



Deux Enfants sont menacés par un rossignol (1924) by Max Ernst

“The unfathomable, the mysterious, the poetic, something a translator can produce only if he is also a poet”

Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in *Illuminations*

“Genuine composition is immutably deeply human”

Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindiffernt Nature*

ASSIGNMENT 1 - TRANSLATING BORGES (25%)

Translation

This assignment takes a phenomenological point of view, to poetically translate the mystic spatial quality of a Jorge Luis Borges short story into an architectural collage. Architecture is a “poetic translation,”¹ not a “prosaic transcription,”² and in this context translation denotes a successful transformation from one form of medium to another. Successful translation does not proceed literally

1 Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Presentation and the Perspective Hinge*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT press, 1997), 8.

2 Ibid.

or word by word: it includes adapting, reconstructing, twisting, and traversing by keeping the essence of the original.³ So architectural translation apart from keeping the “original meaning” goes beyond it in its built form, since it is always about unfinished boundaries in which narrative can take place. This collage exercise is in line with this perspective on architecture as “unfinished translation.” Students will poetically translate the spatiality of a Borges story into a narrative collage. To translate the mystic space of your story poetically, it is important to immerse yourself in the Borges story. Or in John Hejduk’s term, read it “Osmosistically, by osmosis.”⁴ The term osmosis refers to the technique of mastering a language by being environmentally immersed in it. Borgesian environments invite us to a game, but it is a serious game, and if we play it seriously and “osmosistically” we can translate the poetic mystery of Borgesian time and space.

Collage

Collage here is not about the illustrative composition of specific images or gluing different materials but rather about a narrative relationship between them.⁵ In other words, students should see their collage as a narrative told by different pieces using the montage technique. The craftsmanship generates the meaning translated from the Borges story. To reach the goal of this assignment, it is important to read and understand the technique of montage used and described by Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, described in “Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms.”⁶ Eisenstein studies Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s *Carcere Oscure* to understand how he exposed specific meanings in his architectural drawing.⁷ Eisenstein borrows Piranesi’s techniques such as framing, cutting and piecing together for his creative field. These techniques could also be used to create a Borgesian space. Interestingly, there are similarities between Borges’ and Piranesi’s notion of space such as its being mysterious and unbuildable.

Borgesian space is spatiotemporal and eventful scene where activity and events take place mysteriously through time, repeatedly. Borges’s mystic environments invite us to look at being, objects, and architectural elements with a fresh eye and ask questions such as what is the common meaning of a desert, a book, a jaguar, and a labyrinth? How do architectural elements, colors, and lights contribute to the meaning of the story? How does Borges (the architect) may use mathematics, geometry and maps to generate meaning and mystery for a place? How does he give dualistic essence to people and elements, allow a character to be a protagonist and antagonist simultaneously, see Jesus

3 Nora Wendl “Fox/River/House: A Translation” in *Writing Place: Investigations in Architecture and Literature*. Edited by Klaske Havik (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2016), 90.

4 Wim van den Bergh and Mark Proosten, “Narrative as an Educational Approach: Literary Methods in Architectural Education” in *Writing Place: Investigations in Architecture and Literature*. Edited by Klaske Havik (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2016), 111.

5 Ibid, 118.

6 Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature: Film and the Structure of Things* translated by Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

7 Please see MyCourses for this reading.

and Judas in the same person, cause a labyrinth to hide and reveal, a building to be profane and sacred, and a map for losing a place instead of finding it?

The first step is to select a story from the list, and then imagine yourself as the character and experience the space through their eyes. You should let your imagination go beyond the plot and see the character's past and future, and their lived spaces. How was the space before the narrative took place, and how it will be after the story? Is it the same atmosphere? How does the story unveil the atmosphere? Your poetic translation should add another layer of meaning or turning point to the story, without any demystification. Mystery is not about being vague or unclear, ask yourself Paul Valéry's question: "What is there more mysterious than clarity?"⁸ Borges stories are meaningful and clear while being about the mystery of being.

Your collage should be more than an illustration or a visualization of the story. It is the theatrical scenery with spatial potentialities for the story to take place. You are also welcome to look into other stories for aspects of Borges' world that may be useful to your task. I may suggest some options during personal meetings.

Quality and expectations:

- The collage should be 22" x 33" and use good quality thick paper. The materials and the way students curate them should be at the level of a gallery show. As designers, students should pay attention to all the details, from orally presenting the work to even the way they write their name.
- Students may use different media such as watercolor, pastel, transfer techniques, drawing, painting.
- Hybrid media presentation is acceptable, but the final product should be crafted and drawn by hand. Students should only use digital techniques in the process of creating the work, and then transfer it into collage or work on it by hand for the final presentation.
- Students should also add a separate sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper, describing their ideas (no more than 300 words.)

⁸ Paul Valéry, *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 4: Dialogues*, Edited by Jackson Mathews, Translated by W. M. Stewart (New York: Princeton University Press, 1989), xx.

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