Translation and the Digital Age

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Voyelles

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu : voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes :
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d’ombre ; E, candeur des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d’ombelles ;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes ;

U, cycles, vibrements divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d’animaux, paix des rides
Que l’alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges :
- O l’Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux ! -

-A. Rimbaud
Ten Translations of Voyelles

William John Robertson, 1895

Jethro Bithell, 1909

Louise Varèse, 1946

Norman Cameron, 1947

Oliver Bernard, 1962

Wallace Fowlie, 1966

Paul Schmidt, 1975

Louis Simpson, 1996

Wyatt Alexander Mason, 2002

Christian Bök, 2011


Black A, white E, red I, green U, blue O,
Vowels that echo like remote carillons:
A, sheen of black-haired corselet on winged millions
Round cruel stenches buzzing to and fro;

Gulfs of gloom. E, clear vapours and pavilions,
White kings, thrilled blossoms, spears of frozen snow;
I, purples, blood-dews, crimson lips aglow
With shame of rosy limbs on languorous pillions:

U, spheres, divine vibrations of green surges,
Calm of meads sown with beeves, æthereal verges,
Calm wreathed on furrowed foreheads of the wise;

O, supreme clarion shrilling forth strange clamours,
Silences cloven of worlds and angels, glamours;
Omega, O the beam of Her blue eyes!

YE vowels, A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue,
I will reveal your latent births one of these days.
A, of big burnished flies the ebon hairy stays
Buzzing o’er cruel stenches, gulfs of shade; E, hue
Of tents and vapours, lance of proud glaciers, rajahs who
In linen glitter, umbel shiverings; I, displays
Of purples, laugh of lovely lips where angers blaze,
Expectorated blood, excesses steeped in rue.
U, the divine vibration of green seas,
Æons, the peace of cattle-studded leas,
Lines drawn by alchemy on studious foreheads wise.
O, supreme clarion full of strident noises strange,
Silences where worlds and angels range,
O, the Omega, and the violet ray of His eyes!


A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue;
Someday I’ll tell your latent birth O vowels:
A, a black corset hairy with gaudy flies
That bumble round all stinking putrefactions,

Gulfs of darkness; E, candors of steam and tents,
Icicles’ proud spears, white kings, and flutter of parasols;
I, purple blood coughed up, laughter of lovely lips
In anger or ecstatic penitence;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of virescent seas,
Peace of the pastures sown with animals, peace
Of the wrinkles that alchemy stamps on studious brows;

O, Clarion supreme, full of strange stridences,
Silences crossed by Angels and Worlds:
- Omega, the violet ray of His Eyes!

A BLACK, E white, I red, U green, O blue - I’ll tell
One day, you vowels how you came to be and whence.
A, black, the glittering of flies that form a dense,
Velvety corset round some foul and cruel smell,

Gulfs of dark shadow; E, the glacier’s insolence,
Steams, tents, white kings, the quiver of a flowery bell;
I, crimsons, blood expectorated, laughs that well
From lovely lips in wrath or drunken penitence;

U, cycles, the divine vibrations of the seas,
Peace of herb-dotted pastures or the wrinkled ease
That alchemy imprints upon the scholar’s brow;

O, the last trumpet, loud with strangely strident brass
The silences through which the words and angels pass:
O stands for Omega, His Eyes’ deep violet glow!


A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
Which buzz around cruel smells,

Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapours and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;

U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas
The peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the furrows
Which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;

O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:
O the Omega, the violet ray of Her Eyes!

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
One day I will tell your latent birth:
A, black hairy corset of shining flies
Which buzz around cruel stench,

Gulfs of darkness; E, whiteness of vapors and tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, quivering of flowers;
I, purples, spit blood, laughter of beautiful lips
In anger or penitent drunkenness;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of green seas,
Peace of pastures scattered with animals, peace of the wrinkles
Which alchemy prints on heavy studious brows;

O, Supreme Clarion full of strange stridor,
Silences crossed by Worlds and Angels:
- O, the Omega, violet beam from His Eyes!


Black A, white E, red I, green U, blue O - vowels,
Some day I will open your silent pregnancies:
A, black belt, hairy with bursting flies,
Bumbling and buzzing over stinking cruelties,

Pits of night; E, candor of sand and pavilions,
High glacial spears, white kings, trembling Queen Anne’s lace;
I, bloody spittle, laughter dribbling from a face
In wild denial or in anger, vermilions;

U, . . . divine movement of viridian seas,
Peace of pastures animal-strewn, peace of calm lines
Drawn on foreheads worn with heavy alchemies;

O, supreme Trumpet, harsh with strange stridencies,
Silences traced in angels and astral designs:
O... Omega ... the violet light of His Eyes!
Louis Simpson (The Virginia Quarterly Review, Spring 1996, 291-300.)

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
Some day I shall speak of your genesis:
A, corset black and hairy with flies
Heaped to bursting on atrocious smells,

Dark guls; E, candor of steamship and tent,
Spears of proud glaciers, white kings, shivering
umbels;
I, purples, spit blood, beautiful lips
That laugh in anger or drunkenly repent;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of green seas,
Peace of pastures dotted with animals,
Lines that alchemy prints in studious faces;

O, supreme trumpet full of strange, harsh sounds,
Silences traversed by worlds and angels;
O Omega, His eyes’ violet rays!


Someday I’ll explain your burgeoning births:
A, a corset; black and hairy, buzzing with flies
Bumbling like bees around a merciless stench,

And shadowy guls; E, white vapors and tents, proud
Glacial peaks, white kings, shivering Queen Anne’s lace;
I, purples, bloody spittle, lips’ lovely laughter
In anger or drunken contrition;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of viridian seas;
Peace of pastures sown with beasts, wrinkles
Stamped on studious brows as if by alchemy;

O, that last Trumpet, overflowing with strange discord,
Silences bridged by Worlds and Angels
- O the Omega, the violet beam from His Eyes!
A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: the vowels.
I will tell thee, one day, of thy newborn portents:
A, the black velvet cuirass of flies whose essence
commingles, abuzz, around the cruellest of smells,
Wells of shadow; E, the whitewash of mists and tents,
glaives of icebergs, albino kings, frostbit fennels;
I, the bruises, the blood spat from lips of damsels
who must laugh in scorn or shame, both intoxicants;
U, the waves, divine vibratos of verdant seas,
pleasant meadows rich with venery, grins of ease
which alchemy grants the visages of the wise;
O, the supreme Trumpeter of our strange sonnet—
quietudes crossed by another [World and Spirit],
O, the Omega!—the violet raygun of [Her] Eyes....
The primary function of translation is to establish communication within the same cultural setting and also across language borders. However, we have to keep in mind that communication is always preceded by the act of interpretation. We interpret texts, whether they be verbal, visual, or musical texts or cultural situations. The immediate connection with the thought of translation has traditionally been with verbal texts. How can written messages be transferred from one language into another, from one culture into another? For the interpretation and the translation of verbal texts, no electronic or digital devices have been necessary, which meant that throughout previous centuries discussions about the craft and theory of translation have focused mainly on the transplantation of words and the possible variations of their semantic meanings from one language into another.

The introduction of electronic and digital technology prompted a widening of translation thinking. How relevant was the paradigm of translation beyond the level of verbal translation? It soon became apparent that the concept of translation had to enter the realm of visual, musical, multimedia, and hypermedia translations. Digital technology and especially the hypermediatization of texts that it implies reconfirmed one of the basic driving forces of translation, namely, the constant process of associative thinking. Translation is primarily a process of creating, using, and evaluating associations.

With the use of digital technologies the text considered as a fixed object in time and space gives way to the possibilities of interpretations and interactions with multiple occurrences of the text. In that sense, the interpretive act is no longer static, but rather a continuous dialogue with the object. Digital technology allows us to move from the descriptive level to the interactive level. The viewer, listener, or reader of a digital object becomes an active component of an interpretive process, that we call actualization, by which the text comes to be present. Digital objects exist only in this dimension of the present of their actualization. This interpretive process from the verbal to the visual, and the musical, supported by digital technologies, is entirely conditioned by the activities and perceptions of the reader, listener, and viewer.

Now that digital technology has made its presence known, the question has to be asked, in what form does the digital expand translation thinking and the dialogue with texts? The inherent activity of translation can be seen in two ways: translation always establishes associations between two things, and at the same time translation is always movement. Until the emergence of electronic and digital technology, that movement could only be recorded and fixed in one single form. Verbal, visual, and musical translations by their very nature are
static. They exclude the interaction of the reader, spectator, or listener. The audience becomes a passive participant and cannot in any way modify the work. Similarly, an audience maintains a passive attitude toward films, even though the art form of the film brings words, sound, images, and movements together.

However, the multimedia age, and digital technology in particular, have changed and will change the existence of future audiences as readers, spectators, listeners, and interactive participants. Translation is movement, and digital technology creates a total involvement. Since the original image of translation is connected with constantly establishing relationships, movements from one place to the next, the translation paradigm is one of the most convincing tools to create an energetic and creative interaction with works. Digital technology can be responsible for bringing human creative expressions closer together through the incorporation of the action of the user. Referring once again to film and also to other forms of artistic expression, the content is fixed and always strictly organized by the medium itself. In the digital environment, the content is subject to change. In that sense, the digital is closer to life because of its capacity to evolve, to change according to the environment.

For a moment, it might be helpful to think about Julio Cortázar’s novel *Hopscotch*, in which he informs the reader that the novel can be read in the sequence in which it was printed, but also by following a different sequence of chapters that he outlines. The digital allows us to approach texts in non-chronological and non-sequential ways, which ultimately will evolve in a more comprehensive way of understanding and experiencing works. If we consider the short story “The Bound Man,” by Ilse Aichinger, the two most important key words are “rope” and “play.” Both words are repeated numerous times throughout the story. Using digital tools, the reader will be able to juxtapose in seconds all the places where either one of the words appears in the story. This allows the reader to walk through the text in a transverse way. That same technique can be enacted with other images, expressions, or even metaphors. Thus, the reader experiences a different way of recreating a text from within. The strength of the digital world is its “plasticity.” Not only does the content assume plasticity but also the content can emerge through different sensory outputs. The digital word in a text has no fixed place; one is free from the text, which no longer depends on its chronological or sequential presence. The digital dimension is not organized by succession, but rather by means of semantic relationships. In that sense, digital gets us to access works in the present, which also means that the digital can never be saved in a static or fixed form.

The advantage and therefore the disadvantage of digital thinking and practice is the recognition that digital creations can only be experienced and not recorded in a static form. They exist only as temporary phenomena depending on the actions and perceptions of the user. The digital universe allows us to present the interpretation of
texts in the most comprehensive way. We can create objects that contain verbal, visual, musical, and sound components that will allow a person to approach the object from various perspectives to create a multiple sensory experience. Thus, digital technology allows us to create a more total understanding of a work and, at the same time, a possibility to establish a continuous interaction with the work.

A noir Écarlate, Rouge, Un œil, Orpleins : Angoisse,
Je dirai quelque jour sesnaissances labentes :
A noir cœur rubis de mouches déroutées
Que combinent autour Des quantums crémeux,

Celle Tombeau E, liant les voeux et des textes
Ronces des glaïeuls feux, rois blanches, pinsons dorées,
J'appris d'un sang triste, j'opins de beaux belles
Dans la cendre de l'hirondelle j'intente ;

L'oc, c'est le récit des divins des mains rouges
Rains des pâles semés d'ombre, rage des nains
Que l'alchimie imprimeaux grandis fortés

O spinner, Clairez plein des étuves étouges
Silencieux, sans des mœurs et des ragiers
O l'Omige, venant, vient de ces yeux !
Design Principles

By Cassini Nazir

Never hide the original text.
Modal windows, popovers, drop-down windows and other auxiliary content should be avoided or designed in such a way that the original text is never covered.

Encourage exploration and discovery.
Interactions should encourage the user to uncover associations within the poem.

Touch-based interactions.
A multi-touch interface presents the ideal interaction arena for users. Rather than mouse-mediated interaction, users can directly touch the text and interact.

Lines and dividers absent from user interface.
To encourage the idea of translation as a discussion, the user interface should not use lines to segment content. The absence of lines subtly encourages the user to form and make associations with the text.

Distance from the text always visible.
The user should understand the levels of distance from the poem as auxiliary content is introduced.

Hypermedia Translation Principles

By Michele Rosen

Use the text as a prism.
Each hypermedia translation provides new cultural and sensory perspectives through the prism of the text.

Value process over product.
The significance of the hypermedia translation lies in the process of creation as much as in the end product.

Know the audience.
Hypermedia translations should be created with a well-defined audience in mind.

Show your work.
Hypermedia translations should be thoroughly and publicly documented to enable critical examination.

Embrace iterative improvement.
The process of creating many hypermedia translations will help us understand the value of hypermedia translation.
Further Reading


Frank Dufour is the Director of the doctoral program in Arts and Technology at The University of Texas at Dallas. He holds a PhD in Sciences of Information and Communication dedicated to the representations of Time in the digital age. He is a multimedia artist and his research is anchored in multimodal translations.

Cassini Nazir is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Arts and Technology program at The University of Texas at Dallas, where he teaches classes in interaction design, web design and design principles. His interests include accessibility, interaction and user interface design, and user experience.

Michele Rosen is the executive director of the American Literary Translators Association, managing editor of Translation Review, and a PhD candidate in the Humanities at The University of Texas at Dallas.

Rainer Schulte is editor of Translation Review. He is the founder of the Center for Translation Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas and co-founder of the American Literary Translators Association.

For more information visit the following websites:

www.utdallas.edu/atec/translations/
translation.utdallas.edu
github.com/cassininazir/voyelles
THE CENTER FOR TRANSLATION STUDIES

The Center for Translation Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas is an integral part of the School of Arts and Humanities and an internationally recognized research center that promotes the study of translation as an innovative foundation for the study of literature and the humanities. Since its inception, the Center has fulfilled its mission by:

• Conducting Beginning and Advanced Translation Workshops and Seminars
• Building bridges between languages and cultures
• Fostering cooperative initiatives between Arts & Technology and the Humanities
• Collaborating with translation centers in other countries
• Promoting international literature in English translation
• Promoting groundbreaking research in the practice and theory of translation
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• Developing translation studies in the digital age

TRANSLATION REVIEW

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