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Introduction: Translation and performance cultures

Cristina Marinetti*

School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University, UK

* marinettic@cardiff.ac.uk

Enza De Francisci**

School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Glasgow, UK

** enza.defrancisci@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

This introduction to the special issue opens up a dialogue between theatre and performance studies and translation sociology, focusing simultaneously on the importance of developing performance-sensitive forms of knowledge and highlighting performance cultures as fruitful contexts for studying translation as a social practice and the multiple forms of agency shaping it. In particular, it challenges the “ideology of print” as the prevalent epistemological starting point of Western translation theory. The introduction also raises questions about the ways in which processes of translation are constitutive of performance cultures by mobilising translation sociology to reveal the agents, networks, and technologies which are responsible for these negotiations. The ambition is for Translation Studies to see performance cultures as a complement; an alternative; a way of critiquing the text-centric paradigm of Western translation theory, and inspire new ways of thinking about what aspects of performance cultures are silenced, replaced, or negotiated when they are textualized through translation.

This special issue initiates a discussion about the contexts, material conditions, and individuals that have enabled authors, texts, and performance traditions to travel through translation. We shed light on the contexts and networks of agents that have intervened in the circulation of

translated texts. This special issue incorporates theatre, opera, and song from a range of different languages and time periods. It also defines translated texts in broad ways to include scripts and repertoires in a range of performance cultures. While cross-cultural encounters and transnational exchanges have characterised theatre history from its inception (Knowles 2010), little attention has been paid to the agents mediating those encounters and to the multiple forms of translation they engendered (Marinetti 2013b; 2021; De Francisci 2022). In this introduction, we set out our own reflections on how to begin this dialogue between theatre and performance studies and translation sociology, focusing simultaneously on the importance of developing performance-sensitive forms of knowledge and highlighting performance cultures as fruitful contexts for studying translation as a social practice and the multiple forms of agency shaping it. Following an overview of these theoretical reflections, we introduce the five articles that together constitute the issue. Each author, specialising in different disciplines, performance traditions, and languages, draws on empirical case studies to develop new views on key concepts, such as censorship, habitus, non-human agency, literary/theatrical networks, untranslatability, and activist translation. The five articles cross disciplinary boundaries and methodologies to rethink the place of agency in translation practice and offer fertile ground for the development of a more performance-sensitive translation sociology, thus contributing to the advancement of translation theory.

From “theatre” to “performance cultures”: Developing performance-sensitive forms of knowledge

While the term “theatre”, especially in Anglophone contexts, has generally been equated with the performance of scripted drama, we identify our object of study as “performance cultures” to suggest a broader field of enquiry that encompasses different forms and contexts of performance (including not just scripted and “devised” theatre but also opera and song). Engaging with a rapidly growing academic interest in the translation of theatre, which has witnessed a surge in recent publications (Brodie 2017; Brodie and Cole 2017; Laera 2020; Stock 2020), as well as the emerging field of translation and music (Gorlée 2005; Susam-Sarajeva 2008; Minors 2013) and translation and opera (Serban and Chan 2020), this special issue advances research by bringing these fields into dialogue with each other and by promoting broader discussions around the sociology of translation. One of our key aims is to move research on the translation of these forms of performance *beyond* the silos of genre-based enquiry (drama, opera, and music).

We approach “translation” as an open-ended concept; a flexible, heuristic tool which covers a broad spectrum of intercultural practices, including adaptation, interlingual translation, dramaturgy, performance, and reception. This broadening of perspective is the result of a deliberate epistemological shift away from a view of translation primarily concerned with the translated text as a self-contained finished product. Our special issue questions the assumption that translation in performance contexts functions only or primarily along a source and target trajectory, and, instead, views performance cultures as “translation spaces where the focus is not on multiplicity but on interaction” (Simon 2012, 7). Intercultural performance experiences, such as those explored here – where translation originates in a cultural, linguistic, and performative encounter of people rather than a specific translation, adaptation, or dramaturgical process – can help to explore some of the fundamental questions in the now well-established paradigm of translation that sees it as a social relation (Sakai and Mezzadra 2014, 9–15) rather than as a communicative act. These performance experiences enable us to see social relations beyond the textual and unravel the complex and intricate network of agents and practices that constitute what we conceptualize as social reality.

Importantly, our focus on processes of translation that occur within and between different performance cultures also enables us to engage critically with the textuality bias of Western intellectual systems. Here we take our cue from Maria Tymoczko’s pioneering work from over thirty years ago on translation and oral cultures which alerted us to the text-centric nature of theorizations of translation:

It is our obsession with the fixed text that has shifted translation practice over the last two millennia away from oral standards toward types of literalism as Western culture has become increasingly literate and text-based, and increasingly committed to the standard of fixed, written texts, including the fixed text of the Bible. (Tymoczko 1990, 54)

Resonating with scholars working at the cross-roads between translation and theatre, orality, performance, and post-colonial literature who have repeatedly indicated the pernicious and exclusionary bias inherent in views of translation as primarily textual practice (Tymoczko 2007; Bandia 2011; Marinetti 2013a; Brodie 2017), we argue that the “ideology of print” described above by Tymoczko that has dominated Western culture is still the prevalent epistemological starting point of translation thinking. If we are to do justice to the multiple forms of translation that are constitutive of most performance cultures, we must develop

analytical tools able to acknowledge and recognized a “performance-based aesthetic and pragmatic” (Tymoczko 2007, 61).

In calling for a sociology of translation that is sensitive to the contexts and forms of knowledge peculiar to performance cultures, we deploy performance as a tool to decentre “the literacy bias of modernity” (Bandia 2011, 108). Textual epistemologies pervade dominant regimes of knowledge in the humanities (Olson in Conquergood 2013), as well as within translation studies (Tymoczko 2007, 62). We believe with Dwight Conquergood that “performance-sensitive forms of knowledge can contribute to an epistemological pluralism that unsettles the ideology of print” (2013, 62), a view which extends our understanding of the multiple forms agency takes in the translation of performance cultures. While textual paradigms “privilege distance, detachment, and disclosure as ways of knowing [...], a performance paradigm insists upon immediacy, involvement and intimacy as modes of understanding” (Conquergood 2013, 48). Performance is also a more conceptually sophisticated and inclusionary way of thinking about many subaltern cultural practices, including those forms of translation that occur at the margins, in the private sphere, at the periphery of hegemonic cultures.

The sociology of translation and the value of performance cultures

As Cristina Marinetti argues elsewhere, the material complexities of performance cultures with their different ontology, semiotic systems, and multiple agencies have tended to relegate this form of translation to the margins of historiographical accounts (2021, 268) and it appears that contexts of performance have also suffered a similar neglect from sociological approaches. While there has been a great interest in the concept of “performance” by translation sociologists, especially the influential anthropological theories of Victor Tuner and Irvin Goffman that see daily life as performance in the sense of “action” and “agency” (Wolf 2017), contexts of performance or indeed what we call here performance cultures have yet to meaningfully feature in sociological research on translation.

Central to the development of a sociology of translation, literature, and the book industry have by far been the cultural fields explored the most by translation sociologists who have documented the processes of globalization and the unification of the book market, and their implications for translation flows and practices (Schögler 2017, 400). One may think about the work of Michaela Wolf (1998; 2002;) Jean-Marc Gouanvic (2002; 2005) Esmaeil

transnational circulation of performance cultures. The case studies in this special issue are based on the application of these two models, some of which use the foundations of Bourdieu's and Latour's concepts in a less direct way to explain social states and processes.

In contributing to the social turn in translation studies (Inghilleri 2005; Wolf 2007), we call for a more *agent*- and *network*-driven type of research that features performance contexts. Such a widening of perspective reveals agency and networks which go beyond the translation field and allow us to piece together "the process of assemblage" (Latour 2005, 5) at work in the translation of performance cultures. As Buzelin puts it, Latour's approach to the translation process "involves a multiplicity of mediators" and "enables us to grasp both the complexity – and nonlinear character – of the translation process, and the hybridity of the translating agent" (2005, 212). Paying attention to the material conditions of translation process in opera, theatre, and song, as well as interrogating the influential power of often "hidden" agents who have intervened in those processes, will therefore enable us to identify the multiple forms of labour that characterize translation practice. We chart and trace the different "processes of fabrication" (Buzelin 2007) that emerge when adapting and translating various performance cultures, giving a fuller insight into the unique set of circumstances that drama, opera, and song have undergone before reaching international audiences. In reconstituting the often concealed but powerful influences of these "invisible" agents, the special issue offers new and original insights into the labour of the theatre/opera/musical translator and their collaborators.

Our focus on performance cultures therefore aims to promote wider advances in knowledge, understanding, and debates around translation as well as the specific positionings and forms of knowledge engendered by performance contexts. With this direction of travel in mind, it investigates a series of questions that relate to the powerful influence of a variety of "invisible" agents: Who are the agents that have been shaping the translation of performance cultures through time? How have they been exerting their influence over the translation of different performance cultures? And how have they been facilitating different cross-cultural encounters and transnational exchanges in the performance-making process? In spotlighting the various agents in the translation of performance cultures that have been overlooked thus far, we invite an inevitable rethinking of questions of cultural stereotypes and a reconsideration of emergent debates in theatre history around minority performance cultures, paying attention to the women, LGBTQ+ communities, and non-standard language speakers who have often been silenced in performance history. We question the often concealed influence minority groups and languages exerted in the performance-making process, and use minorities to

advance research around complex, if uncomfortable, issues and controversies surrounding the hidden trajectories that have shaped the translation of minority performance cultures through time.

In a rapidly changing socio-political landscape, where the politics faced by travelling peoples and minority languages are as difficult now as ever, uncovering the labour of the individuals who are responsible for the translation of performance cultures makes explicit the vital role played by agents and networks in processes of cultural transmission and works towards affirming the capacity of performative forms of translation to foster cultural transfer and collaboration. It is hoped here that, in drawing attention to the “forgotten-about” individuals responsible for the translation and circulation of different performance cultures, this will work towards affirming the capacity of translation to forge intercultural contact and understanding, and, ultimately, give visibility to hidden labour of translators. It is our belief that closer relationships and clearer communications between the various networks of agents in performance and translation scholars are crucial not just to productivity and ensuring a high quality of translation in performance contexts, but also to creating and maintaining good relations with wider audiences. We hope that, in building a clearer picture about the individuals *behind-the-scenes* responsible for shaping performance cultures, this will make a valuable contribution to activist translation. To use the words of Maria Tymoczko (2010, 14), activist translators are “engaged in translational activities aimed at language reform, cultural change, and nation building [...] to improve their societies, helping their cultures take new directions and adapt to new conditions”.

Invisible agents and performance networks: domestic censorship, the gatekeeper gaze and minoritarian affiliations

This special issue brings together international scholars from different disciplines, such as translation studies, modern languages, theatre studies, and a range of languages, including Welsh, Italian, German, French, Spanish, and Chinese, to provide a new way of thinking about the sociology of translation. The articles focus specifically on theatrical and musical stages from the 18th century to the present day. The contributions put to the test the explanatory potential of a number of established sociological concepts (*habitus*, capital, assemblage, network, non-human agency) with both the material contexts and the aesthetics of performance. Focusing here on agents and networks reveals both the potential of transnational collaboration and minoritarian affiliation to affect theatrical practice, as well as the transformations prompted

by these collaborations. Their interventions into and explorations of narrative fidelity, authorial perspective, and subjective experience emerge through the aesthetics of performance.

Minority performance culture, in particular, is constantly evolving as different agents influence its development through their actions (performing, censoring, composing). Several of the contributions in this special issue put women, queer subjectivities, and minority language speakers at the centre of their analyses. They challenge constructs drawn exclusively from mainstream, heteronormative, and patriarchal experience, such as institutional discourse, canonical culture, and published texts. They devote more focused attention to female, queer, and minority voices and networks by drawing on autobiographical reflections, ethnographic interviews, performance analysis, and neglected archives to explore where and how translation happens in the peripheries, at the margins of history, and in the private sphere, traditionally understood to be the domain of queer subjects, minorities, and women. Grounded in the subjugated knowledge of queer subjects, minority language speakers and 18th-century women, the contributions point to the position of the “outsider within” who participates in, yet remains invisible in and excluded from, mainstream society.

The articles, therefore, address the intricate, two-way exchange between agents, networks, and performance cultures: How various artistic and intellectual figures shaped the circulation of performance cultures, and how the translation of different performance cultures, in turn, shaped the labour of the different individuals involved in the process. Each article examines how different performance cultures have been translated and adapted by “invisible” agents and networks over time; how the agents and networks relate to each other; and how they continue to exist side-by-side. In investigating the representational, sociocultural, and ethical dynamics of translation, the contributions elucidate how both theatrical and musical stage spaces, considered here as a site for transnational encounters and intercultural exchanges, can create vibrant interchanges between a range of performance cultures.

Combining attention to the material conditions that characterized translation in contexts of performance to a focus on human and non-human agency, , the articles move beyond familiar questions about influence, location, and transfer to propose instead a new, evolving paradigm of cultural interchange. The contributions address historically-contingent cultural negotiations: from intertextual dialogues, exchanges of ideas and people, to questions of authenticity, formations of national identity, and problems of originality and ownership in theatre translation. In so doing, they seek to capture, define, and explain these lively, shifting currents of cultural interchange.

We start by paying attention to women as “domestic censors” and agents of translation. Cristina Marinetti’s article, “Doubly invisible: Anna Larpent, domestic censorship, and the translation of performance cultures in Georgian Britain”, foregrounds the importance of the unofficial *female* theatre censor, Anna Larpent, the wife of John Larpent, the Royal Theatre Censor from 1777–1824, who engaged in a form of “domestic censorship” which occurred in the private sphere of the family home. Advancing scholarly research in translation and censorship (Billiani 2007; Woods 2012), Marinetti examines previously neglected censored manuscripts and diary entries by Anna Larpent to make visible, for the first time, the central role she played in mediating the translation of European performance cultures to British audiences. In doing so, she suggests a re-thinking of Bourdieu’s notions of “habitus” and “structural censorship” to encompass the trajectories and the labour of women as social agents and the fact that these agents exercise their influence primarily in the domestic sphere, outside the boundaries of public culture and its fields. A further strand which emerges in the article is the value of archival research in theatre and opera translation. In elucidating how archival materials facilitate understanding of the cross-cultural interactions that took place in eighteenth-century Britain, the article provides new insights into the agency of the theatre archive in translation processes and advances broader discussions around translation and objects (Sturge 2007; and Israel and Frenz 2020).

Also tying in with the special issue’s commitment to minority groups and languages, Elen Ifan’s “Shaping musical performance culture in a minority language context: the Gwynn Publishing Company’s Welsh and English song-translations”, draws attention to the director (William Sidney Gwynn Williams, 1896–1978) and translator (Thomas Gwynn Jones, 1871–1949) who helped to establish and develop the prominent 20th-century Welsh musical publishing company. Ifan examines the repertoire of texts and subsequent translations published by the company, and highlights the translation strategies adopted in disseminating the non-standard language to wider audiences. More broadly, the article provides a model into how agents of minority performance cultures have contributed to processes of nation-building and created a sense of community in the context of Welsh music.

Furthering our inclusion of gender and sexual minorities, Joseph Prestwich’s “Transnational networks and gay subjectivity in the theatre of Thomas Ostermeier, Didier Eribon and Édouard Louis”, focusses on the translational literary-theatrical network involving the French writers, Didier Eribon (1953–) and Édouard Louis (1992–), and German director, Thomas Ostermeier (1968–), who was responsible for disseminating their work to international

audiences. The article asks how these transnational collaborations represent a shared queer experience and, more widely, the potential for representing new experiences and transformations. In uncovering various nodes in theatrical and literary networks, but also in identifying how these networks impact on cultural products themselves, Prestwich uses performance analysis to reveal how traces of these networks are made visible in performance.

Nicole Nolette's "Surtitling and the new networks of theatre translation in Toronto" prioritises the non-human agents that facilitated cross-cultural encounters and exchanges in performance cultures. Nolette examines the use of surtitles in French-speaking Canada to produce new research around the intersection between translation and audio-visual media and the interaction between surtitles and surtitlers implicated in the translation process. Through a series of interviews carried out by the author herself with key theatre surtitlers, namely Nina Olkens and Melanie Hall who have collaborated with the Théâtre français de Toronto founded in 1967, Nolette draws attention to the division of labour, standard practices established over time, and the informal training available to support the profession as well as accessibility for the hard of hearing. In recognising the surtitles as an integral part of the performance-making process, Nolette shows the importance of acknowledging surtitling technologies in performance contexts as an example of Latour's "non-human agents" which greatly influence the translation of performance cultures. Her article also highlights the ability of surtitles to provide novel insights into the mechanisms of mobility and circulation, interrogates how surtitles construct and mediate cultural boundaries, and questions how they translate and transfigure meaning and value in performance.

By acknowledging the tensions that exist between different networks of agents (practitioners and gatekeepers) in the translation of performance cultures, Lisha Xu and David Johnston's article, "Between safeguarding and translating: Chinese classical opera and Spanish Golden Age theatre", examines translation as an ecology of affordance spaces that extends Classical Chinese Opera (戏曲 *xiqu*) and Spanish Golden Age theatre (*the comedia*) into new performance practices. It explores how the negotiation of untranslatability and of the contingencies of translation occur with and against the labour of other agents, such as critics, academics, and spectators. The article puts forward the notion of the "gatekeeper gaze" to illustrate the antagonistic position of critics and audiences of these two canonical but seldom performed theatre forms and shows how such a position rests upon a pervasive misunderstanding of how so-called textual authenticity translates into performance.

As Ric Knowles (2010) reminds us, performance is always negotiated, temporally (across history) spatially (across geographical and social categories), and semiotically (across languages and performance traditions). The articles collected here open up questions about the ways in which processes of translation are constitutive of performance cultures. They mobilise translation sociology to reveal the individuals, technologies, and networks which are responsible for these negotiations. They highlight the diversity and often invisibility of the human and non-human agents that have shaped performance cultures, uncovering the geneses and processes that lead to the production and circulation of translated theatrical, musical and operatic texts. In calling for a sociology of translation that features performance contexts, we argue, with Conquergood (2013, 59), that “performance as both an object and method of research will be most useful if it interrogates and de-centres, without discarding, the text”. In fact, all our contributions rely on texts as well as performances as objects of analysis and acknowledging that performance and textuality are historically and materially enmeshed and intertwined. By giving voice and visibility to performance contexts, the different contributions that follow begin to develop a “performance-sensitive” approach to translation analysis which we believe will help us mitigate the literacy bias inherent in Western translation theory. This is as true for archival research as it is for textual as well as performance analysis. A performance epistemology of the archive can help us read manuscript translations as works-in-progress, and texts that were co-created by performers, with performance in mind. The combination of textual and performance analysis shows that central concepts, such as untranslatability, authorial perspective, and subjective experience, emerge not just through textual process but through an aesthetics of performance. We believe it is vital to see performance cultures as a complement; an alternative; a way of critiquing the text-centric paradigm of translation studies. In future, we hope this will inspire new ways of thinking about what aspects of performance cultures are silenced, replaced, or negotiated when they are textualized through translation.

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Notes on contributors

Cristina Marinetti is Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies at Cardiff University and Chair of the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS). Her research interests combine translation and theatre and performance studies and it is comparative in nature and combines historical/cultural analysis with reflections on her own translation practice. She has written extensively on translation theory in relation to identity and performance, on the history of translation and reception of drama and on the interface between translation theory and practice. She has also researched translation as a participatory practice and collaborated with community groups, the theatre and the arts world.

Enza De Francisci is Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies at the University of Glasgow and Programme Director of the Glasgow-Nankai (China) Translation Studies double-degree. She has published widely in theatre translation, performance history, and dialect literature in peer-reviewed journals, including *Forum Italicum*, *The Translator*, and *Pirandello Studies*, for which she edits the theatre reviews. Recent publications include her monograph, *A “New” Woman in Verga and Pirandello: From Page to Stage* (2018); co-edited volume *Shakespeare and Italy: Transnational Exchange from the Early Modern Period to the Present* (2017); and co-edited special edition in the *PSA: The Journal of the Pirandello Society of America* (2020).

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