

Book Review

Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal, eds. *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media*

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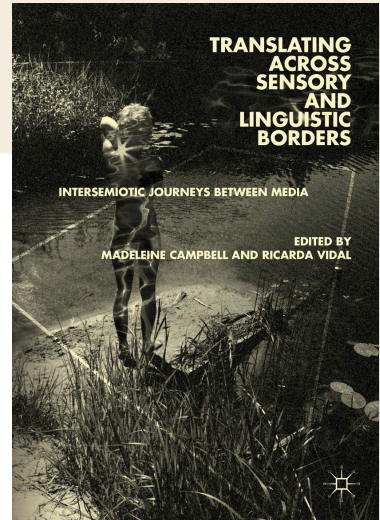
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Practice is an integral part of research in creative and performing arts and design (CPAD). It refers to both “making art work and reflecting on it” (Gray and Malins, 2004, 3). There is an emphasis in this kind of research on process and experience. Points of research are explored through methodology that is open to innovative approaches which aim to contribute to “the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding” in the area of their operation (AHRC, 2021). *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media* (2019) is a volume of research in CPAD that is concerned in its practice with intersemiotic translation. Edited by Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal and authored by a number of practitioners who combine research, creativity and translation, the book offers a stimulating, re-constructivist approach to the practice of translation (often taken or expected by non-practitioners to be an objective, mechanical process) through integrating it into the kind of practice mentioned above as characteristic of artistic research.

In their thinking of intersemiotic translation, the author-practitioners of the volume both agree and disagree with Roman Jakobson’s ([1959] 2000) typology of translation, wherein the latter positions intersemiotic translation (designated as *transmutation*) as a category besides interlingual translation (which Jakobson refers to as “translation proper”, 114) and intralingual translation. They understand, as many contemporary scholars of translation do, that Jakobson’s framework creates a hierarchy between modes of expression whereby the interlingual translation of verbal signs is given pride



of place. Bryan Eccleshall, in Chapter Twelve of the volume, comments on Jakobson's labeling of intersemiotic translation as transmutation (i.e. deforming the source text) by pointing that although transmutation runs in all acts of translation, there is a certain tendency (driven by the principle of equivalence) in verbal, interlingual translation to "mitigate against distortion" (291). Practitioners of intersemiotic translation, on the other hand, having embraced transmutation, are better equipped for exploring the richness and complexity of the act of translation. From this perspective, not only transmutation but also *transgression* is embraced as a welcome aspect of translation: Heather Connelly in Chapter Ten states that Jakobson's view of intersemiotic translation "fails to encapsulate the complex material and disciplinary transgression involved in and through intersemiotic translation and how such an act brings new, extra and divergent forces and intensities into play" (221).

Many of the practitioners refer to Lars Elleström's (2010) taxonomy of media and modalities – what he calls "the *modalities* of media" (15, emphasis in original) – in their artistic exploration of multimodality and intermediality within the context of intersemiotic translation. Elleström argues that all media consist of complex modalities that incorporate the tangible, perceptual and conceptual aspects of medial constructions. These modalities are designated as *material*, *sensorial*, *spatiotemporal* and *semiotic*. The construction of media begins with their material, tangible reality and continues with the sensory perception they receive in spatiotemporal experiences that lead to the creation of meaning through semiotic acts of interpreting. In Chapter Nine, Kyra Pollitt posits that "Intersemiotic translation, then, must surely involve recruiting the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal and the semiotic to effect transfers of meaning through new combinations of ... signs" (p. 186).

That being said, the volume keeps some distance from an understanding of intermediality as transference from one media to another as if through a conduit or a channel, which finds some expression in Elleström's metaphoric articulations, albeit without the intention to simplify the process. The editors of the volume, Campbell and Vidal, prefer an image of *entanglement* to describe the process of intersemiotic translation, since it "entails multiple and simultaneous border crossings between different systems of ideas" (10).

Synesthesia is a favored concept among the practitioners in that it refers to cross-sensory acts of intersemiotic translation. A synesthetic approach to intermediality, argues Clive Scott in Chapter Four, would "permit one art/medium to speak *through* another, *in* another" (92, emphasis in original). That is what Campbell and Vidal call "reading with the nose" when referring in Chapter One to Simon Barraclough's intersemiotic translation of a concrete poem into a "Sniff Disc" (p. 10) whereby circular lines of

poetry are translated into an olfactory composition consisting of “Notes of Opium Poppy, Orange, Cedar Wood, Leather” (13, Figure 1.2 description) on scented paper that is shaped like a disc.

Other CPAD projects that are presented in the book involve the intersemiotic translation of a poem into a multimedia triptych (Chapter Two); a sonnet into filmic poetry or video poem (Chapter Three); an object poem (two dry leaves attached by a paper clip) into another object poem in another language (two bedsheets attached via a bigger clip, Chapter Six); sign language poetry into other forms, which include concrete poem, installation, film poetry and drawing (Chapter Nine); posture (Michael Jackson’s dance poses in a number of posters) to movement (live performance staged by female dancers, Chapter Thirteen); a photo book (an exhibition catalogue of a film installation) to a series of poems (Chapter Sixteen); online images to ekphrastic poetry (Chapter Seventeen); and in the final chapter (Chapter Eighteen) a series of intersemiotic translations that begin with a written text and end with a feeling. From written word to feeling, the text in this case undergoes translation into, among other forms, a morse code, a musical beat, a gesture, a lullaby, a taste and a prayer.

Some of these translations stand from afar as adaptation, but then they differ from adaptation in that rather than recomposing their reference material, they are trying to translate a specific aspect of it into another mode. In Chapter Seven, Cara Berger takes as her source material Hélène Cixous’ novel *Dedans* (along with its interlingual translation by Carol Barko as *Inside*), and creates a theatrical performance wherein the main concern is not to reproduce the narrative but to “translate the hysteric mode of signification that Cixous employs in her novel into theatre” (p. 148). A complex methodology of *hysterization* which Cixous deploys in her prose (through which bodily sensations are brought forth as part of the process of signification at the moment of expression) is adopted by Berger to be used, along with intersemiotic translation, as creative methodology for the development of politically informed theatre.

In these translations, the translator emerges as artist and creator of *afterlives* (with homage to Walter Benjamin, [1923] 2000) as well as a transformer/critic/ideolog—a profile which is fairly remote from that of the invisible translator whom Lawrence Venuti (1995) had brought to the attention of translation scholars almost two decades ago. The emphasis, as noted in the introduction, is on *embodying* the source material in another medium rather than its *conveyance* (p. xxvi). Inspired by a Lacanian sense of mimesis, the translator-practitioners, as Campbell and Vidal put it, “become part of the source, or insert themselves ‘in the picture’” (16). They perform an intense reading of their source material, a kind of reading which is reciprocal like a Lacanian gaze, appropriated by Campbell and Vidal as *the translator’s gaze*:

The task of the reader as it is here described bears resemblance to what we call *the translator's gaze*, the Lacanian regard, which entails the deep analytical involvement with a text or artefact that lives and breathes and gazes back. It rests on the knowledge that communication is neither effortless nor flawless and never seamless (8, emphasis in original).

Interaction is also key to these translations, whereby reception is reconstructed as active participation, making it is possible for the audience, as stated in Chapter Fifteen by Marta Masiero, to “physically receive the translation of the performer’s movement on their own skin” (337).

With all that being said, the volume does not do away with equivalence as a measure of convenience, even when translators defy or reverse it for artistic practices. Indeed, some use equivalent, interlingual translation as part of their larger intersemiotic translation process – such as inserting an interlingual, verbal translation of the source poem (from Italian to English) on the triptych in Chapter Two, or creating one as a basic working version to build upon, as in Chapter Three, wherein a poem in French by Pierre de Ronsard is translated into a series of verbal-visual versions that are expressive of the dynamic encounter between translator and source material.

Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders is an expression of a shift from ‘Why call it a translation?’ to ‘Why not call it a translation?’, from exclusivity to inclusion and reclamation (of what has been given up for the sake of exclusivity). Moreover, it involves a claiming of practices of reformulation such as ekphrasis, and semiotic conditions such as iconicity; therefore facilitating an expansion of our analytical measures when studying translation.

References

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