

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 operation¹ 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).² 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

¹ 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'.

² 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 papers³ but also artworks and performances, many of which have been presented at exhibitions or online events.⁴

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 *Soundscape* course, organized online in the Spring of 2022 under the auspices of the ETN,⁵ 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,⁶ 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

³ 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).

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

⁵ *Soundscape: 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).

⁶ 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.

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