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Introduction to Visibility and Translation

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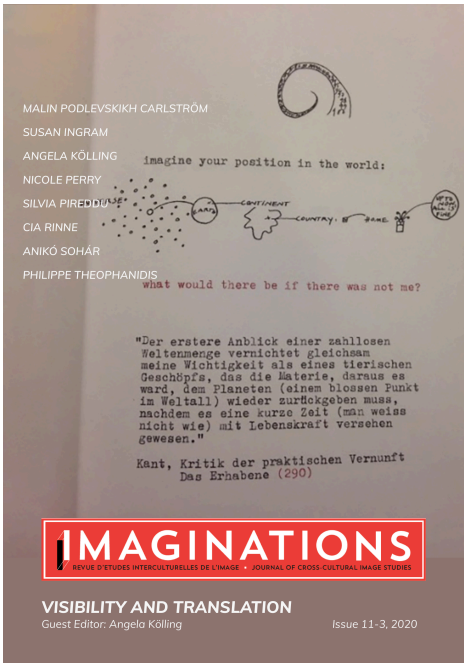

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Visibility and Translation

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Cia Rinne, *Das Erhabene* (2011)

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INTRODUCTION TO VISIBILITY AND TRANSLATION

ANGELA KÖLLING

A note on now:

This issue was anticipated to be published before Covid-19 and its transformation of this planet. I write this on the first anniversary of the first recorded case of Covid-19 and I do not know that I have something important to add to the witnessing of the pandemonium. Only, in relation to the making of this issue, I would like to say that I feel very grateful. Nothing about now is normal. Covid-19 has made visible the fragility of "normal"—and continues to do so. It has also made visible how reliant we are on "normal" to function as individuals, families and society. Seeing this issue come out now, I feel privileged that I was allowed to work on and witness the making of something so seemingly normal. (A.K.)

> *"This anxiety, this need to defend 'our speech' against 'the visual' is, I want to suggest, a sure sign that a pictorial turn is taking place." (W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory 12-13)*

Inquiries into the relationship between visibility and translation are generally concerned with the social and symbolic capital of translation and translators, the processes we see (mistranslations, negative reviews, awards, etc.) and the ones we do not see (foreign language expressions, positive reviews, the translator's name on the cover of a publication, etc.). Laying the ground for this line of inquiry, Lawrence Venuti's *The Invisibility of the Translator* (1995) has

become a modern classic. Yet, more than twenty years later and, in spite of a growing diversity of encounters with visual representation, including the fact that there are generally more pictures in translation studies today, the scholarly focus remains largely in the domain of the verbal.

Neighbouring disciplines, such as linguistics, literary studies, metaphor studies, and so on, have widened their ontological and practical scope. Yet, translation seems to remain almost hostile towards a "pictorial turn," including Venuti, who describes a conversation he overheard at the booth of an Italian publisher exhibiting their books at the Frankfurt Book Fair as "startling and not a little worrying" (158):

> a British representative was handed a new publication and, smiling, said, "The cover looks smart." The Italian rights manager asked, "Do you mean 'clever'?" Her prospective client paused, a quizzical look on his face, before responding, "Sure," as if to quash any doubt that they were on the same … page? I myself wasn't sure they were speaking the same language, even though it was English. "Smart" can mean "clever" and more, of course, but in this context the British speaker was probably referring to appearance, not intelligence. What would happen, I wondered, when these two started discussing the book's actual content? Could it be the same book in their words? In their minds? Given the substantial amounts of money that normally change hands in Frankfurt, you might expect a greater sense of mutual understanding to accompany any financial dealings. The conversation hardly inspired confidence about the current state of literary translation. (158)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that "visibility" has become a core metaphor in translation studies for gauging the social and economic standing of translators (my own work included, see Kölling, "NZ@Frankfurt"), rather than addressing visibility through explorations of visuality (which I have since tried to improve on, see Kölling, "In and Out of Sight"). Writing of the influence Venuti exerts over translation studies, Dirk Delabastita notes, "It is impossible to

miss the poignant irony in the fact that a writer who portrays himself as a champion of dissidence and a critic of established canons should have himself become part of the theoretical establishment of his discipline drawing his own academic visibility from the translator's invisibility" (125). But isn't that the question each translation scholar needs to ask themselves—to what extent does the practicing translator become the (muted) background of someone else's or even their own scholarship?

Rather than getting hung up on "poignant ironies," however, this special issue wants to pick up the visibility or visual gauntlet and answer to the task of inquiring and revealing whether and how a successful pitch for a translation might depend on visual modes of representation: what exactly is the value of visibility to translation and how do we know? Or, to rephrase Venuti's question, what would happen if translators started talking about visibility in terms of appearances, visual acts, seeing, cognitive science?

As Michael Cronin notes, the modern humanities are marked by a longstanding critical engagement with images based on "a notion of authenticity running from Rousseau to the Romantics to Sartrean existentialism which views appearances as deceptive and as irrelevant to any proper or authentic sense of self" (25). The fact that today, due to major developments in information and communication technology, it is possible to communicate more and more information through images does not make authenticity a less important issue, but it needs to be addressed in a contemporaneous manner. Questions such as *how do images actually communicate information* and *how do people actually use these images* need to be asked vis-à-vis these technological changes, which rarely operate in one mode only. Often, images are blended with other modes, such as text (captions, copyright information), motion (images are exchanged or animated), sound, touch (swiping, dragging on the screen), and so on. Especially, since psychoneurological research has begun to reveal that "i-technology" is changing our brains (Swingle) and our understanding of what is (a) human (Metzinger, "Unterwegs zu" and "Zehn Jahre Neuroethik"), the binary distinguishing "virtual reality" from "authenticity" needs to be re-evaluated.

Generations of "digital natives" no longer have to be taught that search engines and social media algorithms place a higher value on images. They know by doing (or being done to). And visibility has been identified as the main mode in which current economies, so-called "economies of attention," operate (Goldhaber, "Some Attention Apothegms" and "The Attention Economy"; Beck and Davenport; Citton; Cronin). Yves Citton writes that this trend marks an ontological shift towards visibility in general and digital visibility specifically; such regimes of visibility measure "*le degré d'existence d'un être à la quantité et la qualité des perceptions dont il fait l'objet de la part d'autrui* [the extent to which someone exists on the basis of the quantity and quality of other's perceptions of them]". (Citton 75; translation as qtd. in Cronin 25). If Snowden hadn't already, Facebook's Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed just how important such multi-disciplinary investigations into the link between visibility and translation are. The German documentary *Democracy–Im Rausch der Daten*, which translates as *Democracy–The Big Data Rush*, follows the development process of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation that was implemented on 15 April 2018. The film exposes how the European Union's legislative procedure is shaped both in acts of image and language.

In this respect, the contributions to this special issue share at least one concern: the extent to which visibility and translation can be a means of establishing and communicating group identity, opinions, solidarity, and aesthetic and social boundaries, and, in turn, how these inflect the intellectual and economic practices of translation. This concern might be traced back to anthropological approaches to the study of "image acts," understood as embodied, humanmade images including gestures (Bakewell 28). The scholars in this special issue also draw out and analyse the physical, intellectual, and emotional affordances and responses of these image acts and, more importantly, introduce fresh reflections about the referential, emotive, conative, metalingual, phatic, and poetic responses these might evoke in translation proper and the scientific discipline.

The variety of topics and disciplines represented in this special issue are indicative of the sheer potential of a proper "pictorial turn" in

translation studies. Art catalogues and online presentations, fashion collections and their curators, Finnish literature represented at the Frankfurt Book Fair, North American indigenous peoples art, international shifts in book cover designs, and human imagination itself are the lenses through which the contributions throw new light on translation. Whether they all hold to the same definition of translation is a moot point.

In the first contribution, "Image as Translation: The Ideological Implication of the Camera Obscura for Media Studies," Philippe Theophanidis considers images in terms of relations (as opposed to objects) which negotiate difference and which, in this way, are part of a cognitive field shared with translation. In guiding us through a historical analysis of how image making and translation are intellectually intertwined—focusing on the influence of the camera obscura on intellectuals from the sixteenth century to the present—Theophanidis breaks with the routine ontological dichotomies between original and copy, in which otherness becomes visible in translation.

Nicole Perry and Susan Ingram drive the investigation into the connection between visibility as the translation of the imagination further, presenting case studies of how visual communication is used to translate and transform the perceived identity of peoples and places. Perry discusses the provocative body of work of Cree/Irish/Canadian artist Kent Monkman, reclaiming the "Indian" Image. Ingram focuses on how garments featured in film, theatre, and museum exhibitions can be used to trace and reveal to its viewer Vancouver's transformation after WWII from a war-based economy into a burgeoning consumer society. Reading them side-by-side reveals fascinating parallels regarding the role of "the feminine" as a counterpoint to male-dominant narratives of the founding of Canada (brought forth in Monkman's art) and of society defined by war (seen through the experience of women who went from coping with austerity to flaunting prosperity). Both contributions also raise further awareness to the importance of the Internet as "attentionscape" (Beck and Davenport 49), but also its function as archive to the artist, curator, public, and/or researcher.

Perry and Ingram thus prepare us for the second part of the special issue, which is driven more directly by the question of how visibility can be linked to the economic practices of translation and vice versa. Responding directly to the issue of a "mutual understanding" among translation, representation, and rights management raised by Venuti in his reflections on the Frankfurt Book Fair, this part of the issue draws out processes specifically geared towards increasing visibility in the translation of specific cultural products into foreign context. The first two contributions focus on specific image acts connected to book covers, and the third focuses on visibility as a power-currency in the cultural market space of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Anikó Sohár and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström investigate the role book-cover designs played in the international success of Terry Pratchett's Discworld Series and Victor Pelevin's *Generation "П"*. Both take Marco Sonzogni's ground-breaking work *The Re-Covered Rose* (2011) as their starting point from which they develop their own material and theoretical reflections. Delivering detailed readings of book covers, both authors reveal that an intersemiotic approach alone does not afford enough analytical currency. Sohár addresses this by drawing on polysystems theory to explain the dynamic between globalisation and localisation of covers, while Podlevskikh Carlström applies Tymoczko's thematic and metonymical approach to uncover deeper connections between narrative and cover. Their blended theory approach allows them to reveal how the processes leading to the final image product are as complex and contestable as any other translational act—and points towards many more *invisibilities* of book cover translations that need exploring in order to fully unfold visibility in terms of its role as power-currency in the cultural market space.

Helmi-Nelli Körkkö also knows that visibility is no superficial matter but belongs to the nexus of power-cum-visibility currency of international market streams. The Frankfurt Book Fair as broker of foreign market visibility is the focus of her contribution, which reviews Finland's presentation as Guest of Honour in Frankfurt in 2012. Following Finland from the planning to exhibition stages, Körkkö describes a series of phases, such as goal-setting, self-discovery, and ex-

ecution, in Finland's project and evaluates their reception and consequences for the Finnish literary book market and scene. Borders becomes a central theme in Körkkö's analysis, revealing the permeability at play in the imagining of "nation," "literature," and "market."

The reader might worry at this point that for the sake of thinking about translation visually we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. If the texts in this collection have given the impression so far that translation proper and translation visibility are two separate domains, the last two contributions to this special issue ought to reveal that this is indeed not our intention.

Silvia Pireddu delivers an insightful analysis of the practical issues of art catalogue translations, including terminology, connotative vocabulary, word-for-word translation, text-image arrangement, and so on. In her discussion of these practical problems, she reveals how aesthetic guidelines for translation and catalogue design are changing under the influence of technological advances as well as the influence of a customer-centred approach.

Angela Kölling—in lieu of a conventional interview-presentation of the guest artist—offers a multimodal dialogue with the art of Cia Rinne. It aspires to give the reader an example of how one might, through conversation with other sectors of the language industry, refresh translation studies a little by bringing it into contact with Rinne's take on "Konkrete Poesie" or concrete poetry. Pireddu's discussion of art catalogue translation and Kölling's engagement with Rinne's word art both have in common that they approach the problem of the perceived "rift between the discursive and the 'visible,' the seeable and the sayable" (Mitchell 12) by guiding our view to the context that "creates the creators" (Danto 216).

In this connection, we would encourage the reader to re-read this special issue at least twice: once forward, then backward and use the tools of creativity discussed here—sequencing, directing, reducing, formatting, trans-media interfacing, and wordsmithing—to re-collect the ideas and propositions presented here in a way that honours the dynamic between reading and creating, seeing and translating.

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