

THINKING ABOUT TRANSLATING COMMUNITY VOICES

Preliminary Notes bringing together:

ART CRITICISM QUESTIONS FOR THE SOURCE IMAGES

- why do I select particular images
- how do I interpret meaning
- how do I evaluate their value as visual communication

CREATIVE TRANSLATION QUESTIONS

- how could I develop a range of alternative translations?
- how do I myself evaluate and compare the relative validity of the different versions?

The underlying premises of my work are that:

- **all images - from communities, development agencies and designers can, and should, be thought about and valued in similar ways.** Community drawings can be as meaningful and also complex as those of artists, if people are given the materials, context and confidence to really express themselves.
- this **requires viewers to suspend judgement and prejudices** that 'drawings are just for children' and that 'illiterates are like children', therefore their drawings are not really worth respect. This in turn means that people in participatory workshops do not take their drawing seriously, so this is a self-fulfilling cycle.
- it is likely that **different audiences will be attracted to, and understand, each translation version in different ways.** Some differences of opinion are likely to be in line with my own ethical judgement. Other opinions may be based on prejudice and power relations between the audience and the community artists.
- Alongside audience feedback, therefore, I need to take responsibility for the translations and **have my own explicit aesthetic and ethical criteria** for evaluating the implications of the feedback for my own practice.

Adapted from:

OPEN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS 2015. Commenting on Artists, Barnsley, UK, Open College of the Arts.

CRITICAL PROCESS

- Describe the image - suspend all judgement and prejudice. what are you seeing? what issue is the drawing representing?
- Analyse the image - what are the elements of the drawing and how are they arranged?
- Guess what the artist intended - what was the context of the drawing? the actual drawing process? wider social and political context?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say about the issue?
- What do you yourself learn from the image? How does it make you feel? What is your reaction to the elements and composition? Does the work feed your imagination? Does it intrigue you or leave you cold?
- Do you think your reaction would be different: if you did not know who drew it?

DESCRIBE IT AND RELATE IT

- What kinds of things do you see in this image?
- What words would you use to describe the image?
- What first attracts you to the image?
- What is it that holds your interest?
- How does the image make you feel?
- Does the image remind you of anything eg another image, place, person, idea or memory?
- What is it about the image that sparks these memories and associations?

ANALYSE IT

- **Composition:** What is your eye drawn to first? What are the different elements in the image? How have they been put together?
- **Lines:** Look at the direction of lines, the edges of shapes. Are the lines horizontal or vertical or at other angles, straight or curved, continuous or broken, thick or thin, long or short, heavy or light, smooth or jagged, aggressive or delicate, fuzzy or crisp?
- **Shapes:** Are the shapes rounded, rectangular, triangular, regular or irregular, symmetric or asymmetric, fat, thin or tapered, convex (bulging) or concave (hollowed out)?
- **Tones:** Look at the light and dark, shadows and highlights. Are the tones pale, murky, dazzling, dim, harsh, subtle? Is the contrast high or low?
- **Colours:** Are the colours natural or exaggerated, intense or soft, dull or bright, warm or cool, complementary or harmonious?
- **Patterns:** Are the patterns bold or subtle, simple or intricate, geometric or regular, rich or sparse?
- **Textures:** What is the surface texture like? Is it even or uneven, smooth or coarse? shiny or matte? If it is a drawing, can you see the tool marks?

Process and technique:

- **What type of image is it?** single drawing, part of a diagram? photograph, role play video? song video?
- **How do you think it was made?** Can you see evidence of how the artist's hand moved? did it move slowly and carefully or quickly and energetically? How long do you think it took to make? Do you think other people may have helped?
- **How is it displayed?** What location is it in currently? What other locations is it seen in?

INTERPRETE IT AND PUT IT INTO CONTEXT

- **What do you think is happening** in the image?
- **Where and when was the image created?** What do you know about the place and time? What was life like? What was happening socially, politically, culturally? Do you think the image is influenced by this?
- **What do you know about the artist,** their life, influence and art practice?
- **What was the intended use of the image?** for the artist to reflect themselves, to show to others? for show at a workshop? training? In what context?
- **How does it compare to other images?** eg the same artist? people from the same community? country? similar workshop? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
- What part of the gallery??? is it in? Why do you think it is in that location?

EVALUATE IT

- Can you classify the image and its subject according to **type**?
- Does it depict something **recognisable** like a person or an object? Is it realistic or more abstract? Natural or unnatural?
- Could it be a **symbol for something else**?
- Does it tell a **story**?
- Is the subject **familiar** to you?
- Can you see **people**? If so what are they doing? What might they be thinking? Look at expressions, gestures, clothes.
- What do you think the image is **about**?
- **What can't you see?** what is omitted? why?
- What **difference** would it make if something about the artwork changed? eg if it was a different size, colour, made in different materials, in a different context eg on a wall outside, framed picture?
- Can you **extend** the image in your own imagination? If it shows a scene, what might have happened before or after that moment? What is happening outside the frame?
- What difference would it make if it was shown in **another context**?

NOTES ON ETHICAL TRANSLATION INTERROGATION PROMPTS

From:

An Analytic of Making: Translating Berman's Twelve Deforming Tendencies Dr Bryan Eccleshall
In Translating Across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys Between Media Edited by Ricarda Vidal and Madeleine Campbell 2019, Palgrave Macmillan. Pp269-??

Translation as Activism conference link: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/french/translationactivism/>
Berman essay: <https://www.scribd.com/document/144369187/Translation-and-the-trials-of-the-foreign-by-Antoine-Berman>

RATIONALISATION

- Is the subject reframed, drawing the attention of the viewer to the 'main' subject and giving only an impression or a summary of less important parts of the source, resulting in a lack of complexity?
- Might these seemingly less important parts of the work, if included, contribute to more sophisticated readings of the translated work?
- Are contradictory or unresolved elements of the work excised in favour of a more consistent argument or assertion?

CLARIFICATION

- Are unclear elements of the source made too clear in the target?
- How are subtlety and nuance managed?
- Does the new work over-explain, telling and not showing, its content to the viewer?
- If the resulting work is too clear, can the work retain the curiosity of an audience?
- Should the work be grasped immediately, or should it play out over a longer period or through multiple viewings?
- How are the exotic qualities of the source managed in the resulting work?

EXPANSION

- Do different textures or tones of voice become flattened or unified?
- What is lost or gained when the new work is of a different scale when compared to its source and how does a change in scale affect the way the work is perceived?
- Is the proximity of individual elements of a work to one another important?
- What might repeated encounters with the work reveal?
- Is the length of time the audience spends with a work important and can that be determined by the maker?

ENNOBLEMENT

- How does a material affect the way the work is perceived?
- Is the material more elegant, or the reverse, and does this obliterate what is particular or foreign in the source?
- Does the material change, enhance, or foreground a particular quality of the work? Might this be related to rationalisation or clarification?
- How are the content and form of the new work related and how does this relationship reflect that of the source's intertwined content and form?

QUALITATIVE IMPOVERISHMENT

- Is the medium or technique appropriate to the subject matter or does it remove associations that would enrich it?
- If inverted, the term becomes 'qualitative enrichment'. Is the work exaggerated or ennobled in any way to make it more striking than the source or richer in allusion?

QUANTITATIVE IMPOVERISHMENT

- Do elements of the work—colour, subject matter, method of manufacture—resemble or recall other works or styles and how do these associations change or impact upon readings of the new work?
- Is the work overloaded with references to other works and to the world? How stable are these references?
- If a work relies on something potentially unstable for its meaning or context, is it vulnerable to being misunderstood or misrepresented?

DESTRUCTION OF RHYTHMS

- Are there repetitions and rhythms in the work? Where are they? How might they be carried into the new work?
- How does the use of material impact on the internal rhythms of the new work? Are they sympathetically deployed and how do they relate to the internal rhythms of the source?

DESTRUCTION OF UNDERLYING NETWORKS OF SIGNIFICATION

- Does a slow or repeated reading of the source reveal something not immediately apparent that is in fact critical to understanding the work? And, by implication, does the way time plays out for the audience impact on the reception of the work?
- Is there a fractal quality to the work's structure? Is the whole reiterated internally in miniature? Do separate elements echo or mimic one another?
- Does the material used require a certain method of making and does that method leave surface evidence that is particular to that method? Does this trace evidence signify activity or practice existing beyond the work?
- Do surface marks, grain, dents, seams, frames, styles of edit, and so on interrupt or complement the work for the viewer?

DESTRUCTION OF LINGUISTIC PATTERNINGS

- To what extent is the surface of a source work homogeneous or heterogeneous? How might this be carried across to the target work?
- Is the scale or relative size of different elements important?
- If a work is homogenised, then what is clarified, rationalised, ennobled, or popularised in the process?
- If a source is, in fact, a collage how is this managed or reflected in the target work?

DESTRUCTION OF VERNACULAR NETWORKS OR THEIR EXOTICISATION

- Does the work deliberately or accidentally make reference to other works in its form, use of materials, or content? Are these references likely to enrich the work or confuse the audience?
- Are there essential qualities that the source and target works share?
- Is the way a work is made—a vernacular condition of the work in that it is local to it—made evident in the final product or is it deliberately obscured and how does this relate to the source's method of manufacture?

DESTRUCTION OF EXPRESSIONS OR IDIOMS

- What associations are inherent to the materiality (which can include scale, marks, and framing devices) of the work and how are they different from those of the source and does this change how the work is received or understood?
- How does the work refer beyond what it represents and/or deal with idiomatic content internal to it?

EFFACEMENT OF THE SUPERIMPOSITION OF LANGUAGES

- Does the embedded material in the new work have the same relation to its frame as embedded material in the source?
- How are rationalisation and clarification managed when incorporating other works, or references to them, in work? Are they quoted in full or summarised?
- Do embedded works constitute "bushy undergrowth"? (Chapiro quoted by Berman, *ibid.*, 288)
- What networks of signification are activated by the inclusion of other works?
- How do quoted works interact with one another and with the larger work in which they are embedded?
- Does the quoted work overwhelm the work in which it is placed?