Translation and Re-translation as Embodied Reading
Draft Discussion Paper by Madeleine Campbell

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Overview of Structure

I will introduce our book Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media (2019)\(^1\), and some of the central concerns we mean to address, followed by some initial observations and examples of how it begins to answer selected questions from the Special Interest Group on Intersemiotic Translation's research agenda. If time permits, I also propose an interactive exercise before the Q&A.

Brief Introduction: Our thoughts and process in developing this book

I’d like to start this paper by giving an idea of our motivation and thought process as editors in compiling this book.

Translation Games

My co-editor, Ricarda Vidal from King’s College London, had initiated the Translation Games project which explored curatorial and translation practice: asking whether the two can be combined, and, in the process, do something for language learning in the UK.

- First project 2013 with Jenny Chamarette from QM and student translators from King’s College and Queen Mary – plus professional artists

\(^1\) All references in this draft paper are to chapters, figures or pages from this book, which can be obtained from https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783319972435

Academic sources and bibliography will follow.
Translation of a single source text into 25 versions – 9 languages, textile and fashion design, dance, installation, performance, film, sound art and silk painting, all drawn together in an exhibition at King’s College London

Since then Ricarda has worked with a variety of practitioners, with poets, artists and translators. She put on different events in schools, in libraries and other public venues. At the heart of Translation Games there is always the collaboration and the workshop – translations are made together and in conversation with the source text and with other translators. Ricarda reflects that when she started Translation Games she didn’t know whether something like a translation between media was actually possible – but the practice demonstrated repeatedly that it was and that what came out of Translation Games events was something that was different from response, adaptation or illustration.

Revolve:R

While working on Translation Games Ricarda was also involved in a project called Revolve:R – Revolve:R is a series of three artist books which chart the visual communication of 20 international artists over 12 months, though the last two editions have also included poetry, film and sound art.

In any case the main difference to Translation Games is that the focus is on communication and conversation by primarily visual means rather than translation.

The publication of Revolve:R 3 coincided with the publication of Intersemiotic Journeys. So she was working simultaneously on the intersemiotic book and Revolve:R – with the result, she recalls, that her contributions to Revolve:R changed from pretending to be an artist and dabbling in visual communication to accepting that, and I quote: “I am not an artist but that I am a translator.”
As a result, Ricarda’s contributions to the visual conversation of Revolve:R then turned into intersemiotic translations which were placed at the end of each visual chapter.

For Ricarda, then, putting together the book Intersemiotic Journeys was an attempt to explain what she had been working on or with for the last 7 years. It entailed a journey from practice to theory and then back into practice.

*Jetties*

For my PhD I translated Mohammed Dib, a francophone Algerian poet whose writing spilled over into the senses, for me as a reader/translator, in a manner I found difficult to convey in a purely verbal form. This led me to collaborate with artists on a project called *Jetties* in order to provide opportunities for a more experiential reading of his work in translation. So the starting point for me was to articulate the non-linguistic implications of the multimodal reality of the act of translation, whether externally enacted and manifested in different media or simply experienced as an internal journey by the translator in their practice.

This focus on the experience of translation is different from the dominant preoccupations of translations studies, which tend to be concerned with what Lars Elleström (2010) refers to as the ‘qualifying aspects’ of media: either their historical and socio-cultural dimensions, or the aesthetic and communicative dimensions. Elleström gives as example the cinematic art form, which developed from an initially technical advance in a medium devoid of the aesthetic or communicative frames that later came to be identified as cinematic genres.

While these ‘qualifying’ aspects of media, and for our purposes of source and target or input and output, cannot be isolated from the process that occurs in the translating agent between these start and end points, the role and subjective experience of the translator as mediator tends to be overlooked in the research literature, partly perhaps because of the very private and individual nature of this encounter and the difficulties associated with its observation and empirical validation. And although personal accounts of the nature and process of
translation abound, these often tend to be framed within a literary, rather than empirical tradition. In the context of the Humanities and the Social Sciences, the empirical dimension of our work falls within a phenomenological ontology and an interpretivist paradigm, and adopts mainly critical and post-structuralist stances.

**Special Interest Group in Intersemiotic Translation**

In 2015, I set up the special interest group on Intersemiotic Translation and Cultural Literacy\(^2\) within the framework of the Cultural Literacy in Europe (CLE) forum – Ricarda joined later as co-leader. We launched the group with a symposium in summer 2016 at King's College London where we started the first conversations for this book – some of the symposium speakers then also wrote a chapter for us. (If anyone attending the seminar on Reading and Re-Translation is interested in joining we’d love to hear from you.)

**Towards an Explanatory Framework**

*Truth, Essence, Beauty, Kinship*

In Chapter 1 of *Intersemiotic Journeys* we observe that while the interlingual translator can be fairly certain of the parameters of the source and target languages, the intersemiotic translator has the freedom of choosing and defining the target 'language', i.e. by choosing the material, the genre and technique that is best suited to the task. This freedom of choice exacerbates the difficulty in defining what constitutes Benjamin’s “truth,” or “essence” or Derrida’s “most proper meaning” of a source.

We also question whether it is at all possible or desirable to determine where the line lies in the “double-duty” of the translator Antoine Berman speaks of, between the “ethical duty” to convey “truth” and the “poetic duty” to convey “beauty.” Rather this line appears to be permeable, fuzzy and blurred.

\(^2\) [http://cleurope.eu/activities/sigs/]
For the purposes of our enquiry we favoured Benjamin’s notion of “kinship” between source and translation, “which does not necessarily entail similarity,” as a more fruitful concept. We can then say that translation, whether intersemiotic or interlingual, is characterized by its kinship with the source, which is expressed through loyalty and respect. It is here that it diverges from response, illustration or adaptation. It became apparent in the chapters which comprise this volume, that the translator’s gaze is guided by the search for these parameters of kinship, rather than for “essence” or “truth.”

**Process, Experience, Embodiment, Gaze**

It follows from this premise of kinship that the experience of the translator, their embodied perception or impression, and then expression, is inherent to the translated artefact. In our book we argue that what makes intersemiotic translation is not so much the end result but the process.

This entails an explicit emphasis on the translator’s gaze, whereby the translator makes her/himself visible to the reader in the target artefact. When we write about the gaze we refer to the intense looking of the translator, which includes the full immersion of the translator in the text, with eyes, ears, skin, nose, limbs and heart. After all, even in literary translation, the translator must always employ more than just the visual sense: a poem can be read, spoken, heard, performed as well as acted out, smelled (by association) or felt. And, of course, the same goes for photography or painting, a film or dance, etc.

**Modes, Modality, Intermediality; Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

In this first introductory chapter, which proposes an explanatory framework for the book as a whole, we review several key notions on modes, modality and intermediality to suggest a common vocabulary and way of referring to phenomena, and we also review the precepts of conceptual metaphor theory – the observation that across different languages and cultures we tend to speak of abstract concepts in terms of human perceptions, for example we speak of time
in terms of space - to underpin the embodied nature of thought and creative expression that forms a basic premise of our approach.

We found that Lars Elleström’s (2010) taxonomy of media and their perception, from material through to sensorial, spatio-temporal and semiotic, was helpful to understand the subjective phenomena recounted by practitioners, and added to this Axel Englund’s (2010) recognition that the impact of these different modes and modalities is both borderless and simultaneous.

We apply the terms modal/modality to denote that cognitive metaphorical interactions must necessarily arise in the human agent rather than the medium. Hence we propose to shift the focus from the artefact to the translator and how they negotiate modal simultaneity in their praxis.

**Preliminary Conclusions to be drawn from the book**

The chapters in this book have focused on the translator’s subjective involvement and give an account of their process, whether reflective or theoretical, and what we have found is substantial common ground in their individual perspectives on embodied intersemiotic practice. The first observation we can make is that the intersemiotic translator seeks visibility in the act, more so perhaps than in literary translation. Secondly, while acknowledging their heuristic value, our contributors challenge the artificiality of so-called semiotic boundaries, preferring to see them as fluid, even when a verbal sign system forms an element of the process.

Thirdly, they are more attentive to individual experience, synaesthesia and affect, and to the dynamics of meaning-making and form, than to the translation of meaning and historical or social contingency *per se*. The boundaries between original author, translator, and listener, reader, viewer or participant, are as entangled as the boundaries between modalities and media. And this experiential quality in turn fosters the potential of their practice to enhance cultural literacy and promote intercultural communication and understanding.
At the same time these chapters begin to answer a number of questions our book seeks to address within the framework of CLE’s Special Interest Group on Intersemiotic Translation and Cultural Literacy. In the table below we can see a list of research questions. Although every question can be addressed to some extent by examining the contributions in this volume, in the time available, we will take questions 5, 6 & 3 one by one and illustrate our answers with concrete examples. We will cover question 3 last as a natural segue into the interactive exercise followed by your questions and comments.

**Intersemiotic SIG Research Questions**

1. What essential ‘body of knowledge’ should be brought to the process of understanding intersemiotic practice?
2. What research methodology should be applied to the analysis of the relationship between the artist, the creative intersemiotic process and the viewer or ‘spectactor’ in the context of broader cultural forces?
3. To what extent is the process of intersemiotic artefact production readable? To what extent can this practice be understood in terms of the practitioner’s subjective account?
4. How does growing cultural fragmentation (social, digital, ethnic) contribute to blurring the borders between aesthetically-driven notions of product and process, spectator and practitioner? To what extent is the viewer or audience a co-creator in this process?
5. How does an intersemiotically-translated artefact differ from one delivered within the same sign system as its source? To what extent can its position in time and space be said to be fixed or fluid?
6. What role can intersemiotic translation practice play in education and in helping individuals and fragmented communities provide continuity or come to terms with the past? How can intersemiotic translation contribute to developing a renewed sense of self and/or place?
7. To what extent can theories of knowledge and society be combined with theories of mind and neurological evidence to better understand the embodied process of intersemiotic translation?
8. To what extent can non-verbal media and modalities contribute to shaping an alternative perspective in the context of hegemonic cultural practices?

Addressing Individual Research Questions

Question 5. How does an intersemiotically-translated artefact differ from one delivered within the same sign system as its source? To what extent can its position in time and space be said to be fixed or fluid?

This is perhaps a bridging question with more traditionally oriented studies of translation, where the output, rather than the process, of translation tends to be the focus of analysis.

CLE’s Intersemiotic SIG challenges structuralist perspectives

On our SIG webpage we differentiate our understanding of intersemiotic translation from Roman Jakobson’s 1959 definition, in which intersemiotic translation carries a source text (or artefact) across sign systems and typically creates connections between different cultures and media. While in literary translation the onus tends to lie principally on the translator to convey the sense of the source artefact, in our expanded perspective, intersemiotic translation involves a creative step in which the translator (artist or performer) offers its embodiment in a different medium.

This process is facilitated by perceiving and experiencing non-verbal media through visual, auditory and other sensory channels, for example through dance or sculpture. Instead of focusing on the translation of sense or meaning, 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 of the source artefact for themselves.

Thus, intersemiotic translation provides an interactive, participative platform with the potential to engage individuals and communities in connecting with cultures different from their own.
Examples from the book which illustrate this premise notably include the contributions by Ella McCartney and Bryan Eccleshall, and others – but for the sake of brevity we will only discuss here examples from John London’s, Cara Berger’s and Laura González’ chapters.

**John London**

John London discusses the “so-called untranslatability of artworks” (141) that use language or visual puns, like Paul Baron’s *Le Vieux et le neuf* or Joan Brossa’s ‘Burocrácia’. John offers some creative solutions to translate these artworks after all.

**Paul Baron’s *Le Vieux et le neuf***

A possible translation of Baron’s work that would keep the pun on numbers in visual terms, could be *The Wan Lady* – a title which would accompany the image of a pallid woman holding the number one, or herself in the shape of a 1.

**Joan Brossa’s ‘Burocrácia’***

In his translation of Joan Brossa’s “Burocrácia” into “Bureaucracy” the title has more or less remained the same, but, here again, the object has been translated: the Spanish hoja (leaf/sheet of paper) becomes sheet (bed sheet/sheet of paper), or, if pronounced with a Spanglish accent “s**t”. It is worth noting also the irony of Catalan artist Joan Brossa’s use of the Spanish instead of his native language in this 1967 piece, a comment on the dominance of Spanish for all official dealings under Franco’s regime.

There are plenty of other examples in John’s chapter where he demonstrates the necessity for “radical mutation” (141) to address the so-called untranslatability of artworks. Ultimately, he calls for the boundaries between adaptation studies and translation studies to be revisited in the broader context of language as an integral component of aesthetic expression in the arts.
Both Cara Berger and Laura González translate text into real-time performances. Cara works from Carol Barko’s 1986 English translation of Hélène Cixous’ novel *Inside* to develop material in collaboration with performers that differs fundamentally from the written word as it unfolds in time and space.

Cara’s approach allows the signifying process of prose to enter the medium of theatre by traversing the bodies of performers through sensory association. Her intersemiotic translation of selected prose expands the vibrative, hysteric properties of the material, its “semiotic density” and simultaneity, to produce in the performer a synaesthetic experience of the source text. Cara stresses that her intention is not to dramatize the source text but rather to “explore how to translate the hysteric mode of signification that Cixous employs in her novel into theatre” (148). Cara’s somatic translation for theatre resonates with an understanding of the hysteric’s behaviour as real-time translation of the world around her.

In her chapter “Hosting the Hysteric,” Laura González allows her own body to become the theatre of past hysteric’s lives travelling through time and through different accounts of these women’s experience by revisiting their case history. The performances she describes in her chapter saw her embodying the stories of Fanny Moser (who is known as Emmy van N) or Ida Bauer – taken from Freud’s case studies – and recreating the psychotherapy sessions of these two women. While Laura slipped into the role of the hysteric, the audience were invited one by one to slip into the role of the psychotherapist, the silent listener who may, every now and then probe by questioning.

Laura draws on the women’s verbal expression and somatization in movement or stillness, gleaned from letters, paintings or photographs, as well as doctors’ recorded impressions and descriptions of their states of mind and body to create an intimate performance which has to be experienced by each spectator on their own. She writes:
From experience to speech and movement, from speech and movement to the text of the doctor; from the text of the doctor to reading attentively, from this reading to re-writing, from re-writing to listening extemately, from listening to ventriloquism, from ventriloquism to embodied, performance from this embodiment to experience.’ (180) Thus, the final translation is transferential: from ghost (the original hysteric and Laura, the performer) to affect (the sitter and Laura, the performer). (182)

Question 6. What role can intersemiotic translation practice play in education and in helping individuals and fragmented communities provide continuity or come to terms with the past? How can intersemiotic translation contribute to developing a renewed sense of self and/or place?

Transformative Learning

We can find some answers to this question, in terms of education, by applying Jack Mezirow’s Disorienting Dilemmas to the intersemiotic experience, which we hypothesize can result in Transformative Learning if conducted in a safe and nurturing environment. The basic tenets of transformative learning, whereby a disorienting dilemma results in profound changes in the person experiencing it, was elaborated from Mezirow’s approach and adapted by many to recognize the role of affect and intuition in forming a more holistic view of transformative learning.

At the same time the notion of simultaneity across sign systems we referred to earlier and expounded by Axel Englund (2010) may play a transformative role in cultural settings where multiple first or primary languages are simultaneously available to foreign language learners.

Similarly, if borders between symbolic (verbal) and non-verbal or pre-verbal modalities are less rigidly adhered to in settings where multicultural communication is at stake, this opens up the possibility in intersemiotic translation for subjects to, in Ofelia García’s (2014) words, “soft-assemble” modalities of expression across different media “from a variety of relational
contexts in ways that fit their communicative needs”—and these contexts are increasingly plural, diverse, multicultural or hybrid and instantly available through digital and social media. Our contention, therefore, is that developing an awareness of intersemiotic processes, whether analogue or digital, can offer a means to promote both a better understanding of the self and a better intercultural understanding in individuals and communities.

The chapters by Kyra Pollitt, Heather Connelly and Arlene Tucker address the role of intersemiotic projects in fostering a sense of belonging. It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail every example, but their contributions are briefly summarized below:

- Kyra Pollit writes about the challenges of translating sign poetry for the hearing
- Heather Connelly writes about her project “Translation Zones” which explores the sounds or the feel of foreign languages
- Arlene Tucker writes about her project Translation is Dialogue, which employs creative writing and artistic methods to get participants involved in translation as a collaborative and embodied practice.

As can be gleaned from their illustrations, all three chapters are concerned with community and collaboration – and with creating an environment for learning and ultimately transformation through taking an active stake in the translation process.

This is, of course, also what Ricarda and I are concerned with in our own projects, in Translation Games and Jetties, but again, time is limited, so I will just concentrate on one example from the book.

*Marta Masiero and BitterSuite*
Dancer Marta Masiero reflects on her work as a performer in immersive intersemiotic events, including Caroline Bowditch’s “Falling in Love with Frida”, Stephanie Singer’s “Bittersuite” and also my collaborative project Jetties.

In her interview, Marta picks up on the notion of the artwork as trigger, responding to Gaia Del Negro’s chapter which examines the potential of evocative objects as triggers for self-negotiation and in which Gaia provides theoretical support for intersemiotic translation as a platform for personal discovery and growth.

BitterSuite, for example, is a company of musicians and dancers who use classical music and touch-based movement to translate sound on the spectators’ bodies to create an immersive and interactive performance. Marta describes how she performed with the BitterSuite ensemble in 2016 for the company’s latest concert “Tapestries,” with music by Leo Janáček and explores how such artworks effectively bring about a transformative experience for both performer and audience:

‘The performers learn how to make their bodies speak through movement, while composition (or choreography) allows communication to be structured to convey the work or trigger responses in the audience.’ (335).

Question 3. To what extent is the process of intersemiotic artefact production readable? To what extent can this practice be understood in terms of the practitioner’s subjective account?

Overview & TOC of Intersemiotic Journeys

The translators assembled in this book have adopted the first-person narrative to provide an account of their practice and made this process ‘readable’ in a number of ways, ranging from a purely creative response (eg. Vahni Capildeo, Prosser and S.J. Fowler) or reflection (eg. Marta Masiero) to approaching their process through the lens of theoretical, cognitive, psychoanalytic or literary
constructs. For the sake of brevity I will only review two pertinent examples from Clive Scott and Eugenia Loffredo.

**Eugenia’s tryptich**

Eugenia Loffredo offers a theoretical framework, followed by an account of her subjective process. She examines “the poetic text as spatial phenomenon” (39), viewed successively from the vantage points of ekphrasis (Kennedy 2012) and visual poetry (Bohn 1986), before proposing a translation practice guided by Alan Prohm’s concept of “poetic variables” (2013) in place of “essence”, and takes a holistic perspective on structure-content relations.

She grounds her argument in a step-by-step translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti’s poem “Tramonto” (1916) into a multimedia triptych. Remarking that “research on literary experimentation has shifted the focus on reading not as a purely interpretive act but as an experience which is configured pragmatically in time and space” (46), Eugenia describes the stages of her subjective ‘Translational Journey’ in translating ‘Tramonto’, saying:

> The starting point of my translational journey, at least immediately clear to the conscious translating mind, is precisely “carnato”. Given the use of this term within art discourse, the visual texture of the image in “Tramonto” was brought to life in my mind in painterly features. Both the sensual phonetic substance and the semantic connotation of carnato, assimilated into the colour of the sunset, activated my sensorial memory, which in turn triggered a mental rummaging in the repertoire of past sensorial images, more specifically, visual experiences. (49-50)

Further, from her own biographical perspective, the compelling impression of the delicate lovingness of the Madonnas’ faces Eugenia chose for her tryptich (as ubiquitous as the paintings in churches and the holy cards circulating in the family) on the mind and heart of a young girl raised in the catholic faith, as Eugenia was, is such that these specific paintings came to be loaded with a
spiritual symbolism and a feminine sentiment that still resonate with her adult self’s values.

She tells us she translated “Tramonto” precisely from this spiritual and feminine vantage point. Further, by assigning to this female figure the role of symbolising the awakening of sensuality, her feminised translations overshadow the more masculine overtones expressed in the ST.

**Clive Scott’s translations of Baudelaire**

Clive Scott favors a translation approach that is more concerned with the senses than with meaning, exposing the shortfalls of theoretical restrictions based on a purely semiotic approach.

He argues that without involving all the senses, the literary cannot be fully realized. Whereas structural semiotics see the translator as performing a linguistic exchange relying on the transmutation of codes into non-verbal equivalents, the synaesthetic approach sees the translator’s role as not to “solve” but rather to offer the transient “capture” of a “persistently indeterminate” source text, which is capable of fostering “fruitful participation” in its reader (88-9).

Scott illustrates his subjective process as “variational play” (89) on the source text by providing a step-by-step description of his successive translations of Charles Baudelaire’s “Bohéliens en voyage” (Les Fleurs du Mal, 1857), creating vivid montages of pastel, paint, photo-fragments and text in which the French Symbolist poet’s notion of “vibrativité” is made visible, or performed. In this series, for example, Clive describes how his subjective reading is embodied in the version in Figure 4.3 as follows:

[A] five-column version, in which the sonnet’s lineation only survives in the capital letters, since the downward movement of the text and the sharply disjunctive lexical segmentation draw the reader into a stuttering, tumbling disorientation. The clusters of different typefaces—trace different
styles of being or consciousness, different perceptual modes, and suggest
that the “tribu prophétique” activates a nomadism of utterance. The pastels
and enamel-paint blend the multiple suns and earth colours of previous
Figs. (4.1 and 4.2), and describe a drama that parallels that of the textual
disposition: cosmic forces caught in an overpowering magnetic attraction
towards the earth.’ (101)

Concluding Remarks

The bodies of knowledge brought to bear on this ongoing enquiry so far include
Semiotics, Cognitive Poetics, Psychoanalysis and Transformative Learning
Theory, and cut across academic disciplines in the Arts and Humanities,
including Fine Art, Comparative Literature, Intercultural Studies, Education and
many more.

The few examples given above illustrate how selected SIG research questions can
begin to be answered, and offer an opportunity to query, apply or fine-tune the
explanatory framework proposed in the opening pages of this paper. In the first
instance, we have gathered critical insights and first-person narratives from
translators, practitioners or participants in a translation event to enable the
reader to piece together or construct a critical, experientially-informed and
practice-led understanding of intersemiotic translation.

As Linda Candy (2006) explained, “if a creative artefact is the basis of the
contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based,” whereas “if the
research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led”

Hence, while many contributions to the present book can be considered to
describe practice-based research with a focus on the process rather than the
product, the eventual perspectives to be taken from this volume can be
considered to be practice-led.

*Interactive session*
If time permits – we propose to ask seminar participants to make a rough translation of our title image into a medium of their choice.