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TRANSLATING [CREATIVE] PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION: LOST IN TRANSLATION

Writing this editorial was not an easy process. Across many engaging conversations, and many exhaustive writing hours, we contemplated how we might translate our motivations, process, and the works of others in response to our call. Many moments of alignment were countered with many others of doubt – ‘wait, what are we actually trying to say?’ The words spiralled; the essence of our aim always seemed just out of reach.

So, we cast ourselves back to the beginning, to the root from where we had first invited speakers from the (then) School of Architecture’s Creative Enquiry series of talks to contribute to a special issue of *Field*.¹ As we looked at the list of speakers from across the previous three years, it struck us that we had a remarkable list of practitioners engaged in spatial practice in its widest possible conception, from both within and outside the discipline of architecture: photographers, installation artists, illustrators, poets. We realised that, despite this breadth and their distinctions, all were in some way facing the same ‘wicked problem’: translation.²

In this special issue, we have sought to understand how we might conceive of the translation of creative practices and modes of enquiry. While the cliché goes that things often get ‘lost in translation’ (and thus the emphasis lies in translation’s negative connotations), we’re guided by the idea that to translate also activates the possibility of enrichening; that sowing within the soils of other fields can allow the smallest of seeds to be even more fruitful.

Our editorial opens with an exposition on what we (may) mean by translation, or at least to which we agree as far as is possible in translating the theories of others and weaving them amongst our own, drawing from literature across disciplines (architectural theory, design, feminist technoscience and philosophy). We go on to explain how this has informed our editorial approach, before providing summaries of each of the papers contained herein.

LOOSENING TRANSLATION

Within linguistics, a simplistic description of translation would be: a process of finding equivalences, or of transporting a concept from one system of signification to another as closely as possible. The complexity of human languages, however, means that neat correspondences are rare and that excavations are more often required. Within etymological records we may discover common roots; yet, these roots can simultaneously render aligning and departing genealogies, offering sometimes shared and sometimes conflicting cultural histories. Translation can, thus, imply an initial defamiliarisation, followed by a need to ‘inhabit’ the language of the other to find common ground.³

In this search for shared understanding, it is inevitable that some things are lost and some things are gained, for better or worse. This can raise many ethical questions as to who is determining or overseeing what is liable to loss, or gain, and why, as well as the ways another’s interests can become enrolled and spoken ‘on behalf of’.⁴ Negotiating difference thereby engenders a need for taking responsibility – or, perhaps, a response-ability. In acknowledging the agency of translation, we wonder if sincere, deferential dialogue can allow translators (in our case, specifically as creative practitioners) to engage attentively with the contexts of their translation, from one field of operation to another. In order for translation to work – in other words, for the translated work to be understood and found to be meaningful in its new context – there is a need to account for the positioning of both the translator and the audience. This situatedness allows others to share in, get up close to, trust; it accepts and adjusts to the losses, slippages, and misunderstandings that will inevitably occur with forgiveness; it understands that these are at once the risks and value of the (translational) activity.⁵

Translation is a constructive process; it is not only concerned with converting meaning from one form to another, but with enriching knowledge in active, creative and transformative activity. As the papers of this special issue reveal, translation can involve: advocating, where the translator upholds the integrity of the original work while serving the needs of the receiving community (Preston, pp. 1-16); commoning, where shared understanding is created, bringing the work into a wider conversation (Rondel, Healy et al., pp. 17-50); caretaking, where the translator is a custodian of the original work, responsible for preserving its spirit and intent whilst carefully transforming it to ensure its continued relevance (Wilson, pp. 51-80); seaming, where the translated text acts as a seam joining two different worlds, mending the divide between them (Jungnickel and Badenoch, pp.

1 The Creative Enquiry Forum started in 2022 by Luis as a series of talks asking ‘what do we mean when we speak of practice and, by extension, how do architects, and other practitioners, know the world?’. As the series evolved from a tentative, experimental event to being absorbed into the curriculum of our programmes, other colleagues in the school got involved and shaped the meaning of Creative Enquiry (and the adventures of translating it).

2 See: Richard Buchanan, ‘Wicked Problems in Design Thinking’, *Design Issues*, 8.2 (1992), pp. 5-21; 1992 The MIT Press.

3 We are influenced by Valeria Luiselli’s proposition of translation as a generative practice. Following modernist theories of translation, Luiselli proposes to depart from literal (traditional) understandings of ‘accurate rendering of a source language into a target language or a vehicle for explaining the foreign or making it more accessible or palatable’ and instead, as a practice of ‘appropriating new forms and a creative locus of innovation’. See: Valeria Luiselli, ‘Translation Spaces: Mexico City in the International Modernist Circuit’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 2015).

4 Michel Callon, ‘Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay’, *The Sociological Review*, 32 (1986), pp. 196-233.

81-112); embodying, where intangible and incomplete qualities are made tangible within a new body of work (Mark, pp. 113-122); and thickening, where layers of context are crowded together around an original piece, expanding it and making it more deeply resonant for a new audience (Mitsoula and Makarouni, pp. 123-144).

We are interested in what is both lost and gained through processes of translation, yet we hope to emphasise a positive framing of transformation and creative potentiality – that acts of translation are often relational, collaborative and oriented towards making things better, more connected, more whole and more cared for, creating value, fostering connection and building a more sustainable and meaningful world. We thus see translation as a process of looking-after while making-accessible-to-others, and as a combined act of maintenance and ‘care for the possible’.⁶

TRANSLATION AS AN EDITORIAL APPROACH

This special issue arrives at a point when creative practices, we would argue, are no longer considered to be an emergent epistemology within the research landscape; yet, practitioner-researchers remain called to frame their projects for institutional processes of metricised evaluation and ‘excellence’, and to validate the rigour of their practices and contributions. It can still be tricky to translate their value. Tackling the issue of the legitimacy of creative enquiry within academia thus requires a continued making visible and sharing of tools for translation.

For the papers gathered within Part 1, we approached our editorial process very much as an open, extended conversation with and between authors. It became important to us to experiment with peer review in the hope we might better reflect the experiments taking place within the creative enquiries themselves, to

interrogate how we can assess this kind of research outcome without limiting the possibilities, and to problematise who defines the parameters of success. We, thus, sought to disrupt the conventional double-blind peer review process – to not know where one voice ends and that of another begins. By asking contributors to review a paper of another contributor, we hoped to foster peers as supportive collaborators in the translation process. Though the fruits of this labour can be seen in this wonderful series of works, we do concede that such an endeavour requires significant dedication and time commitment from authors and editors – and, of course, we must still conform to the requirements of the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment.

With the notion of obligations in mind, we turn to the journal itself, which also has certain translational limitations – for example, in relation to its materiality (printed and digital), its language (English only), and the publication community it is bound to (in that it must publish a certain number of times a year, articles must be peer-reviewed, and so on). Its formats cannot ‘hold’ the outcomes of the practices of sewing, gardening, casting, sculpting directly or physically; rather, these must be translated – written, photographed, field typeset. From the Latin, ‘carried across’, to translate is to move across times, places, mediums. We see in this issue the potential for different forms of writing and visualising to move the boundaries of academic publication, allowing us to ‘approach tensions without succumbing to easy oppositions’ and advance the virtues of translation’s iterative, interactive and incomplete nature as a space of continual ‘becoming’.⁷

In Part 2, Live Writing, we include three paired dialogues originating from a session held at the AHRA 2023 Conference on *Live Writing*, organised by Emma Cheatle and Luis Hernan. The original call described the session as a roundtable and live

5 We take the notion of ‘situated’ knowledge from the theorisation of the term by Donna Haraway. To us, the notion of a design (and architectural) research is intertwined with a sense of being grounded in the situations we find ourselves part of. We are also influenced by Isabel Stengers’ notion of an ecology of practice and its implications for an ethics of interdependence. See: Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), pp. 575–99, doi:10.2307/3178066; Isabelle Stengers, ‘Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices’, *Cultural Studies Review*, 11.1 (2005), pp. 183–96, art. 1, doi:10.5130/csr.v11i1.3459.

6 Erik Bordeleau, ‘The Care of the Possible: Isabelle Stengers Interviewed by Erik Bordeleau’, *Scapegoat*, 1 (2011), 12.

7 The quote is from: Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, Posthumanities, 41 (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 24. Karen Barad critiques the stark definition of observer and observed in her formulation of agential realism. For Barad, matter is not waiting to be discovered by an observer, it is not an entity without preexisting relata but comes into being as relationships are created. See: Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007)

writing session aimed at exploring ‘how we can write alone and together, in the present and past, as an act of care and recuperation’. Six authors were invited to respond with their sites of exploration ‘close and far, interior and exterior’ and propose the way their writing contributed towards ‘repairing their hidden ecologies, confederations and infrastructures’. The event was organised in three pairs of authors who exchanged manuscripts in advance, although the tight schedule in the runup to the conference allowed only a few days to engage with each other’s work.

Following a format that would prove to be a prototype to the peer-review process of this special issue, the authors were asked to respond to each other on the day. We present here the manuscripts as close as possible to the version that was performed on the day, replicating the pairing of authors in ‘exchanges’, and followed by the response which the authors created for each other on the day (a testament to their skill as the timetable allowed only 30 minutes for them to formulate their response, in the format which felt more suited to the piece). The papers would go on to have a life of their own, individually becoming longer articles and chapters. Collectively, Live Writing was performed, one last time, at the ‘Festival of Feminist Architectural Research’, organised by Jane Rendell and Polly Gould at the Bartlett School of Architecture in May 2024.

CHAPTERS OVERVIEW

PART 1

When Words Won’t Work, Julieanna Preston

In this opening piece, Preston invites us back to 1965 and to a performative provocation on ‘deadness’ in art. Her essay employs Beuys’ *How to Explain a Picture to a Dead Hare* (1965) as a tool through which to both ruminate on and explicate her own practice, more specifically the ‘how of it’ – how it is that she has conversed with the other-than-human material bodies of her works, much as Beuys was able, somehow, to converse with a dead hare. Through the continued communications (through this essay) of five live art performances (2011–2020), and in response to the Editors’ call for this special issue, Preston raises one form of translation: explanation. For Preston, it is explanation that has the capacity to act as an advocate for ‘intuition, subjectivity and sensation’ – necessary and implicit in creative activity, yet the justification of which ignites an (all-too-familiar) struggle for creative practitioners in the quest for how to translate the meaning of/within their practice to others. In *When Words Won’t Work*, explanation – above that of reasoned textual exposition – is found, rather, in the small gestures, apprehensions, interactions, bodily movements and vocalisations that persist beyond words.

Learning by Trespass, Louise Rondel, Liam Healy et al.

Learning by Trespass takes the 2023 European Architecture Student Assembly (EASA) as its starting point for a reflection on how creative practices can be employed to ‘learn about and learn the art of paying attention to the commons.’ The event provided the ideal context for Rondel, Healy et al. to explore the issues of land rights in the Peak District. The concept of ‘trespass’ is woven through the article as the authors translate the *Kinder Trespass* through field notes, photos,

sketches and poetry, while recording video and sound as a form of *commoning*. They understand commoning as a creative practice of resistance that pays attention and attunes one to the bodily and emotional resonances of being in the land with others. The potential of creative practice to situate and create knowledge that is political and urgent comes to the fore as the authors navigate the cultural specificity of trespassing, a normative framework whose foundations lie deep in the logic of land tenancy. It is this connection between trespassing and colonial logic that helps unpack the variable meanings of trespass that the authors reflect on, as a transgression tolerated for some and criminalised for others based on their racialisation.

Cité les Long Silons, Robin Wilson

In this article, Wilson guides us through the raging realities and vulnerable imaginaries of the Parisian banlieue. From once-assured foundations of futurity, we meet the decaying fabric laid aslant before us on-the-edge. The piece is a gift of gifts of *gardiennes* – of entrusted words and photographs, from caretaker to caretaker. In Wilson's hands, the blemishes and spatial splinters of the mixed-use housing development, *Cité Les Longs Sillons* (1986), are refigured through collaborative field-work performance (improvised movement), photography and sound recordings. These bodily practices are interwoven with a situated narrative elucidating encounters with both real and fictional characters, leaving the reader with endless questions and speculations as to who is determining each movement. The work highlights the significance of the buildings' legacy as the social and political consensus of their moment of foundation fades, and as their maintenance increasingly reflects the economics of crisis. Wilson thus constructs a speculative discourse of the site as a quasi-fictional, utopic portrait, reconfiguring – and translating – the *Cité* as a stage for representational, spatial play.

Of Clothes and Clay, Kat Jungnickel and Kirsty Badenoch

In *Of Clothes and Clay*, Jungnickel and Badenoch took up the Editors' invitation to build upon the dialogue that they had developed during a Creative Enquiry Forum. Through staging their own studio visits and developing a format that invites the reader into an intimate conversation of their interdisciplinary research translations – to touch, talk, get up close to, and *into* each other's research – the authors explore patented historic clothing and reclaimed earth bowls as sites of alternative stories, research methods, and knowledge production. In doing so, they describe the ways the objects they produce contain speculations of lived pasts, as well as imagined futures, that can help us to understand and respond to larger sociopolitical issues around gender equality, private/public space, citizenship, and the climate crisis. The article experiments with the materiality, embodiment, and dimensionality of practice research, and argues that (re)makings of clothing and clay and their translations are not mere artefacts of representation but containers of knowledge. The format of the article offers a novel precedent for others seeking ways to translate and communicate their practices, or the seams between researchers.

Bodily archives: Exploring memories of experience in Walmer Yard through portraits of the body in space, Laura Mark

Taking a critical and inventive view of the 'archival turn', in this piece Mark argues that the archive can be seen not only as a site of knowledge storage and retrieval, but as a place of knowledge production. Mark proposes that the body is a vehicle of translation with the capacity to transmit minor and ephemeral traces not typically part of the architect's grand narrative. Instead, they centre mundane yet crucial practices of care (cleaning, repairing) fundamental to her role as a live-in keeper of the building, yet which took a

particular toll on the body and mind. For Mark, there is a multiplicity to the practices of translation in producing an archive; conceptualised as (im)permanence, temporality, and completeness. The body does not necessarily leave marks on the building, but may be gathered into the archive through photos, field notes and poetry. The marks that the building leaves on the body and mind require a different kind of translation, perhaps through replication and performance. Mark's proposal is for an archive that is growing and changing over time; it is melancholic, incomplete, and takes into account the unruliness of the body and memory.

Architectural Representations as Translations,
Maria Mitsoula and Eirini Makarouni

In this final piece of Part 1, Mitsoula and Makarouni consider how creative practice, in the form of photographs and drawings, becomes a way of understanding the multiple translations of Syntagma Square and the National Garden in Athens. The authors are interested in the way that the two sites have been read historically – a process of translating the materiality of these sites that has had the effect of disengaging these places from the contemporary realities of the Athenian landscape. Mitsoula and Makarouni understand their engagement with the sites as a form of 'thickened' practice. The authors use this term to situate their practice as interrogating and reflecting on the 'stuff of the thick', and paying attention to the 'multiple experiences, effects and exchanges (...) of our designed world'. Mitsoula and Makarouni engage with multiple processes of translation: the historiographies of maps, mapping, letters of both places and their photographic practice with its chemical rendering and image formation. More crucially, perhaps, their notion of thickened practice leads to six design briefs that aim to address the disengagement of these sites, and translate them back to the contemporary reality of Athens.

PART 2: LIVE WRITING

Exchange One: *Stories of a Tree*, Angela Kyriacou Petrou; *Electric Poetic, the naming and noticing of infrastructure*, Ruth Amy Oldham

Although Petrou and Oldham didn't write their articles with this framing in mind, their pieces speak to the processes of translation that are inherent to creative practice. Petrou's article, *Stories of a Tree*, follows the historic migration of the eucalyptus tree from Australia to Cyprus intertwined with her own experience of migration. Her process of following the trail of the tree reminds us of the etymology of the word translation, rooted in the act of carrying something across. Petrou traces the multiple translations of the Eucalyptus trees, writing of the shifting narratives of the colonial period and the material translations of the tree into basket weaving, while using her own drawing practice as a way of registering these multiple layers. Oldham's article, *Electric Poetic, The Naming and Noticing of Infrastructure*, reminds us of the etymologically-close notion of *metapherein*, the carrying over of meaning. Oldham walks the streets of Paris following electric substations and paying attention to their naming, reading through the literal translation of their names from French to English.

Exchange Two: *Casting Care: The Walls of Walmer Yard*, Laura Mark; *Gardening as Care: Rewriting a Research Paper in the First Person*, Adriana Massidda

Laura Mark's contribution to Live Writing, *Casting Care*, is conceptually and physically connected to her piece in Part 1. In both she reflects on her experience as the curator of Walmer Yard, the group of houses designed and built by Peter Salter. Read as a whole in two parts, *Casting Care* is the earlier piece, reflecting on her early casts of the project, taken from places which held special significance to her inhabitation and caring for the place. These pieces, she suggests, are

a sort of talisman, an artefact created to hold (and invoke) the memories of the place which are left out in official archives. In the second piece, Massidda addresses the translation of research into academic writing, where urban-researchers often feel they must write to a structure that rarely represents how ideas emerge. The proposal is to celebrate more pleasurable, expressive, and accessible modes of academic writing, especially in translating concerns and cares on behalf of others. In our reading, then, gardening as care becomes a provocation for how the iterative process of writing might be cared for, and what practices of tending, growing, and playing with written formats can enable one to see, think, or understand.

Exchange Three: *What About the Underdeveloped Camera? The Situated Image of Care*, Toby Blackman;
From Land's End to Oasis, Naina Gupta

In the first piece of this pairing, Blackman's critical-creative essay explores the spatiotemporality of his father's dialysis treatment, examining the situated image of his care. Blackman is interested in drawing out what lies both within and beyond the image, attending to the entanglement of meanings that are raised. This essay *writes site* in the intervals, revealing the relational, human, nonhuman, and collective assemblage of care and the distributed ecology of its architecture. In complementary dialogue, Gupta's piece also employs immersion as an intimate act, in their case to reveal prejudices in unexpected ways. She traces a tendril from London to Bangalore through bodies of water, suggesting the interconnectedness of the world through water as space rather than material. Her piece is an excerpt from a larger project exposing the politics of swimming in Britain and its ex-colonies, confronting racism and colonialism and

its consequences (ultimately, who can swim). Through musical framings and dips within watery-writings, Blackman and Gupta translate the affective, emotive, embodied nature of their respective practices.

*Luis Hernan, Ashley Mason
and Liam Healy, February 2026*