

Living with translation is not only a fact of life for those of us who are in between languages, or residing outside of the geographical zone of our mother tongue(s), it is the common experience of trying to communicate at all. Living with translation is a condition we share, and it is present to such a degree that it has become nearly invisible. In the field of literature, where translation tends to be most securely situated, a wide vocabulary is at hand to discuss the complexities and controversies of translation. But in art discourses, it tends to be a bit harder to grasp, thus, necessitating this publication. Beginning the year 2017 with an issue on artistic approaches to translation affirms our faith in the necessity of a practice that persistently attempts to communicate across languages, disciplines, generations, and ideologies. Translation as a creative force is a resource that begs to be called upon now, especially in light of the humanitarian and ecological crises that seem to have no end in sight.

If translation, like history, involves both narratives and narrators, let us ask who is allowed to narrate, and which narratives will be told. In other words, what gets translated, and how? The proliferation of fake news in social media and the rise of populist governments are only one part of the story. Poet Adrienne Rich, writing in 2005 accurately describes the situation today, where our lives in “[...] a society fraught with official lying, hyperbolic urgings to consume, contrived obsolescence of words (along with the things and people who produce them),” evidence a lack of varied, heterogeneous, and authentic voices.<sup>1</sup> They have been replaced by a reified fiction that is becoming the dominant order, the linguistic equivalent of which would be a forced universal monolingualism. Philosopher Jacques Rancière’s observation that “An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators”, points at translation’s potential—not only for emancipation – but also for subversive storytelling by anyone who accepts the task.<sup>2</sup> We all know the old adage *traduttore, traditore* (literally ‘translator, traitor’). To quote Rich again in reference to poetic translation, we translate for many reasons, “having to do with what in poetry is inimitable, intransigent, telegraphic, musical, explicit, implicit, physical, impalpable, unmistakably human as the human face yet varied as faces are.”<sup>3</sup> Translation, as a matter of narratives and narrators, depends on a complicit agreement between bodies, texts, and languages; artists have been testing the nature and strength of these agreements with increasing frequency over the years, as with any critical practice.

Translation, as with any practice, is something to return to again and again. Opening this issue, curator and poet Srajana Kaikini’s multi-layered article, ‘The Return of the Translator’ underlines the relevance of

<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Rich, *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1997-2008*, ‘James Scully’s Art of Praxis’, W.W. Norton and Company: New York, London, 2005, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Rancière, ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, in: *Art Forum* (March 2007), p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> Rich, *A Human Eye*, ‘Iraqi Poetry Today’, p. 7.

translation as a critical process, available to anyone, in any field. Bringing in references to philosopher Sundar Sarukkai, poet Gangadhar Chittal, and Buddhist philosophical principles, she locates the place of translation. Kaikini looks closely at the ways “language and the world are in strange relation with each other,” to borrow her words. Translation as a method, she maintains, is a matter of intention, creation, and experience.

For our regular readers, it will be obvious from a glance at the table of contents that something is different: this is the first time in years that *Kunstlicht* has been entirely in English. Although the call for papers was published in both Dutch and English, we received a disproportionate number of proposals in English. What does it tell us? Curator Martin Waldmeier’s in-depth reflection on Nicoline van Harskamp’s work will provoke us to first ask, which English? Based on one of Van Harskamp’s recent works, *A Romance In Five Acts And Twenty-One Englishes*, his essay, ‘From Lingua Franca to New Creole’ questions how identity is claimed or created when a ‘creolized’ language comes into being. How could so-called Lingua Franca English afford emancipatory potential to non-native English speakers? Van Harskamp’s practice firmly centres itself in the field of language, which makes it an exemplary practice to highlight, whereas Waldmeier’s careful analysis contextualizes it within a wide social and linguistic sphere.

Alongside articles from curators Kaikini and Waldmeier, this issue features contributions from artists speaking in their own words about how translation functions as a method in their practices. We are pleased to include composer Yannis Kyriakides’ article, ‘Unanswered Questions’, where he looks at two of his own works in order to discuss the question and answer structures in music and language, and the potential of translations between these media. In this analysis, he tests how these notions play out in a process where the voice of the questioner is not compatible with the language of the respondent, and requires translation across media. However, he does not only make a playful game in the spirit of absurdity but locates these systems within contexts that have a lasting influence on daily life: one such example is seen in the process of cultural integration (inburgering) that helps determine whether or not Dutch citizenship may be acquired. Using a combination of software and algorithms to produce answers to the given questions, he draws out the feeling of chaos and chance involved in any process of communication.

As much as ‘Unanswered Questions’ shows music’s potential to function as the ‘stuff’ of translation, in my own contribution to this issue, ‘Profanatory Translation’, I write about how translation can be used as a tool for revitalizing artistic practice in a crucial way. When the very process of translation is privileged over the result, the question of outcome becomes irrelevant. In this article, I write about how my own work in publishing and performance engages with the process of translation as a means without an end. Meanwhile, this issue gives me an opportune moment to bring the work of the prolific (and as yet, little-known) Dutch artist and composer, Sedje Hémon (1923-2011) into that discussion and introduce her method of

integrating music and visual art to a wider public. While Hémon's work was not explicitly about translation, it goes through the same movements: transforming from one medium to another, resulting in a deeper understanding of what she called the common origin of all arts. Writing this article, the first on Hémon's work published in English, was a meta-process in itself, as I negotiated the terrain of the Dutch language in order to read her notes.

One of the themes threading through this issue is the topic of transformation and its relation to translation. Is it possible to undergo the process of translation without, in one way or another, being transformed? Is translation integral to transformation? Again and again, in the collection of articles and artworks presented here, this tangled question of transformation persists. Artist Oscar Santillan, however, offers us a more tangible solution in his photograph, *The Enemy*, visualizing these questions through physical matter. All of the earth's light (in one hand) finds equivalence in the shape and weight of a small black stone (in the other hand).

As translators by profession know all too well, time dictates translation practices above all: old translations (as with any old technology) become obsolete and give rise to new translations as languages, social contexts, and conventions change. Professional translator and art historian Mary Wardle taps into this rich tradition within the visual arts in 'Homage, Emulation, and Reproduction', looking at the ways visual works of art are reinterpreted over generations, and across geographical and historical contexts. In her case study of the various 'versions' of Velasquez' *Las Meninas*, Wardle approaches translation in its expanded notion – as something that does not necessarily involve texts – and supports this notion by comparing what happens in visual art to that which regularly occurs in literature.

In an especially poetic addition to this issue, Fiona Hanley's essay 'Versions on the Volta' demonstrates and deepens the concept at the heart of the theme of translation as a method. This self-contained work is, in fact, two versions: an exploration of poetic and sculptural form, with Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'Archaïscher Torso Apollos' at its centre. Hanley's prose and poetry let the reader luxuriate in translation as a living, breathing, and changing practice.

Translation is an organism of uncontrollable growth; it does not only double or triple with new versions, but its expansion, through living languages, can potentially occupy pages upon pages; here as well, many articles are long. Throughout the issue, the need for more space announced itself – not only space to research this immense and tangled topic, but also space to breathe on the page. We have had the pleasure of working with artist Antoinette Nausikaä, who has given us some constructive space in her witty and playful line drawings. One of her eponymous drawings asks, "What's the Meaning of Space Here?" It is my hope you will not need to ask the same regarding the density of this publication.

With this in mind, we are excited to announce Kayla Anderson's article 'Holding Up the Sky' as an invitation to look towards a much bigger space when that urge to take a great, long, deep breath arises. Anderson's

attention upwards, towards the sky as a material available for translation in a broad sense, articulates sensitivity to the non-human materials and products around us that we must attend to. Focusing on the work of three contemporary practices (Karolina Sobecka, Pinar Yoldas, and the Center for Genomic Gastronomy), Anderson brings the urgency and relevance of translation as a method to the fore.

Finally, artist Emilio Fantin's 'colour essay', as I have tended to call it, strongly resonates with the themes that many of the authors have fleshed out here. With his question that departs from the colour red and arrives at tierra di siena: 'How Revolution can be Translated with Resilience', we come back to the movement of translation, its circularity, and its visual presence. Finding its place on the inside of the dust jacket, this essay literally wraps around its contents, turning a full revolution from beginning to end. Turning, as with Fiona Hanley's 'Versions on the Volta', or returning, as with Srajana Kaikini's 'Return of the Translator', are unmistakable directions on the changing terrain of translation.

I would like to thank all of the authors and artists who have contributed to this issue. Special thanks to Juliette Huygen and Tim Roerig, both of whom have been important to this issue. With this issue we say goodbye to Juliette and we welcome Tim back on the editorial board. Furthermore I would like to thank all other editors of *Kunstlicht*, and particularly those who have assisted with various forms of translation and transformation throughout this editorial process. As always, we rely on the knowledge of others.

On behalf of the editorial board,  
Marianna Maruyama