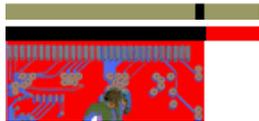


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Foreignness and Translation in New Media

The collected essays in this edition provide a thought-provoking expansion on the themes of “foreignness” and “translation”, subjects habitually explored through the lens of identity. The edition expands the discourse to examine different kinds of identifications, translations and geographies – opening up personal, cultural, physical and conceptual definitions. The essays explore the ways evolving technologies are being used by cultural practitioners to re-interpret and incorporate these notions.

Many thanks to guest editor, Pat Badani

Rachel Clarke, Editor-in-Chief, media-N
rclarke@csus.edu

Editorial Statement

Media-N's spring 2009 issue focuses on the relationship between foreignness and translation in new media. As guest editor for this issue I was interested in submissions investigating the process of translation in new media; in the use of an electronic system that mediates and enables the movement from one state to another while simultaneously exploring the specific notion of cultural translation and migration. That is to say, I was interested in creating a forum for discussion about cultural artifacts or markers that are displaced into foreign and extraneous locations, languages, supports and genres. In this context, foreignness is seen as an investigation surrounding notions of displacement and migration beyond those tied to human immigration. The eight contributions selected for this issue from a wide pool of international submissions, enable us to better understand the scope of these two related themes in new media: *foreignness and translation*.



Figure 1: “Espacio Fundacion Telefonica”, Buenos Aires, Argentina

This issue expands the debate initiated during the Colloquia “Foreigners in Culture and Technology” held at Espacio Fundación Telefónica in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during August 12 to 14, 2008. This is a three-year interdisciplinary research project culminating in an exhibition in 2009 for which I am developing an art project. The research mission was conceived and spearheaded by Argentine sociologist Dr. Nestor Garcia Canclini (Universidad Autónoma de Mexico), and I participated in 2008 with my essay (in Spanish) titled: “Foreignness as context: Interculturality in digital art from Ibero-America.”

The Colloquia included specialists in philosophy; sociology; anthropology; art history; film studies; communication studies; and art and new media practitioners, to examine the impact of technological change upon culture and social relations. Specifically, it investigated the profusion of contemporary production surrounding notions of travel, displacement and migration and their relation to ideas of “foreignness” beyond those tied to the geographical movement of populations, around 4 distinct topics.

- Frontiers and foreigners in society, in culture, and in communications.
- Frontiers and foreigners in the study of art, and in international exhibitions.
- Communication and borders in cultural industries: cinema, video, television, Internet.
- Interculturality, technologies and translations: of languages, supports and genres. [Link](#)



Figure 2and 3: Dr. Graciela Speranza (Argentina), Pat Badani, MFA (Argentina-Canada-USA), & Mariana Castillo Devall, MFA (Mexico-Germany), during Badani's presentation "Foreignness as context: Interculturality in digital art from Ibero-America." (Espacio Fundacion Telefonica, New Media Center, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2008)



Figure 4: Dr. Herve Fischer (France-Canada) & Dr. Nestor Garcia Canclini (Speaker/Organizer - Argentina - Mexico) during closing remarks



Figure 5: Dr. Graciela Speranza (Argentina). Dr. Andrea Giunta (Argentina-USA), Gerardo Mosquera, critic and adjunct curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY. (Cuba, USA) Dr. Alejandro Grimson (Argentina)

My own work juxtaposes culture and technology to explore aspects of mass migration, global processes and translocal identities, as well as the migration of images-in-motion brought about by electronic mediation; and when I was invited to participate in the Buenos Aires colloquia it seemed natural to delve into the deeper roots of my autobiographically driven interest in the subject. Thus, my impulse for the colloquium panel was to research and discuss the relationship between translation and interculturality in the Latin American new media context.

The practice of translation is habitual in new media. There are many works that use an electronic system that mediates and enables the movement from one state to another (such as works that translate sounds into images) but my essay specifically discussed notions of *cultural* migration and translation incorporated in these

new media practices seen from a Latin American lens. That is to say, I focused on how Latin American cultural artifacts and markers are displaced, how these relocate into other "foreign" and "extraneous" locations, languages, supports and genres.

The scope of my essay was double, theoretical and practical. The theoretical section researched a series of questions regarding cross-cultural influences in the way in which new media is defined. The practical section revolved around the presentation and discussion of works from hybrid and new media practitioners born in Latin America who, like myself, live and work "in between" cultures and who exemplified my line of inquiry. Telefonica's FORUM editions and Ariel publishers in Spain will publish conference essays from the 2 colloquia in July 2009, in book form, in Spanish.

As with most colloquia, the questions brought to the table mushroomed into more intriguing questions that were beyond the scope of the conferences, and because the queries reverberated in my mind, I proposed to open up the discussion on ideas of "foreignness and translation in new media" through Media-n Journal, extricating it from the Latin American context and opening it to a broad geographical and cultural spectrum of new media practitioners and theorists.

Guided by this challenge the current issue introduces theoretical essays by **Roderick Coover** who uses the lens of a visual ethnographer and filmmaker to discuss *artifacts* as cultural residue; abandoned objects that have been displaced across time, places and contexts engaging questions of foreignness and otherness. **Heidi J. Davis** theorizes how new media is transforming tourism. She argues that today's narrative translations have roots that extend the long established practice of narrating one's travels through imagery: from the early explorers' sketches, to guidebooks, to photography and video, and to the development of social networking in digital culture today, which drastically changes the experience of tourism by redefining concepts of foreignness and the translation of touristic moments. **Veronika Tzankova** and **Thecla Schiphorst** jointly wrote a theoretical paper analyzing aspects of the process of westernization taking place in the territory of the Republic of Turkey. The authors apply a lens of socio-cultural and linguistic theories and phenomena to the terrain of new media to explore an interpretive relationship linking person, multicultural reality, and electronic environment. The incursion of new media into a homogenous Turkish culture is considered to have effected a transmutation of language and cultural values.

This spring '09 issue also publishes five articles by artists who analyze their new media projects as they relate to notions of "*foreignness and translation in new media*". **Heba Amin's** essay describes her project "Fragmented City" seeking to address the current political and social climate in Egypt by concentrating on Cairo's urban landscape and its emotional impact on inhabitants. Her work translates and relocates visual information persistently re-evaluating context. Images migrate to different supports and genres through a visual language that conveys meaningful content about Cairo's infrastructure and its effects on the city-dweller's psyche. **Aaron Oldenburg's** paper analyzes his project "The Mischief of Created Things." Aimed at creating new images of West Africa, his interactive narrative is informed by philosophies of game design. The narrative content was drawn from the author's two years' experience as a development worker in Mali. He discusses the strategies and processes developed in order to narrow the bridge between the foreign and the familiar, and to create a context for interpreting these stories in an interactive, non-linear environment. **Joaquin Palencia** describes his work showcasing an interfacial encounter between humans and robots. The author claims that his robot is the ultimate "Other"; and that having been conceptualized, initiated, and developed in the Philippines -a non-center, third-world country- the project treads a thin line between ignominy and singularity. Because borrowing [foreign] technology becomes the act by which the Other is enabled, Palencia argues that new media has opened new avenues wherein the previously unvoiced can import and develop technologies that may give them a seat in the world of ideas. **Lily and Honglei** write a statement about their work titled "Land of Illusion", a networked performance project engaging collaborations with artists across several continents. The piece is constructed in Second Life with virtual traditional Chinese architecture and engaging history and philosophy as well as Chinese myths. It explores foreignness and displacement; the fantasy of China; and Chinese diasporas; while at the same time proposing solutions for preserving and re-evaluating cultural heritage with digital arts. Finally, **Willow Tryer** discusses her project *Arlanda Avairy / Ubiquitous Updates*, a project that begins by providing a service to passengers flying from Arlanda airport in Stockholm and ends in an art installation between the airport and the Stockholm Central Station. As passengers physically travel, they invisibly follow and are followed by a cloud of ubiquitous updates. Their thoughts and opinions are translated from one language to another, and yet another. From letters using the existing Twitter service; to transcoding the data and sonifying the Tweets using text-to-speech software, to ultimately playing back the processed sounds through hidden bird boxes around the airport and the Stockholm Central Station. The sounds bring to mind, not only cell-phone rings, but also bird sounds that have been scientifically documented as having learnt to sing mobile phone melodies as part of their mating rituals.

With this issue, my intention has been to offer a snapshot about this very heterogeneous subject by spotlighting essays that bring into play notions of foreignness and translation, where the strange and the familiar coexist with translocal and intercultural perspectives.

Less...

Pat Badani, Guest Editor
Integrated Media - Illinois State University
April, 2009

Papers

[Artifacts: Displacements of Technological Culture and the Concept of Foreignness](#)
by Roderick Coover

[New Media and Travel: How New Media Practices Shape Tourism](#)
by Heidi J. Davis

[Turkish Tea and Internet: The Invasion of New Media and the Shifting Sands of Culture](#)
by Veronika Tzankova and Thecla Schiphorst

[Fragmented City: Visualizing the City-psyche Relationship of Cairo](#)
by Heba Amin

The Mischief of Created Things
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Chong! A Parallel Environment
by Joaquin Palencia

Land of Illusion
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Commentary

Just What Is It that Makes New Media So Different, So Appealing?
by Patrick Lichty

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