

Prof. Richard Watts  
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Office: Padelford C-258  
Hours: Tu 10-11/Wed 3:30-4:30 (or by appt.)

La traduction est comme un art de la fugue, c'est-à-dire [...] un renoncement qui accomplit. Il y a renoncement quand le poème, transcrit dans une autre langue, a laissé échapper une si grande part de son rythme, de ses structures secrètes, de ses assonances, de ces hasards qui sont l'accident et la permanence de l'écriture. Il faut consentir à cet échappement, et ce renoncement est la part de soi qu'en toute poésie on abandonne à l'autre.

Translation is like a musical fugue, which is to say a renunciation that is productive. There is renunciation when a poem, transcribed in another language, gives up so much of its rhythm, secret structures, and assonance, those chance encounters in language that constitute the unpredictability and permanence of writing. We have to accept the loss of control, and this renunciation is the part of ourselves that we relinquish to the other in all poetics.

- Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde* (trans. R. Watts)

**Description:** This transdisciplinary and multilingual seminar, which aims to create a community of graduate students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences working across modern languages as well as students in other fields who see translation as crucial to their scholarship and (eventual) activism, takes as its task the bridging of the gap between academic-theoretical discourses on translation and the practice of translation as a public good. As such, it necessarily assumes a two-pronged approach:

1) Translation and its publics: We will consider the theorists and creative projects that focus on the “public” dimension of translation—broadly, its vocation to enable a provisional and fragile relation between cultures, as Edouard Glissant would have it, by making previously inaccessible texts available to new publics, but especially its potential to create expanded and even entirely new conceptions of the public sphere (e.g., queer translation, translation in imperial contexts). This aspect of the seminar will include application of insights gained from readings and discussions in the form of translations in each of our chosen languages with reflection on the implications of the type of translation being produced.

2) Public translation: In dialogue with the readings that address translation as a public good, we will critically develop the public-facing dimensions of the seminar in the form of a “public translation” collective that offers translation services to those both locally and far afield who, for whatever reason, cannot engage professional translation. While this aspect of the seminar can be placed under the heading of “service-learning”—in its deployment of the “assets” of the university to provide assistance to the community—the broader aim is to design a collaborative network of translators and those who require/desire translation in which multiple parties co-create the resulting target-language text.

Both aspects of the seminar will aim to shift the discussion from the varying conceptions of translation as a private, intimate act (Spivak) to the possibilities of translation as a public good.

**Language requirement:** Advanced proficiency in a language other than English (ideally, in all 3 skills, but at least in reading).

**Objectives:** To engage the wide range of contemporary translation theory with application in the humanities, humanistic social sciences, and other fields; to reflect critically on translation as a branch of public scholarship; to develop and test the potential of a university-based public-translation service; incidentally but not insignificantly, to bolster translation skills across a variety of media and genres in the chosen language; to generate documentation of a professional skill.

**Assignments/Commitments:** First and foremost, everyone is responsible for the careful reading of the assigned texts, which includes the preparation of discussion questions and a critique of the reading(s) in question. This makes up most of the 20% “engagement” portion of the final grade and is what enables rich discussion and collective learning. The other portion of the engagement grade will take the form of contributions to the seminar’s “living documents”: a bibliography of translation theory, a list of practical resources by language, etc. Each of you will also assume responsibility for leading part of one of our sessions, which entails preparing a 10-15 minute assessment of a reading for that session and launching the discussion with a series of open-ended questions.

You will be also evaluated on the basis of the quality of your work on and the depth of your commitment to 6 tasks across the two broad orientations of the seminar:

1. The theory and practice of (public) translation:
  - a. Quarter-long translation project: can be (part of) a work of either fiction or non-fiction, genre and medium (poem, novella, play, manifesto, short film, YouTube video, academic writing [e.g., translation theory!]) open; length determined on a case-by-case basis, but shorter is better in light of other seminar work; accompanied by a reflection essay not simply on the semantic and syntactic difficulties of translation, but on the likely publics for the translated work in question (modeled on *PMLA*’s “little-known documents” and “criticism in translation” sections), with a view to eventual submission; in almost all cases, this will be a work that has not yet been translated into English; in the case of a re-translation, the rationale needs to be particularly strong (e.g., accounting for and correcting the previous translation’s “domesticating” or “foreignizing” tendencies)
  - b. Weekly workshopping of translation-in-progress with seminar (submitted day before seminar to dropbox on Canvas)
  - c. Presentation of translation project in end-of-term colloquium
2. The translation collective
  - a. Participation in authoring of the translation collective’s “manifesto”
  - b. Cultivation of partner organizations and establishment of web presence of collective
  - c. Translation of a short document for a partner organization: this assignment carries a risk of failure (if, for instance, you are unable to match yourself to an organization or individual who requires translation services in your language); you will therefore be assessed in part on the documentation of your efforts to make this happen and your overall contributions to making the collective function

**Determining the grade:** engagement (general preparation for and contributions to weekly discussions, posting to living documents, etc.), 20%; leading discussion of a reading, 10%; final translation portfolio (drafts, corrections, final version), 30%; participation in creation of translation collective, 20%; translation for collective, 20%.

**Seminar texts:** unless otherwise noted, all readings, videos, and other documents are available on Canvas

## Schedule:

### Week 1 Introduction: When Translation Studies and Public Scholarship Meet

Discussion of seminar content, objectives, and expectations  
Readings: Bartha, Miriam, and Burgett, Bruce. "Why Public Scholarship Matters for Graduate Education"  
Venuti, Lawrence. "Translation, Community, Utopia"

#### Schools of Thought: A Brief History of Translation Studies

### Week 2 Translation Methods and Strategies I

Historical overview of functionalist approaches to translation  
Readings: Vinay & Darbelnet, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* (selections)  
Jakobson, Roman. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"

Solo: Selection of text to translate + intended outlet w/rationale for both; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Ethical orientations/possible partners for collective; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

### Week 3 Translation Methods and Strategies II

Historical overview of functionalist approaches to translation, continued  
Readings: Toury, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies* (selections)

Solo: Draft of first 1/3 of translation for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Collective authoring of translation collective manifesto; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

### Week 4 The Cultural Turn in Translation I

Consideration of post-structuralist approaches to translation  
Readings: Bermann, Antoine. "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign Text"  
Derrida, Jacques. *The Monolingualism of the Other* (selections)

Solo: Revision of first 1/3 of translation for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Description of contact with potential partners; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

### Week 5 The Cultural Turn in Translation II

Adaptation as the master trope of cultural translation; application in visual culture  
Readings: Andrew, Dudley. *What Cinema Is!* (section on adaptation 123-141)  
Venuti, Lawrence. "Adaptation, Translation, Critique"  
Video: *Adaptation*, dir. Spike Jonze (2002)

Solo: Draft of second 1/3 of translation for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Work on site map; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

#### New Directions in Translation Studies

### Week 6 Translation and the Crowd

Crowd-sourcing, "peer production," and the techno-utopianism of the Open Translation movement  
Readings: <http://booki.flossmanuals.net/open-translation-tools/index> ("Intro," "What is Open Translation?")  
Cronin, Michael. "The Translation Age: Translation, Technology, and the New Instrumentalism"

Solo: Revision of second 1/3 of translation for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Description of text to be translated; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

**Week 7 Untranslatability?**

Philosophies of translation in contact with globalization, world literature, etc.

Readings: Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (selections)  
Lezra, Jacques. "This Untranslatability Which Is Not One"; "Translation" (politicalconcepts.org)

Solo: Draft of final 1/3 of translation for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Creation of web site; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

**Week 8 Nations in Translation I**

Officially bilingual/multilingual nations: a Canada case study

Readings: Mezei, Kathy, et al. *Translation Effects: The Shaping of Modern Canadian Culture* (selections)  
Simon, Sherry. "Translating Montreal: The Crosstown Journey in the 1960s"

Solo: Revision of final 1/3 of translation for workshopping;; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Draft of text translated for collective; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

**Week 9 Nations in Translation II**

Translation in imperial contexts and shifting public spheres

Readings: Rafael, Vicente. *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (selections)  
Mwangi, Evan. "Against Monolingualism" in *Translation in African Contexts: Postcolonial Texts, Queer Sexuality, and Cosmopolitan Fluency* (36 pp)

Solo: Draft of translation reflection piece for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Revisions to web site; contribute to discussion board on Canvas

**Week 9 or 10 Translation Colloquium (Simpson Center)**

Individual presentations of translation projects and group presentation of translation collective

**Week 10 Queer Translation**

Readings: Harvey, Keith. "Translating Camp Talk: Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer"  
Baer & Kaindl. *Queer Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism* (selections)

Solo: Final version of translation reflection piece for workshopping; submit to dropbox on Canvas

Collective: Revisions to text translated for collective; contribute to discussion board on Canvas