

G. BAULE, E. CARATTI

DESIGN IS TRANSLATION

**THE TRANSLATION PARADIGM FOR THE CULTURE OF
DESIGN. "DESIGN AND TRANSLATION": A MANIFESTO**

What connections are there between Design and Translation? The widening of the scope generated by the evolution of Studies on translation and Studies on design reveals a possible and promising connection between the two worlds. Communication design, in particular, deals with these unique connections. Here, within the design processes, transitions between support and media, language transfers, formal mutations and bridges between cultures, techniques, disciplines are implemented. Synesthetic translations, transmedia translations, intersemiotic translations, unique translations, artefactual translations, editorial translations: cases and paths for new explorations. The translation perspective increases the critique of the design dimension with an additional level of reflection.

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The Communication Design publications project grew out of the Politecnico di Milano's research and educational activities.

Design della comunicazione

The objective of the Communication Design range is to bring out the density of the subject matter framework of this area of design and contribute flexibility to the insights which nourish and define its sectors, specific features and inter-connections. Communication Design's presence in the great development of media culture is ever increasing and cross-disciplinary. Communications requires design know-how in the area in which culture merges into publishing, in which transport systems become IT savvy and where industrial products and services make contact with users. Communication design goes into action in large scale distribution networks in which consumers come into contact with goods, music, sport, entertainment and image in great events and their mass media dissemination.

This book range is a convergence point in which to register thoughts, studies and emerging themes. It is an expression of the souls which make up the world of designed communication and the different subject areas which can be traced to it. The subject of study is the artefact dimension in all aspects of a communication project: publishing graphics, TV, audio-visual and multimedia publishing, co-ordinated corporate image and brand identity, product packaging and communication, script character design, web design, data and information visualisation, interactive communication artefact, service and complex communication system design such as social networks and joint platforms. Alongside the applied dimension, publishers' attention focuses also on theoretical and critical insights with special attention to the semiotic, sociological and mass media disciplines which make up the core of communication design skills. The range is structured into three sections. The ESSAYS contain theoretical contributions from various subject areas relating to design, constituting an exploration of the subject's fundamental spheres of study. PERSPECTIVES presents documents from design research and experiences as an observatory on how to work in the field. INTERACTIONS contain interdisciplinary contributions with Communication Design.

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Edited by Giovanni Baule, Elena Caratti

Design is translation

The translation paradigm
for design culture

FrancoAngeli

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For a translation
design

For a translation design

Giovanni Baule, Elena Caratti, *Politecnico di Milano*

This volume presents a new paradigm in the form of a first exploration: identifying a number of relevant links and the emerging implications of the relationship – a close one in our opinion – between Design Studies and Translation Studies. We hold that the design discipline – elsewhere seen as a *meta-discipline* or as *interdisciplinary* – contains specific affinities with the translation field on multiple levels and, on overall, in its multiple shared characteristics. We believe that new design sensibilities and new design research opportunities can emerge from this relationship on the language and process levels. The underlying interest is in introducing a further strategic-cultural differential in the apparent universality of design understood as purely functional and free of critical depth. If circumscribing a research area is a necessity, above all if we are working in the terrain of novel connections, it is also simultaneously a question of not limiting potential future horizons and the plurality of possible approaches precisely because once they have taken root mono-linguism and mono-culture constitute limitations and closed borders which are then difficult to overcome.

The assumption is thus the design field's interest in translation culture taking on board an extended meaning of the notion of translation compatible with a «total translation» concept (Torop 2000), thus considerably widening the spectrum of traditional «translation forms» (Holmes [1988] 1995: 239). In this sense it encompasses both de-verbalising translation forms and extra-textual translation emphasising all cases in which translation studies also open up to non-literal texts or work at the intersection between literary and non-literary texts. The evolutions of this relationship can be traced to the idea of text production beyond recurring linguistic limitations in the development of semiotic studies (Marrone 2001).

The evolution of translation theories and studies can be summed up in what are generally recognised as three generations: the first is that which is defined 'science of translation' – limited to words like terminological transposition; the second is the 'theory of translation' evolving out of inter-linguistic and inter-textual relationships (Nergaard 1995: 11); the objective of the third generation would be appear to be identifying it as a discipline called Translation Studies and contextualising it as «inter-cultural communication» (Holmes [1988] 1995: 3). This *cultural turn* in the translation studies field marks its passage from 'text' to 'culture' (Snell-Horby [1988] 1995: 15) and as such it meets us half way.

These inter-generational passages have, on one hand, certainly enabled stereotypical elements in the debate within translation studies in earlier eras to be overcome principles such as faithfulness, transparency or equivalence which, however, do highlight real critical issues in inter-linguistic textual translation. But of the greatest significance, for us, is the overcoming of a «research approach focusing on the diverse relationships between source and target» which, Toury has argued, would have «taken translation theories down a dead end street» (Toury [1980] 1995: 112).

These and other references have given way to an intercultural dimension in translation implying that the dialogue between cultures cannot avoid encounters between diverse but neighbouring disciplinary areas in terms of vicinity or affinity. In this sense a veritable paradigm shift has taken place which opens up translation principle as a system. Consequently the process which has cut through translation theories has multiplied and made plausible those multiple points of interdisciplinary contact which are preliminary to the construction of a translation paradigm usable in other fields of study.

Whilst translation studies and theories show signs of having progressively widened the programmatic field, other disciplinary fields – including those which interest

us here, i.e. the fields of design and design culture – have equally been affected by cultural turns shifting their traditional areas of study and extending their interdisciplinary scenarios. Within the wider design discipline area, the field of design now encompasses those design theories and practices whose fields of application are different but adjoining and deal with material and immaterial systems and artefacts of varied nature but which share the same culture, methods and formative processes.

If the whole field going by the name of design is affected by these powerful affinities – and communication design in particular as we will see, as an area which has shown itself to be tangibly closer to translation culture working as it does with communication artefacts and systems. In mediating between diverse languages, it involves continual support and media transfers. It shows specific affinities with the translation field on multiple levels and, overall, at least two main shared characteristics, one constituent and one process-related. The constituent characteristic postulates the communicative nature of translation: «From a theological point of view translation is a communication process» (Levý [1967] 1995: 63). This process aspect highlights translation process, similarly to the design process, as an ongoing system of options:

From a practical point of view [...] translating is a decision-making process, a series of consecutive situational moves just like in a game, situations which oblige translators to choose between a certain number of alternatives [...]. (Levý [1967] 1995: 63)

The translation dimension would thus appear to be an indispensable part of the design process: the act of designing and the act of translating are thus to be identified as a common performance principle.

If the interdisciplinary relationship between the fields of design culture and translation studies would thus appear to have a common translational platform of reference, the translation paradigm adopted in the field of communication design thus implies an undoubted foundation term shift promoting theory and design practice contributions and impacting on the design artefact statuses. Those relevance nodes in which translation – with its own culture and theories – intersects with communication design need identifying. If, with the current widening of the field of translation studies, the area of translation reference is also extended in order to identify new relevance to other fields – and, as far as we are concerned here, with the design field – some special issues within translation studies highlight their proximity to relevant themes in the design field and constitute the

basis for a shared paradigm. In this way it is possible to identify affinities and initial connections between the two different fields of study.

If there is a recognised «options grammar» (Bell 1997: 118-22) at the heart of linguistic skills, this constitutes the load-bearing structure of translation practice and it is in this context that the transformations which are at the heart of translation practice take place. This is what Levy himself argued (1995) in *Translation as a Decision Process*, a study which also has the merit of having emphasised the process aspect in translation. It is precisely this aspect which is fundamental to generating the intersection with design culture studies. It is not only the design process in general which would seem to be based on a grammar of options in a general sense but especially those transfers from one language to another precisely of that which we might call 'translation design'. It is effectively on this plane that coherence and symmetries with design practice take place.

The similarities with the field of design culture multiply when translation theory goes beyond the 'literal' – the concept of literal translation – the abstract principle of 'faithfulness', the concept of an 'original' text, the very idea of a 'source' text – in favour of a circular process and reciprocal interaction between text to translate and

translated text. References to *memetics* (Dawkins 1976) – the principle of transmission and reproduction of culture and information in the translation context (Salmon 2003: 155) – opens up convergence scenarios with communication design.

The design field, for example, is affected by all those considerations which go beyond a rigid and schematic vision of the principle of equivalence which has spilt over into Skopos theory (Reiss and Vermeer 1984). The focus is the purpose of the translation process, «the translator's coherence with his project [...] and it is only in reference to this coherence that the concept of 'faithfulness' can be used, but no longer to the original but to the project as a whole» (Salmon 2003: 118). There are tangible signs of similarity with the methods and culture of design here too.

The inter-cultural principle has, in turn, come centre-stage: «never before to the same extent as in this decade has translation been spoken of as intercultural communication» (Nergaard 1995: 16). The recognised inter-cultural nature of translation «emerges from the statement that translation relates to cultures to a greater extent than languages and from the fact that, of all the difficulties and aspects to be considered, language is perhaps the least important» (Lefevere 1992: XIV).

The idea of translation as «an act of communication

which takes place between cultures» (Nergaard 1995: 16) has further implications for the field of design. Many passages between diverse cultures, including for example, that which we might call 'visual cultures', those we call 'digital cultures' and visual manipulations and media hybridisations (Manovich 2010) can be recognised as translation passages. In such cases we are very close to the theme of communication access – or «access design» (Baule 2009) – and interface design (Anceschi 1993) as designing mediation devices for interaction between diverse worlds.

The same proximity applies to the theme of the invisibility of the translation in accordance with the approach expressed by Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1995 and 1998) linked to translator invisibility. «Paradoxically the translator appears 'visible' only negatively, sharing the supposed faults of the writer but not his or her merits. In particular the undoubted merit of Translation Studies is to have defined the paradox by which, at least in the West, translators – those who enable cultures to open up, evolve and seek out new thought and expression processes – are excluded from appropriate social, economic and emotional recognition» (Salmon 2003: 174). The invisibility of the translator has a direct counterpart in the invisibility of the designer, in his or her anonymity. In contrast to certain 'designer projects' – the minority – which are duly

and emphatically 'signed', the invisibility of the designer-translator is the order of the day above all in the communication design context, admittedly in a context in which the designer would appear at least apparently to enjoy his or her recognition and social status. In the design context the issue of visibility sometimes leads, as a counter tendency, to an emphatic authoritarianism such as to ensure maximum visibility and media success at the expense of designs based on the principles of moderation.

Disciplinary transitions relating in general to the field of design are also worthy of note.

Of the salient and critical aspects of this transition Pizzocaro has highlighted:

an increase in adaptability of the various design disciplines whose borders are now hazy; the emergence and advance of a conspicuous experimentation trend as far as experiential product components are concerned, integrating physical and materials products; the absence of a clear demarcation line between products and services; the consolidation of research methods specifically targeting and interpreting people's needs and desires. (Pizzocaro 2015: 28)

But it is precisely communication design which has undergone radical transformations over recent decades