

## **Brief Introductory Notes on Translation and Transcendence**

*Modern Horizons Editors*

In our fifth issue contributors explore and expand on the theme of “Translation and Transcendence”, a theme that was addressed at our conference held in October 2013 in Toronto.

Since translation is prevalent in many, if not all, aspects of life – whether one works between languages or across cultural divides – this theme is central to Modern Horizons’ projects; we want to think about translation and transcendence in their various modes and form multiple perspectives. While recognizing that translation is often thought of as communication between languages, it should not be confined to this one definition. Transcendence should not be confined to narrow definitions either, such as ineffability, superiority, or an inviolate absolute. Rather, by bringing together a variety of approaches and subjects, we hope to expand on these concepts with the aim of addressing issues of identity, tradition, relationships, responsibility, and forms of culture.

If translation is literally a carrying across of meaning, transcendence is what makes this possible as it allows translation to be distinguished from mere imitation, formal repetition, or reproduction in other media. Construed this way, translation involves continuity and change, difference and sameness, because transcendence allows for the rejuvenation of ideas and experiences across change of context. Difference and sameness — continuity and change — are essentially related: we can only recognize either one through the presence of its counterpart. There is therefore a certain groundedness at stake, but one that remains open to new ways of thinking and being.

Here we may think of the relation or the shared affinities between translation and mimesis. Because we wish to think translation along with transcendence, that is translation as an essential opposite to reproduction, copy, or imitation – the question of mimesis needs to be addressed. This question provides an interesting angle from which one can think about translation and transcendence. If Aristotle “rescued” mimesis from the tyranny of the polis and realised its essential function in human becoming and identity, so too we may consider translation as a way of being and acting in everyday life; a way of thoughtful engagement with the world we live in that does away with destructive anxieties surrounding issues of authenticity, originality, and uniqueness or purity.

Translation has an important topological or spatial element. It carries over from one *topos* to another, but it is also embedded in its own *topos*, without being ultimately defined by it. It transcends its own space without exhausting it; points beyond without ignoring presence in the here and now. We can also think about the way in which translation creates new *topoi* for experiences and thinking – deviations from certain limiting or oppressive spaces we encounter in our lives. Further, there is an important temporal dimension to translation, for it points to the importance of now, but is also a negation of the predominance of the present. Contextually present, translation denies narrow-minded and fundamentalist overemphasis of one’s own

time (and place), for it necessarily conjugates past with present, and in doing so prepares for not only a translated future, but an active translating of the present.

In the etymology of translation we discover that the term can signify the transition or the removal from earth to heaven. This, of course, among other “forms” of translation, brings up the question of what remains untranslatable. What and where are the limits of translation? Is every text, every work or art, every object, every Other translatable? What gets left behind (historically speaking) when translation transcends?

While these ought to remain open questions, we may deepen our consideration of them by thinking about significant aspects of translation. Two such aspects we want to bring into critical dialogue are appropriation and completion. Translation as *appropriation* occurs when the Other is drawn into and becomes a part of our own ethos (our being, sensibility, or ethical disposition) and yet does not lose its own proper essence, its essential difference. In this sense appropriation is a form of relation, not dissolution. Translation as appropriation is the bringing into one’s own of something that is strange (without annulling strangeness), the bringing close of something distant (without doing away with distance), and the bringing into one’s horizon of meaning something that is foreign (without force). Appropriation also brings to mind what is “proper”, and we note that in the etymology of the term “translation” we find that in juridical terminology, translation refers to the exchange of goods; it is a contract and therefore carries with it a certain duty or responsibility.

Translation as *completion* occurs when we recognize that the Other (text or person) must be read or heard in order for its meaning to be complete. This is not to say that meaning is finalized, but rather that nothing stands in a vacuum, and encounter and affirmation are essential to meaning. Translation and transcendence can then be seen as fulfilling the other without exhausting it; trans-forming the other while being trans-formed ourselves in the double act of transcendent immanence, or perhaps even a translating (grounding) transcendence.

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### **Quelques remarques sur la traduction et la transcendance**

*Rédacteurs, Modern Horizons*

Dans le cadre du 5<sup>e</sup> numéro de la revue *Modern Horizons* nous avons sollicité des articles en sur le thème de « La traduction et la transcendance ».

La traduction affirme sa présence au quotidien, notamment lorsqu’on travaille l’entre deux des langues, ou à travers les divisions culturelles. Tout en reconnaissant le fait que la traduction est souvent pensée comme un dispositif de communication entre deux langues, nous voudrions développer la notion de traduction afin de la mettre en relation avec l’identité, la tradition, les relations, la responsabilité, ainsi que les formes culturelles. Si la traduction a lieu à chaque nouvelle rencontre ou à chaque expérience inattendue, elle est fondamentale à toutes les expressions humaines.

Penser la traduction avec la transcendance est une mise en relation qui permet de révéler la nature et les enjeux de ces deux concepts. Parce que, littéralement, la traduction signifie le transport de la signification, la transcendance est ce qui rend cet acte possible puisqu'elle permet de distinguer la traduction de l'imitation, de la répétition formelle, et de la simple reproduction médiatique. Considérée de cette façon la traduction implique la continuité et le changement, la différence et l'uniformité, car la transcendance permet l'animation des idées et des expériences dans des contextes changeants tout en permettant la coprésence de ces oppositions, se positionnant contre la binarité que la traduction pourrait pourtant engendrer à première réflexion. Ces oppositions sont pourtant essentiellement liées : on peut seulement en reconnaître une à travers l'autre. C'est ainsi que la traduction fait signe à l'importance de la présence, mais elle est aussi une négation de son règne. Contextuellement présente, la traduction refuse pourtant d'admettre l'excès fondamentaliste de la présence, car elle conjugue le passé avec le présent, préparant ainsi non seulement un avenir traduit mais aussi une traduction active et actuelle.

On peut également penser la traduction en tant qu'appropriation et achèvement. La traduction *comme* appropriation a lieu quand l'Autre est accueilli dans notre propre ethos (notre être, notre sensibilité, ou notre inclination éthique), qu'il en devient une partie mais qu'il ne perd pas sa propre essence, sa différence essentielle. Comprise dans ces termes, l'appropriation est une forme de relation et non pas de dissolution. La traduction en tant qu'appropriation est la reconstitution dans l'espace du soi de ce qui est étrange ; elle est le rapprochement de ce qui est lointain, et le rassemblement dans son horizon de ce qui est inconnu. La traduction *comme* achèvement a lieu quand on reconnaît que l'Autre (en tant que texte ou personne) doit être lu ou entendu pour que sa signification soit complète. Cela n'insinue pas que la signification est finalisée, mais davantage que rien n'existe dans le vide, et que la rencontre et l'affirmation sont essentielles à la manifestation du sens.