

## Time, Space, Matter in Translation

BEATTIE PAMELA; BERTACCO SIMONA; & SOLDAT-JAFFE TATJANA (eds). 2023. *Time, Space, Matter in Translation*. New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by SHANTHALEMBI LISHAM

The question of defining translation in the age of globalism and in the midst of a pervasive crisis of the humanities; unpacking the untold stories of cultures of translation which have remained silenced by a certain prescriptive and selective narrative is an important one. Spivak (1993, 2018) is indeed emphatical on the question of what is it to translate, the right to claim originality and translation as an intimate act of reading. Moreover, the historical trajectory of Translation Studies presents a continuum of the focus from conventional definitions of translations and Translation Studies to go beyond traditional theories; translation as an 'end product' to translation as a 'process' - generating a horizon of new questions around how one works with a process that is unpredictable, on the constrictiveness of theories in Translation Studies, but the disparities between languages remain backseat. Further, the exponential increase in the number of publications in the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century identifying themselves as Translation Studies in different genre widens the translational gaze. Simon (2023) underlines the entry of the non-professional translation like fansubbing, translanguaging, translational experiences of migrants, orature, visual urban landscape into the frame of translation on one hand and the adoption of translation as an ancillary perspective in disciplines like History, Philosophy, historical, Anthropology on the other. Floods (2009) nudges the study of translation towards materiality, places and not just texts, as stories are embedded within. Against this backdrop, this book attempts to broaden these unresolved questions by exploring the less visible sides of the translation experience, its notion and practice through the categories of space, time and matter to encounter the urgent problems of the contemporary times in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The editors of this volume –a medievalist, a linguist, and a comparative literature scholar coming together to curate a new perspective of thinking translationally, to venture beyond the unresolved issues on question of language and culture, on the nature and object of translation. This book tease out the configurations - whether exploring the relation of human to non-human, or the iconic melding of words and movement that make up the *via crucis*, or graffiti or neural machine translation or the life of miniatures as visual translations in medieval manuscripts (Simon, *ibid*). It has presented an iconoclastic attitude towards translation without rationalizing the absence of a linguistic perspective but rather embracing this deviation. It captures the essence of translation as a means through which one interrogates processes of knowledge transfer and creation, interpretation, reading, communication, and relationship building and attempting an interdisciplinary pact between Translation Studies and humanities. This book project has thus taken the step for an exciting and ambitious challenge providing the platform for new solidarities with the desire to capture the movement in what seems apparently stable, to adopt the in-between as a space rich with potential meaning – to think translationally. Translation beyond its 'linguistic only' category has used both historically and in present to challenge not only religious, cultural and disciplinary boundaries but also serve as powerful mechanism for persistence of ideas, practices and ideologies. This collective monograph links a series of case studies to explore translation as habitats/landscapes venturing out of its comfort zone and

providing a more capacious interdisciplinary understanding of what translation is, what it does, how and where. The authors although grounded in their respective disciplines initiate groundbreaking interdisciplinary conversations mentionably - interdisciplinary symbiosis between Translation Studies 'writ large' and the humanities can contribute meaningfully to the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarship. In a time when challenges concerning relevance, canons, and methods in different disciplines are thrown to contemporary practitioners, this book provides a new habitat to dwell emerging discourses in the global humanities to respond to the contemporary challenges and a way forward to recognize the possibility of the use Translation Studies to deepen interdisciplinary dialogue, enrich scholarly conversations, and create a new synergy that crosses traditional boundaries.

This book has presented case studies with contributors from different disciplines and expertise roping in the discourses on translation as a metaphor and as a theory; as a practice and as an experience; as a method and as a solution to alter, expand, and to intervene in the stories of translation. Each chapter engages critically acknowledging the culture of translation out of which it operates and within that culture. The collection besides showcasing a host of disciplinary tools and approaches also produces a new and shared trajectory of thinking within the tradition of the years of profound self questioning of the practical valance of the humanities in its academic settings and navigation. In this review, an attempt is made to highlight the arguments in each of the cases to address the questions on how to integrate, in practice, the breadth of new knowledge and a new shared mode of knowledge production, which is primarily the aim of this volume. The thought experiment carried out in this space of reflection established a dialogue between translation as a quintessentially anthropocentric activity and translation as a method to discuss the non-human and post-human aspects of planetary existence.

The first four chapters in this project, explores new approaches, new theories, and new objects of study for Translation Studies. In the first chapter titled "Translation, Ecology, and Deep time", Michael Cronin (2023) citing the eruption of the Eyafjallajökull volcano in Iceland in April 2010 that caused enormous disruption to air travel across Europe and North America discusses the material life of translation. These experiences perhaps serve as a prologue of the endurance during covid-19 global pandemic with long days of travel bans and closed borders. Cronin quoting Snaer Magnason (2021) '*When system collapses, language is released from its moorings*', elaborates through the notion of geotranslation, the possibility of translation to be used in disciplines such as Paleontology or Archaeology to describe the world around us that are neither human nor textual. In times of disaster, words which are meant to encapsulate reality hang empty and no longer holds applicable to articulate concepts that matches the reality. Anthropocene opens up new perspective for Translation Studies. Incorporating deep time into the horizon of reflection allows integrating history of human presence beyond the advent of written records; extension of geological timelines draws attention of scholars to process and instantiation of translation; conceives Marai's (2019) four-dimensional thinking and modeling stressing on the need for spatial conceptualization and temporal conceptualization of meaning in translation. Hyperobjects being bounded with a notion of deep time are translational; and its entanglement in deep time, Cronin (ibid) writes that it could be dealt through paleontological negotiations of geotranslation, through the terratranslation of a post-Holocene ontology of inclusion, or through the unfathomable futurity of nuclear translation. From this purview,

translation has the potential to be the practice for understanding the world and our experience in it differently by coming to terms with the material world.

In the chapter titled “The Experience of Translation”, Vicente Rafael (2023) going beyond languages and texts, canvasses the central aspects of the translative experiences - the call-and-response dynamic and its transformative power – through a multi-sphere analysis that unknots the inescapable ties of translation to issues of social, political and language justice. The exploration of colonial history to Creole poetry and from the predicament of Afghan interpreters to Trump’s authoritarian rhetoric, the autoimmune effects of translation on one side and social movement such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo – these aspects bring forth different translation practices. Thus Rafael interprets translation as ‘life itself as socially enacted as on-going networks of communication and pathways of power and knowledge’. In the next two chapters, Raley and Fraunhofer remind us about these networks of communication are both human and more-than-human. Rita Raley in her chapter ‘Translation Degree Zero’ explains translation as always technologically organized. Focusing on the neural machine translation (NMT), Raley (2023) describes Google ‘zero shot’ model for machine translation which performs translation between languages where translational processes are many-to-one rather than one-to-one, and multi-way rather than unidirectional has the potential to diffuse the linguistic authority of English and other dominant languages albeit in some uncertain, unspecified future. Hedwig Fraunhofer’s chapter titled “Translating Plants: A Starting Point” closes the first set of theoretical chapters by reflecting on posthumanist translation as intimately concerned with the co-production of human and non-human material relations and phenomena. Translating the language of plants involves a lived experience. Being an embodied language, plant translation requires an intra-action between not only plants and human discourses, but between different biological and more-than-biological member of a habitat with which all members are in a continuous conversation; an ecology produced by organisms in an interdependent and multispecies interrelation. Thus language, as Gagliano (2019) writes, is a truly ecological, dynamic process of relationship. This approach echoes the indigenous worldview. Fraunhofer (2023) thus underlines that the linear chronology of source text and translation is replaced by a continuous sympoietic circle. The first section is thus crucial for framing and understanding the relation between the human and the more-than-human especially in the beginning of the new millennium. The possibility is by adopting a trans-if not post-disciplinary approach, an approach that, as Fraunhofer stated ‘enmesh[es] science with an awareness of the politics and ethics of connecting with difference’. It may be mentioned that ‘Enmeshed’ is one of Maria Lugones’ lexicon to explain how our world of sense are enmeshed in multiplicities – enmeshing of race, gender, culture, class and other differences in doing decolonial feminism (Lugones 1994).

The second set of chapters shifts its reflection from the theoretical to practical and centres on the materiality of translation, on real translators and extracts its theories from the reading of case studies. The chapters by Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya, Reid Gómez, Garry Sparks, and Zainab Cheema in their analysis point out the concrete benefits of a porous and inclusive interpretation of translation. Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya and Tatjana Soldat-Jaffe’s focus on real translators and their subjective experiences in translating, and further the aspect of the translation process. In Soldat-Jaffe’s (2023) chapter titled “Translation, Language Meaning, and Intentionality”, it brings out the theoretical musings on language, meaning, and intentionality by paying attention on the ‘unpredictability of the translator,’ - an element which has been relegated to the margins of

language-centric approaches to translation. Here she recalibrates the essential terms of discussion by substantiating an essential necessary dialogue with the linguistic approach to translation. She thus pursues the challenge of tackling translation in the age of globalism. Recognising the aspect of the expansion of object of translation beyond text, she underpins the idea that the concept of translation to be replaced by the concept of a translation process, thereby providing a better understanding of the nature of translation by setting out seven postulates. She sets seven postulates to understand the nature of translation underlining the points of the instability of language as a signifying system, the unavoidable subjectivity of the translation process as well as the beyond-language existence of translation from where translation theory must start in current times.

Following Raymond W. Gibbs' 'paradox of metaphor,' in which metaphor is creative, novel, culturally sensitive while drawing on enduring schemes of metaphorical thoughts but not necessarily creating anew; Wakamiya (2023) argues that paradox of the non-idiomatic, somatic metaphors used by translators illustrates retranslation itself, which is an exercise of the creation of original use of language and new ways of interpretation out of the already existing forms. Citing the use of novel somatic metaphors by the translators Edith Grossman and Lydia Davis in conversations about retranslation, Wakamiya in the chapter titled "Somatic Metaphors and Retranslation" contextualizes the uses somatic metaphors to explicate the specific conditions of a particular retranslation project, its intentions and interpretations, innovations and conservatism. Perhaps translators develop one's own set of somatic metaphor to curate the ideas and practices and develop them adhering to the specific retranslation project. Placing the cases of the translator's use of metaphor, the present chapter attempts to bring home the use of somatic metaphors lend insights in the translation process and their approach in particular projects. Deviating from Lawrence Venuti, Wakamiya posits how the work of Grossman and Davis are embedded in biography and the body, method and motive, while illustrating the uncomfortable relationship between practice and criticism.

Evoking the cultural tradition of Laguna Pueblo, Reid Gómez (2023) reflects on the story making process complementing Rafael's analysis of language rights in differential settings of power and Soldat-Jaffe's conceptualization of language beyond Saussurian system as an unstable and changeable system of signification. Questioning the prescription of clarity and logic situated in the grammar of colonialism, Gómez articulates that language revitalization goes hand in hand with the problematization of common grammar. Gómez contradicts the general parlance of translation as less original and not pristine, by canvassing the tradition of Laguna Pueblo story process that requires extreme precision in word choice, which in turn adds to the English language an understanding of words themselves as 'story structures'. One must recognize the practice of storytelling or sharing stories by indigenous peoples is perhaps the only discourse (linguistic) to be able to absorb a Native American perspective on language, story, structure and beyond. Gómez and Garry Sparks in their chapters problematised the implied ideology of linguistic categories and offers crucial interventions that show not only what is missing but also what is conceptually problematic within the restrictive and prescriptive culture of translation. Sparks (2023), in the chapter titled "Shifts in Semantic Souls, Transmigration of Meanings: From a Mendicant toward a Maya Theory of Translation", examines the notion of commensurability in the context of the translation of theological concepts. The Christian missionaries in America both the Dominicans and Franciscans strategically appropriated native

words they understood to be analogous enough to Christian construals; however the Mesoamericans have their own ways of thinking analogically by means of diphrastric kenning. Sparks discusses the doctrine of the soul as an insightful 'translation zone' and documents how first original Christian theology written in the Americas re-semanticized by not only engaged Maya religious terms but also appropriated Indigenous rhetorical strategies of diphrastric kenning presenting a lexical couplets to convey important theological concepts. Sparks by tracing the shared key terms through the contemporaneous literatures, underlines his reflection on language shifts and meaning to reveal a distinctive understanding of the translation process and articulates a Maya theory of translation.

Zainab Cheema (2023) in her chapter discusses Fletcher and Massinger's translation practices in "The Custom of the Country" through the lens of domestication and foreignization. She maintains the focus on the unexpected resistance embedded in concrete experiences of translation by examining at translation in early Jacobean theatre as a site of imaginary and liberating border crossing at a time of political and cultural conservatism. Burke (2007) noted that Fletcher and Massinger's translation practice can be situated within the creative license taken by Renaissance translators. Historically, immigrants during the early seventeenth century in England were grappling with the uncertainties of exile and migration which is true in contemporary times as well, and at the same time the English translation of Spanish works shaped a cosmopolitan poetics of imagination that traversed sectarian and religious divisions between Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam. She examines Fletcher and Massinger's practices of domestication in such social milieu citing how the heroine of 'The Custom of The Country' borrows her name. She describes how through translation practices that play with the religious, racial and cultural ambivalence of the immigrant's body, Fletcher and Massinger bring forth and problematize the emergent spatial concept of 'country.' By closely examining the material translation / adaptation of Cervantes' romance 'Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda' which constitutes the palimpsest of John Fletcher and Philip Messinger's play 'The Custom of the Country', she documents the bold translation choices made by the two playwrights that convey an idea of translation as magic, as a practice that 'claim[s] power, authority, and appropriation of meaning in the face of circumstances such as expulsion, captivity, and conquest/reconquest'. Perhaps, Cheema's reflection on migrants during James I in England opens up fresh trajectories of thinking for translation and comparative literature of the present.

The central idea of the concluding chapters of this book is the power of translation to make things visible through attempts to use translation to break the existing mold and invent new modes of consciousness. Simona Bertacco in her chapter titled 'Translatio and Migration' brings the focus on migration to see translation as *translatio* – a pervasive phenomenon where one participates, as a primary mode of making sense of culture, as a fact and an act, as semantic presence and not as void and that it is too complex a phenomenon to be reduced to only one aspects. Discussing on the historical model of the medieval concept of *translatio*, and looking at *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii* as a theory used to describe the movement not only of the forms of knowledge and the centers of intellectual life but also of imperial power from the East to the West during the Carolingian period. Bertacco (2023) elaborates a different way of understanding translation and its dimensions at once in which the whole idea of translation is paid to the geographical, material, and political migrancy of knowledge, people, texts and objects; while underling the importance of linguistic aspects. She discusses the case of the art

installation *Via Crucis* by the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir to position her interpretation that translation process as a contemporary re-enactment of the movement of relics (*translatio*) and as a means of intervention in the current political debate about migration, and stories left behind for Translation Studies. She thus argues the need of a discipline to boldly embrace its potential for political and cultural innovation and to re-imagine itself as a truly multidisciplinary endeavour. Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien in her chapter 'An Alphabet Inventor' pulls the act of translation and interpretation out of the surface of the linguistic plane by showing that new contexts and manipulations can stimulate symbolic evolution through the work of French artist, Jacques Villeglé, active during world war II. Jacques Villeglé was critical of the problems of divisiveness embedded in multiple scripts, lurking within ideologies and localized histories that could not be properly translated without bias; protested the divisive geopolitical situation through the concept of 'ripping and tearing' as a method of reconstructing the linguistic landscape. His engagement in building an entirely new alphabet composed of symbols and icon poached from advertising and ideology rather than the existing language scripts in Europe is significant as such sociopolitical alphabet, Ch'ien (2023) explains, not only reanimates past symbolic history but also reminds humanity of values and ideas in everyday life, bearing the potential to allow individual agency navigate and re-think commonly held truths and convention, one such concern is what spaces translation can inhabit. Such alphabets speaks of peace, coexistence, integration, religion in the plural, tolerance, resistance, liberation, victory, money, but also shock, struggle, alienation, censorship, and past events of genocide. Ch'ien like Bertacco in the previous chapter shows what insights can be drawn in examining the current phenomenon through the lens of a historical experience or practice. The volume ends closes with the chapter by Pamela Beattie in which she engages two contemporary approaches to translation of *The Breviculus* by Thomas Le Myésier- firstly, Sherry Simon's notion of 'translation sites' (Simon 2019) and secondly Kobus Marais' '(bio)semiotic theory of translation' (Marais 2019). Beattie (2023) shows how translation can generate a different way of engaging with the material object of the past. Le Myésier's the *Breviculus* is a manuscript that guide the thought of Majorcan philosopher, reformer, and missionary Ramon Llull (1232–1316). It was meant to be dedicated to the French queen and the work is hoped to cross the boundaries between 'the experts' of the universities and educated laypersons. This manuscript as a site of translation allows to draw attention on the audience for the images and the texts it contains. Beattie explains that such condensed explanation of his thought function as an exemplar, a mnemonic device, and a call to action; such combination of word and image changes the experience of 'reading' in a way that is understandable to the intended audience. She shows how Le Myésier invested in a beautiful book that serves as a bridge between different communities of learning at the beginning of the fourteenth century; but also the possibilities of interpretation for grounded communities of learners, readers, and viewers, that are summoned by the inter-semiotic dialogue within the text.

This collective monograph is a reflection on a lifetime of reading, studying, talking and listening via translation within and across disciplines. Indeed this volume is a step to change the humanities from within, from individualistic forms of scholarship to models of scholarly collaboration, inclusiveness, and shared goals that that we already live, think, and work translationally and together. The editors have welcomed an iconoclastic outlook towards translation and not rationalizing the absence of a linguistic perspective but embracing this deviation. The discussion in the case studies presents translation as a means through which one interrogates the processes of knowledge transfer and creation, interpretation, reading,

communication, and relationship building; perhaps aims at an interdisciplinary pact between Translation Studies and humanities. It provides strong grounds to incorporate beyond the conventional approaches in theory and doing of translation. Although this volume draws the attention of global readers with case studies based on certain geographical locations, it provokes similar line of thinking and looking in the Translation Studies approaches as practice in the Indian subcontinent to be specific and the global south in general. The rich oral traditions, the different versions of the *Ramayana*, the less explored archeological sites, the history of distorted knowledge production and its efforts to decolonize, the Indian experience in theorizing where one further finds a gamut of diversity are some mentionable sites which invites exploration and inherits potential for change in our ways of knowing which entails political, social and cultural implications and prospects for interdisciplinary approach in Translation Studies; this space as source for new solidarities, new meaning making to think translationally.

## References

- BEATTIE, P. 2023. Thomas Le Myésier's Breviculum as a 'Translation Site'. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- BERTACCO, S. 2023. Translatio and Migration. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- CHEEMA, Z. 2023. Foreignizing the Nation: Fletcher and Massinger's Translation of Cervantes' Immigrants in The Custom of the Country. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- CH'ÏEN, E, N. 2023. An Alphabet Inventor. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- CRONIN, M. 2023. Translation, Ecology, and Deep Time. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- FLOOD, F, B. 2009. *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- FRAUNHOFER, H. 2023. Translating Plants: A Starting Point. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- GAGLIANO, M. 2019. Breaking the Silence: Green Mudras and the Faculty of Language in Plants. In Gagliano, M., Ryan, J, C. and Vieira, P. (eds.), *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- GÓMEZ, R. 2023. The Story Process: Writing Translation. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- LUGONES, M. 1994. Purity, Impurity, and Separation. *Signs*, 19(2). 458-479.
- MARAIS, K. 2019. *A (Bio)Semiotic Theory of Translation*. London: Routledge.
- RAFAEL, V, L. (2023). The Experience of Translation. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- RALEY, R. 2023. Translation Degree Zero. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.
- SIMON, S. 2019. *Translation Sites: A Field Guide*. London & New York: Routledge.
- SIMON, S. 2023. Foreword: Thinking Translationally. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.

SNAER MAGNASON, A. 2021. *On Time and Water*. Translated by L. Smith, London: Serpents Tail.

SOLDAT-JAFFE, T. 2023. Translation, Language Meaning, and Intentionality. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.

SPARKS, G. 2023. Shifts in Semantic Souls, Transmigration of Meanings: From a Mendicant Toward a Maya Theory of Translation. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.

SPIVAK, G. 1993. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge.

SPIVAK, G. 2018, February 21. Prof Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on 'What is it to Translate?' [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ8TDXET5Qw&t=22s>.

WAKAMIYA, L, R. 2023. Somatic Metaphors and Retranslation. In Beattie, P., Bertacco, S., Soldat-Jaffe, T. (eds.), *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (pp. xii- xv). DOI: 10.4324/9781003259732.

#### About the author:

**Shanthalembi Lisham** is an Assistant Professor at Assam Don Bosco University. She is presently pursuing her doctoral in the Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai. She is currently working on the political struggle of women in Manipur. Her areas of interest are on Research Methodology, Gender and Politics, Indigenous Perspectives and Translation. She is also a student of poetry. Email: slisham[AT]gmail[DOT]com