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INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE: TRANSLATABILITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Now in its fifth year of publication, *Critical Multilingualism Studies* offers with this issue a broad stock-taking of the principle of translatability, as it has gained conjuncture in the human sciences over the past decade. A number of the articles in this issue stem from a seminar at the American Comparative Literature Association, hosted at New York University in 2014. Co-led by İlker Hepkaner and David Gramling, this seminar sought to explore the political, literary, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of the notion of a “right to untranslatability,” as proposed in Emily Apter’s 2013 monograph *Against World Literature*.

In proposing this seminar, we were concerned with the extent to which ‘getting translated’ (into English, French, or German) had increasingly become—under conditions of economic globalization—the entry fee for humanitarian, literary, and political attention. In this vein, we also sought to understand how new world-literary and comparative models for studying literature have come to be structured around certain kinds of translatable and translation-ready texts at the expense of others. Meanwhile, large-scale industrial-strength algorithmic translation platforms have wrested the power and prerogative of translating away from universities, individual literary translators, and

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the humanistic disciplines—towards well-financed, well-engineered corporate localization enterprises that convey large tranches of data and discourse across language borders, with little guidance or monitoring from trained human translators. In this economy, literary translators find themselves in new positions of critical resistance and dissent, requiring new lines of thinking for the human endeavor of translation in the twenty-first century.

While not all of the articles in this issue arose from this seminar in 2014, they each nonetheless shed light on the concept of translatability as it relates to disparate methodological, ethnonational, and philosophical contexts of inquiry. The contributions can be read as a constellation of mutual approaches, unsettling whatever presumed framework we may hold to at a given moment for the relevance of a concept like translatability. That is, the concerns and investments of each single article point implicitly and asymmetrically toward phenomena in neighboring articles, and the non-overlaps among this Issue's contributions offer uniquely suggestive areas for further research. For instance, while Steven Kellman's essay about the translatability of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights chronicles the most widespread conceit of global translatability on record, Johanna Domokos' essay considers a case in which an indigenous poet explicitly prohibits the translation of his own work.

We thus confront, in the course of these five arguments, scales of analysis on translatability that range from the personal experience of trauma and witnessing (Rodríguez) to local sites of poetic meaning-making within an indigenous community (Domokos) to the (un)translatability of linguistic nationalism into a multilingual state like Luxembourg (Baumann) to the logistics of addressing a multilingual global polity of rights-bearing citizens (Kellman) to the prospect of interstellar translatability (Meade). Though the literary appears to represent a shared common ground, the contributions are at turns equally invested in questions of second language learning, psychoanalysis, indigenous poetics, human rights, science fiction, posthumanism, trauma, minor literatures, and colonialism.

We open this issue with Steven G. Kellman's essay on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and specifically on the translation of critical terms within this document into the 466 planetary languages in which it appears. "Translation" is ultimately the wrong word to designate this process because, as Kellman points out, the Declaration is juridically understood as originating in *all* of these languages, and not merely in the

official UN languages in which it was first drafted. Accordingly, Kellman introduces the conception of “omnilingual aspiration” as a kind of philosophical watchword for global translation projects in modernity, in which the desire to access universal legitimacy pressurizes hundreds of languages beyond Europe’s hegemonic legal repertoires to produce makeshift equivalents that then assume the full weight of law.

Karen Rodriguez draws on the work of the Israeli-born visual artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger to query how and whether additional language learning can offer a *relationship-without-relation*, an ability to bear witness to traumas experienced within that language. In Rodríguez’ case, Mexican Spanish is the L2 that houses traumatic experiences of colonization, genocidal pogroms against indigenous peoples, and interreligious conflict between Islam and Catholicism. Rodríguez draws on Ettinger’s concept of “wit(h)nessing” to theorize the empathetic potential of multilingual answerability, of “someone else singing through your throat.”

In a similar spirit, Johanna Domokos takes as her touchstone the Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001), who served as president of the Sámi Writers’ Union and a major leader in Nordic indigenous poetic revival movements. Domokos takes specific moments of untranslatability-as-interdiction in Valkeapää’s work to develop a more precise theoretical vocabulary for (un)translatability—as it may issue from author, text, or textualization process. Isabell Baumann’s essay offers a synthetic overview of Luxembourgish multilingualism, and the ways it challenges the explanatory power of Benedict Anderson’s theses on imagined communities. By drawing on various Luxembourgish literary authors from the 19th century to today, Baumann is able to develop a nuanced linguistic portrait of how the development of a specifically Luxembourgish civic multilingualism can shed light on the presumptive modeling efforts that predominate in European policy debates. Baumann’s careful historical analysis is also useful for rethinking the methodological traditions of the national philologies, as well as applied linguistics research on multilingualism that presumes either a hegemonic monolingual state or a non-European counter-model. Where Global South scholars in applied linguistics have been rather skeptical of the notion of a recent “multilingual turn,” Baumann complements these critiques by detailing how multilingualism has always been a nation-building predicament in the heart of Northwestern Europe throughout the modern period.

This issue closes with Christopher Meade's interstellar critique of the World Literature debate under conditions of globalization, in which he draws on theories of science fiction and object-oriented ontology in order to extend and transmogrify the scalar presumptions inherent in a Mercatorian logic of world literature. Developing a conception of "worlds literature" based in Samuel Delany's fiction, Meade points toward new epistemic horizons that upend the explanatory paradigms of critical and celebratory globalisms alike.

We are grateful to our outgoing Managing Editor Alexander Ganz for his irreplaceable assistance in helping us develop the Journal platform over its first five years. We welcome Judith Menzl as our new Managing Editor. Forthcoming Special Issues of *CMS* include *African Multilingualisms* (Anne Storch and Andrea Wolbers, Special Guest Editors); *The End(s) of Competence?* (Renate Riedner, Special Guest Editor); *The Critical Translation of Disciplines* (collaboratively edited with the Researching Multilingually at Borders working group); and *Languages Under Pressure and Pain*.

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DG & CW

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