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Some Thoughts on Experimentation as a Way to Implement Translation.
From the second workshop: “Interdisciplinary reading, measurement and notation of ambiances”, Montréal 2015.

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Quelques réflexions sur l’expérimentation comme mise en œuvre de la traduction.
Retours sur le 2nd séminaire du GDRI

I would like to share with you a small text I wrote after the 2nd workshop of Montreal. It has, in fact, more to do with a collection of thoughts than a set of “lessons” – like I saw it was written in the program.

It’s a reflection from my own point of view of what happen there, during the different experimentations what we made within my group and the questions that these experiments could raise regarding the translation of ambiances.

The idea behind this text was to share it with the other members of my group or some other people who took part of this seminar, and propose to them to do the same: writing their own journal, in order to debate on what happen during these experiments that could lead to a better understanding of the translation of ambiance. Because we did many things during this workshop, but in my opinion we didn’t really have the time to speak about them.

So here are some thoughts on experimentation as a way to implement translation of ambiances.

First of all, just a little precision about the composition of our group: we were 5 persons, all women, coming from a broad range of places (North America, South America, Maghreb and Europe). But our fields of work were not so diverse, since we were 4 persons associated to the field of architecture and urban design and only one artist. And I think that this detail is important if we stress the fact that the accent of the second workshop was put on the topic of interdisciplinary translation.

In our group 4 people proposed an experiment and we did the 4 of them during the time we had: so only a very short time was dedicated to each experiment. For example, I conceive my proposition thinking what we could spend at least half a day on it, but finally we had only 30 minutes to do so.

And if I’m saying that, it is because from the beginning this time issue oriented the way we worked

together: some people didn't want to spend too much time on trying to build an experiment from the combinations of the different proposals, but they prefer to try to do all of them quickly. So we briefly exposed to each other the different experiments and we went on with them.

So, the 4 experiments we did in that frame, and that were regarding the site of La Place des Arts in Montréal, can be summarized by these 4 actions:

- 1 – Telling the words of the others through some kind of a performed vocal choreography*
- 2 – Mapping our own perceptions and appreciations of the place*
- 3 – Addressing the colors that we perceived in the place*
- 4 – Comparing different videographic views of the place*

For the first experiment proposed by Sophie, she had collected on the Internet different images of Place des Arts, and reframed them. She asked us to describe them and tell what these fragments called to mind. Our comments were recorded. And from these recordings Sophie edited a sonic piece that we then had to perform on stage during the final restitution in a sort of choreography: each of us were listening to the sonic piece via earphones, and we had to repeat some edited fragments of speech that we said about the pictures. This performance was composed of repetitions and echoing between the voices of the participants. It seems to me that this experiment dealt with the question of repetitions, series, and shifting between what as been said and repeated, between the images and the real site, between the reframing and the first frame. And it made me wonder what Sophie was looking for in this experiment: was it the translation of the words of others? Or their interpretation? What is to tell the words of others through an apparatus of sound recording and sound diffusion?

The first question about translation that this experiment made me formulate was: does translating have to do with an act of performing a rewriting?

For the second experiment, which was about mapping our own perceptions and appreciations of the place, Cristiane had prepared a map of the Place des Arts and a set of color pencil. The idea was to follow a path and to fill the map with indications of open spaces vs./ constraining spaces; pleasant / unpleasant noises; cold or warm places; good and bad smell (and maybe I'm forgetting 1 or 2 entries). These different entries were corresponding to colors and pictograms and we had to draw the limits of the zones for each items. I followed the instruction of this experiment but, at the same

time, I twisted them a little bite because I had the feeling that no space fits perfectly into a category. So, for example, I added contradictions in my drawing because the Place des Arts is full of contradictions: from one perspective the space can seem to be open, but if we look at it from another point of view it will seem closed and constrained. Or sometimes I painted the same area with 2 colors. It was the case of the musical swings that were on site: if at first there sound can be enjoyable, if you're living near by I think you can soon become very mad about these sounds!

So, my thoughts about this experiment were about the possibility of complexifying the categories.

And it led to another question regarding the translation, which is: do we have to simplify in order to translate? And how can we do, in the process of translating, in order not to lose the complexity, nay sometimes the contradictory aspect of places regarding ambiances?

The third experiment was about the colors that we perceived on Place des Arts. The only indication that Anne gave us was : to "Browse the field of study by walking wherever you want. When a prominent color catches your attention, take a picture of it and describe briefly your perception". So I walked on site trying to focus my attention only on colors, on their impact on my perception of the space, but also on my way of walking. And I did feel that this experiment made me see the place differently, I was particularly attentive to the colors of lights (the reflections on the windows, but also the artificial lights). For the restitution, Anne picked some recurrent color effects from the pictures we took, and she composed some families of images around these color effects. Then she photoshopped some of the pictures in order to amplify the effects. And finally, she made a map of the color effects that we perceived on site.

The translation proposed in this experiment seems to me to raise the question of the necessary articulation of different registers of images. Different techniques and means of expression like photography and digital manipulation of the pictures, written descriptions, and maps were used to translate our perception of colors. This multiplication of methods and means of representation raise the question of the materials with which we work – the "rawness" of the recordings or their manipulations – and the means of mediation that can be suitable for the translation of ambience.

Unlike these 4 first experiments, the one I proposed about the comparison of different videographic

views of the Place des Arts didn't have strict indications or protocole to follow. On the contrary, I thought what we would build together filmic sequences combining 2 contrasted ways to read the same place : 1/ an objective and distant take of the place and 2/ a subjective and engaged take of the same place. The goal was to exchange between us (on the field and then by looking at the recordings) about how these different ways of filming can expose or translate something of the ambiance of the place. But with the time issue I mentioned earlier, we didn't have the time for this debate.

So I just edited a little film to show during the final restitution.

This experiment, in my opinion, wanted to address the question of the construction of representations in order to translate the ambiance, and wanted to point out the impact on the understanding of ambiance by a spectator that can have a specific relation to the world (or point of view) embedded in the representations.

The last thought about this workshop was about the question of the restitution of the experiments.

In my opinion, it is less important to be able to show some final productions at the end of the workshop than to be able to debate on what happen during the experiments, on what are the different stakes or limits of the experiments regarding the question of translation. And this collective exchange is important particularly if we want work on the question of translation from a disciplinary or an interdisciplinary point of view. And I think that such a debate did actually take place after the presentation of Samuel Tronçon about the network representation of the different experiments that he proposed. And it made me wonder if this happen because this type of representation is quite unusual for the majority of the people that were there (people coming more from architecture, urban design and art, and being not very familiar with "system complex" and mathematics logic).

And this raised a last set of questions about our ability to interrogate the modes of representation that are obvious for us, that we use all the time without thinking much about them: how to question our habits, our usual disciplinary tools? Just like linguistic translation is questioning as much our own language that the foreign language with which we are trying to communicate, can we think that disciplinary translation requires as well to rethink our own methods and ways of working?

So, this is the extent of my thoughts after Montreal.

And the proposition I would like to make is that if some of you would be interested to do the same about the experiments in which they took part, maybe we could try to write a collective text that could work as a synthesis of this workshop. So, let me know if you are interested. And thank you.