

GS/HUMA 6149 3.0: Theorizing Cultural Translation
FS 2020 W 16:00-19:00, offered remotely via Moodle

Course Instructor

Susan Ingram

consultation time via Zoom/ phone: please arrange via email (singram@yorku.ca)

“mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished features, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, belonging, home.”
(Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*, qtd. in David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, 207)

“There is no Logos, only hieroglyphs...
to think is therefore to interpret,
is therefore to translate.”
(Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 162)

Course Description

The concept of cultural translation differs from strictly linguistic translation in that it does not understand itself as a binary phenomenon involving an original text and a secondary production in another language. Rather, in taking its cues from Walter Benjamin’s seminal “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers/ The Task of the Translator,” cultural translation does away with the early Romantic presupposition that either an original, a translation, or the two languages involved could be fixed and persisting categories. Instead, they are not assumed to have any essential quality but rather are presumed to be constantly transforming in space and time. In this course we chart the development of a cultural approach to translation by examining a range of theoretical and experiential texts, beginning with Benjamin’s seminal essays and then continuing on through deconstructive, feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and journalistic approaches to the traumas and potentials of our mediated, imagistic present.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- identify and classify theoretical approaches to and understandings of translation
- succinctly present and assess the situatedness of examples of academic writing
- succinctly present and assess the composition and logical organization of examples of academic writing
- analyze and demonstrate the relevance of a complex academic text
- prepare an original academic argument for publication

Texts

- will be provided on the course Moodle site.

Evaluation

- Moodle forum discussion/ participation (30%)
- coordination/synthesis of short introductions of a reading via the authors and short presentations of the main ideas of a week's texts – sign up on the Moodle for one of each (30%)
 - The coordinator is responsible for contacting the presenters of the authors and the texts and ensuring that what they present is both concise and coordinated. That person is also responsible for taking notes of any readings, authors, or texts mentioned during class that are not on the syllabus. After class, they will email the people who mentioned them and ask for a full reference. Once all relevant citations have been collected, the coordinator will prepare a small document including the references, key points, passages, and questions that came up during the discussion into a single PDF and post it on the Moodle before the next class. This way, everyone can have a quick reference to each week they can keep.
- a commentary on either Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" or "Work of Art" essays that connect to a cultural work of your choice – ~1500 words, due 21 Oct (20%)
- an original reading of a cultural work or practice, choice of text should be cleared with me first, ~6000-7000 words, due 12 Dec, (30%)
 - both of the written assignments should have a Works Cited section that has been generated by Zotero, and two versions of each assignment should be submitted: one formatted in MLA 8 and one formatted in Chicago.

Schedule

- 9 Sept Introductions
Boris Buden, "Cultural Translation: Why It Is Important and Where To Start With It."
- 16 Sept (<https://transversal.at/transversal/o6o6/buden/en>)
Antoine Berman, "The Manifestations of Translation" and "Introduction" (1-21)
Raymond Williams, "Culture"; Tony Bennett, "Culture"
- 23 Sept Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" – both translations
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" – both translations
- 30 Sept Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel"
"Critical Intimacy: An Interview with Gayatri Spivak"
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translating in a World of Languages"
- 7 Oct Robert J.C. Young, "Freud on Cultural Translation"
Deborah Friedell, "Bear, Bat, or Tiny King?"
- 14 Oct READING WEEK
- 21 Oct Bina Freiwald, "The Problem of Translation: Reading French Feminisms"
Judith Butler, "Gender in Translation: Beyond Monolingualism"
Hongwei Bao, "Translation and Travelling Theory: Feminist Theory and Praxis in China"
- 28 Oct Heather Collette-VanDeraa & Douglas Kellner, "Review of W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)"
Susan Buck-Morss, "Visual Empire"
María Iñigo Clavo, "Traces, Signs, and Symptoms of the Untranslatable"
- 4 Nov Barbara Godard, "Writing Between Cultures"
Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation"
Elaine Mohktefi, "Panthers in Algiers"

- 11 Nov Jason Demers, "Taking Deleuze in the Middle, or Doing Intellectual History by the Letter"
Nir Kedem, "What is Queer Translation?"
- 18 Nov Anton Shammass, "Torture into Affidavit, Dispossession into Poetry: On Translating Palestinian Pain"
Françoise Lionnet, "Translating Grief"
Michelle Roberts, "Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Impossible Wedding"
- 25 Nov Michaela Ott and Thomas Weber, "Introduction: Situated in Translations: Cultural Communities and Media Practices"
Kate Taylor-Jones and Yan Ying, "Cultural Translation and East Asia: Film, Literature and Religion"
Justin Jin, "When a rising star of China's live-streamers fell in love offline, it cost her the virtual world"
(<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3079244/when-rising-star-chinas-live-streamers-fell-love>)
- 2 Dec Wrap up: current considerations