

Translating Gesture in a Transnational Public Sphere

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Translation is a key concept for interpreting cross-cultural exchanges. In this article, we track the development of an artistic project that we developed in conjunction with Federation Square Melbourne and Art Centre Nabi in Seoul. It involved the performance of a live telematic dance that occurred in both cities and was transmitted via the use of large screens. The interaction across these physical and mediated spaces produced a dynamic exchange of learning and communication. Through our active involvement as curators, participant observers and the gathering of audience participation data, we discovered that the corporeality of the dance placed both the addresser and the addressee in the context of the social practice of translation. In this context, we note that artistic projects can provide an embodied experience of the forms of heterolingual address and cross-cultural translation as analysed by Naoki Sakai. We conclude that the fascination for engaging in transnational communication was stimulated by the cross-cultural process of translating gestures.

Keywords: Translation; Cultural Translation; Large Screens; Telematic Dance; Transnational Public Sphere

In the mediated networks of the transnational public sphere, cultural communication is prismatic, prompting new forms of cultural hybridity. In this article, we explore the effects of transnational cultural hybridity not simply as the representation or depiction of translation within an existing text or an image, but a process that is materialised within contemporary cultural interactions. The cue for this approach is taken from a key trope of contemporary artistic practice: the ephemeral yet

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generative aspects of cultural translation. From the nomadic events of artistic collectives such as Stalker to the participatory meals, games, symposia and ‘constructed situations’ that mark the work of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija or Tino Sehgal, there is a strong trend within contemporary art practice towards generating interactive methods of public participation and experiments in critical forms of transnational dialogue (Papastergiadis 2012). In these cases, a new creative modality based on ‘interpretation’ rather than ‘legislation’ has been established. This new creative modality is essential for the formation of transnational public sphere as the result of an accelerated cross-cultural flows in contemporary society (Papastergiadis 2005).

As theorist Aihwa Ong (1999: 4) has noted, ‘transnationality alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalisms’. A transnational public sphere is a shared arena of public awareness that cuts through, beyond and across geographic and political borders. It hinges on the mobility of cultural processes to foreground the ways in which human practices are shaped and shifted through flows of information. In this milieu, the role of face-to-face behavioral and communication protocols are necessarily entangled with other modes of presence. What is at stake is arguably a process in which the assumptions embedded in the face-to-face and the mediated are transformed through renegotiation and redefinition.

Although there is already an extensive discussion on the formation of transnational cultural spaces within political and cultural discourses (McGuigan 1996, 2002, 2005), there has been little empirical research conducted on the potential of large screens to act as key sites in the transnational public sphere or as agents for cultural hybridity (McQuire 2009). Following Habermas’ (1989 [1962]) formulation of a literary public sphere reflexive of early capitalist society, McGuigan expanded the cultural public sphere to include not only literary reflection of daily events but also a whole range of popular cultural interventions in our late-modern society (McGuigan 1997, 1998, 2002, 2005). These works provide the basis for including popular media and forms of mass entertainment as important reflexive sites for public participation. In this article, we consolidate these lines of arguments by evaluating a collaborative production process that was deployed during a research project that commissioned and curated innovative interactive artistic content on large screens in Australia and Korea.¹

Formed in 2008, the research project ‘Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere’ was centred around a partnership between Federation Square in Melbourne and Art Centre Nabi in Seoul. Both the organisations are host to large screens in public plazas. The aim was to link the remote screens in real-time for the simultaneous display of interactive artworks and to investigate the extent to which these networked media events could contribute to new understandings of civic, national and transnational communities. Part of the research process involves commissioning participatory, screen-based art works to be used as platforms for

public interaction. Our methodology as investigators during this process has not been driven by a mode of critical detachment that generates insight by means of belated examination of the documentation of an event, or even as disengaged observers of the event as they occur. We have been involved as critics, but we are also collaborators with the artistic, curatorial and technical production of these events. This kind of involvement has prompted the amalgamation of data gathering and observational research techniques, and it has also precipitated a complex series of interventions and feedback loops in the conceptualisation, production and dissemination process. To date, this research project has commissioned four transnational public art events that have engaged real-time participation simultaneously in Korea and Australia: Value (2009), SMS_Origins (2009), The HELLO Project (2011) and Australia vs. Korea: Dance Battle (2012).

This article focuses closely on The HELLO Project (2011), a live telematic dance event that linked two large public screens in Seoul and Melbourne. Choreographed by Rebecca Hilton (Australia) and Soonho Park (Korea), it took the form of a continuously evolving dance routine in which sequences of movements were shared, learnt and translated through the screens in real time. As an easy-to-learn dance game, the project negotiated linguistic, technological, spatial and cultural differences to produce a concrete manifestation of a temporary transnational public sphere. In taking HELLO as a case study for transnational cultural translation, this article aims to expand investigations into the ways in which large screens can shape transnational public space and to address the role of cultural translation within a mediated transnational public sphere.

Translation as a Cultural Trope: Producing Knowledge through Gesture

Scholars on translation have eloquently discussed how the practice of translation destabilises the fixity of the original to produce meanings that weave between the history of the language and its performative force (Spivak 1993: 179–200, Benjamin 1999: 60–9). Translation has been elevated as a meta-trope for representing the processes of all thought and communication (Derrida 1998). Most recently, this model has also served to highlight the dynamic process of cultural differentiation in, through and despite the forces of globalisation (Delanty 2009). Since the 1970s, the trope of translation has been applied in a wide range of cross-cultural practices, sociopolitical situations and across a number of media and is now used as frequently in visual and cultural studies as it is in linguistics and literary studies. Verstraeten (2000), for example, argues for a political economy of public sphere centred on the idea of media as a site for translating social exclusivity and political ideologies. The sphere of music is probably most productive in supplying evidence for translating cultural practices into wider social signage of contemporary society. Simon Frith's extensive study of contemporary music provided us with a new interpretative framework of cultural identity and intercultural communication (Frith 1996). Works on dance have raised similar issues around identity, gender and race (see, for

example, Albright 1997; Banes 1998; Hanna 1988; Grau and Jordan 2000; Pillai 2002).

Theories of translation are suited to the gestures of dance identified in this project. Not unlike the linguistic signs of language, dance is a form of cognitive semiotics that functions as a symbolic and iconic process, its gestures furnishing motifs of embodiment and public rituals for the cultivation of group and self agencies (Turner 1995). By highlighting the present-ness and embodied reflexivity of the performance, the spatial translation of dance provides new potential to experience space and corporeality (Hunter 2011). As Preston-Dunlop and Sayers (2011) suggest, the translation of dance extends the creative practice. Butler (1990) also addressed the significance of gesture when she noted in her theory of performative identity that the performer's individualised creative practice is evident in even the most repetitive movements. Subtle changes in gesture can, therefore, reflect a process of making a new identity.

Using gesture as a form of 'making identity' was a key motivator for choreographers Hilton and Park in their initial design of HELLO. The first step of the project was to invite specific groups of people from Seoul and Melbourne to 'donate' movements to the choreographers in response to a series of verbal questions. The questions aimed to elicit emotional and physical responses that would translate easily into gestural movements, including 'How would you describe Australia/Korea in one movement? What's your favourite dance move? How are you feeling right now?' The idea was to develop a repertoire of gestures that expressed the individual's immediate and broader placements within specific geographic, personal and cultural frameworks. Attentive not simply to differences but also to linking principles, Park and Hilton worked with different cultural groups at community centres in Melbourne and Seoul (predominantly children and teenagers from Footscray Community Arts Centre and Seoul Multicultural Families Centre) to 'harvest' a selection of movements. Movements were timed so as to be delivered in the space of one human breath, resulting in the delivery of short gestures such as putting a hand over the heart, miming the playing of a guitar, spinning on the spot, pretending to give someone a hug, drawing circles in the air, touching both hands to the nose, jumping with legs outstretched, pointing in opposite directions, opening and closing both hands, taking a step sideways, walking forwards or backwards and clapping. These simple physical responses were videoed and catalogued to produce a database or 'gesture archive'. Park and Hilton then each choreographed two 15 second dance sequences based on the gestures collated in their respective archives. Their sequences were deliberately short, easy to learn and able to translate easily to a big screen format.

This process led to intensified curatorial discussion about exchange, translation and cultural difference. As Korean curator Somi Han noted (personal communication, October 2011), 'In the 21st century where the development of technology is making similar phenomena occur around the world, is it still possible to find the difference in cultural identities?' At the heart of this project was the

acknowledgement that all translations involve gaps – moments of elision and miscommunication, compromise and exchange. An enduring sense of melancholy frequently trails in the path of translation, a sense that something inexplicable but vital, a part that exists in a pristine and imperious way in the original, is almost inevitably lost. We begin with an alternative proposition on the dynamics of translation: The act of searching for an equivalence of meaning in another language is not an exhausting action exacted on the original, but is the initiation of a creative relationship across the two languages. Translation occurs in the paradox of reproduction and creation, equivalence and surplus amongst differences. This twisting and pulling of one meaning into another – the exchange of one gesture for another – this composition from the old and the new can only occur if we accept that communication is inherently plastic and extensive, rather than bound within a field of mechanical finitude.

Translation is then not only the transfer or even the reconfiguration of meaning from one language into another. It also involves the eruption or articulation of something new that has seemingly come out of nowhere (what Castoriadis calls the void), but that is actually implicit or latent in the encounter between the two coding systems. Another way to say this might be that the eruption comes from the shared humanity that baffles and thrills as much as connects all the communicators. It is through creativity that the existence of being can generate new forms, otherwise, existence is an ‘abyss, chaos, groundless’ (Castoriadis 1997: 3). For Castoriadis (1997), creativity is neither the reconfiguration of existing elements, nor the assemblage that results from external pressures. Creativity is the form through which a paradigm of being is distinguished from the multitudes of forces that exert influence on it. In this context, we understand the task of translation as a creative, meaning-making activity in both the ongoing social practice of constructing intersubjective relations and in the building of institutional structures. This task highlights that conceptual meanings and social forms are never fixed but are always emergent.

By situating translation within the spectrum of creativity, we are also stressing that it is not confined to a reconfiguration that is the result of the interaction between existing entities and concepts. Following this logic, the work of translation can be understood as the bringing forth of something into the world that previously did not exist. It requires a creative leap. The labour of translation is in its production of creative modification and conceptual extension. To adopt and combine the familiar phrasing of Benjamin and Sakai, we contend that the work of translation is in the invention of a new addressee and the reinvention of the languages used for communication (Sakai 1997: 7).

Telematic Dance as a Conduit for Translation

How, then, to establish a model for translation that makes visible both the ellipses of knowledge transfer and the process of knowledge production? Choreographer

Rebecca Hilton began thinking of a continuously evolving series of gestures that would foreground the translations of individual exchanges rather than encourage mass participation. The method turned around the notion of a dance game, a kind of ‘exquisite corpse’ based on physical movements rather than words or images. For the Surrealists, the game of ‘Exquisite Corpse’ was a conduit for a new kind of collaboration, one that allowed segregated individual contributions to coalesce into a new, unexpected whole. We matched this principle with the idea of ‘Telephone’ or ‘Chinese Whispers’, a game in which chains of mistranslations are generated in the simple exchange of usually poetic information. Hilton called the process ‘exquisite whispers’. As she explained, ‘working with human beings in real time, creating art that is abstract and representational and something else altogether, collapsing and freely traversing as it does, the spaces between visceral, visual, intellectual and emotional information, I think dance is the premiere art form for elaborating on the human condition. There are many languages in the world but we all share the human form’ (Hilton 2011).

Performance projects that use video-conferencing tools to build networked environments often highlight the ways in which corporeality can revitalise digital exchange (Brooks 2010). The incorporation of digital communication technologies in telematic dance events impacts not only upon choreographic style but also upon relationships between performers, audiences and sites. As Lisa Naugle reports, these projects consistently involve ‘a synchronous approach to communication [...]. The basic technology system consists of a computer, monitor, video camera, projection surface(s), microphones and speakers at each site’ (2002: 56). Moreover, as networked performances are often streamed or archived to the Web, relations between public and private space take on new dimensions within these digitised performance frames (see, for example, the work of the US Association for Dance and Performance Telematics). However, unlike many of its telematic precursors, HELLO did not necessitate the deployment of expensive custom-made motion-capture or movement sensory hardware and software. It was instead designed to work with vernacular, readily available telecommunication platforms such as Skype, laptop computers and video projectors. As Hilton (2011) noted:

There are several primary intentions in the conceptualising of this project. One intention is to use the large screen technology in a public space as a vehicle for a connection and communication between cultures. Dance is the natural partner for this technology as information is translatable and transmittable without a heavy dependence on language. Also, the idea of generating a new international or transnational folk dance is very appealing to me as a response to the way nationalism is so often used as a way to divide us.

The choreographers’ shared willingness to involve non-dancers in the creation of their public events was also a significant driver for the project’s development and tied in with the aim to experiment with readily accessible public communication platforms so as to bridge disparate cultural arenas.

The Screen as an Interface for Translation

Finding the right kinds of large screens as an interface for the translation process was also crucial to the success of HELLO. It was clear from the outset that translation would occur on multiple levels: Within the development of the gestures themselves (as bodily responses to verbal questions posed by the choreographers); between the participants who were exchanging and teaching the gestures to each other in Seoul and Melbourne and across the different social, technological and architectural registers that framed the screen sites in each city. The capacity of urban screens to affect public space and facilitate urban participation is dependent on numerous factors, including the architectural integration of screens within their urban surrounds and upon programming and commercial directives. However, the extent to which the public may be physically or emotionally 'connected' to urban screens (via interactive technologies, or through the screen's integration within broader instances of cultural consumption) also significantly shapes the individual's engagement with both the content and format of large screen presentations.

Within the distinct urban environments of Melbourne and Seoul, large screens take on variegated economic and social significance. Unlike Melbourne, the urban landscape of Seoul is saturated with large screens, the majority of which function as privately owned corporate billboards designed exclusively for promotional purposes. Screen clusters populate the tops of high-rise towers, some visible from kilometres away. The intense commercial density of the Seoul ad-scape tends to relegate the moving image to background noise. In contrast, the deployment of large screen advertising in Melbourne is much smaller in scope, limited to a select number of public billboards displayed in prominent civic spaces throughout the central business district (CBD).

As the public's relation to the screen in each context is tempered by these economic and social factors, the curators needed to select screens with similar urban, architectural and technological qualities so as to maximise the potential for cross-cultural exchange. The screen site in Seoul was chosen to complement the screen site at Melbourne's Federation Square. Billed as 'the city's meeting place', Fed Square was established on the banks of the Yarra River in the centre of the city in 2002. It has since become one of Melbourne's key public urban spaces. Privately managed by Federation Square Pty Ltd, the square is host to a variety of restaurants, tourist attractions and cultural centres such as the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, and the National Gallery of Victoria. It can accommodate up to 15,000 people at any one time. Fed Square's large LED screen is unique for the extent of its integration with the built environment. Mounted 5½ m from the ground and spanning a width of 13 m, the screen is situated directly above a performance stage and embedded into an architectural façade. It serves as both a key visual element of the square and an important platform for public events in Melbourne. Current screen programming incorporates live broadcasts (of performances, celebrations such as New Year's Eve and sporting events), television, films and screenings of prerecorded content

including creative and artistic programmes of video art, interactive art and video games.

The screen site chosen in Seoul was located in a public outdoor space owned by Arko Art Centre, a cultural hub located off Daehak-ro Street to the east of Seoul's CBD. Referred to as the 'Broadway of Asia', Daehak-ro was predominantly a university district until the 1970s, when Seoul National University relocated. The area now contains numerous performance, theatre and arts venues and is a busy cultural precinct. The ambient traffic around Daehak-ro includes students, tourists, arts audiences, performers and business professionals. Arko Art Centre was opened in conjunction with Arko Art Theatre and Arko Art Library in 1979. The centre includes three exhibition spaces dedicated to the presentation of contemporary art and is located on a small street close to Marronnier Park, a small but popular public space in Seoul. Abutting the centre's entrance, the street is lined with hawkers selling used books and magazines, sweet snacks and cooked food.

Having no permanent large screen of its own, for the purposes of this project a 13 × 5-metre screen was installed across the external façade of Arko Art Centre, custom built to match the scale and positioning of the screen at Fed Square. Two high Lumix projectors were used to project the image onto the screen during the event. The emphasis was on generating equalities of experience for spectators within the two very different public environments. To further facilitate connections between individuals in Seoul and Melbourne, private tent enclosures were incorporated within the two public spaces, forging 'private-public' bubbles within the urban landscape. This consideration stemmed directly from the transnational aspects of the project: it addressed the concerns of the Korean partners about individual reticence to spontaneously perform in public. The temporary tents helped to create a sheltered, relaxed and comfortable environment for all members of the public who wished to participate in the event. Projectors inside each tent allowed participants to view each other through the Skype portal. Two cameras were installed at each site, one capturing the participants in the tent, the other capturing footage of the public interacting with the screen in the screen. The vision feeds from the four cameras were also shared live between the big screens in Melbourne and Seoul. Vision mixers at each site allowed for live broadcast mixing of the footage between the screens, while a split-screen system enabled the simultaneous transmission of footage from Seoul and Melbourne on the big screens. In Seoul, DJ Soolee provided the sound track for the event, and his dance mix was audible to audiences and participants in both cities.

When participants entered the tents, they encountered a live life-size projection of their counterpart across the globe. The participants were encouraged to learn whatever they could of the dance they were shown and then teach whatever they remembered to the next person in line. Each participant was able to share, learn and translate sequences of movements so as to collectively produce a chain of gestures. Movements were passed back and forth between participants in real time over the course of one hour, resulting in the surprising and rapid mutation of the original choreographed gestures into highly personalised, creative adaptations. Footage

captured inside the tent was broadcast in real time to the big screens in the two cities, allowing the public audiences at both sites to witness the process of translation as it unfolded live. Over 400 people attended the event during its simultaneous delivery in Melbourne and Seoul.

Audience Responses to the Event in Seoul and Melbourne

Although the event was synchronised across the two sites, differences in environmental and temporal factors did alter the overall experience for participants in Seoul versus those in Melbourne. In Seoul, the event began at 6 pm on the evening of a warm autumn day. The sun was just going down, and crowds of people were milling around the public space after work. The event attracted significant ambient traffic, many of whom were on their way to other performance events in the cultural district. The demographic was largely families, young people and students, the majority of which came from Seoul. In Melbourne, the event commenced at 8 pm on a Friday night. It was dark at this time and also had begun to rain. The ambient traffic in the square was minimised because of these environmental conditions. Those that did participate in the event were both residents and tourists – many had come to Federation Square for other purposes (dinner and shopping) and decided to join the event spontaneously. The majority of Melbourne participants were young (between the ages of 18 and 26), and many were students.

During the event, 30 people participated in an audience response survey in Melbourne and 40 in Seoul. The survey asked questions about motivations for coming to the event, overall experiences of learning and teaching the dance, and the regularity of interactions with digital media and public art works. Both Australian and Korean participants felt a strong sense of personal connection during the event, in part because of its live public broadcast between the urban screens. By prioritising embodied engagement in the development of a transnational interface, the event facilitated meaningful connections between strangers separated by language and space. This was in part because mobilising dance allowed us to work with, rather than around, the different cultural priorities of participants with no shared spoken or written language. Participants in Melbourne and Seoul were involved in translating a message that did not 'belong' to them (the dance was a choreographed montage of donated gestures; it did not issue from a 'self' and was not affixed to a singular speaking subject), and they were also able to intervene in the way in which the text was physically delivered. Many attendants appreciated personalising the routine or improvising on the dance movements: 'I enjoyed making it my own thing', as one participant noted of her experience in teaching the dance. Without having mastery over the dance, they were able to make individual contributions – gifts – while still permitting the whole to remain as an open-ended collectivity.

In Seoul, one in five participants improvised on the dance moves, either of their own volition or because they had trouble remembering the original sequence. Others took their role as a teacher more seriously and valued accuracy in the translation

process, one noting that ‘I just copied what I saw, hoped that I got it right and that the other person was able to follow’. The process of real-time teaching and learning – of absorption and repetition – heightened the participants’ sense of meaningful connection, generating a communicative rather than spectacular exchange of knowledge. The large majority of participants in both cities had also never participated in an interactive digital art works before. As one participant in Seoul commented, ‘It was amazing because I felt we were very close even though we were physically very far away’, with numerous others also commenting on the close relation between communication and pedagogy. ‘Even though they were strangers to me’, said one participant, ‘I didn’t feel strange. Because there was no verbal communication involved, it felt comfortable to communicate [with the Australians]’.

Heterolingual and Homolingual Address: Translation as a Poetic Social Practice

But how to understand the status of the public–private communications that occur within these dance events? Are these performances that communicate an identity – a sense of self that conforms to an already known entity and thereby performs according to a scripted identity? Alternately, the question can be posed in a more open-ended manner, in the sense that the identity is not just encoded within a bounded sense of self but is also a platform for an emergent form of subjectivity. Identity in this sense is not a given but part of a process through which subjectivity appears in the encounter with the world and through the media of communication. The interaction of the participants therefore needs to be considered in a conceptual framework that is both open to and bound by relational dynamics. The gesture of one person is literally connected to and a departure from the gesture of another. The event is then constantly stretched by and recoiling from the actions initiated by participants. The form of this interaction can only be grasped by considering the relation one partner develops with another – it works when the point of contact is not only just a return of equivalence but also an encounter with contact points of difference.

Audience participation data demonstrated that (1) the corporeality of the dance placed both addresser and addressee in the context of the social practice of translation, and (2) it was within this context that new relations were formed, from the intensive intimacy of the one-on-one teaching and learning process to the public display of this process to a wider but situated audience through the large screens. Naoki Sakai’s differentiation between homolingual and heterolingual address provides one framework to better understand the kinds of inter-subjective relations at stake in this process. Sakai discusses the communicative function of translation by comparing the representation of translation in homolingual address and the practice of translation in heterolingual address. Where homolingual address refers to how the addresser relates to the addressee through the immediacy of reciprocity and comprehension, heterolingual address refers to how the addressee would respond to the addresser through different degrees of comprehension, including

misapprehension. He draws this distinction by differentiating between address and communication: address is an anterior performative that does not designate the description of its aim; and communication is a perlocutionary act that comes after, accomplishing that which it anticipates. Address does not guarantee that the message arrives; communication ensures that it does. And yet, it never arrives completely (Derrida 1998) – communication is not a process with an easily definable beginning and end.

Heterolingual address is evident in the dance exchange through the transmission of movements between participants. Inside the tents, as the participants attempted to imitate what they saw on the screen, their body movements became more and more comfortable until they appeared to internalise and incorporate the steps into their regular dance moves. Outside the tents, about 10–20 m away on the large screens where the Skype feeds from Seoul and Melbourne were projected, the ambient audience was witness to the similarities and the differences of these gestures. Two movements can be identified here: first, the interpellation of the gesture as it is internalised and embodied by the addressee; second, the externalisation of the translated gesture from the addressee, who has now become the addresser, to the next participant and to the crowd. Where the first can signify communication in that the message is successfully sent from sender to receiver, the second can also signify the iteration of the form through the practice of incommensurability. As one respondent from Australia said, ‘What’s she watching now is not what she was doing’; another commented, ‘No distinction between learning and teaching’. In Korea, one participant quipped, ‘I did modify some bits, and they followed me well’; another revealed, ‘My version was a bit different from the original’. Both sets of commentaries from Korea and Australia highlight the two types of movements suggested above. Where the comment identifying ‘no distinction’ between teaching and learning shows direct engagement with the changing subject-position from addressee to addresser, the other responses demonstrate the multiple performatives from heterolingual address within a social domain.

Homolingual address elides the disparity between address and communication by focusing on the representation of translation. Where translation between two different language communities succeeds in the transfer of the message from one to another, this type of address, which assumes that to address is to communicate, does not take into account the addressee’s multiple language histories or how the message delivered can also be excluded. If communication fails, it is understood as ‘an experience of understanding the experience of not comprehending’ (Sakai 1997: 6). It is interesting to note that none of our respondents referred to the absolute failure of comprehension. There are two possible reasons for this. First, it could be argued that most acknowledged the technical limitations of the low-resolution Skype platform used to transmit the video and conceded that this sometimes inhibited copying the gestures accurately. Second, it might be suggested that most participants were attuned to the instantaneous and spontaneous nature of the dance as a fleeting and ephemeral practice of embodiment and did not expect to

achieve mastery of the dance, despite their efforts to watch and repeat the dance gestures of their partners. This indicates that the corporeality of dance can also disrupt programmed trajectories by mobilising the body, dance lends itself well to the incommensurabilities of social articulations that underpin cultural hybridity.

The difference between homolingual and heterolingual modes of address and the potential of heterolingual address to encompass multiple audiences, underpin Sakai's framework for translation as 'a poetic social practice' (Sakai 1997: 13). Sakai's method might be productively compared to Lefebvre's concept of transduction. In his essay 'A Right to the City', Lefebvre defines transduction as an experimental methodology enabling a dialogue between existing and potential alternate forms of social life: 'Transduction assumes an incessant feedback between the conceptual framework and empirical observation. It introduces rigour in invention and knowledge in utopia' (1996: 151). Transduction creates meaning by taking knowledge out of its context and passing it into a new domain. It heightens the feedback between the empirical observation of everyday life and the imaginary forms by which alternate states are constructed. Like the particular use of the concept of translation that we have adopted, it destabilises the set of personal relations that structures the addresser and the addressee. The translator is devoid of positionality because she/he is internally split and multiple; she/he is also singular, and it is the externality of this singularity that marks the point of discontinuity in the social and produces translation as a practice of continuity that sutures discontinuity. As Morris suggests, heterolingual address illuminates translation as a social relation at the site of incommensurability and 'as a practice always in some way carried out in the company of others' (1997: xiv).

The sense of connection between strangers was evident from the comments of the participants: 'Really nice ... like there was a connection'; 'It's useful – finding out about culture and coming together as one'; 'We used a body language. That's why we felt a sense of closeness even though we don't speak the same language'; 'we communicate with each other through the screen without actually talking to each other. I felt like we became friends'; 'without verbal communication, we communicate through bodily movements'. These responses – the first two from Australia and the later three from Korea – sketch a common discourse about possible social relations, articulated from the experience of publicly mediated dance.

In Seoul, these social relations, and their claims to the city, were further amplified towards the end of the evening when choreographer Soonho Park took the microphone, positioned himself just below the screen and started teaching the dance to the crowd. With a mobile DJ continuously piping in music from the side of the square, the ad hoc public dancing culminated in a spectacle of mass participation. For more than half an hour, the dance did not stop. The event grew bigger as passers-by joined in, spilling the dance from the pavement onto the road. Even as the street hawkers started to pack up for the evening, the crowd did not dissipate. When the music stopped and the screen faded out, people still mingled, soaking in the ambience, chatting or just standing around. As an affective cacophony of real voices

and real bodies, this event evinced the potential of transduction to manifest new social relations.

Representing Translation: Cofiguration and the Dialogic Realm

In considering the differences between the practice and representation of translation, Sakai notes that:

Only in the representation of translation can we construe the process of translation as a transfer of some message from 'this' side to 'that' side, as a dialogue between one person and another, between one group and another as if dialogue should necessarily take place according to the model of communication. Thus the representation of translation also enables the representation of ethnic or national subjects [...] (T)ranslation is represented as a form of communication between two fully formed different but comparable, language communities. (Sakai 1997: 15)

Cofiguration is the schema Sakai uses to elaborate the transition of translation from practice to representation. This is the process by which one figure makes visible the contrast of the other by invoking the platforms by which the desire for identity is produced (Sakai 1997: 52). It refers to the tendency of the subject to make sense of the world on the basis of an imaginary figure from which it then disidentifies or excludes. It is critical to note that the imaginary figure is located beyond the bounds of the immediate. The tale of modernity is partly the tale of the expanded scale of imagined communities and of the increasing heterogeneity of the empirical actors that might speak in its name. That is, the subject's identity is formed with the self's departure from the self. This movement marks the subject objectively at the same time that it returns to know itself subjectively. In other words, rather than treating translation as an equivalent between two language groups, heterolingual address views it as conceptually different, and it is this difference that enables one subject to be evaluated as superior over the other. Instead of seeking proximity, configuration enables the subject to relate to itself, 'to know [its] own lived language' (Sakai 1997: 34).

This is also evident in the responses that relate to the participants' sense of self. In Australia, two participants stated: 'Difficult, had to copy, didn't know what gestures to do'; 'Enjoyed teaching the dance more'. Among the Korean participants, three remarked: 'I was worried about the judgment of others'; 'after today's experience, I now feel like I can do anything!'; 'It's really amazing that those Australians were watching me and dancing and were learning from me'. These responses reveal the capacity of the self to learn and teach: while some found it hard not to be self-conscious about their abilities, others found the exercise to be self-empowering. In these contexts the gaze operates in a complex manner. It directs attention to those who are proximate (those co-present in the space) and intimate (screen-based one on one), as well as more distanced (co-present spectators and tele-present spectators who are co-present with others in another space). This newly acquired sense of competencies (or lack thereof) shows how cofiguring transforms the self when it reaches out and reshapes itself through the contact with another. Cofiguration

governs the representation of translation and determines how the desire for subjectivity is produced and modulated (Calichman and Kim 2010: 4). It provides a discourse to think about the labour of translation as both ‘a practice producing difference out of incommensurability’ (Morris 1997: xiii) and of producing connection out of distance/difference. This complex composition and affiliation between insiders and outsiders is the constitutive condition of what Sakai calls the ‘non-aggregate community’ (Sakai 1997: 7).

Critically, as participants forgot moves and altered sequences in the teaching and learning process, they further broke with established rules of translation and began to enter what Mikhail Bakhtin might have recognised as the dialogic realm. Bakhtin also viewed interpersonal communication as a state of production. Meaning, he argued, was an ‘evental’ relation, because of the event-like qualities of communication. All content resides in the distributive space between speaker and receiver, producer and consumer, text and interpreter, score and performance. For Bakhtin, the split worlds of experience and account were seen to mirror the relation between grammar and speech: ‘Emotion, evaluation and expression are foreign to the world of language and are born only in the process of its live usage in a concrete utterance’ (1986: 86–7). Dialogism effectively displaces meaning from the effect of an action (as somehow outside the event) towards its trial in specific circumstances.

Although Bakhtin’s focus was on linguistic communication and the generation of meaning through language, his work can help to illuminate artistic practices that in recent years have come to be known as ‘relational’. Instead of approaching aesthetics as a mode of critical attention focused on the material manifestation of artistic expression, aesthetic experience can also be constituted through inter-social action – durational and temporal, contingent, multifarious, while also directed towards sensory experience and sense-making. Taking this one step further, the kind of cultural translation taking place in a project like HELLO belongs to what Roman Jakobson has called ‘intersemiotic translation’. In his 1971 taxonomy of translation, Jakobson distinguished ‘translation proper’ from the category of ‘intersemiotic translation’ or ‘transmutation’, defined as ‘an interpretation [...] by means of non-verbal sign systems’ (in Sakai 2006: 73).

Participants in HELLO translated chains of non-verbal signs through a process of recall and re-enactment. Instead of acting as an intermediary between two individuals, they facilitated the kinetic mutation of a text and its dispersal amongst a crowd. The dance-as-text was exchanged between two individuals, but it was also broadcast between two crowds, in two public spaces, across two large screens. The effect of broadening the field of reception and delivery spoke to the possibility of creating a transnational public sphere. Within this ‘transitory’ realm, the position of translator is no longer situated in between two known polarities and nor are they involved in conveying a singular message from a ‘foreign tongue’ to a ‘mother tongue’. The translator is instead a collaborator in the creation of a third meaning or a third text.

Going Public: Towards a Discursive Mode

Preceding the conceptual, technical and artistic challenges of creating such transnational linkages between large screens was an even more basic question that needed to be tested: Would people wish to participate in public forms of communication through the medium of a large screen with strangers that were both in their proximity and located at a considerable distance? From the outset we observed that the process of engagement exceeded conventional expectations. Everyone is familiar with the extent to which mobile phones have instigated a wide range of new forms of public-private communication. People have overcome previous inhibitions and created new barriers in order to conduct behavior in public that was once done in private. The blasé attitude that was developed in response to the sensory overload of metropolitan life is now extended into new domains. Georg Simmel noted that modernity was marked by the fact that it was the first time in history where people would gather in a public place – like a bus stop – and not speak to each other. At this point in history, the bus stop is a place where people will gather, and while waiting they will be speaking to others on their mobile phones and everyone else will at least attempt to not listen to these performances. Silence and speaking in public has new ambivalence. What then is the fascination for performing in public, for interacting with strangers in a prominent civic space?

For the participants in HELLO, it appeared that the fascination rested not with the mediated reflection of the self, the kind of narcissistic sensation that was often wrongly attributed to Dan Graham's video loops, or even to the feeling of enhancement that comes with seeing oneself magnified many times over on a large screen. Rather, the fascination is with the very act of 'going public' (Groys 2010), in order to institute the alternations of subjectivity. In the evolution of the dance movements, the labour of cross-cultural translation and the materiality of its practice were made explicit. HELLO's potential for a heterolingual mode of address, and its capacity to configure the social relations of communication, show how it is within the collective subjectivity of the transnational public sphere that national-cultural differences surface as irreducible sites of proximate co-existence and affiliations. The movement into this collective public zone encourages a perpetual creation of subjectivity rather than a performance of scripted identity.

The kind of art produced within this context is akin to what artist Liam Gillick has turned 'the discursive' mode of contemporary artistic production. The task is not to re-present local knowledge in a globally accessible format or to impose definitive political statements within an increasingly diaphanous social order. It is instead to encourage what Gillick has called a 'movement between subjects without or beyond order'. The discursive, Gillick writes, 'emerges from collaborative, collective or negotiated positions'. It is 'a mode of generating ideas and placing structures into the culture rather than producing varied forms of 'pure' expression of super-subjectivity' (Gillick 2008: 13). The question remains – what of the relation between dance and discourse? Can we enter into discourse on a non-verbal level, reappraising its attachment to systems of rationality and reason, speech and writing? If we subscribe

to the idea that all forms of communication are event-like, and that the event itself can never be grasped in its entirety, then our understanding of the communicative text is easily expanded beyond the linguistic towards the multi-sensory, generating a new kind of subject motivated by principles of interference rather than correspondence. These are the same principles at work within Sakai's heterolingual address. It may then well be, as the artist Tino Sehgal has noted, that 'dance as well as singing ... could be the paradigm for another mode of production that stresses transformations of acts instead of transformation of material, continuous involvement of the present with the past in creating further presents instead of an orientation towards eternity' (cited in Bishop 2005: 217). The artist now appears in the guise of choreographer, setting in motion gestural trails of interaction that speak not to an ordered or bounded subject but to the translated complexities of a shared and negotiated global terrain.

Note

- [1] More information on the ARC-funded Linkage Project 'Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere', including video documentation of commissioned projects, can be found at www.spatialaesthetics.unimelb.edu.au.

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