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Historiography, Rehearsal Processes, and Performance as Translation; or,

How to Stage Early Modern English Drama Today?

> The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.
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> L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

> *If time travel is possible, where are the tourists from the future?*
>
> Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*

The Dynamics in Play

I think the reason I have been selected to share my thoughts with you is that I have been

engaging in Practice-as-Research-(or PaR-)based enquiries into historically distanced drama

(both early modern English and European drama, as well as classical Greek drama) for over

twenty years now; I have an academic background and current publishing interests in both of

these theatre-historical areas and, additionally, at my own university (the University of Hull)

I have helped to develop and currently run a doctoral programme that enables PhD students

to engage with PaR as their primary means of conceiving, framing, executing, and reflecting

upon higher-level research questions in relation to both contemporary and to historically

distant performance events, dramatic literatures, and other arts-based practices. I love to

participate in and to supervise PaR projects, and I am passionately committed to the notion

that it is only through practice-based, or performance-based, enquiries that we can come to

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terms with the theatrical mechanics of how historically distant plays of the type that we have before us at this conference actually *work*.

Important to understanding more fully the dynamics in play in historically distant performance texts is recognizing the ways in which they deploy their own linguistic registers; the ways in which they articulate their own sets of cultural referents; and the ways in which they speak to a series of political and philosophical concepts that were deeply embedded not merely within the historical, cultural, and geographical *contexts* that produced them, but also within the types of theatre that helped to shape their structure in terms of both their *form* and their *content*. As Karen Cunningham observes in relation to her own topic on this website, the law: 'What I am suggesting [in her reading of the play] is that the English common law is something more than 'history' or 'context' [to the *Three Ladies of London*]; *it is the language in which the play thinks and speaks*'.[1] I would add that the law is just one example of this 'language of contextual association' that is central to an understanding of any historically distanced play-text.

I believe that these sometimes hard-to-hear theatrical languages, these seemingly archaic forms, and these pre-modern strategies of representation are the means of encoding historically distant drama (and evidence of dramaturgical and structural encoding for *The Three Ladies of London* is amply present in Leslie Thomson's accounts of stage directions for that play,[2] or Helen Ostovich's interrogation of the internal evidence for the dramatic uses of such practices as theatrical doubling).[3] Given these structurally encoded qualities and others, I think that we require very *specific* ways of working theatrically and practically in order to understand how information of this type, for a play like *Three Ladies of London*, can now be *de*-coded and brought back to life in both theatrical and academic contexts. In many ways, without listening to these voices (from both historical sources and contemporary analysis), without learning these languages, these plays remain 'foreign' texts to us. Just like

visiting a foreign country, then, to understand such plays we need at first scholars and

practitioners to guide us through them – which is a process that takes time and patience.

Equally like any trip to a foreign country, moreover, we will only enjoy the process of

hospitality that the text can offer us as an intellectual space if we have decided in the first

place that we want to go there; if we think that deeper engagement with the sites, languages,

and concepts to which this play-text alludes hold thoughts, cultural statements, and forms of

artistic expression that are, like Hamilton, Ontario, well worth a visit!

Perhaps more important than my own connections with the discipline of PaR,

however, or the undoubted 'foreignness' of many early modern English play-texts (especially

non-Shakespearean ones) is the fact that my talk is an attempt to elucidate what I see as most

useful about practice-based research processes – and to think in theoretical terms about why

we accept PaR both as a valid and as a *necessary* mode of academic enquiry. I will speak a

little (well a lot actually) about PaR and PbR (its close relative and North American cousin:

practice-*based* research) as modes of *translation* and *interpretation* – by which I mean

systems of semantically and syntactically aware, open, and exploratory practices that not only

set up their own communities of collective collaborators (the personnel involved in rehearsal,

workshopping, dramaturgy, actorly preparation, direction, and so on – groups who share their

own languages and understandings of practice-based working); but also practices that rely

equally heavily on modes of engaged thinking that bring into play two other sets of highly

important communities: (1) those communities, no longer present, but who first created the

texts and performances in which we have an interest; and (2) the communities, now living,

with whom we can and must share PaR and PbR work. I mean the audiences who watch

public performances of early modern English and European, or classical Greek drama that

emerge from our PaR projects; as well as the students in our classrooms who observe,

discuss, and dissect small moments, or scenes from these plays undertaken using PaR and

PbR methodological frameworks – communities described, for example, in the essay by

Jessica Dell for this website.[4] Last, we need to remember the communities of academics

whose research feeds into PaR and PbR processes, but whose own theoretical approaches are,

or really should be, equally shaped by what we learn in PaR — see the work of everybody

else who has written an essay for this website!

Because in my own work I am increasingly interested in PaR as an act of *translation*

and because I see it as an attempt at the *intercultural interpretation* of complex cultural

residues and ethnographic artefacts, located within plays (and the material artefacts that

surround them) that display numerous markers of difference, and come from culturally,

linguistically, and historically distant locations, much of the theoretical background to what I

say comes from two disciplines that lie *outside* theatre studies or literary studies; but that are

in my opinion directly relevant to both: the first is translation studies; and the second is the

philosophy of language (primarily in its British and North American 'analytical philosophy'

variant). *Language … translation … community ...* these will be the pulses guiding this

essay, the ideas that constitute its intellectual heartbeat; so, if I seem now to be giving an

account that has been written for another constituency entirely, please bear with me. I hope

that by the end of my essay, what seems like a slightly tangential beginning will make sense

to you as a useful theoretical model for approaching the fundamental components of practice-

based thinking in theatre-historical contexts, as well as the methodologies that attend those

practices in our own disciplines. As Andrea Stevens puts it in her essay for our project: 'The

challenge to potential directors of [*The*] *Three Ladies of London* [it could be any historically

distant play-text] is to decide whether to try to 'update' it by somehow *translating for*

contemporary audiences the lost contexts (if such transformation is even possible), or

whether to embrace the play's historical distance (granting the fact that audiences are not, of

course, homogenous entities and that directors are not limited to choosing one approach to

the total exclusion of any other).'[5]

Thick Translation

In his essay 'Thick Translation' the linguistic philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah outlines an aspect of language that we all understand very well. The fact that it is *predictable*, that it follows rules, and that 'part of what is distinctive about utterance as a kind of action, with distinctive sorts of reasons, is that it is *conventional*; … [that] the thought we normally take someone to be intending to express in uttering a sentence is the thought that the conventions of language associate with it'.[6] Turning to the speech act theory of Paul Grice, whose theory of 'implicature', developed in the 1950s and 1960s, explained the fact that what a speaker means by an utterance can be divided into what the speaker 'says' and what the speaker thereby 'implicates',[7] Appiah observes:

> Grice famously suggested that we could say what an (assertoric) utterance meant by identifying the (content of) the belief that it was conventionally intended to produce; and he identified … the heart of the mechanism by which these beliefs are supposed to be produced. Roughly, he [Grice] suggested that when a speaker communicates a belief by way of the utterance of a sentence, she does so by getting her hearers to recognize *both* that this is the belief she intends them to have *and* that she intends them to have that belief in part *because* they recognize that primary intention. This is the heart of utterance – meaning; the conventions of language associate words with roles in determining *which* belief is to be communicated by an utterance, but it is by way of the Gricean mechanism that this communication occurs, when it does.[8]

Appiah goes on to assert: 'It is no surprise that Grice, who discovered this mechanism, also discovered … conversational implicatures: these thoughts we communicate by encouraging others to draw inferences that go beyond the meanings of the words we utter … [ie,

linguistically constructed moments in which] we "mutually know" that [a particular condition, implication or action is in play]'.[9] These 'conversational implicatures' are the fundamental building blocks of language; and it is on them that other Speech Act theorists, J.L. Austin and John Searle among them, were simultaneously building a theory of performatives – those analytical investigations of the way that language works that further extend the network of implied understanding into social and political practices: 'I can pronounce you man and wife only where there exists a social practice of marrying, in which my utterances are conventionally given a role'.[10]

Now of course, an early modern playwright such as Shakespeare (being the genius that he was) had read his Grice, his Austin, and his Searle [!]; and literary critics such as Stanley Fish and Susanne Wofford have shown us, many years ago now, how to do philological things with Shakespeare's playful or forceful, political and/or gender-political uses of performatives in works such as *Coriolanus* or *As You Like It*. But I do not want to turn to a literary application of linguistic theories just yet (and I certainly don't want to turn to Shakespeare), because I want instead to stay focused on the concept of *translation* and the idea that utterances – those fundamental particles of which any play-text is built – contain implied meanings that exist in relation to the syntaxes, grammars, and most importantly *cultural and theatrical contexts* that form and surround them.

In a post-colonial-inflected exploration of the Gricean mechanism in relation to translating works from disparate global cultures, particularly West African ones, Appiah states:

> Learning the grammar and the lexicon of a language is learning a complex set of instructions for generating acts that are standardly intended to achieve their effects in others who know the same instructions … precisely by way of recognition of those intentions.

When somebody speaks, therefore, in the ordinary course of things and in the absence of contrary evidence, she will be taken and will be expected to be taken by participants in the conventions of her language to have the intentions that those conventions associate, by way of grammar and lexicon, with her utterance. To be able to identify *those* intentions is to know the literal meaning of what she has said; and the literal meanings of words and phrases are determined by the way in which they contribute to fixing the intentions associated with the speech acts in which they can occur. Let me call these the *literal* intentions. While each utterance of a sentence will be surrounded by more than its literal intentions, will have (in other words) more reasons than these, and while *some* utterances will not even have these intentions – because, for example, they are clearly ironically intended – it remains true that explanations of what a speaker is doing in uttering a sentence will almost always involve reference to the standard intentions, even in cases where they are absent.[11]

In other words, much of what is said in interlocutory structures (including those that are contained within a dialogic form of artistic expression such as a theatrical play-text) exists beyond what the words in any given sentence mean, and such expression is at least *equally reliant* on cultural understandings, which are also expressed and created linguistically, about the wider values associated with certain linguistic markers. The knowledge of the *cultural contexts* and the *concepts and structures* with which we associate individual words or larger phrases allows us intention, and thus meaning: we both create and understand. In such a formulation, what a phrase *means* is more important than what we might take the words within it in isolation to signify. Such a viewpoint in relation to the way that language operates allows Appiah to make a perhaps otherwise startling assertion about translation, namely:

> If … translation is an attempt to find ways of saying in one language something that means the same as what has been said in another; and if … the literal meaning of an utterance is a matter of what intentions a speaker would ordinarily be taken to have in uttering it; then a literal translation ought to be a sentence of, for example English, that would ordinarily be taken to be uttered with the intention that the original, for example, Twi, sentence was conventionally associated with [Twi is an African language spoken in the southern two thirds of Ghana].[12]

This reliance on meaning *as intentionality*, rather than meaning at the level of lexical *equivalence* leads us to accept that a French expression such as: *'j'en ai ma claque!'* is an accurate translation of the English 'I'm fed up!'. Thus we can find equivalences at the level of meaning that depart from the literal equalities of the lexical units deployed. Now, this equivalence is handy for theatre directors too, who find the expression of a complex idea in a particular play to be deeply embedded within a dramaturgical or theatrical structure that is no longer current, and thus no longer understood in the modern theatre (such, perhaps, as the use of cross-gendered casting to draw emphasis towards the artificiality of 'femininity' as a social as well as a theatrical construct – as outlined in Clare Jowitt's and Andrea Stevens' papers on the website).[13] Problematically, of course, the principle of linguistic relativity (as expressed in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis)[14] holds that the structure of a language affects the ways in which speakers of that language can conceptualise their world; brutally, that language shapes and limits one's ability to conceive of the world in which one finds oneself; and that, concomitantly, what is structurally possible in any given language influences all speakers of that language's cognitive processes. Herein lies one of the great problems of the act of linguistic translation: a bilingual or polyglot individual will regularly be faced with the fact that they read, know, and understand the meaning of something said in language A, but that there is *not only* no linguistically equivalent way of expressing such a thought in language B,

but there is *no recognition of the concept it is deployed to articulate either*. To this dilemma, Appiah responds as follows: 'If you cannot conventionally communicate a certain literal intention in language A and you can in language B, then the translator cannot produce a literal translation; that is all it amounts to'.[15] As a theatre director who deals almost uniquely with plays that are between 350 and 2,500 years old, I equally understand the difficulty of translating literally a stage practice or a way of thinking that has no equivalent in my own historical moment, or an expression or mode of performance that we struggle to understand. I therefore concur with Appiah that at such times, we cannot translate a [theatre] text literally, and that we have to move to a different way/style/mode of unpacking and repackaging the intended meaning that we can deduce, through familiarity with an archaic form or scholarly explication, that a moment originally had in performance. But let us park this idea for a while.

Moving back to linguistics, in the same vein, despite the philosophically difficult exercise of understanding the possible significances of a simple phrase like: 'Do you need an umbrella?' in terms of its intentional meaning (a phrase that is highly ambiguous, because I may be questioning your judgment because the day is sunny; I may be expressing my love for you because I do not want you to catch cold; or I may even be talking to my eleven-year-old son, in whom I am currently trying to inculcate a sense of thinking that extends beyond the immediate moment); we must all acknowledge that many utterances, particularly in media such as theatre and drama, are even *more* complex than even this deceptively simple phrase: 'Do you need and umbrella?'; and that such utterances accordingly have even wider sets of possible meanings than their more pedestrian lexical and syntactical elements reveal. A statement, such as 'She is spherical, like a globe. I could find out countries in her' (*Comedy of Errors* 3.2) clearly works theatrically precisely *because* audience members' prior ocular engagements with the character to whom the line refers reveal that this description is *not* a

literal 'truth' relating either to the character's physical form, or to the present speaker's abilities to do as he says in relation to her body. We therefore take the words to be (1) a metaphor and (2) a joke. As Appiah observes of such situations:

> metaphor is supposed to work by getting you to see how it is supposed to work and getting you to recognize [sic] that that is how I want you to understand it. And here both convention (metaphor, however it works in detail, is mutually known to all of us) and specific features of the mutual knowledge of speaker and hearer that derives from context interact to produce meaning.[16]

In relation to works of literature, of which we will all acknowledge drama forms a large subset, Appiah goes on to assert:

> it remains true that in order to begin to have a literary understanding of many texts, we must usually first know its language well enough to be able to identify what the intentions conventionally associated with each of its sentences are: that we must begin with the literal meanings of words, phrases, sentences [but m]ore than this, in understanding many of the texts we address as literary, we must grasp not merely the literal intentions but the whole message that would be communicated by the utterance of the sentence in more ordinary settings: metaphor and implicature, as they occur in fiction, occur also outside it.[17]

In this statement, Appiah seems to sum up the entire project of our discussions of PaR – a project that puts significant historiographical, philological, gender-political, formalist, and musicological effort into identifying just *what* the intentions conventionally associated with each of the sentences uttered in Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* are, as well as the embedded mechanics of its theatrical forms. Appiah, however, goes on (and it's always *bad news* when a philosopher keeps going): 'the literal intentions [of narrative fiction] can hardly

be the point of the matter, since to be packaged as fiction is to be offered with the literal

intentions cancelled';[18] therefore:

> for literary translation … our object is not to produce a text that reproduces the literal
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> intentions of the author – not even the one's [sic] she's cancelling – but to produce
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> something that shares the central literary properties of the object-text; and, as is
>
> obvious, these are very much under-determined by its literal meaning, even in the
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> cases in which it has one. A literary translation therefore aims at producing a text
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> whose relation both to the literary and to the linguistic conventions of the culture of
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> the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object text to its culture's
>
> conventions. A precise set of parallels is likely to be impossible, just because the
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> chances that metrical and other formal features of a work can be reproduced while
>
> preserving the identity of literal and non-literal, direct and indirect, meaning are
>
> vanishingly small.[19]

And ***this*** aspect of translation brings us more directly to PaR, because unlike a

scholarly essay, a practice-based enquiry attempts not simply to mine and to explain one (or

several) aspects of a play-text's wider lexical and intentional meanings, but *also* attempts to

take on a text on its own terms, using its own languages, observing its own rhythms, finding

equivalences not just for its intentional meanings, but for its *ways of expressing them*. And

that is difficult. To make the point most forcefully: imagine if Helen Ostovich or Melinda

Gough had set as a condition for Jeremy Lopez's essay about *The Poetry and Prosody of*

Robert Wilson that he had to write it in 'lurching, searching, often deliberately over-long

poetic line[s], with … surprising and sometimes stinging rhyme[s] in [their] tail[s]'. This task

would surely be difficult, because, as Lopez himself admits: 'You simply can't

unintentionally write poetry this bad' – Lopez would therefore not only have had to have

written his essay in the form of Elizabethan fourteeners, but also have had to have written it

in deliberately *bad* Elizabethan fourteeners, with his primary points of meaning embedded in the cringing direness of his awful rhymes.[20]

In its simultaneous grappling with both form *and* content, the theatrical conventions *and* the wider culturally inscribed meanings, PaR always attempts to do this feat of imagination – and as it does so, it throws up many unexpected discoveries. This process of discovery is, to my mind, its greatest benefit.

This is not to say that I think that writing an academic essay is **easy** – heaven knows how I know that it is not! Rather it is to say that PaR needs to embrace and replicate form in ways that conventional research and publication do not, even if they try to attend to it. Of course, PaR does not have to be a slavish re-enactment of a ceremony at which one was never present and for which no accurate record exists, as many Original Practices (hereafter OP) experiments attempt to do (although I acknowledge readily that many OP projects do have their merits); but rather it is to say that in attempting to create a modern performance from a historically distant play-text, to make a *translation* of that text that renders its dialects intelligible to modern ears and its spectacle interesting to modern eyes, one must always attend to form – both in terms of what is possible in a modern theatre and to how those forms relate to the originals. Sometimes in order to do so, we must refocus and recategorize our criteria, we must productively re-read a play-text in ways that will be useful to our research questions, and using modern forms that appropriately investigate historical ones. Appiah again (still on linguistic translation):

> the reason why we cannot speak of a perfect translation here is not that there is a
> definite set of desiderata and we know they cannot all be met; it is rather that there is
> no set of desiderata. A translation aims to produce a new text that matters to one
> community the way another text matters to another: but it is part of our understanding
> of why texts matter that this is not a question that convention settles; indeed it is part

of our understanding of literary judgement, that there can always be new readings,

new things that matter about a text, new reasons for caring about its properties.[21]

Appiah further observes that: '[q]uestions of adequacy of translation thus inherit the

indeterminacy of questions about the adequacy of understanding displayed in the process we

now call 'reading' – which is to say that process of writing about texts which is engaged in

by people who teach them';[22] and further, in an echo of Roman Jacobson (to whom I shall

return below), he asserts:

> to focus on the issue of whether a reading is *correct* is to invite the question: What is
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> it that a reading is supposed to be a correct account *of*? The quick answer – one that as
>
> we shall immediately see, tells us less than it pretends to – is, of course, 'the text.' But
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> the text exists as linguistic, as historical, as commercial, as political event; and while
>
> each of these ways of conceiving the very same object provides opportunities for
>
> [interpretation], each provides different opportunities: opportunities between which
>
> we must choose.[23]

In relation to the interpretation of literary works, Appiah concludes: 'we should give up

language that implies an epistemology in which the work already has a meaning that is

waiting for us to find and ask instead what modes of reading are *productive*'.[24] Speaking

from a politically motivated, profoundly ethical perspective that seeks to undo the work of

scholars who have glibly asserted 'difference' and 'tolerance' without attention to the

specific details of *how* particular cultures think, speak, organize themselves structurally, or

produce art in unique and accountable-for ways, Appiah argues for a concept, in the academy

at least, of 'thick translation' – which practice he defines as a mode of elucidation that

counters the tendency, even in academic contexts, never 'to attend to how various other

people really are or were';[25] he proposes instead a form of: 'academic' translation as:

'translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context'.[26]

Such a concept of 'thick translation' is deeply resonant of PaR enquiries into historically distanced drama, because PaR is a mode of exploration and explication that neither attempts to elide one culture directly into another, nor is it one that preoccupies itself with ascertaining and reasserting (but simply in a different vernacular) the beliefs that an original text was conventionally intended to produce. Rather it is a form of investigation, a discovery, and an elucidation that makes apparent to a receiving community the immense cultural, structural, and cognitive *differences* that exist between their present, localized ways of being, seeing, feeling, and speaking and those of the source community. Because PaR is a *process* and not simply the *product* that emerges in final performances, moreover, it focuses its attention on the asking of questions and the answers discovered, rather than the choices between which of these is most aesthetically or intellectually 'right' to choose. In a moment, I shall turn to the reasons why such a way of 'thick translation' can map extremely well onto the epistemologies of Practice as Research in academic contexts; but before I do that, I want to dwell a little more on the notion of community.

Translational Communities

Developing Appiah's points about the necessity for ethical engagement with a more meaningful acknowledgement of difference, Lawrence Venuti has written, again in relation to linguistic translation:

> when motivated by this ethical politics of difference, the translator seeks to build a community with foreign cultures to share an understanding with and of them, and to collaborate on projects founded on that understanding, going as far as to allow it to revise and develop domestic values and institutions. The very impulse to seek a

community abroad suggests that the translator wishes to extend or complete a

particular domestic situation, to compensate for a defect in the translating language

and literature, in the translating culture.[27]

For Venuti, translation (and I would expand the meaning from linguistic translation to

include theatre-practical translation) is therefore always an activity that involves at least two

communities, a discipline in which '[t]he source message is always interpreted and

reinvented, especially in cultural forms open to interpretation, such as literary texts,

philosophical treatises, film subtitling, advertising copy, conference papers, [and] legal

testimony'.[28] Venuti therefore asks the question: 'How can the source message ever be

invariant if it undergoes a process of 'establishment' in a 'certain' target language and

culture? It is always reconstructed according to a different set of values, and always variable

according to different languages and cultures',[29] adding:

> Any communication through translating, then, will involve the release of a *domestic*
>
> *remainder*, especially in the case of literature. The foreign text is rewritten in
>
> domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles, and this results in the
>
> production of textural effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language
>
> and culture. The translator may produce these effects to communicate the foreign text,
>
> trying to invent domestic analogues for foreign forms and themes. But the result will
>
> always go beyond any communication to release target-oriented possibilities of
>
> meaning.[30]

Thus our engagement with an act of 'thick translation' in an activity such as PaR is as much

about the release of energies latent in our *own* cultural and academic moments as it is about

finding and delivering a version-understandable-to-modern-audiences of any given source

play-text. We can easily see this complex activity not just in theatrical terms in relation to our

own project with Wilson's *Three Ladies of London*, but also in academic ones, particularly in

an essay such as that by Fatima Ebrahim, who seeks in her analysis of the representation of

Turks, Islam, and the Ottoman Empire in Wilson's play to counter the Judaeo-Christian

myopia of most critical analyses of early modern drama in the West and to bring to the fore

the geo-political agendas that shape our current political lives, domestic and foreign.[31] Were *I*

undertaking a PaR exploration of the *Three Ladies of London*, I would want to focus on these

particular questions quite insistently; I would want to include centrally in my PaR community

voices such as those of Ebrahim, Kelly, Semple, Stevens, Ingram, and Brown, who speak of

the early modern as 'foreign' to our own understandings, and who also ask us to unpack the

intercultural historical contexts of Wilson's play. Venuti asks: 'Can a translation ever

communicate to its readers the understanding of the foreign text that foreign readers have?';

he then answers his own question: 'Yes, I want to argue, but this communication will always

be partial, both incomplete and inevitably slanted towards the domestic scene. *It occurs only*

when the domestic remainder released by the translation includes an inscription of the

foreign context in which the text first emerged'.[32] Exactly, I would argue, as PaR processes

do. Venuti again:

> the translator involves the foreign text in an asymmetrical act of communication,
>
> weighted ideologically towards the translating culture. Translation is always
>
> ideological because it releases a domestic remainder, an inscription of values, beliefs,
>
> and representations linked to historical moments and social positions in the receiving
>
> culture. In serving domestic interests, a translation provides an ideological resolution
>
> for the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text.
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> Yet translation is also utopian. The domestic intention is made with the very
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> intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that
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> a community will be created round that text – although in translation. In the remainder
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> lies the hope that that the translation will establish a domestic readership, an imagined

community that shares an interest in the foreign … [a]nd it is only through the

remainder, when inscribed with part of the foreign context, that the translation can

establish a common understanding between domestic and foreign readers. In

supplying an ideological resolution, a translation projects a utopian community that is

not yet realized.[33]

In what follows about the processes of theatrical rehearsal, and PaR strategies, I will

return quite insistently to this notion of utopianism and shared community – my heartbeat

will be centred on the idea of PaR-based rehearsal and performance as a heterotopic space in

which I can accommodate the multiple opportunities for reading that exist in any historically

distant play-text, and in which I can hear many disparate voices and critical readings; but for

now, I will conclude this section by quoting Venuti one last time, and saying that I agree with

him in this sentiment: 'Translating releases a surplus of meanings which refer to domestic

cultural traditions through deviations from the current standard dialect or otherwise

standardized languages – through archaisms, for example, or colloquialisms. Implicit in any

translation is the hope for a consensus, a communication and recognition of the foreign text

through a domestic inscription'.[34]

Against the 'Loss' of Translation

I will soon move towards a fuller outline of the performance strategies and epistemologies of

PaR. As an opening gambit leading towards that endgame, however, allow me to share with

you a quotation from the Irish actress Fiona Shaw. In response to the critical outrage that

surrounded her playing the theatrical role of the male king Richard II in Deborah Warner's

1996 National Theatre (UK) production of Shakespeare's play, she stated:

It's funny, I'm asked this question about why a woman, but you might just as well ask

why somebody who isn't English is playing him, or what makes us in the 20th

century think we can play people from other centuries. *The theatre's role is to show things by reflection not by direct representation.* I believe that you could do a production where you get down to the naked woman but people will still see a king because that's what they believe they see. That's a terribly good jolt for our accepting minds … What is the nature of the theatre? To create totalities that people can look at, accept, reject, be changed by. Why paint the painting that's already been painted? Paint the one you don't know. There's no harm done. *Next year you can put somebody nice in it and have the play back again if you need to.*[35]

Shaw responds here with a sense of genuine incredulity to her many critics' consternation at what they saw as a betrayal of Shakespeare's text, and an inappropriate appropriation of a cultural icon (Shakespeare's patrilineal history play) by two wayward theatrical sisters. I agree with Shaw. How can any such act undertaken in a theatre be act of betrayal? Nobody's stolen the text, nor replaced it with a fake; the actors and director have merely commented on it, added to its many depths. Accordingly, to any such sense of cultural betrayal – be it betrayal of a text, of an author, of a cultural icon, of a language, of a performance style – I would respond with Roman Jacobson's observation, derived once more in relation to linguistic translation:

If we were to change into English the traditional formula *Traduttore, traditore* as 'the translator is a betrayer,' we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement and to answer the questions: *translator of what messages? Betrayer of what values*?[36]

The linguistic translational project is one whose teleology seems, like that of theatrical performance, often couched in terms of loss, betrayal, infidelity, and absence – a process of change that abandons, discards, renounces, and replaces its culturally significant

source with another, somehow substandard simulacrum. As the translation theorist Paul

Ricoeur observes, 'In translation, work is advanced with some salvaging and some

acceptance of loss'.[37] Ricoeur goes on to define translation as a process that is based in the

individual, the translator, stating: 'In reality two partners are connected through the act of

translating, the foreign – a term that covers the work, the author, [her] language – and the

reader, [the] recipient of the translated work. [Between the two, there is] the translator who

passes on the whole message, who has it go from one idiom to another'.[38] Despite this

emphasis on inter-communal exchange, and an acknowledgment of the *societies* that both

produce and receive such texts, Ricoeur's subsequent definition of the process of translation

as a 'chiasmus'[39] emphasizes, even in its tacit elision of the balancing fulcrum that such an

epistemological division requires, the translator as a pivotal point across, through, and against

which the physical moments of translation (and I use the term in both its scientific and its

temporal phenomenological sense) come into some kind of equilibrium.

Source Text ➜   ⬅ Translator ➜   Target Text (+ Audience)
                              ⌃

fulcrum
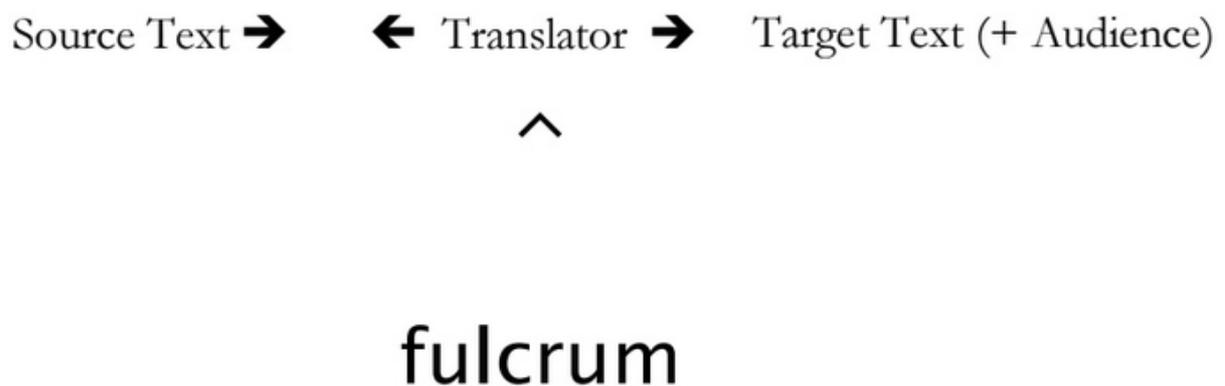
Ricoeur acknowledges the monolithic status of the 'foreign' (in our sense read 'the

historically distanced') text and suggests that only in the abandonment of both the 'fantasy of

a perfect translation [and the] banal dream of [a] duplicated original' can any act of

translation take place. Acknowledging the currently fashionable concept in translation theory

of 'untranslatability',[40] which 'scattered through the text [makes] the translation a drama, and

the wish for good translation a wager',[41] Ricoeur argues that the true dilemma of translation

is that 'in a good translation, the two texts, the source and target, must be matched with one

another through a third non-existent text'[42] against which we can measure its efficacy. This

argument is also implicit in theatre-interpretive terms in Shaw's comments about 'giving the

text back' about 'having someone nice in it next year', someone who will once again do it

'properly'. In the light of this lack of a normative 'third text' (be it performative or textual),

and in lieu of mourning its absence, Ricoeur encourages us rather to: 'give up the ideal of the

perfect translation [and I would argue a perfect production, or a full explication of the critical

and performative potential of a historically distanced text, because] this renunciation alone

makes it possible to live as agreed deficiency … the impossibility of serving two masters: the

author and the reader [/the critic/the spectator]'.[43]

Once we abandon the notion of 'perfect' translation, or of adequately representing all

of the possibilities for performance or historical and cultural reconstruction (a historically

accurate architectural remodelling) that are possible from, or inherent in, a particular play-

text, we can move on to some much more productive processes than the ritualized lament that

constitutes qualitative judgment in relation to translational or interpretative achievement, and

we can consider instead what Ricoeur terms the 'two access routes to the problem posed by

the act of translating: [namely] *either* take the term 'translation' in the strict sense of the

transfer of a spoken message from one language to another *or* take it in the broad sense as

synonymous with the interpretation of any meaningful whole within the same speech

community'.[44]

Thus we might evoke George Steiner's famous observation, 'To understand is to

translate'.[45] We might also expand it to say 'to teach is to translate; to research is to translate;

to publish is to translate'. Rather more interestingly, however, Ricoeur takes an

anthropological and social turn instead of a solipsistic, self-reflective, and purely cognitive

one, and he considers in detail the fact that 'the exchange of signs in interlocution [is] the

main role of a common language at the level of *community identification*'.[46] Now this point is

very similar to Grice's, Appiah's, and Venuti's claims about *community* (ie, shared cultural

values and their connection to intentionality); and whilst Ricoeur's point is limited to the

linguistic sign, to phonetic utterances (or to indentations, raisings, or other marks made on

surfaces, to alignments in plasma, liquid crystals, or the illumination of light-emitting diodes

that have in our culture taken over the communication of lexical systems from more primitive

forms such as charcoal sticks, or styli in wet clay), the ways in which humans develop

'*common languages at the level of community identification*' are very obviously *not* limited

to writing and its various word-bound grammars – a point to which I shall return in a minute.

But for now I want to pursue Ricoeur a little further into the idea of linguistic *hospitality*. He

asserts that:

> either the diversity of languages gives expression to a radical heterogeneity – and in
>
> that case translation is theoretically impossible; one language is untranslatable *a*
>
> *priori* into another. *Or else*, taken as a fact, translation is explained by a common fund
>
> that renders the act of translation possible; but then we must be able either to *find* this
>
> common fund, and this is the original language track, or to reconstruct it logically,
>
> and this is the *universal* language track; original or universal, this absolute language
>
> has to be such that it can be shown, with its phonological, lexical, syntactic and
>
> rhetorical inventories.[47]

Rather than acknowledging the practical dialectics of faithfulness *versus* betrayal, presence

versus absence, original *versus* copy, Ricoeur suggests that we should all – as transl*ää*t-ors

(in the Classical Latin sense of *translatio*: as morph-ers, move-ers, interpret-ers, change-ers)

– consider translation in its wider cultural and communal function: 'not only [as] intellectual

work, theoretical or practical, but also [as] an ethical problem. Bringing the reader to the

author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and betraying two masters: this is to practice what [Ricoeur, with a significant nod to Derrida] like[s] to call *linguistic hospitality*'.[48] And here I want to turn more fully to theatrical practice and to research-based enquiry.

PaR as Communal Translation through Rehearsal

In what follows I suggest that the activities undertaken in the rehearsal room by actors, directors, and other production personnel during the processes of practice-based research and rehearsal are similarly hospitable to those processes that Ricoeur advocates in the practice of linguistic translation. I want to convince you that the acts of exposing any printed play-text to the active and embodied processes of collaborative investigation, risk, play, and the repeated creating of exploratory interpretations that constitute PaR practice constitute an activity that, much like scholarship, allows us theoretically to map out any play we might wish to know. But *more* than this hypothetical mapping, through PaR strategies we can begin to have a proper idea of what any given text actually *means* in four dimensions,[49] what it contains, what the literal intentions of its phrases are, what the wider meanings of scenes, stage images, and the entire play might be, as it progressively reveals to spectators why the historically distant community that created it made it in the way that it was, and why constituting a new community to interpret it now is the only way to allow us once again to breathe life into it in any meaningful way. In this regard, I would point you also to Rob Conkie's wonderful essay on exactly this topic: 'Rehearsal: The Pleasures of the Flesh'.[50]

PaR in theatre-historical contexts allows us to create a number of hypertextual, heterotopic realities[51] (much like a translator's notes, or a researcher's notes from the archive – those explorations of possible and contingent meanings that exist before the final choice fixes a translation, an article, or a performance). These explorations allow the hosting of

newly articulated embodiments of theatrical form that can rehearse, probe, and test the validity of any number of critical and performative propositions for the potential meaning of a word, an exchange, a look, a set-piece of staging, an entry, or an emblematic stage picture. PaR is an act of accommodation, the creation of an embodied, spatial, and temporal *refuge* in which both the communities of the past (those who first wrote and acted the play, as well as those who have subsequently interpreted it), and those of the present (those who now interpret, as both scholars and actors) seek collaboratively to reconstruct a semantic *assemblage* of its elements for those communities who will see and feel it live in the future, in theatres, classrooms, and increasingly through digital media. It therefore works in at least three time frames (the past, the present, the future) and across several borderless geographical places – in the case of *The Three Ladies*: London, Turkey, Venice, Hull, Hamilton … and so on. In such a heterotopic space, communities come together to meet one another as translational and interpretative 'guests' – people who seek to reanimate and bring the cultures of the past to those of the present in active and embodied ways. And, significantly, I want to make an assertion: *that only the hospitality of theatrical practice can bring to life any printed play-text in such a way that it can be understood, and thus itself hosted, by, in, and through any other living human subjects.*

Mine is a bold assertion. How dare I make it and what do I mean? Clearly a conventional theatre director and team of actors 'know' and 'understand' the play they have chosen to produce in numerous senses before they begin to work on it. They will have read it, seen it performed in various other interpretations; perhaps they will also have encountered it explained to them in pedagogical contexts (such as school or university). Good directors and actors will also have made their own personal recourse to the highly valuable bodies of textual, editorial, and interpretative scholarship that exist in profusion for any play. Thus, before a new production of, let us say, *The Three Ladies of London* goes into rehearsal,

various members of its creative team may have had access to the significant amounts of

propositional or *epistemic* knowledge (understanding defined in philosophical terms as

'knowledge *that*'),[52] which they can glean from reliable philological and historiographical

authorities such as those published on our website.

Knowledge of this sort is virtually useless in creating the philosophical and cultural

artefact that will eventually emerge as *this living*, *embodied, inculturated production* of *The*

Three Ladies of London (ie, a human hosting of the text) without two key additions to latent,

abstract, and preparatory understanding of the propositional/epistemic sort. They are: (1)

significant amounts of *procedural* and *experiential* knowledge (knowing *how* to do things

and knowing *of* things which exist or have been done before) deployed across time and space

as part of a unified, embodied rehearsal process; and (2) the concomitant negotiated creation,

acceptance, and subsequent deployment of a consistent collected set of newly translated

performative 'truths' that participants agree pertain in relation to both the source text (the

play) and its eventual target text (this specific production, this *translation* of it). Thus any

knowledge *that* a play might 'mean' certain things, or come from a certain historical period

(implying a number of structural and dramaturgical conventions, as well as a range of

original and historical performance practices – all of which are encoded and keyed into the

performative traditions, directorial approaches, and scriptural notations to which its live

performance has become subject), together with any knowledge *of* previous productions of

the play (or of previous rehearsal processes that actors and other production personnel have

observed or participated in) are only of any use when they are hosted in an always new and

always unique rehearsal process – an act of *translational collaboration* that is largely

mediated through actors', directors', and technicians' hospitality, their procedural know *how*

– as part of a wider combination of cognitive skills that bring together (in embodied practice)

the major ways in which human beings interact with the processes of both doing and

understanding. This concept, I would argue, is a broadly similar phenomenon to the deployment by the translator of lexical, linguistic, grammatological, and cultural knowledge(s) in the equally embodied *travail* of translation, or the strategies of the academic interpreter, whose labours in archives or in reading the scholarship of others come to bear on a text. The rehearsal room, then, like the translator's body in Ricoeur's formulation of the act of translation, or like the academic's working methodologies as they are deployed in libraries and studies, is an epistemological fulcrum: an engine room of theoretical and practical cultural production.

Play Text → ← PaR → ← Performance Text
(+ Original Community) (Production Community) (+ New Audience Community)
involving scholars, actors,
directors, dramaturgs,
technicians

^

fulcrum

Like linguistic translation, which is reliant on the acquisition of a range of phonological, lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, and cultural inventories, the embodied practices of PaR have their own toolkits: these may include, but are not limited to, oral and spatial exploration; the accretion of meaning through active investigation and interpretation; understanding the consequences of certain decisions (and in particular relating these to notions of *translational contingency* – if we say that any given moment means X1 then we'll have later to do Y, how about saying that in means X2, so that later we could do Z?); using the body (or groups of bodies) as biomechanical devices capable of communicating particular semiotic significances

(what Roman Jacobson might call acts of inter-semiotic translation); deploying risk; allowing structured departures from text if they illuminate or make possible the performance of its essential meanings (a process akin to the 'dynamic equivalence' of modern translation theory); exploiting the joy of fresh discovery and channelling it into repeatedly communicable meanings … thus the slow garnering of shared and collaboratively derived sets of found-in-the-moment, but later-to-be-performed theatrical realities that can not only represent a literary and linguistic text in embodied ways, but also discover hitherto hidden aspects of a performance tradition and a performance text that are as 'foreign' to us at times as if they had been written in Twi and for a performance mode that we have never previously encountered. To elucidate these pathways, we need much recourse to scholarship and that is why PaR projects make so much use of it. For *The Three Ladies of London*, for example, an essay such as David Bevington's explication of the play's relationship to the language and staging conventions of medieval liturgical and morality drama is of immense benefit, or Roderick McKeown's framing of the play as proto-City-comedy.[53] Such readings (as critics know) are not mutually exclusive – and PaR finds ways for the practitioner also to inclusively incorporate them.

In other words: the function of PaR is to derive and to work with 'thick translation', a set of detailed notes that we may use to lead towards a functional performative grammar capable of carrying the source text (in our case a rare and seldom-performed drama) towards its physically translated target: realized theatre. Such are the vocabularies of movement, spectacle, and utterance that will render a play-text such as *The Three Ladies of London* understandable within, to quote Ricoeur again: '*a common language at the level of community identification*'.

This tripartite process requires time to develop; it involves substantial reiteration (with many slight deviations and experimentations with detail). Much like the processes of

finding an idiom in linguistic translation, then, PaR involves changes through time and multiple redraftings based on the logistics of contingency; more explicitly: what if we take X1 to mean using Helen Ostovich's idea of casting two boys to play three ladies? Where does that take us? What if we take X2 to mean Clare Jowitt's contrary mode of analysis – that concentrates on exploring how a modern audience might experience the play's gender politics if women played all three female characters and men all male roles? Taken collectively, the various sub-processes outlined above, the insights they provide and the decisions to which they lead consolidate the activities of PaR-based rehearsal into a final performance text that becomes greater in sum than any of its source parts could ever have been as discrete analytical text(s), experiential memories, or ways of working contributed by individuals during process (in much the same way that any linguistic translation is always more than the sum of its structural grammars, syntaxes, algorithms, and lexical units).
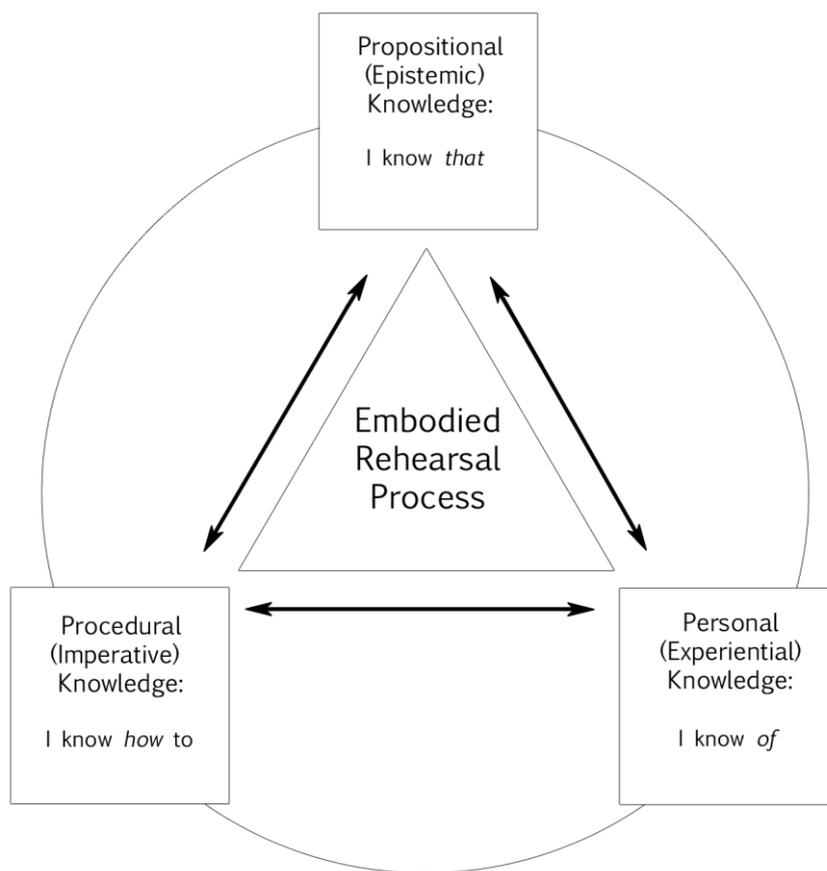
Fig. 1. Diagrammatic Representation of the Forms of Knowledge Deployed in Rehearsal.[54]

The processes are implicit – not in what most (uninitiated and ill-informed) people take

rehearsal (or workshopping) to be: ie, simple repetition (for that is what PaR and rehearsal

are *not*) – but rather in the *incremental* and *developmental* combination of three

interdependent forms of embodied knowledge, or *ways* of knowing, that constitute the

'translational modality' of theatre practice. As with the various linguistic elements and

methodologies of conventional translation, then, PaR includes disparate processes that share

little in their approaches, but which always lead to the eventual development (both *through*

and *in* action) of a set of core, production-specific, and language-specific vocabularies

capable of prompting new perlocutionary 'meanings' and 'truths' in the minds of individual

audience members, as well as inculturated performative 'authority' (the visible deployment

of the cultural remainders of the hosting community) that exist more widely in relation to a

newly sociologically received dramatic canon. PaR always derives such new insights as a result of unique and unrepeatable processes and, in each case, they make translational or performative sense of the many disparate forms of understanding that can be (and are) brought to bear on any dramatic source-text as it moves towards embodied realisation in public performance. Only through *combinations* of radically different types of knowledge (deployed in systematized ways of working) can we add any value at all to the source text as it moves towards its translated performance. As Venuti states in relation to the literary work, the profitable question is not: 'What does this play-text mean?' But rather: 'What strategies of interpretation can we bring to bear on this play in order to find out what modes of reading it theatrically are productive?' The play-text itself contains no truths, no answers; and in a very real sense, it does not exist at all until it is moving and breathing; living through the engaged bodies of knowledge that are controlled and deployed by directors, actors, and other production personnel on the rehearsal room floor.

Equally true to say, of course, complex actorly skills (much like the skills of individual translators), or much experience of watching good theatre (just like much reading in source and target languages), or indeed knowing the world (a bit like growing up bilingual or polyglot and immersed in at least two cultures) cannot and do not in isolation bring the ability to make good theatre (or a good translation). The key difference between any discrete form of knowledge (propositional, procedural, or personal) and the tripartite knowledge deployed in PaR practices (and I would argue from a phenomenological perspective, also translation and scholarship) is thus that isolated types of understanding cannot make a new production of a play-text, whereas the *combination* of all three ways of working is the absolutely essential *Urstoff*[55] upon which theatre making is predicated. Propositional knowledge is without doubt very useful in the abstract world of one's own mind. There it can exist happily as both (1) one's own macro version of, say, the *Henry VI Part 1* (a cerebral

palimpsest composed of numerous, overlaid, sometimes contradictory encounters with the text: text as text in all its variant versions, text as critical interpretation, text as performed theatrical product); and (2) individual, focused, but still-abstract micro investigations of the play (one *particular* approach to the text articulated as an individual essay, lecture, or single spectatorial engagement). Experiential knowledge is highly useful too in understanding both diachronically and synchronically the theatrical practice(s) of those who have scaled such textual monuments before (and I would argue that vestiges of historical performance practice become encoded within performance traditions and unavoidably reanimate themselves in rehearsal), and equally in knowing the inhabited human world within which any new production or translation must exist and with which it must be in dialogue; but it is only through embodied *combinations* of different modes of understanding that anyone produces innovative or interesting responses to any literary play-text on stage.

Put another way: despite the skill of textual critics, the existence of immensely talented actors, or the late-twentieth century notion of a director's theatre, *process will always out;* and, in successful theatre, *process* will always trump actor's tricks, the propositional cognition of scholars, epistemic directorial concepts, or any other interpretation an individual dreams up, with a view to applying it *to* a text (including scenography and *mise en scène*). Good theatre (like good translation) arises *from* text during process as a result of many ingredients. Why does PaR work? Because it involves many human beings working together, and human beings learn more actively and effectively (in three-dimensional, interactive and temporally mediated situations such as those that regulate social and theatrical communication) through play, risk-taking, trust, and embodied discovery than they do through didactic instruction or emulative models of skills-based pedagogy. Quite simply we cannot possibly move from any (propositional) literary or philosophical interpretation of a play, however robust or well agued such an interpretation may be, or from any set of

repeatable (procedural) performance skills directly to the physical manifestation of that idea or those skills as embodied performance. Taking the work of even the most autocratic director as an example, therefore, the life, vitality, and any eventual 'meaning' that may appear to reside in a given production arises *not* as a result of directorial 'vision', or any inherent 'significance(s)' in the play-text, or even as a result of how good the actors are; but rather through collaborative processes undertaken by actors and other members of the production team. Here, in real time and through the hospitable collaboration of rehearsal, theorized visions (and the propositional instructions intended as their effective communication), procedural actorly skill, and an experiential awareness of how any new production relates to those which have gone before moving towards more meaningful *physical* fruition.

In this manner, the experience that actors, directors, and production personnel have of a play is entirely different from simply 'studying' or 'understanding' it. Their approaches do not simply discover or intersect with the intellectual semantic potential encoded within a text and are thus shiftable into another syntax or semiotic register; but rather they provide for that text the spatial and temporal environment(s) within which social and physical interaction can take place. They *host* the text; they *live* it. Such elements of hospitality can involve game playing (with and around text), can constitute a kind of agonism (in the classical Greek sense), or a ludic and embodied questioning of any propositional articulation that has been (or could be) made in relation to the text. Thus no PaR process is ever about simply putting a researcher's vision or interpretation on its feet (much like any translation of a text is not about putting a text written in language A into language B), but rather repeatedly, transiently inhabiting a 'possible world' (or a 'fictional world') that exists as part of a kind of textual and performative 'heterotopia' of contingency – a work in progress that possibly eventually discloses itself for the audience (or reader) and possibly does not. Thus, very much like

translational processes, PaR-based rehearsal possesses rely upon markedly different qualities

of 'knowing' and 'understanding': those that arise from conditionality, often in the double,

sometimes in the triple conceptualization of the fact that decisions made in the past still haunt

the present. PaR should perhaps lead us to use rather different terms of description in order to

achieve a more metaphorical expression of the whole process of acting (or translation), such

as taking hold of, appropriating, or seizing a play; or possessing oneself in/with/of a transient,

embodied, or scriptural realization of it; of *hosting* a particular interpretation of it, made for a

particular place, at a particular moment.[56]

Despite having three main components, then, the structure of PaR is more of a circle

than a pyramid – and no particular mode of understanding can take precedence over another.

So what constitutes 'good' PaR practice and how can it be deployed in the service of the text?

Happily, we have no prescriptive manual, but several general tenets do hold true. For me (and

this is a personal list) one may recognize effective PaR-based rehearsal because:

(1) it is often elliptical in form rather than linear: it raises points of somatic interest (including

vocal developments, such as the articulation of sound and/or text in particular ways) and

develops them, recording the progress made (or lack of it) before parking the issues

encountered for subsequent (but not necessarily consecutive) rehearsals, thereby allowing

time outside a particular rehearsal to affect what is produced within it;

(2) it combines in subtle ways a variety of ways of working, including: physical warm ups,

group-dynamic building games, games more focused on specific ends – such as status

relationships or somatic exercises relating to balance, movement, vocal articulation, etc;

(3) it encompasses a series of guided or mediated encounters with text that move significantly

beyond the read-through, reading-on-book, acting off-book progression of a simple iterative

approach. Such encounters are varied, but might include: Stanislavski's 'Method of Physical

Action', Michael Chekhov's use of 'Atmospheres' or the lexical overdeterminacy of

'Dropping in'. Such guided encounters lead variously to the discovery, analysis, and development of the new meanings and interpretations that lie at the heart of good theatre;

(4) it brings into play certain aspects of the training and rehearsal techniques of individual actors in relation to ensemble practice and/or pedagogically transferred individual skills (ie, actors during rehearsals teaching other actors, or the ensemble, things they know how to do and applying them to the text in question);

(5) it entails a shaping of the ways in which it frames and models performance in both time and space (thereby incorporating scenographic and other representational aspects within an overarching realm of performance process);

(6) it is *hospitable*, in that it invariably involves humour (in the senses of both 'good humour' and 'comic humour'), as well as the development of a sense of trust and openness among all those involved in the process – this latter quality is particularly essential if risk-taking during process (a prerequisite of good theatre making) is to be possible;

(7) it is robust enough to embrace *failure*, both in rehearsal itself and in eventual performance – because just as no single article or book can stand for the entire critical history and intellectual potential of a particular play, so no PaR process or production can represent all possibilities for its performance (in fact productions that present *a few* aspects of any given play in innovative and interesting ways are doing very well, and to do this they normally must fail in several other regards);

(8) it frequently departs from text in order to return to it – because often the most valuable insights about textual meaning, those with the greatest performative authority, are derived from tangential approaches to the text rather than repeated vocal iterations (or acting in response to modernized glosses) of it;

Perhaps most importantly, however:

(9) like any other form of translation, it seeks not to *replace* the source text or to *define* it, but rather to add to it as part of a wider transhistorical narrative of interpretative practice. It exists in an economy of abundance.

Transhistorical Collaboration

Fortunately, we task no one translation, no lone critical essay, and no single PaR-based production of any given play with hosting its full meaning for all eternity. I am sure that Jennifer Roberts-Smith and Peter Cockett will be glad to hear me state that firmly! Practice-based theatre research, just like linguistic translation, is not a museum; neither activity attempts to show authentic artefacts in display cases, it does not frame performance as a series of material objects for which provenance and indisputability are the primary guarantors of cultural capital. As with more conventional forms of interpretative scholarship, then, the processes of intellectual negotiation undergone in order to make a particular PaR production, or a particular research-informed *translation* of a particular play, serve to create informed *readings* of that source which, if the production (or translation) are any good, help to bring something new to viewers', readers', and auditors' understandings of the original work. An individual human being's understanding of a play such as *The Three Ladies of London* is, therefore, somewhat like the layers of a pearl – built up of many performative, translational, and interpretative deposits. These strata consist of private readings of the text (influenced by conditions in one's life at the time one reads); the sum of all critical responses one has considered in relation to it; historical facts about what is performatively possible within it, as encoded within the *performance* texts that have arisen from it … and so on. The production of *The Three Ladies of London* that we saw on 23 June 2015 was not, *nor could it ever hope to be* definitive. But it was never *meant* to be. Peter Cockett's production, like any translation arising from the hospitality of rehearsal, was merely be a fragile vessel that hosted for a

while, and strove to add some particularly funny, sad, and beautiful lustres to, the pearl that is our understanding of Robert Wilson's capacious and polysemous play-text – and one would have to be inordinately base to throw such a jewel away simply because one did not like the latest secretion deposited on its surface. Because only through such freshly shining gestational oozings, such faint-trace remainders from particular receiving cultures over time, may *Three Ladies* become the greater jewel. The pearl of such a collaborative, transhistorical understanding of Robert Wilson's play was here long before we were, and it will outlive us all. For that reason, it is richer than all our biologically, nationally, ethnically, religiously, historically, or linguistically constructed 'tribes'.

Notes

[1] Karen Cunningham, 'Robert Wilson's Legal Imaginary', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*,

http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/KarenCunningham.htm

[2] Leslie Thomson, '"As it hath been publiquely played": The Stage Directions and the Original Staging of *The Three Ladies of London*, *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*,

http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/LeslieThomson.htm

[3] Helen Ostovich, 'Doubling Love', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*,

http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/HelenOstovich.htm

[4] Jessica Dell, 'Classroom Performance of Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*: A Case Study', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*, http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/JessicaDell.htm

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[5] Andrea Stevens, 'The Spotting of Lady Conscience in *The Three Ladies of London*'

Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies: The Three Ladies on London *in*

Context, http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/AndreaStevens.htm

[6] Kwame Anthony Appiah,, 'Thick Translation', Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation*

Studies Reader, 2nd edition (New York and London, 2004), 390.

[7] See Stephen Neale, 'Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language', *Linguistics and*

Philosophy 15 (1992), 523-4.

[8] Appiah, 'Thick Translation', 390-1. Emphasis mine.

[9] Ibid, 391.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, 392.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Claire Jowitt, 'Performing Gender in Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*',

Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies: The Three Ladies on London *in*

Context, http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/ClaireJowitt.htm; Stevens,

'Spotting'.

[14] The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is the theory that an individual's thoughts and actions are

determined by the language or languages that individual speaks. The strong version of the

hypothesis states that all human thoughts and actions are bound by the restraints of language,

and is generally less accepted than the weaker version, which says that language only

somewhat shapes our thinking and behaviour. See Paul Kay and Willett Kempton, 'What Is

the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?'*, American Anthropologist* n.s. 86.1 (1984), 65-79

[15] Appiah, 'Thick Translation', 393.

[16] Ibid, 395.

[17] Ibid, 395-6.

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[18] Ibid, 396.

[19] Ibid, 397.

[20] Jeremy Lopez, 'The Poetry and Prosody of Robert Wilson', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*,

http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/JeremyLopez.htm

[21] Appiah, 397.

[22] Ibid, 398.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid, emphasis mine.

[25] Ibid, 399.

[26]Ibid.

[27] Lawrence Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York, 2004), 483.

[28] Ibid, 484.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid, 485. Emphasis mine.

[31] Fatima Ebrahim, 'Baubles for Bell-metal: English Anxieties about Trade and Traffic in *The Three Ladies of London*, *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*,

http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/FatimaEbrahim.htm

[32] Venuti, 'Translation, 487. Emphasis mine.

[33] Ibid, 498-9.

[34] Ibid, 499.

[35] Fiona Shaw, on the criticism of her playing Shakespeare's Richard II (emphasis mine):

'And she's not bad at tennis, either', Interview article with Fiona Shaw, Georgina Brown, *The Independent* (26/05/1995). http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/and-shes-not-bad-at-tennis-either-1621147.html paragraph 8 of 14.

[36] Roman Jacobson, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*', Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York, 2004), 143. Emphasis mine.

[37] Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation,* trans. Eileen Brennan, introd, Richard Kearney. (London, 2006), 3.

[38] Ibid, 4.

[39] Ibid, 5.

[40] See, for example**:** *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Barbara Cassin (ed.) Translated by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra & Michael Wood (Princeton, 2014)**.**

[41] Ricoeur, *On Translation*, 5.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid, 8.

[44] Ibid, 11.

[45] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford, 1998).

[46] Ricoeur, *On Translation*, 12.

[47] Ibid, 13-14.

[48] Ibid, 23.

[49] I will clarify here my use of the concept of four dimensionality in theatre practice: what I mean is the three dimensions of inhabited space, and the fourth dimension of time – across which spatial dimensions shift and are modified.

[50] Rob Conkie, 'Rehearsal, the Pleasures of the Flesh', Christian M. Billing (ed.), *Rehearsing Shakespeare: Alternative Strategies in Process and Performance,* Special Issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* 30.4 (2012), 411-29.

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[51] For a discussion of theatrical heterotopias, see the seminal essay by Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York, 1997), 330-6; and, more recently, Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (London, 2015).

[52] In the philosophy of knowledge, propositional knowledge (also termed as both 'descriptive knowledge' and 'descriptive knowledge') is a form of *a priori* knowledge (knowledge or justification independent of experience) that is based on the acceptance of proffered facts and propositions, usually expressed in declarative sentences, indicative propositions (such as in mathematical formulae $E=MC^2$ or $2 + 2 = 4$), or other accepted statements of fact ('all bachelors are unmarried'). Such knowledge is contrasted with the two *a posteriori* forms of knowledge (knowledge based on experience, or empirical evidence), which are defined in philosophical terms as 'procedural knowledge' (knowledge *how*) and 'personal knowledge, or knowledge by acquaintance' (knowledge *of*). These philosophical distinctions are central to the early part of this introduction.

[53] David Bevington, 'The Ideals of Christian Charity and Forgiveness in Robert Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* and the Anonymous *The Play of the Sacrament*', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*, http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/DavidBevington.htm and Roderick McKeown, '*The Three Ladies of London* and the Pre-History of City Comedy', *Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies:* The Three Ladies on London *in Context*, http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/contexts/RoderickMcKeown.htm

[54] Graphic representation by the author – developed from the 'Dynamic Model for Practice as Research' by Robin Nelson. See also Nelson's article: 'Modes of Practice-as-Research Knowledge and Their Place in the Academy', Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw,

and Angela Piccini (eds), *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* (Basingstoke, 2009), 112-30.

[55] Primary matter or substance; 'an artifact that is one of the individual parts of which a composite entity is made up; especially a part that can be separated from or attached to a system' (see *Vocabulary.com* http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/de/Urstoff).

[56] On the process of game playing as a mode of social interaction and understanding, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938), esp. Ch. 2. For 'Playing and Knowing', see Ch. 6 of the same volume. For 'possible/fictional worlds' in drama see Thomas G. Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: Case of Renaissance English Drama* (Manchester, 1986) and also the same author's *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA, 1989). I am grateful to Pavel Drábek for the ideas here, and for the references.