


Review of Translation and Contemporary Art: Transdisciplinary Encounters

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ABSTRACT

As a well-established field, translation studies (TS) has acquired significance since the late 20th century, with a proliferation of TS journals, conferences, and books over the last three decades. The result of such expansion is diversification, leading to multiple interpretations of the term “translation studies.” Since the cultural turn in TS was proposed in 1990, the notion of what translation involves has been expanded. An increasing number of translation researchers are inviting us to expand the object of the field. The book represents the most recent discovery in cross-boundary translation studies. It is organized into three sections, namely “Translating in a Visual Age: Transdisciplinary Routes,” “The Artistranslator’s Gaze,” and “Translating With Art.”

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Art, Transdisciplinary, Translation Studies

BOOK REVIEW

Translation and Contemporary Art: Transdisciplinary Encounters, written by M^aCarmen África Vidal Claramonte, New York, Routledge, 2022, 126 pp., \$47.96 (hardback), ISBN: 9781032211657

As a well-established field, Translation Studies (TS) has acquired significance since the late twentieth century, with a proliferation of TS journals, conferences, and books over the last three decades. The result of such expansion is diversification, leading to multiple interpretations of the term “translation studies.” Since the cultural turn in TS was proposed in 1990, the notion of what translation involves has been expanded. An increasing number of translation researchers are inviting us to expand the object of the field (Blumczynski, 2016; Brodzki, 2007; Gentzler, 2016). Many scholars view translation as transdisciplinary and open-ended, rejecting the detrimentally narrow definitions of translation and the idea that translation is binary (Gentzler, 2016, p. 5). The book reviewed makes a great contribution to that cross-boundary process. The author’s research interests lie in contemporary art, the way people

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look at images, and the way to observe the world through images. She argues that the connotation of translation should be widened and that translation is happening through semiotic repertoires because we are living in an area where the Internet, machines and multimedia are essential to our lives. What we have been witnessing since the beginning of the twenty-first century is a dramatic change of perception from verbal literacy to multifaceted literacy. Such a multifaceted landscape raises new questions for translation. Hence, the old disciplinary boundaries created in the last two centuries do not fit with the status quo. The key terms for TS now are interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. With that in mind, translation will inevitably move forward, both as a means of enriching itself and as a means of increasing dialogue with other fields. We are faced with new contexts, and “we need new rules” (Claramonte, 2022, p. 24), which means understanding the translation process and the multifaceted nature of the world. Therefore, the goal of the book is to examine the similarities and links between translation and modern art and to demonstrate how translation is viewed and used in modern art.

The book represents the most recent discovery in cross-boundary translation studies. It is organized into three sections, namely “Translating in a Visual Age: Transdisciplinary Routes,” “The Artistranslator’s Gaze,” and “Translating With Art”.

The first part introduces transdisciplinary routes, claiming that the multimodal environment cannot be successfully approached within a single disciplinary paradigm.

The author’s starting point is the assertion that people translate not just with their eyes but with the other senses and the “outward shift in translation studies” (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019). The new texts, which include videogames, websites, album covers, visuals, icons, tweets, graphic novels, and dance performances, necessitate the development of new composite and heterotypical translation techniques across many media. Thus, developing the area of TS is crucial since new translation techniques are required for stories that are delivered in unconventional ways. In order to be truly multidisciplinary, the discipline of translation studies must emerge and incorporate other branches of knowledge and research techniques. The author believes that to translate is to interpret. Every action we take is a translation, and the translations of others speak volumes about ourselves. Therefore, translation should be defined from the visible dimension, that is, look to translation and translate to look at the world (Claramonte, 2022, p. 25). This requires contemplating how images function. Images are visible ways of thinking, feeling, and looking at the world. They also speak to translate different realities. In order to deconstruct the masculine gaze, Cindy Sherman, for instance, post-translates by employing her own body as a text that rewrites other bodies (Mulvey, 1991; Solomon-Godeau & Nochlin, 1991).

The second part explores looking as a way of narrating the world and thus a way to translate it. The author stated that different perspectives on the world lead to conflicts when it comes to recognizing and conveying differences. Our perspective on others does, in fact, disclose a lot about who we are. Not only do we live in heteroglossic times, but we also inhabit diverse cultural contexts. Images are unquestionably cultural elements since they foster hypervisibility and voyeurism, which merits investigation. The investigation relies on the translator’s perspective on this new field of study, which is predicated on the notion that images can be exploited to manipulate viewers or criticize politics. Numerous scholars highlight that the image’s political and manufactured dimension serves as a text that conveys information and establishes the viewer’s right to look. The manufactured nature of images compels viewers to consider the diversity and inequality of individuals they observe. The author mentioned a question proposed by John Berger (2008), that is, whether the way we look affects what we know. And Roland Barthes (1999) highlighted that, like words, every image carries a secondary level of meaning, which is what must be translated. However, it is also the most challenging to rewrite because translators are most exposed there. Each image, like each translated sentence, represents a certain way of seeing. Every time we view a photograph, we are cognizant of the fact that the photographer, who rewrote reality with his gaze, selected that image from an infinite number of alternatives. Seeing precedes words, and it establishes our place in the surrounding world.

The third part analyses translation with art. Modern art is no longer a passive object; instead, it is an active force driven by a critical mindset. Looking ahead to see what is provided and beyond it is the

very essence of art. The way we perceive and conceptualize the world can be changed through art. Art has the capacity to alter our perception and understanding of the world. Politics-related violence is an issue. From the Middle East to Wall Street, it has taken part in revolutions, battles against oppressive governments in Libya and Egypt, and campaigns against racism, gender violence, and climate change. Modern artwork is viewed as a mode of perception in this setting. In such an area, many artists heavily rely on words in their creations. The relationship between language as a communication system and its adaptation to the real world is born in the gap between the visible and the utterable. Hence, it is this gap that needs to be translated. Cindy Sherman (Respini & Sherman, 2012) is a particularly pertinent example of translation outward, or rewriting by forging into uncharted territory. In order to subvert the masculine gaze, she post-translates, or translates outward, utilizing her own body as a text that rewrites other bodies. Analysis of her work has identified it as a glaring example of postmodern American art and as art that emphasizes the politics of representation. Research in the art world has already focused on translation, and several publications have contributed to this interaction between contemporary art and translation, despite the fact that it is still a relatively unexplored subject in Translation Studies. The outward translator is conscious that in order to address the disparities between strong and weak languages, new hybrid mestizo identities, and the political and ethical challenges resulting from this, action must be based on new models and techniques. This forces us to ask fresh questions before we begin to translate. These concerns include how we should translate a text made up of images, colours, sounds, noises, and bodies, as well as whether it is actually reasonable to claim that languages are pure in the modern era.

This review highlights two of this book's many positive qualities. This book begins with an explanation of how the "outward turn" may be a valid technique for translation. The concept originated in a 2011 article titled "*Translation: A New Paradigm*" by Stefano Arduini and Siri Nergaard. It clearly expresses the new vision of translation that promotes transdisciplinarity as a means of "moving beyond the traditional boundaries of the profession" and opening up to art, architecture, philosophy, etc (Claramonte, 2022, p. 18). To properly understand "this new intercultural and intersemiotic age of translation" (Gentzler, 2016, p. 217), translation scholars need to look beyond the language and literary to music, lights, set, costumes, gestures, make-up, and facial expressions. Future translation and internationalization theories must be more dynamic as the media evolves and performance options grow. Furthermore, by examining contemporary works of art as artistic forms that communicate, as semiotic systems that transmit information through entwined channels, this book has successfully shown that it is possible to blur the boundaries between disciplines and take the concept of translation to the extreme.

The objective behind the book is to challenge "the word-based model of 'the reading' by translating 'the reading' into the lookings" (Apter, 2007, p. 149). The book encourages readers to notice and look at the various layers that compose both words and images. Translation occurs between more than just the readable and the visible. The book also makes the case that it occurs on a variety of levels, including the olfactory level. For instance, using just his nose, Sam Treadaway¹ translates "Sniff Disc," a tightly printed disc of powerfully scented paper enclosed in an opaque sleeve, from Simon Barraclough's concrete poem "Two sun spots"². The original poetry, printed as a series of expanding circles, is incredibly illustrative, but Treadaway's translation creates a scent-based poem.

Also worth noticing about the volume is its cover and title. The title of the book accurately captures the focus of the text. The authors explore the intersections between translation studies and contemporary art, highlighting the ways in which these two fields have influenced and shaped one another. The proliferation and diversification of research *foci* in translation studies is exemplified by the book cover, which features an oil painting that captures the essence of contemporary art in its vibrant colours and fluid brushstrokes. The painting depicts a scene that is both representational and figurative, evoking a sense of movement and transformation.

While the book has exhibited some of the most recent tendencies in integrating translation studies and contemporary art, it has a few minor shortcomings. A detailed examination of the book

may reveal that there are no photographs, drawings, illustrations, or other multimodal materials to illustrate the author's viewpoints. For example, the author wrote, "These translations outward are a constant in the art world, a discipline where the meanings of words like "original" and "representation" were understood long before they became part of the translation world" (Claramonte, 2022, p. 44). Then she cited Manet's 1863 translation of *Venus of Urbino* (Titian 1538) by Titian as an example. However, no image of the painting *Venus of Urbino* is provided, nor is Manet's 1863 translation presented, leaving the reader in the dark. Secondly, no research methodologies for translation studies in the contemporary art field are introduced. Indeed, it is reasonable that the author is dealing with an under-explored area. Nevertheless, since research is an important part of any established field, some research methods will help future investigations.

Despite these minor shortcomings, this book is a valuable resource for scholars interested in contemporary art and translation. It provides timely evidence that translation is "a method to allow the other to look" (Claramonte, 2022, p. 87). Translation studies is a field that seeks to understand the complexities of intercultural communication. It involves the study of language, culture, and communication, and recognizes that meaning is never static but rather is constantly negotiated and reinterpreted. On the other side, contemporary art is a genre that questions how we see and comprehend the world. The volume pushes boundaries and encourages scholars and practitioners to think critically about the ways in which we experience and interact with art, society, and culture.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For more about the translator and his work, see <https://samtreadaway.com/work/sniff-disc/>
- ² For more about the poet and his work, see <https://simonbarraclough.com/sunspots/>