. (2013) *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Eisner, W. (2008) *Comics and sequential art: principles and practices from the legendary cartoonist*. New York, London: W.W. Norton (The Will Eisner library).
- Gavaler, C. (2017) 'Refining the Comics Form', *European Comic Art*, 10(2), pp. 1–23 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/eca.2017.100202>.
- GraphicAudio (no date) *Accessibility Statement* [online]. Available at: <https://www.graphicaudiointernational.net/accessibility-statement> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).
- Groensteen, T. and Miller, A. (2013) *Comics and Narration*. Jackson, United States: University Press of Mississippi [online]. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=1113447> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).
- Kingett, R. (2016) 'Finally, There's a Comic Book Store for the Blind', *Vice*, 9 August [online]. Available at: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xdmd9d/comics-empower-comic-book-store-for-the-blind> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).
- Kleege, G. (2016) 'Audio Description Described: Current Standards, Future Innovations, Larger Implications', *Representations*, (135), pp. 89–101.

- Liu, C. – Repetition and Addition as Coherent Devices in Audio Description of Comics  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 102-120, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a6](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a6)
- Kruger, J.-L. and Orero, P. (2010) 'Audio description, audio narration – a new era in AVT', *Perspectives*, 18(3), pp. 141–142 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2010.487664>.
- McCloud, S. (1994) *Understanding comics: the invisible art*. 1st ed. New York: Harper Perennial.
- McCloud, S. (2006) *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels*. New York: WmMorrowPB.
- Messner, E. (2021) *X: Big Bad* [MP3] [online]. Available at: <https://www.graphicaudiointernational.net/x-volume-1-big-bad.html>.
- Osolen, R.S. and Brochu, L. (2020) 'Creating an Authentic Experience: A Study in Comic Books, Accessibility, and the Visually Impaired Reader', *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI)*, 4(1) [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i1.32405>.
- Packer, J., Vizenor, K. and Miele, J.A. (2015) 'An Overview of Video Description: History, Benefits, and Guidelines.', *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(2), pp. 83–94.
- Stainer, W. (2004) 'Pictorial Narrative', in M.-L. Ryan (ed.) *Narrative across Media: The Language of Storytelling*. Lincoln and London: the University of Nebraska Press.
- Swierczynski, D. et al. (2014) *X: Big Bad*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse [online]. Available at: <https://www.darkhorse.com/Books/22-521/X-Volume-1-Big-Bad-TPB>.
- Taylor, C. (2016) 'The multimodal approach in audiovisual translation', *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, 28(2), pp. 222–236 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.28.2.04tay>.
- TPGi (2017) 'Accessible Comics!!! – Cordelia McGee-Tubb : #ID24 2017' [online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsQcOV0dZew> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

**About the author:** Chunwei “Harold” Liu is a third year PhD student at the University of Glasgow, specializing in Modern Language and Culture, and supervised by Professor Laurence Grove and Dr. Enza de Francisci. After graduating in Translation Studies, as part of the Glasgow-Nankai University double-degree, Harold has developed a strong interest in the study of graphic literatures and inter-semiotic translation. Their PhD thesis focusses on Feministic and Queer studies in verbal-visual texts and popular cultures, especially in superhero narratives and their secondary writings and arts. Also, as a practitioner, they work in translation, interpretation, second-language education and digital illustration.

## INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION IN THE THEATRE: CREATING A STAGE PRODUCTION

Raili Lass\*

University of Tartu

**ABSTRACT:** The standard way of creating a stage production is to take a written source text (the play) and transfer it to the stage through visual and auditory means. This is, essentially, an act of intersemiotic translation although, in the theatre, the “languages” of the target text are neither clearly defined nor limited. This article explores the function of the playtext in the theatre as the source of both the stage production and the verbalised meaning-making system that constitutes a performance. The objective is to reconstrue the various participants in the process as translators, analysing the ways in which interlingual and intersemiotic translation are comparable.

**KEYWORDS:** Interlingual Translation, Intersemiotic Translation, Drama Translation, Theatre Translation, Dominant, Stage Production

### 1. Introduction

Staging a play for performance in a theatre is a collective art form. People from very different professional fields are involved in the creation of a stage production, each with their own area of responsibility and expertise but collaborating together: the stage director is conditioned by the intent of the playwright, actors are conditioned by the concept of the director, etc (Lotman, 2006, pp. 195-196).

Theatrical signs and sign systems have been categorised differently since the initial establishment of theatrical semiotics in the 1930s (Elam, 1980, pp. 4-5). For example, the German performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (1992, pp. 14-17) divided theatrical signs into 14 categories covering music and other sounds, the different expressive means of actors, and the physical appearance of performers and the stage (ibid.)<sup>1</sup>. However, Fischer-Lichte’s categorisation, though thorough, is today a little dated, especially in the light of the technological changes of the last decades. Today, for example, productions often include a video background or even live filming.

Despite such developments, the classic form of staging still involves, for the most part, building the entire production on a certain source text, i.e. a play or dramatisation.<sup>2</sup> Each participant in the process bases their personal vision on the initial ideas of the playwright, which will then be adapted according to the context, making it possible for the director, actors, costume designers and other participants to generate a variety of meanings (Birch, 1991, pp. 7-8). Each participant expresses their understanding with the

---

\* raili.lass@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Fischer-Lichte’s complete list is as follows: sounds, music, linguistic signs, paralinguistic signs, mimic signs, gestural signs, proxemic signs, mask, hair, costume, stage conception, stage decoration, props and lighting (1992, p. 15).

<sup>2</sup> This article deliberately leaves out “non-traditional” forms of creating a stage production, such as the ‘devising method’, formerly called ‘collective creation’, when a troupe begins rehearsing without a fixed playtext and creates the final dialogue during that process (see, for example, Epner, 2013, p. 119).

means available to them in their personal area of responsibility, namely the meaning-making or sign system that they operate with.

From this viewpoint, we can extend the notion of “translation” to every participant in the process of staging a play since each one of them transfers a meaning found in the source text to a target text, which is intersemiotic translation as defined by Roman Jakobson (1959). The central component of any translation is the text. In semiotic terms, ‘text’ is not necessarily viewed as a written line of sentences but rather any materialisation of a narrative or meaning that emerges from the need “to cast a structural framework on a portion of reality, thus turning it into a text” (Leone, 2023, p. 118). In this sense, the entire stage production (with or without spoken words) is the target text of a process of intersemiotic translation. In the context of this article, however, ‘text’ is used predominantly to refer to the written playtext<sup>3</sup> that is the basis for all subsequent intersemiotic translations of a stage production, and the enunciation of words by actors on stage.

In the theatre, the playtext assumes a dual role: as a work of literature, it is holistic and self-contained, but as a text spoken by actors, it becomes only one of the several verbal and non-verbal sign-systems that constitute a performance (Ubersfeld, 1999, p. 14; Lotman, 2006, p. 194). The main objective of this article is to analyse to what extent and in what terms the participants in the process of staging a play can be considered translators. In sections three and four, we will analyse the way that the general structure of (interlingual) translation applies to intersemiotic translation as executed by the stage director and actors respectively.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Translators are simultaneously meaning-makers and meaning-takers, who “receive and interpret the source text as a whole but communicate that interpretation forward by compiling a new complex of signs to be included in a target text, which is then received as a whole by the target audience” (Haapaniemi, 2023, pp. 14-15). The craft and significance of translation has been viewed in different ways throughout history but contemporary views incline toward the notion that a translation involves “working *alongside* an original work, extrapolating the work in oblique fashion and always maintaining semiotic distance and creative tension with it” (Lee, 2022). This analysis is eminently applicable to the process by means of which a dramatic performance is built out of an initial playtext.

When we are speaking of translation in the context of the theatre, especially if we regard it as something that goes beyond a language-based activity, we should make a terminological distinction between drama translation and theatre translation. In this article, I will use *drama translation* to signify interlingual translation, the act of translating a written play from one language to another, and *theatre translation* to signify

---

<sup>3</sup> Different authors refer to this as the script or dramatic script (see, for example, terminological overview by Tarantini, 2021, p. 19).

intersemiotic translation, the act of transferring the ideas of a playwright to the other sign systems that comprise the stage production.<sup>4</sup>

Any kind of translation is dependent on the translator's perception of the focal points of the source text, something on which to build the translation. As such, it is not so much a constraint (as articulated by Lefevere, 1985; or Bennett, 2007) as the ground for successive creative acts. Consequently, the outcome of theatre translation (i.e. the target text) depends on a number of factors, including external circumstances and "the translator's psycho-physiological condition at a particular point in time and in the sociocultural habitus in which they are embedded" (Lee, 2022).

Take, for example, the act of dramatizing and staging a well-known literary work like *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. The playwright or dramaturg in charge of dramatizing the novel must make a choice about which characters, scenes, and dialogues to display explicitly and which can be compensated through other meaning-making systems (for example, long descriptions of the scenery can be illustrated by the set design; these do not need to be verbalised by actors). This is an act of translation in itself since the dramaturg will utilise the same kinds of internal and external factors as the literary translator (such as the surrounding circumstances, media resources, and personal psycho-physiological conditions). The person that dramatizes a well-known novel like this will also take account of the fact that the majority of the audience is probably familiar with the work and build on what spectators already know.

As for the scenic designer, they will search the novel for descriptions of scenery and transfer these to the non-verbal sign system of the set design and decorations. They will also make choices between what to display explicitly and what can be compensated by other resources. The costume designer, for their part, may try to find a balance between reproducing the authentic costumes of 17<sup>th</sup> century France while also considering that actors must be able to move freely or engage in sword fighting scenes. On the other hand, if the stage director decides to create a modern version of the play, the costume designer may still choose to include some elements that serve as references to the original era of the story. All the examples described here illustrate that the decision of what to preserve and what to adjust or exclude essentially rests on the stage director's interpretation of the original work. And as we will see, this applies to all types of theatre translation, regardless of the target sign system.

The general function of the theatre is to create meaning under specific conditions and in a specific manner through the internal code of the theatre, which regulates "(1) which material creations are to apply as vehicles of meaning – in other words, as theatrical signs; (2) in what way and under what conditions these signs can be combined selectively with one another; and (3) which meanings can be attributed to these signs [...]" (Fischer-

---

<sup>4</sup> This distinction does not correspond with the terms used by other translation and theatre scholars. A detailed overview is given by Tarantini (2021, p. 18), who also notes that terminological issues arise not only from differentiating between interlingual and intersemiotic translation, but already from whether an interlingual translation is intended for page or stage.

Lichte, 1992, p. 10) The target text of theatre translation is the stage production in all its complexity and multi-level meaning-making systems.

### 3. The playtext

A great deal of attention has already been given to drama translation in the interlingual sense, from Susan Bassnett's pioneering attempts to find a way through the labyrinth (1985, 1991, 2001) to more recent works by Sirkku Aaltonen (1996, 2008, 2010), David Johnston (2000, 2004, 2011), Eva Espasa (2000, 2013), and Cristina Marinetti (2013a, 2013b, 2018), among others. We will not be exploring the issues of performability, speakability and the craft of interlingual drama translation in much detail here. Instead, we are more concerned with the extent to which a dramatic text can itself be considered a translation.

Literature is also a type of a translational phenomenon in the sense that literary works often reproduce classic or religious narratives. As Allen (2000, p. 67) puts it, "the text not only sets going a plurality of meanings but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning." As an example, we might consider the plays that are regarded in Estonian theatre history as first Estonian-language plays, produced from 1865 and onwards. Inevitably, these were loose adaptations of German dramatic works, translated from German to Estonian and adjusted to local circumstances that the audience could relate with. From this viewpoint, literature is a permanent process of iteration in which "what is iteratively accreted is not a vast collection of identical units or perfect clones of the same thing; rather, every (re)iteration of 'the same' introduces some slight difference or deviation" (ibid., p. 110).

Writers and playwrights are also engaged in their own personal acts of translation. They have their childhood, education, work experience, reading and theatre background, personal preferences and experiences, cultural, societal and political environment, etc, all of which directly or indirectly influence the finished play. This is a sort of experiential translation in the sense that the writer "translates" aspects of his or her life that are relevant to the play.

Regardless of whether a play is staged in the original language or in a translated version, when the participants of the stage production start transferring it to the stage, they are engaging in an act of intersemiotic translation: the ideas in the written text are translated into different sign systems and include a number of complementary details (Lotman, 2006, p. 20). Such details, or theatrical signs, are added on all different levels, from the colour of the details on costumes to the lighting changes and musical background of the stage production. For example, when Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* was staged in Estonia in 2016, the stage director Ain Mäeots chose the entire playlist of pop hits from 1990s to play in the background of the Coverlies' party in the final scene, thus stressing the era of the events.

A theatrical sign, as defined by Fischer-Lichte consists of three dimensions: the syntactic dimension, or the relation of the sign to other signs; the semantic dimension, or

the relation of the sign to the object that it designates; and the pragmatic dimension, or the relation of the sign to its user (Fischer-Lichte, 1992, p. 2). This three-dimensionality of the theatrical sign serves two functions. First, it enables all participants in the process of staging to make subjective conclusions about the meanings embedded in the text, which will in turn affect the outcome of the stage production. Second, it allows spectators to make their own subjective meanings and conclusions about the performance that they see and its story-world.

The verbal enunciation of the playtext (including actors' characteristic voice timbres, speech rhythms, pitch and intonation, etc.) is also a theatrical sign since in a performance, cooperating with other signs and contributing to new meaning-making processes.

#### **4. Stage director as a translator**

The starting point of the creative process of staging a play can vary greatly: some directors carry a play with them for years or even decades until they feel like it is the right time; some fulfil an order (for example, staging something in celebration of a renowned actor's birthday); some are introduced to a contemporary play by the dramaturge of the theatre, etc. The possibilities are endless and often rely on conditions that have less to do with the play and more to do with the director's internal world or external conditions.

The stage director is engaged in a translational act, similar to that of a playwright as discussed earlier, in that their personal experiences, cultural background, social circumstances and other conditions directly or indirectly affect the finished stage production. What is different is the "matter of expression" as formulated by Ubersfeld (1999, p. 5).

In this form of intersemiotic translation, the director-translator has a lot of space to adjust, modify, complement, accentuate, or even erase details of the story or nuances that are not easily accommodated to the needs of the production or their personal vision. The stage director focuses on the elements of the playtext that they consider to be most central to the story. Once this has been established, the less significant details may be included, modified or omitted as they see fit. Even if the stage director tries to pursue an outcome that is maximally faithful to the source text, their work still depends on the available resources, which include not only material resources like money, stage space and scenery, but also cultural resources like the audience's expectations, societal conditions, theatrical traditions, etc. The outcome of the translating act is always contingent on the surrounding circumstances, including the availability and accessibility of media resources (Lee, 2022). Therefore, all decisions made by the stage director ultimately serve the stage production's integrity and success.

The stage director can utilise any kind of meaning-making systems that they choose. Visual and auditory means are quite standard in contemporary theatre, i.e. costumes and make-up, musical background, lighting design, etc. But it is common for stage directors to push the boundaries. For example, in the 1995 production of *The Three Musketeers* in Estonia, the stage director Elmo Nüganen brought actual horses onto the stage and

organised riding lessons for the four leading actors. He also had the courtyard of the Tallinn City Theatre complex, which had until then been a duck pond, reconstructed to make it into a complete open-air stage (the construction of which was not complete until the night before the premiere). And for the third act of the production (Milady's imprisonment, escape, and the culmination of the story), the entire audience was directed from their seats in the open air to the fourth floor of the theatre where there used to be an attic. Innovations at the hands of stage directors are not limited to using live animals or expanding the concept of the stage: basically, a stage director can use whatever they think can get their interpretation across best.

All such theatrical signs are coordinated in the *mise-en-scène*, defined by Pavis (1992, p.132) as the situation of enunciation. The *mise-en-scène* is a complex of theatrical signs and their interaction. Each sign carries a meaning which can change if the sign is (a) inserted into a different semiotic context; (b) related to something else; or (c) used by another user (Fischer-Lichte, 1992, p. 2). Theatrical signs can also carry different meanings for the characters on stage and the audience. This is another aspect of the theatre that a stage director can utilise. Sometimes they need the audience to know less than some of the characters (for example, in classic detective stories), and sometimes, they need the audience to know more (which is often the case in comedies). Thus, the stage director is able to manipulate the audience with the amount of information they are prepared to share. This brings us to the concept of control. The stage director has almost complete control over the *means* of getting their own or the author's ideas across, but they lose control when it comes to the *execution*.

The workload that the stage director assumes depends on their personal preferences. However, the more they delegate different assignments, the more they lose control of the whole vision. Even if the stage director is well familiar with the work of the other professionals involved in the staging process (set designer, costume designer, etc.), each new person involved is another translator, an additional voice. And the outcome of the stage production is the result of each of these different voices and visions. Whatever decisions a stage director makes, the interrelations between theatrical signs and their dynamics will start to fall into place during performances and in interaction with the audience. The stage director has no choice but to accept that their creation is a living organism that will always escape their control to some extent.

The most significant element of a stage production that is out of the control of the stage director is also the central element of any performance: the actor. Since actors occupy such an important part of a production and are an interesting phenomenon to explore separately, we will dedicate the final section of this article to them.

## 5. Actors as translators

It is the actors that present the characters of the play to the audience. Their act of intersemiotic translation occurs in an agreed time and place where they must act in a specific way and have a specific appearance (Fischer-Lichte, 1992, p. 13). The means for

actors to create an intersemiotic target text are (1) their thinking process, (2) their bodily expression, (3) their physical appearance, and (4) verbalisation. Let's look at each of these separately.

The most widely used system of acting in contemporary Western theatre is the Stanislavski system<sup>5</sup> (Whyman, 2008, p. x; Elsam, 2006, p. x) developed by the Russian stage director and acting teacher Konstantin Stanislavski. He divided the process of creating a character into six stages. In the first stage, an actor gets acquainted with the play; in the second stage, they look for the psychological material needed to play the character from within themselves as well as the text; in the third stage, the actor will create an outline of the character; and only in the fourth stage will they actually start to physically embody the character (Mitter, 1992, p. 11). The fifth and sixth stages have to do with interaction with partners, the handling of external devices (props), and preparing for performance by generating a creative impulse within themselves, even when the choreographed movements and rehearsed encounters have started to feel mechanised. But one of the key words that is constantly stressed in all stages of creating a character is *embodiment*. For a plausible performance, actors adopt the mentality of their character and process it through their bodies. According to the Stanislavski system, this is the most important aspect of creating a character.

This process is analogous to that often used by interlingual translators trying to acquire a sense of the fictional world that they wish to deliver in translation. For example, Estonian translator Katrin Kaugver has said:

Each text is new, everything is strange. This has allowed me to dive into worlds that I would have never known to exist, let alone discover. And each one of these worlds has complemented me in some ways: a fresh view on things, a location that I visited, the music that I listened to. If you focus on translating, you enter a character like an actor does; you are almost living the life of a character [...] (Sakova, 2022, p. 13).

Trying to fathom the thinking process of the writer or grasp the characters of the play is common in the act of translation, and this applies to both interlingual and intersemiotic (theatre) translation. For actors, if the thinking process is in place, it will be bodily expressed. Actors will seek characteristic ways for their characters to move; there may be some specific trait like hunching or limping, or there might be smaller details like the motion of the head when something is bothering the character or raising one eyebrow or the corner of the mouth. Whichever detail the actor feels will fit the character, they will have found it by sensing the source text and trying to translate it with the means available to him or her.

---

<sup>5</sup> Although the Stanislavski system is very common in Western theatre and film, it is by no means the only system that an actor can use. There are a number of alternative approaches, for example, those developed by Bertolt Brecht or Jerzy Grotowski, and there are also experimental approaches that knowingly refrain from submitting to any fixed systems.

Bodily expression is supported by the actors' physical appearance. This, of course, depends more on the vision of the costume designer and hair and make-up department. However, as theatre is largely a visual art form, the physical appearance of actors/characters is also very important for the integrity of the stage production.

The fourth means of creating a character is speaking their words. According to the Stanislavski system, verbalisation can begin only when the thinking process of the characters and the motives behind their actions are properly established because spoken words are the result of thought and action (Karusoo, 2020, p. 33). Adjusting the tone, rhythm, volume, or other aspects of their voice is one way for actors to convey their character's thoughts and emotions to the audience. Stanislavski wrote: "Remain still, wipe away the tears that roll down your cheeks, control yourself so as not to burst into tears openly, and speak in a barely audible voice, the way we speak of our dearest and most secret things" (2010, p. 39). What this description entails is that lowering one's voice is a way of illustrating intimacy and vulnerability, that is, of translating certain emotions and states of mind.

Speaking the words of others as if they were one's own requires extensive focusing, and can often be complicated, especially in the early stages of rehearsals. According to the Stanislavski method, actors are encouraged to reformulate the words of the playwright to make the meaning more understandable to themselves, only turning back to the author's original words when the thought process has become clear. "We must fight hard against vocal tension and clichés so that voice, speech and inflexions are still fully dependent on inner feeling and are its direct, precise servant" (Stanislavski, 2010, p. 185). The use of the voice and enunciation of words is thus a way of translating the character's internal world into external expression, something that is achieved by first making sense of the internal world by paraphrasing the writer's words.

As we can see, actors working within the Stanislavski system are encouraged to engage in *intra-lingual translation*, at least in rehearsals or on a mental level, much in the way that writers and interlingual translators do, as discussed earlier. But the process of portraying a character on stage is a constant intersemiotic translation because actors search for the meaning behind a playwright's words and start looking for ways to embody that meaning with all the mental and physical resources available to them. To this extent, it is an experiential process.

## 6. Conclusion

Theatre as an art form is the result of a number of multi-level acts of translation, the dominant one being intersemiotic. A performance utilises different theatrical signs to transmit a particular interpretation of a (usually written) source text to the audience.

All intersemiotic acts of translation in the theatre are directly or indirectly based on a source text, usually a playscript. The people involved in the process of staging a play will read the playscript and transfer it through their own perception to the sign system that they operate with. All such sign systems will generate meanings both separately and in

interaction with each other. Intersemiotic theatre translation therefore illustrates how a translation is not necessarily the result of faithfully reproducing an author's thoughts but rather an independent work that operates alongside the original, as observed by Lee (2022, above). The number of meaning-making operations used in a stage production is limitless. The final result is in the hands of the stage director who can utilise any kind of resources at hand. This requires a skilful and innovative approach to the source text as well as to the target text, i.e. the production.

However, even though the stage director is responsible for the end result of the stage production, they are not in total control. A production that results from the efforts of a number of people is a living organism which will adapt and change in accordance with the varying micro-circumstances of the individual performance. As we have seen, multiple acts of translation are present in any performance, whether intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic. Indeed, the various forms of intersemiotic or experiential translation present in the stage production are very similar to classic interlingual translation (or 'translation proper', as Jakobson [1959] called it) in the sense that all involve interpreting the source text in the light of a particular agenda, and then trying to convey these perceptions using the various resources available to them.

## REFERENCES

- Aaltonen, S. (1996) *Acculturation of the Other. Irish Milieux in Finnish Drama Translation*. Finland: Joensuu University Press.
- Aaltonen, S. (2008) *Retranslation in the Finnish theatre*, pp. 141-159 [online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242149248\\_Retranslation\\_In\\_The\\_Finnish\\_Theatre](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242149248_Retranslation_In_The_Finnish_Theatre) (Accessed: 6 July 2023).
- Aaltonen, S. (2010) 'Drama Translation', *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 105-110 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1075/hts.1.dra1>.
- Allen, G. (2000) *Intertextuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (1991) 'Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability', pp. 99-111. *Languages and Cultures in Translation Theories*, Vol 4 [online]. Available at: <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ttr/1991-v4-n1-ttr1474/037084ar.pdf>.
- Bassnett, S. (2001) 'Still trapped in the labyrinth: further reflections on translation and theatre' in Bassnett S. and Lefevere A. (eds.) *Constructing cultures: essays on literary translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, pp. 90-108
- Bassnett-McGuire, S. (2014 [1985]) 'Ways Through the Labyrinth. Strategies and Methods for Translating Theatre Texts', pp. 87-102. *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*. New York: Routledge.
- Bennett, K. (2007) 'Words into Movement: The Ballet as Intersemiotic Translation' in Brilhante, M. J. and Carvalho, M. (eds.) *Teatro e Tradução: Palcos de Encontro*. Lisbon: Colibri, pp. 125-138.
- Birch, D. (1991) *The Language of Drama. Critical Theory and Practice*. UK: The Macmillan Press LTD.
- Elam, K. (1980) *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Lass, R. – Intersemiotic Translation in the Theatre: Creating a Stage Production  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 121-131, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a7](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a7)
- Elsam, P. (2006) *Acting characters. 20 Simple Steps from Rehearsal to Performance*. London: A&C Black Publishers Limited.
- Epner, L. (2013) 'Teispool draamat: tekst nullindate teatris', *Methis. Studia humaniora Estonica*, 11, pp. 116–129 [online]. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/raili/Downloads/1005-Article%20Text-2107-1-10-20130604.pdf>.
- Espasa, E. (2000) 'Performability in Translation: Speakability? Playability? Or just Saleability?' in Upton, C-A. (ed.) *Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*. New York: Routledge, pp. 49–62.
- Espasa, E. (2013) 'Masks, Music Scores, and Hourglasses. Rethinking Performability through Metaphors' in Bigliazzi et al. (eds.) *Theatre Translation in Performance*. New York: Routledge, pp. 38–48.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. (1992) *The Semiotics of Theatre*. USA: Indiana University Press.
- Haapaniemi, R. (2023) 'Translation as meaning-construction under co-textual and contextual constraints: A model for a material approach to translation', *Translation Studies*, 16(1) [online]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/14781700.2022.2147988?needAccess=true&role=button>.
- Jakobson, R. (1959) 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' in Brower, R. A. (ed.). *On Translation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 232–239. [online]. Available at: [https://monoskop.org/images/6/68/Jakobson\\_Roman\\_1959\\_On\\_Linguistic\\_Aspects\\_of\\_Translation.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/6/68/Jakobson_Roman_1959_On_Linguistic_Aspects_of_Translation.pdf).
- Johnston, D. (2000) 'Valle-Inclàn: The Meaning of Form', *Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 85-100.
- Johnston, D. (2004) 'Securing the Performability of the Play in Translation' in Coelsch-Foisner S. and Klein H. M. (eds.) *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*. Frankfurt: Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, pp. 25-38.
- Johnston, D. (2011) 'Metaphor and Metonymy: The Translator-Practitioner's Visibility' in Baines, R., Marinetti, C., Perteghella, M. (eds.) *Staging and performing translation. Text and theatre practice*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 11-30.
- Karusoo, M. (2020) *Panso. Nii palju kui andsid koerale... Mina, mu õpetaja ja teised tegelased*. Tallinn: Varrak.
- Lee, T. K. (2022) *Translation as Experimentalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lefevere, A. (1985) 'Why Waste our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm' in Hermans, T. (ed.) *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*. London & Sidney: Croom Helm.
- Leone, M. (2023) 'Post/structuralist Semiotics'. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 109-128.
- Lotman, J. (2006) *Kultuurisemiootika. Tekst – kirjandus – kultuur*. Eesti: Tänapäev.
- Marinetti, C. (2013a) 'Translation and theatre. From performance to performability', *Traget. International Journal on Translation Studies*, 32. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 307-320.
- Marinetti, C. (2013b) 'Transnational, Multilingual, and Post-dramatic. Rethinking the Location of Translation in Contemporary Theatre', *Theatre Translation in Performance*. New York: Routledge, pp. 27-37.

Lass, R. – Intersemiotic Translation in the Theatre: Creating a Stage Production  
Translation Matters, 5(1), 2023, pp. 121-131, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1a7](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1a7)

- Marinetti, C. (2018) 'Theatre as a "translation zone": multilingualism, identity and the performing body in the work of Teatro delle Albe', *The Translator*, 24. UK: Routledge, pp. 128-146.
- Mitter, S. (1992) *Systems of rehearsal. Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pavis, P. (1992) *Theatre at the crossroads of culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sakova, A. (2022) 'Vestlusring, VAJA ON ÜHT SAKSA ASJA EESTKÖNELEJAT. Saksakeelse kirjanduse tõlkijate vestlusring. Katrin Kaugver, Piret Pääsuke, Tiiu Relve, Krista Räni, Eve Sooneste ja Aare Pilv', *Tõlkija hääl X. Eesti Kirjanike Liidu tõlkijate sektsiooni aastaraamat*. Tallinn: Eesti Kirjanike Liit, pp. 10–24.
- Stanislavski, K. (2010) *An actor's work on a role*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tarantini, A. T. (2021) *Theatre Translation. A Practice as Research Model*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ubersfeld, A. (1999) *Reading Theatre*. Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Whyman, R. (2008) *The Stanislavsky System of Acting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**About the author:** Raili Lass is a doctoral student at the University of Tartu Department of Semiotics where she is writing her dissertation "The role and significance of interlingual drama translation within a stage production as an intersemiotic translation and polysemiotic structure". She has a background in theatre studies (BA 2016) and translation studies (MA 2018), both graduated from the University of Tartu. She is currently working as a translator at the Estonian Military Academy Department of Applied Research.

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### TRANSLATION, CREATIVITY AND EXPERIMENTALISM

África Vidal Claramonte\*  
University of Salamanca

*TRANSLATION AS CREATIVE-CRITICAL PRACTICE*, Delphine Grass, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

*TRANSLATION AS EXPERIMENTALISM: EXPLORING PLAY IN POETICS*, Tong-King Lee, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 88 pp., £16,59 (Paperback) ISBN: 978-1-108-93295-0

*TRANSLATING THE AVANT-GARDE, AVANT-GARDE TRANSLATION*, Alexandra Lukes (ed.), Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

*EXPERIMENTAL TRANSLATION: THE WORK OF TRANSLATION IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHMIC PRODUCTION*, Lily Robert-Foley, London: Goldsmiths Press, 2023, 248 pp., £27,54 (Paperback) ISBN: 978-1-913-38070-0

*THE EXPERIMENTAL TRANSLATOR*, Douglas Robinson, CHAM: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022, 185 pp., 117,69€ (Hardcover) ISBN:978-3-031-17940-2, 93,08€ (e-book), forthcoming (2024), ISBN: 978-3-031-17943-3

#### 1. Introduction

More than twenty years into the 21st century, it is now evident that Translation Studies has changed considerably. Traditionally conceived as a process of linguistic substitution, translation has since been redefined to incorporate concepts such as culture, ideology, power, time, and space. The concept of ‘equivalence’ has also evolved. A text is no longer understood to have only one meaning but various, because meaning is not static. It is fluid, polyphonic, plural, and open-ended. In short, meaning depends on context, time, and place. Translators now attempt to discover how meaning was constructed and who constructed it. They must also determine whom it was created for, and by what means. In today’s world, translating is a complex, critical practice that can be regarded as a palimpsest. It is a journey through different stories, times, and voices that also reveals the wounds and scars that each word has accumulated during its travels.

In this line of broadening the definition of translation, it is hardly coincidental that the second and third decades of the 21st century have witnessed a veritable explosion of publications in Translation Studies that link ‘translation’ to other concepts such as ‘experimentation’ and ‘creativity’ (Malmkjær, 2019; Loffredo and Perteghella, 2006; Di Paola, 2015; Dot, 2019). Relevant examples include Susan Bassnett and David Johnston’s ‘outward turn’ (2019), Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal’s ‘experiential translation’ (2019, 2024a, 2024b), and Monica Boria’s ‘multimodality applied to Translation Studies’ (2020). These publications as well as many others make it abundantly clear that the borders

---

\* africa@usal.es

of translation have become much more flexible because what is translated and the means by which it is translated have now significantly broadened in scope.

This is the context of the five books reviewed in this article. These books deal with translation as the starting point for new artistic manifestations. Lily Robert-Foley's *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production* takes the AI angle; Douglas Robinson's *The Experimental Translator* focuses on the translator, rather than the text; Tong King Lee's *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics* introduces us to concrete Chinese poetry and its translation; Delphine Grass' *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice* insists on the link between theory and practice and Alexandra's Lukes' edited volume *Translating the Avant-Garde, Avant-Garde Translation* wants to answer several questions: What is avant-garde translation? Why should we pay attention to it? And why now?

The five volumes offer a creative approach to traditional ideas on translation. Grass argues for an experimental, bodily translation, in which translating is seen as a poetic and political task, which highlights openness, variation, a vast patchwork of impulses of a diverse range of cultural, physical and emotional reaches. In her book she integrates theory and practice with autobiography, the body, and other subjective modes.

Lee foregrounds an open-ended, experiential translation that focuses on memes rather than signs and adds value to the original through verbal and nonverbal resources. His ludic translation offers a brilliant methodology to approach apparently untranslatable writing like concrete poems, and deconstructs traditional assumptions about translation. It can be seen as a site for raising questions of representation and for understanding translation not as the mere reproduction of an original but as a Deleuzian map where the translator's voice must also be heard.

In her edited volume, Lukes invites the various contributors to challenge the role and limits of translation, to destabilize such concepts as authorship, primary and secondary, and also the very notion of translation. From different perspectives, the chapters show the reader the possibilities of the experimental and the avant-garde through translation seen as a dynamic process. The volume shows translation as a mobile, creative process and reveals "the extent to which the translator's 'readerly consciousness' [...] comes into play during their (the translator's and the reader's) encounter with a text".

Robert-Foley argues that experimental translation responds to the way translation happens in the algorithmic marketplace of languages, in order to oppose, respond, critique interrogate and try to understand that it is operating as a device for interrogating and challenging marketplace norms and practices of translation. In the age of algorithmic production, this seems mostly to happen between spoken human languages with writing systems.

Robinson, for his part, celebrates experimental translation through the hypercyborg translator, the collage translator, the smuggler translator, and the heteronymous translator. A translation is totally different from any binary, predetermined, and unmoveable truth. His experimental translator participates in literary creativity and he

invites the reader to play with the rich possibilities created by the wide and rich variety of experimental texts he offers.

## 2. Beyond verbal equivalents: the politics of experimentalism

Although each of these five books is different, they also have many ideas in common. An interesting point is that they all argue that experimental translation, far from being a simple game of words, is a serious matter that can have far-reaching consequences in the spheres of politics and even of social justice. For Delphine Grass, the task of the translator as a theorist should go beyond a process of linguistic substitution and explore the socially transformative potential of translation. She points out that “translation as creative-critical practice is concerned with questions of social justice and representation beyond translation theory” (Grass, 2023, p. 7).

As mentioned above, Lily Robert-Foley’s volume focuses on the theoretical and practical consequences of the AI Revolution, made clear in her subtitle, “The Age of Algorithmic Production”. Taking this as its distinguishing mark, her book analyzes collaborative acts of activist translations, and related to topics such as the Holocaust, migration, colonialism, minor languages, and genre, inter alia. Examples range from Joyce’s “Anna Livia Plurabelle” to M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* Other examples include Caroline Bergvall and the translations of the Outranspo group. Robert-Foley’s book begins with a deconstruction of Vinay and Darbelnet’s seven translation procedures. “I have hijacked them – *transcreated* them” (Robert-Foley, 2023, p. 18), from the *emprunt* and *calque*, to the techniques of literal translation, transposition, and modulation, not to mention equivalence and adaptation. According to Robert-Foley, experimental translation criticizes rules and norms given that it is deeply entrenched in language as well as in cultural and historical specificity. She describes it as follows:

(...) a translation practice that runs counter to conventional ideas about translation (...) Experimental translation opposes itself to the norms, the doxa of current translation practices. But what norms? Whose translation practice? Situating norms is obviously a fluid and problematic, culturally specific activity. Examining what is opposed to these norms serves to accentuate this (Robert-Foley, 2020, p. 401).

Douglas Robinson, in his book, concentrates on an experimental translator who “does not translate just for fun, but initiates a transformative exploration of the legitimate-illegitimate binary [...] the experimental translator uses that binary to undermine and disperse political control, at least in its linguistic and literary instantiations” (Robinson, 2022, p. 21). This idea is also present in what Tong King Lee calls ‘ludic translation, “[p]lay transforms normativized identities, thereby gaining its politico-ethical force” (Lee, 2022, p. 6). It is a way of democratizing languages:

(...) a method to democratize expression and level the ground of linguistic transaction, such that “no one is permanently on top, no one is permanently at the bottom”, resonates with

how the dyadic relation between source and target, author and translator, can be reconfigured through ludic translation. This is particularly the case with overtly performative modes of translation, where the distance from one language to another is mediated not through relations of semantic equivalence but through relations of semiotic analogy grounded in the materialities of representation (Lee, 2022, p. 7).

### 3. Theory and practice

Still another thing that these five authors have in common is that they are all experimental translators, which is why their books contain analyses of their own translations. Like Douglas Robinson and Tong King Lee, Delphine Grass is a member of the AHRC Experiential Translation Network.<sup>1</sup> Lily Robert-Foley, whose book mentions the activities of this group, is a member of Outranspo (Ouvroir de Translation Potencial).<sup>2</sup> And Alexandra Lukes edits a volume that includes prestigious translators such as Robinson himself, Clive Scott, and Matías Battistón (who illustrated the cover).

Also featured in Lukes' book are members of the unofficial underground Translation Limits and Outranspo. There is a chapter by Pablo Martín Ruiz, one of the founders of Outranspo, which describes the group's participation in a contemporary art exhibition for the 33<sup>rd</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 2018. An interesting topic of debate was:

(...) the role that ideas about translation played in the conceptual and curatorial setup of the exhibition, as well as the connections between this project and Brazilian concretist poet Haroldo de Campos and his concept of "transcreation" (Lukes, 2023, p. 91).

In Lukes's volume, authors such as Battistón, Martín Ruiz, Scott, and Robinson continuously play with the reader through creative, experimental translations, which are in constant flux. For example, there is the question of what Robinson's "ninja translator" does with "aggravated" readers. This conversation between an Avant-Garde Translator and a Questioner finally results in an experimental translation of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," (Lukes, 2023).

After reflecting on Ermes Marana, the Translator in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, Robinson (2022), in *The Experimental Translator*, plays with the reader, in the same way as Calvino, by simultaneously assuming the roles of the "Bare Life Provocateur", "Postmodern Provocateur", and "Heterotopian Provocateur". This book also has many magnificent examples of experimental translations. A case in point is his pseudotranslation of Algot Untola's *The Last Days of Maiju Lassila*. Others include the analyses of experimental

---

<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal propose the integration of translation into the field of contemporary art through their *AHRC Experiential Translation Network*. Available at <https://experientialtranslation.net/2021/07/09/etn-holds-its-first-symposium/> (Accessed: 23 May 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Outranspo is a group of international translators, scholars, and writers who work playfully in-between languages. They belong to the tradition of the Ou-X-Po groups who have followed (in our case rebelliously) in the model of Oulipo (Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle), except instead of the 'li' in 'Oulipo' (which stands for Litterature) we have replaced it with Translation. Our full name, Outranspo, spells out 'Ouvroir de Translation Potencial.' The three languages of our name represent the three languages of our founders" (Bloomfield and Robert-Foley, 2017, p. 469).

hypercyborg translators, of Finnish poems and novels, of William Carlos Williams's poem that apologizes for eating the reader's plums, and *Wittgenstein's Mistress* by David Markson. The range of examples is impressive and is not only limited to different literatures but also includes examples taken from the world of art and photography, via John Berger. Robinson never addresses "a *resolution* of the heterotopias explored. There is no right answer—let alone prescriptive "guides" to the "best" or the "most effective" kind of experimental translation" (Robinson, 2022, p. 33).

"The Collage Translator" is a chapter in *The Experimental Translator* about (un)original texts, such as those by Graham Rawle, Jonathan Lethem, David Shields and many others. According to Robinson (2022, p. 109), "translating is like collaging precisely because it 'quotes' from the original". In this chapter, when Robinson reflects on his own translation of Kari Aronpuro's collage novel *Kääntäjän floppi* as *The Translator's Flop* he also mentions the use of footnotes (Robinson, 2022, p. 135). Footnotes also have an important role in his pseudotranslation, *The Last Days of Maiju Lassila*:

(...) which on one level *donates* credit to J. I. Vatanen, the supposed author of the book. On another level, however, since J. I. Vatanen was not an actual human author but one of Algot Untola's heteronyms, and "Vatanen" writes the novel both about his life before meeting Untola (from the mid-1880s to 1918) and about the 9 months after Untola was murdered in the White Terror after the Finnish Civil War—i.e. since Untola's heteronym could not realistically have survived the human author's death—I explicitly (but misleadingly) donate that credit to some other Finnish author who supposedly used the Vatanen name pseudonymously. Throughout the book in footnotes, too, I speculate repeatedly as to the actual author. Annotations are the experimental translator's secret weapon in all three of these experimental translations (Robinson, 2022, p. 135).

Robinson reflects on his translation, *Gulliver's Voyage to Phantomimia*, which he refers to on the cover as the "transcreation" of *Gulliverin matka Fantomimian mantereelle*, Volter Kilpi's last unfinished and posthumously published novel:

And inside the book, again, in the paratexts and footnotes, I maintain the pretense that I didn't translate or otherwise create the book, but *edited* it: inspired by Kilpi's preface announcing that the manuscript of this book appeared on his desk at the University of Turku Library, in English, apparently written by Lemuel Gulliver himself, and he (his heteronym) *translated* it, I created a "Douglas Robinson" heteronym who has found the same English manuscript and edited it (Robinson, 2022, p. 136).

The concept of heteronym is very important for Robinson. Heteronyms lie somewhere between fiction and reality, between the original and the copy, in a space in which the creation causes the creator to disappear. They are a game in which it is not clear whether it is the author that creates the text or whether it is the text that creates the author because the author's name is an unstable signifier that gives rise to multiple interpretations. That is why heteronyms not only make us think of Fernando Pessoa – as Robinson (2022, p. 68) and Battistón et al. (Lukes, 2023, p. 73, ff) do when they analyze Pessoa's heteronymic

translators – but they also evoke the transparencies and masks of an artist as versatile as Frances Picabia. An interesting example is Saramago's *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (1984 / 1991), in which Ricardo Reis is a heteronym (perhaps a copy or a multiple/fragmented personality) of Fernando Pessoa, though Saramago allows the heteronym to outlive his creator by nine months. Robinson (2022, p. 143) writes: "The interesting question is whether the translator's projected/imagined self-image is then a heteronym of the source author or of the translator—or both at once, in a kind of Bakhtinian internal dialogism". As in Roland Barthes's "writerly text", "the lectorial heteronym is a co-producer of the translation — the translatorly text" (Robinson, 2022, p. 148).

Tong King Lee explains his groundbreaking theory of translation which he applies to Chinese experimental concrete poetics. He also provides a brilliant analysis of experimental translations, such as Clive Scott's translations of the poems of Baudelaire. His are visual, random, chaotic, nomadic translations that convey meaning through all the senses by playing with fonts, typography, colors, and movement. In addition, Lee presents his own English translations of Chen Li's concrete poems "A War Symphony", "Nation", "White", and of others, where he theorizes through exemplification.

In all of these cases, Lee constructs a playful, rhizomatic, creative type of translation with political resonances. His "ludic" translation is performative, "not subservient to a source text [...] translation subjects an original work to experimental play replete with contingencies and [...] extrapolates it toward multiple trajectories and plural media" (Lee, 2022, p. 2); never "submissive to or subversive of the original text and its author" (Lee, 2022, p. 6). Ludic translation is open, plural, and never definitive:

The ensuing experience stands in contrast with that of straight translation, characterized by the ordered and rational transference of meaning, perhaps clause by clause or line by line, from one language into another. Experimental translation is much more chaotic, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable, continually inflected by epiphanic images and texts conjured up in the here-and-now of translating. Instead of discarding these idiosyncrasies and epiphanies as irrelevant to the work of translation, a ludic perspective embraces them and actively considers how they can be co-opted to add value to the original work in unexpected ways (Lee, 2022, p. 46).

According to Lee, ludic translations are texts that convey meaning through all of the five senses. They are visual, open, and in constant movement. As lively scenarios where all text elements are in play, ludic translations are canvases that transform words into images that appeal to our perceptions and feelings. Ludic translation is thus a complex adventure, because it invites us to translate by seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, and tasting. This is the best way to approach indeterminate, radial, polycentric texts, which lead to multiple and polyhedral translations:

Each time a work is translated, even by the same translator, the outcome will inevitably be different because the extraneous circumstances impinging on each instance of translation can never be exactly the same (Lee, 2022, p. 46).

As observed by Delphine Grass (2023, p. 2), it is for a translation theorist to also be a translator, because it changes the way that translation theory is addressed:

(...) from the point of view of translation practice as a materially situated and critically engaged meaning making process, of exploring how experimenting with translation could invite the fixed forms of theory into a space of experimental possibilities.

Effectively, Grass's *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice* advocates blurring the limits between translation theory and practice with a view to opening translation to experimentation and creativity. These same ideas also permeate the volume edited by Lukes, which includes chapters on "translating the avant-garde" and others on "avant-garde translating". Here, "avant-garde translation" refers to the intersection of both approaches as well as to critical and creative texts that bring together translation theory and practice.

In her book, Grass incorporates the concept of 'autotheory', which refers to the integration of theory and philosophy with autobiography, the body, and other subjective modes. The examples presented – Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi, Kate Briggs, and Diane Meur, among others – are case studies of the commingling of theory and practice and of translation as a sensorial, tactile task. This means touching the other with language, in the sense of *délicatesse* in Roland Barthes's *The Neutral*. Interestingly, Briggs and her *This Little Art* also appears in Robert-Foley's book, since for both authors it is a very special example of an essay on translation, or "a translation memoir". As in the call for papers for a special issue of *Life Writing* (Routledge, 2023), a translation memoir is "a reflexive writing practice on the personal and political intersection between writing and translation". In Grunenwald's translation practice, which is another of her examples, Grass adds the dimension of gender, though she always approaches translation from a social and material perspective, while subverting the myth that translation theory and practice exist on different planes. The second section of the book explores performative translations as illustrated in the work of Charles Bernstein or Caroline Bergvall, among others. However, her main focus is on Anne Carson's translation of Sappho and the role of gaps and silences on the page, which invite further translations. With this performative translation, Carson dramatizes Sappho's absence, rather than imposing her presence by completing the original, as other translations do.

In the third section, Grass looks at "transtopias", which are "experimental forms of translations to challenge normative representations of place and identity funnelled by the nation" (p. 44). As such, they are polysemic and dialogic spaces that translation creates in the face of cultural hegemonies. All of this is exemplified first by the analysis of a French text and film by Noémi Lefebvre and Laurent Grappe, titled *We are We*, where translation is performative and multi-layered; and then by the analysis of the spatial translations of Slavs and Tatars, an internationally renowned art collective. She then discusses "paratextual transtopias", in which "translators become the fictional writers of new psycho-spatial geographies [...] paratextual transtopias are a symbolic intervention, through the visual spatialisation of the source text on the page, on the national and cultural geographies

reproduced in the abstract myth of authorial agency” (p. 55). Grass explores paratextual transtopias by comparing the ideological posture of Vladimir Nabokov's annotated translation of *Eugene Onegin* with Chantal Wright's paratextual translatoxia in her translation from German into English of Yoko Tawada's novella, *Portrait of a Tongue*.

Grass portrays translation practices that are tactile, and that consequently go beyond the interlinguistic. She proposes a theory based on practice, on a translation activity that is performative and which transcends the concepts of equivalence and transparency. It is a type of translation closely related to Campbell and Vidal's (2019), “experiential translation”, to Loffredo and Perteghella's (2006) ‘creative translation’ and to Robinson's (2022) ‘experimental translation’. Grass opts for an active, moving, non-instrumental translation, which gives rise to a theory that is never prescriptive, conclusive, or definitive.

From all of the above, it is evident that this book advocates translation as a creative-critical practice, as a political practice which re-imagines ontologies of belonging, something that, as we have seen, is common to experimental translators, because this type of translation “expands and self-multiplies [...] circumvents meaning, aiming instead at *performance* [...]. Performative translation entails dialogic engagement with the source text through the translator's body, with a view to creating multimodal variations on that text” (Lee, 2022, p. 11). Translation is transformative (Robinson, 2022, pp. 32-91).

#### **4. Translating with all five senses**

Another element shared by these authors is their insistence on translating with all five senses. As it is well known, the concept of the ideosomatic was used by Robinson (1991) in *The Translator's Turn*, as well as in many other publications. We have already seen how for Grass speaking is touching the other. Both in this book and in other publications (e.g. Lee and Baynham, 2019, pp. 97-122, *inter alia*), Lee insists on the importance of all the senses when translating. In line with this, Lukes not only discusses Carroll/Artaud's “nonsense/nonsens” (Lukes, 2022) but also Artaud's writings (Lukes, 2019a, 2019b, 2022) during his confinement in mental asylums. During these stays, he incorporated unpronounceable and untranslatable words, mysterious syllables that Lukes relates to preverbal space and the relation of “the breath flow of the body” (Lukes, 2019a, p. 195) to language. The body, the somatic, and its relation to translation is also present in the introduction and in several chapters of Lukes (2023). In addition, Robert-Foley (2023, p. 19) highlights the fact that in theory as well as practice, both in her work as a translation professor and in her translations:

All of the experimental translation procedures and practices that I describe rely on the sensual, material, corporeal dimension to language and translation. This happens on the level of the letter or other linguistic units like the word, the token or the phrase, but also in the materiality of the structure of language, the materiality of its code and of code. This also happens on the level of the ecology in which the work is taking place and the texts are produced, translating through the material location and body of the translator in the world in which it is made, or operating material procedures on the physicality of the text and its medium. It is my contention [...] that this tendency in experimental translation to translate through the materiality of the senses, is connected to the material shifts in translation culture, and in particular, with regards

to the radical paradigm shifts that are happening to signification in language in the age of algorithmic production.

What all these authors propose is a carnivalesque translation, in the manner of Bakhtin, which progressively expands to generate multiple interpretations. The experimental translator is thus a heteronymous author, a smuggler:

Experimental translators quote furtively as well. They too are smugglers. The (non-) smuggling *furtum* is endemic to the act of translating. The difference is that experimental translators smuggle the liminal space of “equivalence” openly, brazenly, in order to reveal and play with its liminality. If they deny that they’re smuggling that space, they overdeny it (Robinson, 2022, p. 110).

These translators ask themselves about the meaning of the concepts of ‘equivalence’, ‘original text’, and ‘translation’. And in doing so, they oblige us to also question them. And finally, they ask themselves about the role of the translator in this process of experimentation, which does not exclude any kind of translation and which transforms the textual space into a “playground” (Lukes, 2023):

We all want traditional translations *some of the time*. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. All I’m saying is that there are other things one can do with a great work of literature, and there is considerable pleasure to be had from both the doing and the reading of such things. I’m not trying to legislate traditional translations out of existence (Robinson, 2022, p. 171).

“The more the merrier” is the phrase used by Robinson (2022, p. 171) to end his book. It is thus a matter of incorporating new experiences into the act of translating and of transforming the translator into a writer (Bassnett, 2006/2007):

The translator effectively plays the role of mediator in an experiential process that allows the recipients (viewer, listener, reader or participant) to re-create the sense (or “semios”) of the source artefact for themselves (Campbell and Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi).

The proposal is a translation:

That finds meaning not only in words but also in forms, sounds, silences, smells, and textures. It is an interactive and participative translation that is the result of a holistic approach that “recognizes that there are multiple possible versions of both source and target texts and this can help mitigate the biases and preconceptions a static, intralingual translation can sometimes introduce (Campbell and Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi).

What is proposed here is a translation that is not substitution but creation. This practice is never complete, but always unstable. What these authors share is a love for translating texts that are in themselves visual, sonorous, tactile, sensorial challenges. They share a passion “for thinking about translation outside the box” (Lukes, 2023, p. 16). They seek

translations that highlight the reader's physiological relationship with the text. These are translations that open the senses to all the possible meanings of the text and play with the page as though it were an artist's canvas. They are performances that never repeat themselves, multibodied participations in which “the translator and the 'reader' become live presences” (Lukes, 2023, p. 41).

Translation is non-linear, rhizomatic, performative (Lee, 2022, p. 66). The ludification of translation:

Is not meant to wholly substitute rational-scientific models of translating. It aims to supplement instrumentalist thinking to enrich the fabric of our cultural discourses by tapping into our full resource repertoire across diverse languages, modes, and media. In theory and in practice, ludic translation is the counterpoint of instrumental translation; each has its own domain of application (Lee, 2022, p. 72).

The translator is, from these perspectives:

Like a bulldozer driver turning off the source-textual highway into the forest, creating a new road as s/he goes. In so doing the translator is not only changing the source text into something new, creating a new face for it that hides (and smuggles) the original portrait, but also changing the target language/landscape by importing transformed versions of the original face into it (Robinson, 2022, p. 112).

Translation is a never-ending process, always mutable and versatile. Each translation is a superimposed story that slips into the space between one text and the other. Experimental, ludic translators show meaning as only hypothetically, and each word as a crossroads of cultures, a paradigm of encounters and misencounters, a space of interstices, and a wall of both containment and overflow.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. ([1971] 1977) 'From Work to Text' in *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, pp. 155–164.
- Bassnett, S. ([2006] 2007) 'Writing and Translating' in Bassnett, S. and Bush, P. (eds.) *The Translator as Writer*. London: Continuum, pp. 173-183.
- Bassnett, S. and Johnston, D. (eds.) (2019) 'The Outward Turn in Translation Studies', *The Translator*, 25(3), pp. 181-188.
- Baynham, M. and Lee, T. K. (2019) *Translation and Translanguaging*. London: Routledge.
- Bloomfield, C. and Robert-Foley, L. (2017) 'Tweetranslating Trump: Outranspo's "Bad Translations" of Trump's tweets', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, (21)5, pp. 469-476.
- Boria, M. et al. (eds.) (2020) *Translation and Multimodality. Beyond Words*. New York: Routledge.
- Calvino, I. (1994) *Se Una Notte d'Inverno un Viaggiatore*. Einaudi.
- Campbell, M. and Vidal, R. (eds.) (2019) *Translating Across Sensory and Linguistic Borders. Intersemiotic Journeys between Media*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Campbell, M. and Vidal, R. (eds.) (2024a) *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*. London: Routledge.
- Campbell, M. and Vidal, R. (eds.) (2024b) *The Translation of Experience: Cultural Artefacts in Experiential Translation*. New York: Routledge.
- Di Paola, M. (2015) 'El Arte que Traduce. 1995-2015. La traducción como Mediación Cultural En Los Procesos De Transmisión Y Recepción De Las Obras De Arte', PhD. diss., Universitat de Barcelona. Unpublished.
- Dot, A. (2019) 'Art i Posttraducció. De teories i Practiques Artístiques Digitals', Doc. diss., Universitat de Vic. Unpublished.
- Loffredo, E. and Perteghella, M. (eds.) (2006) *Translation and Creativity. Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies*. New York: Continuum.
- Lukes, A. (2019a) 'Translating Artaud and Non-Translation' in Harding, J. and Nash, J. (eds.) *Modernism and Non-Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 192-210.
- Lukes, A. (2019b) 'An Aesthetics of Discomfort: Nonsense, Madness, and the Limits of Translation', *Translation Studies*, 12(1), pp. 1-14.
- Lukes, A. (2021) 'Translation Limits' in Phelan, M. (ed.) *Translation Ireland. The Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association*, 21(1), Cork, pp. 47-50.
- Lukes, A. (2022) "'What's the French for fiddle-de-dee?": Nonsense in French' in Barton, A. and Williams, J. (eds.) *The Edinburgh Companion to Nonsense*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 182-198.
- Malmkjær, K. (2019) *Translation and Creativity*. New York: Routledge.
- Robert-Foley, L. (2020) 'The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 69(267), pp. 401-419.
- Robinson, D. (1991) *The Translator's Turn*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Saramago, J. (1992/1991) *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. Harvest Book.

**About the author:** África Vidal is Full Professor of Translation at the University of Salamanca, Spain. Her research interests include translation theory, migration studies, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, contemporary art and gender studies. She has published 19 books, 12 edited volumes and over a hundred articles and book chapters on these issues. She is a practising translator specialized in the fields of philosophy, literature, history and contemporary art.

## BOOK REVIEW

### TRADIÇÃO E NOVIDADE: A TRADUÇÃO LITERÁRIA EM CONTEXTO IBÉRICO

Inês Espada Vieira\*

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas  
Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**Iberian and Translation Studies: Literary Contact Zones**, Esther Gimeno Ugalde, Marta Pacheco Pinto e Ângela Fernandes, Coleção: Contemporary Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, 374 pp, £88, ISBN 9781800856905.

Surgido do encontro internacional iberTRANSLATIO, que teve lugar na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa em março de 2019, o volume *Iberian and Translation Studies: Literary Contact Zones* é a prova material da teoria que propõe e analisa: ele é *zona de contacto* entre académicos de distintas áreas de investigação, na(s) fronteira(s) da Península Ibérica. Nestas páginas, tocam-se e assim se esbatem os limites entre campos de estudo autónomos, mas não independentes: os estudos ibéricos e os estudos de tradução têm vivido lado a lado, mas são aqui assumidos como interseções produtivas de novos olhares sobre o espaço linguístico, literário, cultural, político e mental da Ibéria.

Nem sempre acontece assim, mas no presente caso o título do volume corresponde ao seu conteúdo. Diria mais, ele sintetiza-o, como se fossem as palavras-chave que habitualmente acompanham e comunicam a investigação académica: estudos ibéricos, estudos de tradução, literatura, zonas de contacto. O nome da coleção em que é publicado – *Contemporary Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures* – contribui também para a apresentação deste travejamento crítico sob(re) o qual se apresentam e desenvolvem os capítulos: ‘sobre’, porque se vêm consolidando ao longo dos anos os alicerces que sustentam a reflexão; ‘sob’, porque partilham o mesmo resguardo do chapéu-de-chuva dos estudos literários (cf. p. 5).

*Iberian and Translation Studies* divide-se em três partes. A primeira, “Iberian and Translation Studies: Theoretical Contact Zones” (pp. 19-134); a segunda, “Fluid Contact Zones: Indirect Translation, Self-Translation, Intersemiotic Translation” (pp. 135-208); e a terceira parte, “Iberian Contact Zones: Crossing Times and Genres” (pp. 209-356). As partes não se equivalem em extensão, mas propõem um itinerário de leitura coerente que se inicia no enquadramento teórico, revisitando o conceito central de *contact zone* (Pratt, 1991 citado em Ugalde et al., 2021), mas também a identificação do espaço transnacional ibérico como polissistema de/para a tradução. Num segundo momento, destaca-se a *fluidez* (e, portanto, o movimento) dos limites entre zonas, conceitos e práticas de

---

\* iev@ucp.pt

tradução. O final deste percurso abarca uma linha cronológica mais extensa, permitindo um diálogo entre a tradução e a história da literatura dos dois países ibéricos.

A introdução (um texto indispensável) e os 16 ensaios do volume exigem de nós, leitores e investigadores, a capacidade de nos ressituar num território que por um lado nos é familiar, mas que simultaneamente é como novo. Esta é a beleza e a satisfação do conhecimento científico: a descoberta não cria uma novidade surpreendente, mas cria o novo a partir da reorganização do que já existe, dando-lhe, assim, uma coerência e um sentido que não tinha antes. Não há nada de substancialmente novo, mas tudo é novo, porque visto de uma outra perspetiva.

No conjunto dos seus capítulos, *Iberian and Translation Studies* é o volume que estabelece formalmente algo que se vinha intuindo há alguns anos (há algumas publicações): a centralidade dos estudos de tradução no âmbito dos estudos ibéricos, tradicionalmente focados na literatura. A tradução dá visibilidade a dinâmismos culturais que doutra forma passariam despercebidos e os estudos de caso apresentados nos capítulos, nas suas diferenças e singularidades, apresentam conclusões comuns: a heterogeneidade do sistema literário ibérico, com intervenientes de dois estados, um sistema hegemónico, um sistema linguístico nacional, cinco línguas diferentes, três línguas periféricas, etc.

Uma das leituras possíveis deste volume é seguir as linhas das diferentes línguas do espaço ibérico e tatear o tecido que resulta do entretecer de relações condicionadas pelas épocas, pelos géneros literários, pelas dinâmicas editoriais, pelos poderes informais e institucionais da Cultura, entre outros. Ao longo dos capítulos, apresentam-se contextos de convivência pacífica entre línguas e sistemas literários, e também de tensões resultantes da necessidade de distinção e de contraste, ultrapassando-se definitivamente uma visão dual dos estudos ibéricos. Como escrevi no início, este livro é ele mesmo ‘zona de contacto’, como metáfora e como evidência.

Gostaria de chamar a atenção, ainda, para a riqueza do paratexto que o acompanha e compõe, nomeadamente os resumos biográficos dos autores que participam no volume; eles fazem parte da cartografia dinâmica desta área de estudos. Uma nota também para a importância do índice final (sobretudo onomástico e temático) que o volume coloca à disposição dos leitores. Trata-se de um generoso legado aos estudantes e aos investigadores que se iniciam ou prosseguem os seus trabalhos neste campo.

A investigação desenvolvida no Centro de Estudos Comparatistas da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, nomeadamente no âmbito do grupo de investigação DIIA – Diálogos Ibéricos e Ibero-Americanos – estruturou de forma sólida, mas não imobilista, os estudos comparatistas ibéricos a partir de Lisboa. Não como centro de poder ou de domínio que nem a cidade, nem o país, nem a língua têm ou desejam, mas como espaço caleidoscópico, crisol de diferentes matérias e objetos de estudo.

Os centros de estudo, as faculdades, as associações, são constituídos por pessoas que são mais do que a sua produção científica. As comunicações, os artigos, os livros, são uma marca perene que fica *on paper* ou *online*. No caso das organizadoras deste volume, Esther

Espada Vieira, I. – Tradição e Novidade: A Tradução Literária em Contexto Ibérico  
Translation Matters, 5(1), 2023, pp. 143-145, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1r2](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1r2)

Gimeno Ugalde, Marta Pacheco Pinto e Ângela Fernandes, a marca da consistência do seu compromisso intelectual e humano é igualmente definidora deste campo de estudos. A elas, como agradecimento, fica a última palavra desta leitura.

**Sobre a autora:** Inês Espada Vieira é doutora em Estudos de Cultura pela Universidade Católica Portuguesa. É docente da Faculdade de Ciências Humanas e é investigadora do Centro de Estudos em Comunicação e Cultura. Os seus principais interesses de investigação são os estudos de memória, cultura e conflito, migrações e exílio.

## BOOK REVIEW

### INNOVATION AND EXPANSION: A NEW POINT OF DEPARTURE IN CORPUS-BASED TRANSLATION STUDIES

Yuan Tao\*

Dalian University of Technology

**Extending the Scope of Corpus-Based Translation Studies**, by Sylviane Granger and Marie-Aude Lefer, London, Bloomsbury, 2022, 290 pp, 85.5£ (hardback) ISBN 978-1-3501-4325-8, 68.4£ (e-book) ISBN 978-1-3501-4327-2.

Since its inception in the early 1990s, corpus-based translation studies (CBTS) has gained momentum thanks to the empirical and statistical evidence produced in the past three decades. A number of publications have sought to reflect on the progress made in this field and envisage its future development (e.g. De Sutter & Lefer, 2020; Pérez & Laviosa, 2021). As suggested by the title, *Extending the Scope of Corpus-Based Translation Studies*, edited by Sylviane Granger and Marie-Audie Lefer, strives to broaden the spectrum of corpus-based research by introducing the state of the art in theoretical, methodological, empirical, and pedagogical studies in this field.

The book consists of four thematic parts, with all contributors responding to the call for innovation and presenting interrelated topics, complemented by lists of further relevant readings and their summaries. Part 1 provides a retrospective and prospective view of corpus-based studies. The opening chapter, *Corpus-based Translation and Interpreting Studies: A forward-looking review*, charts the progress of a mixed-method approach to 12 peer-reviewed journals over nearly a decade (2012-19). Unlike the bibliometric quantitative analysis of titles and abstracts, this study conducts a qualitative full-text survey and identifies the current trends in “linguistic focus” and “translation features” (p. 25) in corpus-based research, which account for one tenth of the dataset. Furthermore, the authors foreground some lesser developed fields: semantics and morphology within the “linguistic focus”, the applied study of translation quality assessment, studies using monolingual comparable corpora, interdisciplinary studies and studies using sophisticated corpus techniques and statistics. In Chapter two, *Expanding the corpus-based translation studies: The opportunities that lie ahead*, Federico Gaspari encapsulates the current foci on translation universals and translation directionality. Whilst admitting the advances in corpus studies, he proposes the application of “hybrid

---

\* taoyuan@dlut.edu.cn

Tao, Y. – Innovation and Expansion: A New Point of Departure in Corpus-Based Translation Studies *Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 146-149, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1r3](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1r3) *comparal* approach” (p. 50) in methodology as well as investigations into “technical interventions” (p. 52), such as online platform translation by social media, crowdsourcing by amateur translators, fansubbing and localisation of games in the digital era.

Part 2 zooms in on the methodological and theoretical innovation which integrates product- and process-oriented research on the nature of translationese, “a language variety as a third code” (p. 68). In Chapter three, entitled *Translation as constrained communities: Principles, concepts and methods*, Haidee Kotze examines the interplays of the constraints on the *that/zero* alternation between English translations from Afrikaans and written native South African English. With the “variationist, multifactorial and interdisciplinary” approach (p. 70), she concludes that there is the similarity in as regards factors of register but difference in text production and language activation, which illustrates different “cognitive and social constraint configurations and effects” (p. 90).

In Chapter four, *On the use of multiple methods in empirical Translation Studies*, Stella Neumann, Jonas Freiwald and Arndt Heilmann examine the English-to-German subject identifiability with a creative combination of “observational and experimental” methodology of corpus analysis, eye-tracking and keystroking logging (p. 99). Both corpus-based and behavioural research exhibit similar patterns, where translation shifts occur more often in non-identifiable subjects. The corpus results, which reveal more obvious shifts, are interpreted and complemented by the process-oriented research for the cognitive demand. With the triangulation of method and data, the findings provide more validity and explanatory power from both linguistic and cognitive perspectives.

Part 3 is dedicated to empirical studies by focusing on the lesser studied linguistic focus, taking into consideration sociocultural factors. Chapter 5, *Syntactic properties of constrained English: A corpus-driven approach*, carries out a bottom-up analysis of part-of-speech dependency bigrams between L1 and the constrained languages of translation and L2 with keyness and multidimensional analysis. The results illustrate the preference for post-nominal noun phrases and proper nouns in constrained varieties and the influence of complexity of registers.

Chapter 6, *Grammatical metaphor in translation: A corpus-based investigation of nominal of-constructions*, draws on the metaphorical lexico-grammatical decisions from Systemic Functional Linguistics and investigates the English to German translation shifts in the nominal *of*-constructions from non-congruent to congruent structure using multivariate statistical analysis. The low frequency of de-metaphorisation (15%) in the translation of *of*-constructions demonstrates that the structural equivalence is facilitated by cross-lingual structural priming and normalization, while the shift in metaphoricity may be attributed to increased idiomaticity.

In Chapter 7, *Detecting normalization and shining-through in novice and professional translations*, Ekaterina Lapshinova-Koltunski compares the translationese effects of

Tao, Y. – Innovation and Expansion: A New Point of Departure in Corpus-Based Translation Studies *Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 146-149, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1r3](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1r3)  
normalisation and shining-through in the English-to-German translations of seven registers between novice and professional translations. Although the translation varieties do not display significant preference for the two effects, student translations exhibit normalisation in political speeches and fictional texts.

Part 4 shifts to applied translation studies in translator training, particularly learners' error typology with CBTS as a tool for learning and analysis. In Chapter 8 titled *Translation quality in student specialized translation: The impact of corpus use*, Heidi Verplaetse integrates Toury's acceptability and adequacy into translator training with different corpora. The results reveal higher acceptability errors among learners with monolingual corpus (MOC) in comparison with bilingual corpus. A closer examination on the error types reveals that MOC holds the advantage in lexicon over stylistic and register. On a related note, Chapter 9, entitled *Using comparable corpora for translating and post-editing complex noun phrases in specialized texts: Insights from English-to-French specialized translation*, shows that there is little variance between the efficiency of bilingual dictionaries and comparable corpora in the translation of complex noun phrases. The study then focusses on follow-up post-editing classroom activities based on error types.

Summing up, the book provides both a theoretical and a methodological framework for future research in the broadened scope in CBTS. Theoretically, corpus-based studies exhibit an outward-looking integration with neighbouring disciplines, such as cognitive linguistics and Systemic Functional Grammar of grammatical metaphor and thematic structure. Not only do the full-fledged disciplines enlarge the ever-expanding body of corpus-based research, but they also offer a theoretical framework for investigating the nature of translation as a constrained language.

Methodologically, CBTS presents an inward-looking focus with multifactorial and multimethod analysis. For one thing, the monofactorial analysis, which may suffer from "confounding explanations" (p. 162), is enlarged to multifactorial analysis, which takes into account a larger range of factors in the translation process, such as register, modality, and competence. For another, the multi-methodological analysis triangulates the data and methods with complementary evidence from both product-oriented and process-oriented studies. The innovation enhances the methodological rigour and is consistent with the cognitive turn in translation studies.

Despite its clear contribution to expanding the research spectrum, the book also has some limitations. First, the theoretical extension is mainly draws on linguistics and stylistics (if we consider register) and some of the empirical studies are limited in sample size. Second, the study of translator training could take into account other factors, such as fine-grained assessment of learners' proficiency. The revamping of methodology and theoretical perspectives, however, will undoubtedly contribute to the full maturity and underpin the validity of the young discipline of translation studies, which may provide a

Tao, Y. – Innovation and Expansion: A New Point of Departure in Corpus-Based Translation Studies  
*Translation Matters*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 146-149, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5\\_1r3](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm5_1r3)  
fresh starting point for its enlarged scope.

## REFERENCES

- De Sutter, G., and Lefer, M. A. (2020) 'On The Need For A New Research Agenda For Corpus Based Translation Studies: A Multi-Methodological, Multifactorial And Interdisciplinary Approach', *Perspectives*, 28(1), pp. 1-23.
- Granger, S., and Lefer, M. A. (eds.) (2022) *Extending the Scope of Corpus-Based Translation Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Pérez, M. C., and Laviosa, S. (2021) 'Twenty-Five Years On: Time to Pause For A New Agenda For CTIS' in Calzada Pérez, M., and Laviosa, S.(eds.) *MONTI: Monografías de Traducción e Interpretación*, 13, pp. 7-31.

**About the author:** Yuan Tao is the associate professor the Translation Department of Dalian University of Technology and focuses on literary translation, translation studies and translation theory. Her translations include many documentaries which had been awarded and shortlisted in some international film festivals.

## BOOK REVIEW

### DIÁLOGOS ENTRE POETAS, TRADUTORES E PENSADORES: O CASO DE CERNUDA E HÖLDERLIN

Isabel Araújo Branco\*

CHAM-Centro de Humanidades (NOVA FCSH - UAc)

**Luis Cernuda y Friedrich Hölderlin: traducción, poesía y representación**, Javier Adrada de la Torre, Granada, Editorial Comares, 2021, 162pp, €16, ISBN 978-84-1369-104-6

*Luis Cernuda y Friedrich Hölderlin: traducción, poesía y representación*, de Javier Adrada de la Torre, é um inspirador ensaio sobre as relações que se estabelecem entre poetas e tradutores, para lá do contacto pessoal e directo entre pessoas. É possível dialogar com o «outro» e tornar essa conversa intelectualmente produtiva, sem a troca de palavras, gestos ou olhares – sem conhecer, de facto, o «outro». Esta minha última afirmação não é, contudo, rigorosa, porque se pode conhecer o «outro» sem partilhar o mesmo espaço ou tempo. Porque o «outro» é feito mais da sua perspectiva do mundo do que de aparências físicas – tal como o «eu», um «eu» que se vê reflectido nas palavras do «outro» e que, através delas, pode repensar o mundo, a literatura e a sua própria obra.

Foi o que aconteceu com o poeta espanhol Luis Cernuda (1902-1963), leitor e tradutor do alemão Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843). Como explica Javier Adrada de la Torre, a marca do segundo sobre o primeiro manifesta-se a três níveis: na sua poesia, na sua concepção da arte e na sua atitude face à vida. «Tras ahondar en la obra de Hölderlin mediante la traducción, Cernuda empezará a comprender la poesía de otra manera, escribirá poemas congruentes con este estado de conciencia recién forjado y le encontrará un nuevo significado a su existencia en el mundo» (p. 96), indica Adrada de la Torre. O impacto da obra de Hölderlin em Cernuda foi, pois, enorme. O ensaio demonstra como tal se deu, analisando os 22 poemas de Hölderlin traduzidos para espanhol em 1935 por Cernuda em colaboração com Hans Gebser (18 publicados e quatro inéditos), organizados em função dos temas abordados e relacionando-os com a obra poética do autor sevilhano, anterior e posterior ao trabalho tradutório, nomeadamente no acto de revisão dos seus próprios textos. Entre outros aspectos, Cernuda herda de Hölderlin o encavalgamento, um tom altissonante e uma dimensão mais longa das composições. Adrada de la Torre apresenta possíveis razões para a não publicação dos referidos quatro poemas, à semelhança do que faz com várias outras questões, como o método de selecção dos textos a traduzir, o conhecimento que os círculos literários espanhóis teriam sobre Hölderlin, as razões da colaboração entre Cernuda e Geber ou a forma como Hölderlin permeou Cernuda. Na verdade, o ensaio aponta para muitas hipóteses de processos de trabalho,

---

\* ibranco@fcsch.unl.pt

relações pessoais ou razões que levam a determinadas escolhas, apesar de não ser possível confirmar estas interpretações.

Entre as consequências das traduções em causa, conta-se a aproximação pessoal dos tradutores e a colaboração formal ou informal noutros projectos, com impacto na circulação cultural europeia. Refiro-me concretamente à antologia *Neue spanische Dichtung (Nova Poesia Espanhola, em português)*, publicada na Alemanha por Hans Gebser e Roy Hewin Winstone e que inclui composições de Rafael Alberti, Vicente Aleixandre, Manuel Altolaguirre, Luis Cernuda, Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, Emilio Prados e Pedro Salinas. Como assinala Adrada de la Torre, esta antologia mostra como o encontro entre Cernuda e Gebser para traduzir Hölderlin levou a «intercambio cultural en ambas direcciones: de Alemania a España y vice-versa, y del Romanticismo al siglo XX» (p. 94). Mas não se fica por aqui: a publicação desta antologia revela que a tradução e a selecção do que é traduzido pode funcionar como instrumento para desafiar uma determinada representação hegemónica da literatura e propor uma alternativa. Trata-se, pois, neste caso, de uma resposta à antologia *Poesía Española*, coligida por Gerardo Diego e que acabou por ser marcante na construção do cânone da literatura espanhola do século passado. Temos, portanto, um exemplo de que a tradução pode ser uma «arma contra el canon, como caballo de Troya que, a pesar de su apariencia inofensiva, no solo destruye, sino que alberga en su interior una propuesta poética nueva» (p. 94). Neste caso concreto, a antologia de Gebser e Winstone poderia ter desencadeado um novo interesse por estes poetas espanhóis em vários países, poetas que, apresentados em grupo neste volume, veriam a sua proposta estética e conceptual mais respaldada. No entanto, o início da Guerra de Espanha, com o levantamento militar franquista contra o governo democrático em 1936 e o seu prolongamento até 1939, bem como a posterior II Guerra Mundial tiveram impactos profundos a diversos níveis, nomeadamente na circulação nos espaços, no intercâmbio cultural entre pessoas de diferentes países e na publicação de novos títulos: Gebser sai de Espanha e muda-se para Paris, cidade que terá de abandonar para se fixar em Berna, numa fuga continuada aos exércitos nazi-fascistas. «Estas circunstancias también impidieron la publicación del segundo volumen de *Neue spanische Dichtung*, que estaba ya previsto desde 1936», indica Adrada de la Torre.

O presente ensaio dedica as sessenta páginas iniciais – cerca de metade do livro – a uma extensa revisão teórica, abordando temas como o conceito de intraduzível, o debate histórico sobre a fidelidade, o trabalho dos tradutores enquanto leitores e enquanto criadores literários, o papel desempenhado pela tradução na constituição dos cânones e os diferentes métodos da tradução de poesia. Assim, o título que encontramos na capa acaba por ser de certa forma enganador, visto que a relação entre a obra poética e tradutória de Hölderlin e Cernuda são abordados apenas em dois apartados, um deles o «Epílogo». E aí encontramos uma interessante interpretação do trabalho de Cernuda à luz das teorias da «pós-tradução»: como o espanhol fez de Hölderlin seu precursor, como a relação com Gebser se desenvolveu após a tradução e como os poemas de Cernuda

dialogam com outros meios discursivos e outras artes, em particular a pintura, a música e a escultura. Uma boa forma de concluir esta leitura, portanto.

**Sobre a autora:** Isabel Araújo Branco é Professora Associada na Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. É investigadora integrada do CHAM-Centro de Humanidades (NOVA FCSH—UAc), de que é subdirectora. É directora de *Cultura. Revista de História e Teoria das Ideias*. Entre outros, publicou *Recepção literária das literaturas hispano-americanas em Portugal* (LIT, 2021) e *Tradução e edição de obras hispano-americanas em Portugal* (Peter Lang, 2020).