

**From:** Susan Gevirtz <[susan@tsoft.com](mailto:susan@tsoft.com)>

**Date:** August 7, 2007 12:01:10 PM PDT

**To:** Susan Gevirtz <[susan@tsoft.com](mailto:susan@tsoft.com)>

**Subject: Re: Invitation to participate in translation discussion panel, Wed., 8/22**

On Aug 7, 2007, at 9:11 AM, Susan Gevirtz wrote:

Dear Judith, David and Brandon --

Thanks for the invitation to participate on this panel. I've been thinking about it and I have to respond in this way:

--First, I am really not a translator. This is a somewhat different "not" from the "not" in Norma Cole's wonderful and useful piece "Why I Am Not A Translator."

I am a riveted up-close voyeur of translation. I am committed to it in some sort of inescapable way -- I am captured by it, captive to it. I am a translator wannabe. Many mornings every week I go 1st to my infant greek books and sit with my dictionary writing out words, letter by letter, taking great kinesthetic pleasure in what might be happening -- a cypher and a kind of sense -- and a hope of learning something. But I really do not know enough greek to do anything that could approximate the full complexity that involves being able to swim and breathe in another language like Norma or Stacy Doris or Chet Weiner or Brandon or so many others we know (and so many we don't know), that could be called translation.

--I also am not a translator (in the sense that I understand Norma to mean that she isn't) in that I am also always in a state of translating as writing. So to pick out translation from one language to another as the only kind of writing that = translation is, to obfuscate the myriad acts of translation that go on in language and in the work of some writers all the time. After a conversation we recently had about this Larry kearney wrote a wonderful series of poems called "Translations" in which he translated poems originally in english by Stevens, Auden, and many others, into poems written in other englishes. In this kind of translating there is no possibility of anything like one-to-one correspondences between exact words. --Not that there is between, i.e., english and greek, or french and english...either.

--I am further not a translator because, as I said above, I know little greek, having studied for only 3 years, and because I am 1st a mute, though it may not sound that way, and I am chock-full of weird dyslexias, alexias, asphixias, counterlexias and memory processing quirks, that come to bear in all language, it's hard to \_say\_ much in or about greek yet. And this is really a different state from a person who does not consider herself a translator but is fluent in and beyond her 1st language. I'm really not sure I'm even fluent in my 1st language.

--There is also being translated by place. And translation by exposure: one immerses oneself in a situation -for example, in a cauldron surrounded by the sound of greek, the weather, the ways of eating, sleeping, driving, drinking, ..., in that place --and one's mode of explaining the world to oneself is altered and mixed up. Translation of one's senses, of one's sense of sequence like a grammar of proceeding in the 3d, is impacted by vicinity and contagion. --Not to mystify, but to acknowledge that being out of place [ec static], in an utterly new place where even the road signs are startling, can have a great impact, can destabilize one's 1st language as well as one's ways of proceeding that are part of the 1st language/social milieu including appetites, bodily energies, health, ....

-- In addition to this (above) physicality of being in greece, there is having one's poetry translated into greek while sitting next to and working closely with a greek poet-translator. A

very profound embodiment --maybe like being next to the musician instead of having the cd on in the room. Or maybe improvisation itself. For hours and hours we discuss and grapple with the fabulous illuminating minutia of words inside of words, of contended histories inside of and associated with particular words, of the sounds and their maybe impossible to explain music and sense, of the politics of how and who gets to or got to speak when and where, and of course much more. All of this profoundly alters one's relation to and hearing of one's own work and one's "own" language. Among other things, one gets literally and figuratively -read back- to oneself. -- While I can barely translate there are few necessities or pleasures bigger than being in the midst of it. This is the really selfish and shameless truth about why, with Greek poet Siarita Kouka, I started the Paros Translation/ Conversation Symposium that has been meeting now for 4 years. Whether I can "do" it or not, or to what extent, it is evident to me that translation is inescapable, that it's the only responsible -- and I mean that in the fullest sense of \_ability to respond\_ --act for americans and others, but especially for americans in the current political climate. Insisting on this has a different inflection for one holding an american passport than for anyone else. As Siarita recently said (in english), " Believe me, if you weren't american they wouldn't be so quick to invite us back every year --If you were Czech or Bosnian or something else this symposium wouldn't get so much attention from the greek authorities. -- Again, thank you for asking me to participate on this panel. If you would like me to talk about these kinds of things I would be glad and honored to do that. But I would also be happy and honored to be in the audience if you decide instead to invite someone who is a translator. You really may want to do that. It really may be much more appropriate and of interest to have someone like Eleni Stecopoulos who was the Symposium guest organizer for anglophone poets this year, or any number of other translators to be on this interesting panel and usher Brandon's play into the 3d world.

All best  
Susan

On Aug 6, 2007, at 8:52 AM, judith goldman wrote:

Dear Susan,

On Sunday, Aug. 26th, David Brazil and I, together with the nonsite collective, will be hosting a performance of Brandon Brown's translation of Aeschylus' Persians. This event will take place in the stunning setting of the bunkers at the Presidio--a site resonant with historical-material parallels with the play and its context--while Brandon is working with a 10-person cast from a truly amazing translation he created as his MFA thesis project.

In conjunction with this event, David and I are planning to host a panel on the politics/ethics of translation at our home in Rockridge, about three blocks from the Rockridge BART station, on Wed., Aug. 22, probably at around 7:30pm. We are hoping that you would be interested in participating in the panel by preparing a 5 to 10 min. informal talk on your translation practice, perhaps dilating what you see as the key issues of translation through a discussion of a problem you addressed in translating a specific text.

I can let you know who else is lined up for the panel as we hear from other potential participants about their availability. We would really love to have you there as a discussant in the conversation, even if it can not work out for you to give a mini-talk.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience whether this piques your interest!

all best to you, Judith (and David and Brandon)

p.s. We are on the lookout for a participant who can discuss their translation practice vis-a-vis non-European languages--i.e., African and Asian. If you know of anyone who might like to participate who has these languages, please let us know!! Thank you so much for your help with this.