Introduction

At arm's length, we might define translation as a process by which a set of information is manipulated, altered, transferred, or rendered into another form. But translation also, and often, bears on us more personally, more intimately. It has the potential to bridge chasms of difference in our encounters between languages, interpretations, and experiences. Translation also carries with it the possibility of getting things wrong. How might we align the spirit of translation—of the things it does—with the undoings it can engender? How might this issue probe the scope of translation across and beyond modes and textures of expression such as the written, the spoken, the sensory, the visual, and the auditory?

Selected contributions to *Refract*'s second issue interrogate the mechanisms of translation, its various outcomes, and its role in visual culture or other forms of creative, social, or political production and representation. This rich topic inspired a variety of thinkers and makers to experiment with different forms of inquiry, from video and interviews to audio recordings and photo-essays. In keeping with *Refract*'s first issue, we have published a menagerie of explorations side by side, treating artistic production as no different from other forms of scholarship.

Such an intervention is critical to *Refract*'s mission to offer new modes of thinking *with* and *alongside* conversations that are often siloed by disciplinary boundaries. This volume is no different, and, as we produced the issue, it became clear that we were participating in a long history of sociopolitical interventions in how "translation" is understood. In keeping with *Refract*'s mission to avoid aligning ourselves with only a few select thinkers, we did not specifically refer to this history in our call for papers. And yet, the resulting volume contributes to the robust and amorphous field of translation studies by addressing how "translation" might have wide-reaching implications in the field of visual studies.

We are particularly invested in thinking about translation beyond the written word or spoken language, an emphasis that characterizes most of translation studies—from debates over the "autonomy" of a written text to the "function" of a translation and the "equivalence" between a translation and the "original." Walter Benjamin famously writes that the "task" of the translator is to find "that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."[1] Jacques Derrida similarly argues that a "relevant" translation is "the transfer of an intact signified."[2] More recently, however, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that "it is not bodies of meaning that are transferred in translation."[3] Rather, the rhetorical nature of language leads to disruptions in the "logical systematicity" of grammar, revealing how language is itself the "production of agency."[4] Derrida, too, acknowledges the messiness of translation, describing an "economy of in-betweenness" in which a translated text "stands between…absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency, and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance."[5] This "in-betweenness" remains a crucial issue in translation studies, from Homi Bhabha's theorization of the "third space" as a "translational space of [cross-cultural and unequal] negotiation" to Kwame Anthony Appiah's call for a "thick translation" that "meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others."[6]

This is by no means a comprehensive review of all that has been written or theorized about translation. Nor is this issue of *Refract* necessarily an effort to speak directly to this genealogy. Rather, we wanted our contributors to think of translation alongside and beyond text and language, asking questions such as: What could "thick translation" *look* or *sound* like if it were made manifest in artistic production? How can we think through the "translational third space" in today's *digital* world? And rather than solely ask about equivalence, intention, and function, what could be gained by focusing more on *transformation*?

The resulting contributions take translation as both method and object of analysis, and often as both. As method, translation can be a powerful tool for creating new forms or opening up new avenues of inquiry. Scott Hunter's "Translation, Translation, Rehearsal," for example, explores issues of translation when a tarot deck is used to dictate the fate of each note for a saxophone quartet. Each translation of a tarot card, be it "the fool" or "the hermit," manifests in a harmonic progression of "rehearsals" that culminate in an infinite play on what is lost, or preserved, in the act of translation. Accompanying "Translation, Translation, Rehearsal" is an interview between Hunter and *Refract* editorial board member Alexandra Macheski discussing how translation of tarot into musical composition creates unforeseen harmonies.

Ryan Page also considers sound and translation in his aural montage "Daisy Bell." In this mash-up audio recording, Page re-creates the 1892 song "Daisy Bell," which sits squarely within a history of digital interfacing with speech synthesis and artificial intelligence. Here Page references how the song is used in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* as part of the sentient onboard computer HAL's (Heuristically Programmed Algorithmic Computer) database. The audio piece combines the voices of earlier singers and vintage modes of recording with new technologies for sound making as well as "voices that were never alive to begin with." Through the compilation of various versions and recording instruments, the piece showcases how, symbolically, the translation and transmutation of voice and music across modes can produce the uncanny and force us to question what is essential, what is persistent, and what changes through different formats.

Translation as process or transformation is also a key focus for "Interpreting the Legal Archive of Visual Transformations," by Asif Ali Akhtar. This contribution analyzes the way penal law was modified, subverted, and translated across different cases in the Nizāmat ʿAdālat, a criminal court operating in Bengal from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. Focusing on the publication *Reports of the Cases*, Akhtar explores how law came to be articulated in unprecedented ways that reshaped Bengalese relationships with British colonial authority. What counted as evidence shifted to emphasize the visible traces of the crime, and certain Islamic voices were erased through a colonial articulation of jurisprudence. Akhtar's detailed discussion of specific cases recorded in *Reports* shows how Islamic modes of seeing and knowing were restructured, or translated, to follow the logic of British modernity. Akhtar's piece highlights the way translation is used in political, social, and colonial ideologies, a theme that runs throughout many of the submissions. A major tenet of this issue, therefore, is that translation can lead to structural inequalities but is also a means for resistance and subversion.

Marc Miller's "Conceptual Transpositions: Considering the Grammars of Conceptual Art and Parametric Drawing" explores the ambiguity of language when communicating instructions, again using translation as method. Miller takes as a starting point Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #118*, one of over a thousand such drawings LeWitt created between 1968 and 2007. The drawings are created according to instructions such as "place fifty points at random" and then "connect them with straight lines." Miller transposes these instructions in Rhinoceros, a 3-D computer-aided design application using Grasshopper, a visual programming language, in order to emulate the outcomes of the original conceptual piece. Modifications are then made to the first set of instructions given to the program in order to change the grammar and syntax, and these modified instructions are

transposed back to text. The resulting differences remind us of the ambiguities inherent in acts of translation, and Miller's contribution further complicates the relationship between algorithmic input and its translation into structural output.

Another mode for thinking about data, digital interfaces, and translation is Adriene Jenik's *Blast Radius*. Jenik uses the term *data humanization* to describe her performance-based practice in which the artist intervenes in large-scale data set visualizations by using her body to physically explore a single data point. For *Blast Radius*, Jenik retraced the one-mile blast radius of a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) the US government dropped on Afghanistan in 2017, by walking its circumference barefoot. Her work physically translates data so that it is readable, and therefore comprehensible. By imprinting the data onto her body, Jenik's work considers the corporeal ramifications of military violence that is purposefully kept outside the purview of US civilians.

Ansel Arnold is similarly interested in violence and data, using translation as a method for interrogating the role of digital media in normalizing violent acts. Arnold's video *Languages of Violence* translates the sound of gunfire in video games into an act that often seems benign: typing on a computer. The video shows what appears to be a text-document on which letters and symbols are typed in real time. Accompanying these keystrokes are the sounds of rapid-fire gunshots and the clicks of a gun being reloaded. By removing the visual evidence of violence that gamers normally see while playing video games, or what Arnold calls "blatant violence," the artist calls into question the role of media technologies in legitimizing "subtle violence." Translation, in this case, becomes an act of resistance and critique.

Rebekkah Dilts also investigates the capacity of translation to resist or subvert social norms by looking at two nineteenth-century female writers, Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney, and their translations of works by the classical Greek poet Sappho. Sappho's poetry was highly popular during a surge of Western European nationalism and neoclassical nostalgia in the late nineteenth century. Sappho's lesbian identity was mined at this time for alternately radical and reductive attention to female sexuality, depending on the translator and audience. Dilts uses Luce Irigaray's rewriting of classical Greek texts as a template for analyzing the two female authors' translation projects. Like Irigaray's interventions in the masculine canon of Greek literature and thought, Dilts argues that their "radical approach to translation [destabilized the more] canonical and phallocentric" translation efforts of their male contemporaries. Vivien and Barney countered this with strategies that reclaimed "multiplicity" and "ambiguity" as applied to Sappho's identity and works.

Ace Lehner's essay and interview with Alok Vaid-Menon offers a different approach to issues of gender, ambiguity, and radical forms of translation. This contribution takes up the history of portraiture, its intersection with social media, and representations of trans individuals. Vaid-Menon is known for their performative poetry and is widely followed on social media platforms such as Instagram. Vaid-Menon's posts are often self-portraits featuring their boldly styled and brightly colored outfits. These portraits are often paired with captions that unveil raw emotion and the brutal and beautiful experiences of being a transfeminine performer, writer, and activist. This piece begins with an essay by Lehner, followed by an interview with Vaid-Menon in which Lehner inserts essay-style prose to further elaborate on the context and history of the conversation. Lehner's thoughtful writing and inquisitive questions reveal the critical intervention of Vaid-Menon's practice while writing that act into a history of self-visualization and presentation.

Many of the pieces in this issue engage with translation as *process*. Austin D. Hoffman's essay, "Lupine Sensibilities: Dynamically Embodied Intersubjectivity between Humans and Refugee Wolves," looks at the process of translation in mediating interspecies relationships. Hoffman's contribution is a somewhat autoethnographic study of what happens within interactions between the "more-than-human" and the human, considering these interactions as a form of translation. Through a phenomenological approach, Hoffman explores how interspecies communication dissolves the nature-culture divide and how theories of semiotics can help us better understand narratives of trans-species interactions to offer new perspectives and break down anthropocentric ways of constructing knowledge in the discipline of anthropology.

This issue is committed to engaging with the inequalities inherent in the mechanisms of translation. This comes to the fore when we think about accessibility, inclusion, and differently abled bodies. Marrok Sedgwick addresses this in their *Speech Poem* series, an experimentation with bilingualism and translation through performative American Sign Language poetry. By performing ASL poetry, *Untitled (Speech Poem #2) 2018* translates sound, poetry, and sign language to explore the gaps in meaning and meaning making that exist between spoken language, closed-captioning, ASL, and augmentative and alternative communication tools. For example, meaning is often lost in the translation of spoken dialogue into closed-captioning. Sedgwick's video complicates the phonocentric implications of this translation process by engaging the viewer in a brief ASL lesson, allowing viewers to watch as the sign for "speak" takes on greater meaning through ASL. *Speech Poem* is an ongoing series that continues to grow as Sedgwick explores different and new ways to communicate poetic meaning. At its core, *Untitled (Speech*

Poem #2) 2018 makes clear to the viewer not only the varied ways translation can occur but the impact translation has on comprehension and meaning.

In each issue, the *Refract* team solicits contributions from scholars and artists whose work we feel exemplifies the theme, and we wanted to highlight issues of accessibility in one of those guest contributions. The artist and writer Joseph Grigely was generous enough to allow us to publish a selection of his social media posts, curated by *Refract*'s managing editor, Kate Korroch. The posts consist of screenshots or photographs of Grigely's everyday experiences as a person who is deaf. He accompanies these images with captions explaining the frustration he faces when navigating a world designed for people with hearing. The photo-essay illustrates how translation is fundamentally about access and inclusion, and the posts we have published here are a small instance of how the world might be translated, or mistranslated, for differently abled bodies.

We also asked Alessandra Reango to reflect on her work with liquid blackness, a research group that interrogates blackness as an aesthetic, a way of being, and a methodology for investigating the material and discursive forces that condition how blackness operates today. Through an analysis of Kahlil Joseph's BLKNWS and Arthur Jafa's *White Album*, Reango unpacks how liquid blackness does not "behave" in the way demanded of it by the rules of exchange, labor, and dispossession that so define black social life. Reango reflects on the way liquid blackness moves in multiple directions, evading characterization. In other words, it is *un*translatable, "it cannot be held in place, but only, and precariously, *in sus-pension*."

And finally, Alexandra C. Moore contributed the photo-essay "All le moto a ces droits: Notes on Hervé Youmbi's Translation of the Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme (DUDH)," which unpacks Hervé Youmbi's *Translation of the Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme* in Camfranglais, presented as murals for Salon Urbain de Douala. In this project, Youmbi translates articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations) into Camfranglais, a pidgin language of English, French, and several Indigenous Cameroonian languages. In a similar format to Grigely's piece, Moore's contribution presents images of Youmbi's murals and translates the Camfranglais text into English. Extended captions explore the cultural nuances of Camfranglais, unpack the geopolitical contexts of the murals, and unveil the challenges of linguistic and visual translation.

In addition to the submissions and solicited contributions engaging with the theme, each issue of *Refract* features a short piece from a scholar working in, or around, the discipline of visual studies. This issue's featured "Voice of Visual Studies" is Sara Blaylock, assistant professor of art history at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Blaylock's astute observations about the lacunae

of visual studies stems from her pragmatic experiences as a professor, organizer, and cross-disciplinary thinker. Blaylock responds to James Elkins's contribution to *Refract*'s inaugural issue and his concerns about presentism in visual studies.[7] Using the notion of the "lag," Blaylock explores how visual studies was originally envisioned and how it manifests itself today. While *Refract* includes "Voices of Visual Studies" to offer windows into the multiple, and sometimes divergent, views on the discipline, we can all agree with Blaylock that artistic production acts on us, produces *something*, and "leave[s] the embers burning, hoping—though not expecting—someone to keep the fire going."

Notes

[1] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 20.

[2] Jacques Derrida, "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001): 195.

[3] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 397.

[4] Ibid., 397, 405.

[5] Derrida, "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 179.

[6] Homi Bhabha, "Translation and Displacement" (presentation, Translation Theory Today conference, CUNY Graduate Center, May 6, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVQcdbSV6OI; Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation," *Callaloo* 16, no. 4 (1993): 818, https://doi.org/10.2307/2932211.

[7] James Elkins, "What is Radical Writing in Visual Studies?," *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2018): 15-22, https://doi.org/10.5070/R71141455.