

Translation and Surrealism

Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (TRACT group) & York University (English)

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Maison de la Recherche Sorbonne Nouvelle, 75005 Paris

The centennial of key texts of the surrealist movement including *Les champs magnétiques* (1919) and the *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924) has sparked new publications (reprints, correspondences, critical works and biographies) and events (an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, the ISSS Paris 2024 congress) on this complex movement that has profoundly marked our way of conceptualising the arts by shaking up the boundaries between the different forms of textual, visual, dramatic, musical and cinematographic creation.

A fluid movement whose contours are difficult to define, eminently international and collaborative while representative of a rich diversity of practices, surrealism offers a particularly productive field of inquiry for Translation Studies. Through its questioning of language, reconceptualisation of the subject and pluridisciplinarity, surrealism offers new perspectives from which to explore the objectives and modalities of the translation process as well as its aesthetic, social, epistemological and ethical positioning. By challenging many concepts and conventions, surrealism opens up a vast range of reflection on the linguistic, semiotic, psychophysical, and even ontological borders of translation. In this way, thinking about translation and surrealism in tandem can lead to new synergies among Translation Studies and other disciplines (art history, musicology, philosophy) while at the same time underscoring the immense international resonance of French surrealism.

Within this free and inventive framework, the following questions could be considered:

- Fundamentally, surrealism asks the question of meaning. How do translators respond?
- Can, or should, translators stick to a translation by the “letter” of surrealist works? Faced with the blurring of form and meaning, how do translators take up the challenge? How do they position themselves with respect to the different vectors of surrealism: automatism, dreams, exquisite corpse games, provocative intention, free association, co-writing, quotations, etc.?
- Whether the works they are translating are textual, pictural, or musical, should translators stay close to the method or positioning of the author of the source text? Or should they make the work resonate through an act of creative exploration of their own?
- The relationship between text and image proposed by surrealism (for example by Paul Éluard and Man Ray in *Les Mains libres*) raises questions about the contours and fluidity of meaning, often perceived as fixed or static. As it juggles with overlapping meaning(s) in intersemiotic contexts, what new pathways or perceptions does translation engender?
- How can the source work be defined and translated in the case of texts making a generous use of quotation?
- Subversion is an integral part of surrealism. How can the rupture and breakdown of codes be reproduced at the level both of their conception and their formal implementation? How can the immense energy radiating from surrealist creative activity be replicated?
- Do works inspired by surrealism, such as those by Samuel Beckett and James Joyce or by the Quebec automatist painters, to name only a few, also constitute a form of translation? Could the reuse of surrealist practices in contemporary poetical or pictural works be considered a kind

of translative “continuing life” in the sense of Walter Benjamin’s term (“*Fortleben*”, trans. Stephen Rendall)?

- Women creators – writers, painters, composers, film directors – have maintained diverse, complex and even oppositional relationships with surrealist aesthetics. Does the issue of gender affect the translation of their works?
- Some surrealists, including Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault, have themselves translated works, for instance, by William Blake, James Joyce and Lewis Carroll. In turn, Samuel Beckett has rendered French surrealist texts into English. How do their translation and writing methods interrelate?
- The works of French surrealists have been translated in numerous linguistic and cultural contexts. How have the different editorial and paratextual practices underlying these translations influenced or even determined the ways in which they have been received?
- Since their publication, key surrealist works have frequently been retranslated. What light can an analysis of these successive translations shed on the process of translating these works whose meaning is particularly open and fluctuating?
- Ultimately, can surrealist works be translated?

The main languages of the conference are French and English but reflections on French and languages other than English (or on English and languages other than French) are welcome. Presentations are to be given in French or English. The conference will be held in person at Maison de la Recherche de l’Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, 4 rue des Irlandais, 75005 Paris (France).

Abstracts (250 words) for papers of 20 minutes, along with a short bio (150 words), should be sent to the conference organisers, Laetitia Sansonetti (laetitia.sansonetti@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr) and Agnès Whitfield (agnesw@yorku.ca), before 31 March 2025.

Guest Speakers

Timothy Adès, translator and poet

Michel Murat, Emeritus Professor, Sorbonne Université and École Normale Supérieure de Paris

Michel Remy, Emeritus Professor, Université de Nice Côte d’Azur

Selected Bibliography

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