

# Introduction

## Translationality and the Impossible Necessity of Contemporary Performance Translation

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In 1995 I directed my own translation of Argentinian dramatist Ricardo Monti's play *Visita* (*Visit*) for Florida State University's School of Theatre. I had met Monti three years earlier, during an extended stay in Buenos Aires, where I interviewed theatre artists as part of my dissertation research into dictatorship-era theatrical production. I still vividly remember our second meeting, when I summoned the courage to tell him that I disagreed with the majority of the critical interpretations of one of his plays and cautiously offered my own analysis.<sup>1</sup> Ricardo fixed me with a pleased stare and slowly nodded, "Sí, ¡Sí!" As I left his apartment that wintry afternoon, I knew that I was going to translate Ricardo Monti's plays into English, convinced, as so many translators are (with our sustaining missionary's zeal), that I needed to find ways to interpret and disseminate the plays of this artist whom I still consider to be one of the world's great playwrights. Monti's overt theatricality, self-positioning within a larger Western cultural tradition while writing from a very localized and historicized Argentina, and overarching critique of modernity still hold enormous potential for international production; and his plays have been performed throughout Latin America and Europe. I hoped to see them produced on English-language stages.

Within the year Monti and I had embarked on a decade-long project of translation, one of whose results was the collection *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*.<sup>2</sup> Our collaboration took me into his imaginative

<sup>1</sup> The play was Monti's 1989 *Una pasión sudamericana* (*A South American Passion Play*), and my reading of the repressive Brigadier character complicated the general critical assessment of him as simply a monstrous stand-in for nineteenth-century Argentinian dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas.

<sup>2</sup> Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, Jean Graham-Jones (trans. and ed.) (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2004). For a bio-bibliographical overview of Monti (1944–2019) and his theatre, see Jean Graham-Jones, "Ricardo Monti" in Adam Versényi (ed.), *The Dictionary of Literary Biography: Latin American Dramatists* (Columbia, MO: Brucoli Clark Layman, 2005), 220–35. My discussion of Monti's own translational approach to theatre has benefitted from scholarly exchanges at various meetings of the International Federation for Theatre Research, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, and Latin American Theatre Today.

world and solidified a twenty-seven-year friendship that continued until his death in July 2019. Any success I can claim in having translated Monti's plays is owed to the fact that he and I spent nearly ten years working together – translationally, as I argue in this book. In fact, it took me the entire period to complete the translation of the critically misunderstood play that had initially inspired me to undertake the project, so integral to my translation experience was the deepening of my access to the playwright's creative world and its complexly dramatic mix of myth, history, and literary genres. Our long collaborative process remains one of the highlights of my translator's career.

However, before *Reason Obscured*, there was *Visit*. Monti's play had figured prominently in a key chapter of my dissertation, which in revised form became *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater under Dictatorship*.<sup>3</sup> Premiering during the darkest moments of Argentina's 1976–83 military dictatorship, *Visita* was the dramatic hit of the 1977 Buenos Aires season (with Roberto Mario Cossa's *La nona* [*The Granny*] as that year's comic success). Given its local and national circumstances, *Visita* is strategically allusive and open to multiple readings; it is also a wonderfully theatrical vehicle for four actors. So, when I was invited to submit a directing project for Florida State University's 1995–6 theatre season, I proposed *Visit*. I wanted to try out my translation, still in draft form, to see if it worked on the stage, and I wanted to build upon my own background in physical actor training to translate for US-trained actors a signature performance style evolved out of the River Plate region's *grotesco criollo* (or creole grotesque, which I discuss at some length in Chapter 2). As a scholar and an artist, I felt on very solid ground with Monti's play and Argentinian theatrical traditions. Nevertheless, when we brought Monti to Tallahassee for the first two performances, during a post-show conversation, he declared his theatre to be resolutely nonpolitical, a declaration with which I disagreed. I wondered how we could have such opposed interpretations of a play on whose translation the two of us had so closely collaborated.

It was then I began to suspect that translations really are different plays and not simply the different-language offspring of an “original” text. They are new plays written for new readers and new audiences, created and performed by new artists. For Monti, “political theatre” was equivalent to agitation-propaganda, a category within which Latin American theatre artists often find themselves pigeon-holed, especially by scholars

<sup>3</sup> See Jean Graham-Jones, “1980–1982: Myths Unmasked, Unrealities Exposed,” in *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 55–88.

and theatre-makers from outside the region, and Monti was entirely justified in resisting the limitation. On the other hand, and knowing that my 1990s US university audience would be largely unfamiliar with the context within which his play had been written and premiered, I felt a responsibility to underscore the social and political circumstances informing *Visita*. That responsibility drove multiple artistic decisions, all of which I now call translational.

Staging *Visit* at Florida State had alerted me to translationality's potential long before I had arrived at the concept. Years later I realized that directing *Visit* had altered my approach to theatre and performance translation, and incorporating that realization into my translation practices has led me to write this book, which combines my multiple experiences – as translator, actor, director, spectator, scholar, and teacher – through an exploration of the possibilities for and limitations of translating for the contemporary stage.

As a translator, scholar, and educator who began her professional theatrical life as an actor and director and continues to perform and direct, I have often found myself with a foot on either side of the rather arbitrary – and at times obstreperous – divide that separates scholarly reflection and artistic practice.<sup>4</sup> As a specialist in Latin American theatre residing in the United States, I stand astride yet another divide, but it is one that from my hemispheric vantage point I have found ever productive. These multiply sited professional circumstances – crossing back and forth between Argentina and the United States, dramatic literature and theatrical performance, theory and practice, and Spanish and English – have all informed my approach to translation and have directly contributed to this book. Through my varied experiences – as a translator of some two dozen playscripts, as a director and dramaturg of my own translations, as a teacher of Latin American and Iberian theatre and performance in English translation, as a performer working across multiple cultures and languages, and as a spectator who considers her true home the rehearsal room – I have come to regard the act of translation as a defining element of all my scholarly and artistic endeavors. *Contemporary Performance Translation: Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Stage* encapsulates my entire scholarly and artistic career.

Having fully explored and embraced what was only a tiny inkling when I began my artistic work with Ricardo Monti, I call here for readers to

<sup>4</sup> I have previously shared some of the observations that follow in slightly modified form. See, for example, “The Critical and Cultural Fault Lines of Translation/Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre,” in Emma Cole and Geraldine Brodie (eds.), *Staging and Adapting Translation* (London: Routledge, 2017), 137–43.

push beyond now-standard approaches to theatrical translation, typically conceived as linguistic and cultural, by incorporating into the translation process itself translational considerations of dramaturgical logic and staging, actor training and performance styles, choreography and gesture, and performance aesthetics and reception. This book bears the traces of my long-abiding concerns regarding linguistic, cultural, and performance translation and circulation as I encourage readers to rethink radically the possibilities, and impossibilities, of translating for the contemporary stage through a theory of translationality.

Theatrical translation in performance – during which the presence of two or more texts is often sensed – exemplifies what many theorists, going back to at least Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay,<sup>5</sup> consider a translation's (and a translator's) unavoidable relationality. Japanese literary scholar Jonathan E. Abel has built upon Benjamin's frequently cited concept to assert that "translations do share something with the translated, but this sharing is not ... the erasing of one by another, the domineering of one over another ... This sharing is the being-in-common, the standing-in-relation between two texts."<sup>6</sup> I employ the adjective "translational" not only as a way of acknowledging, with Benjamin and Abel, the always-present and always-fluid relationality in translation but also as a means of expanding the category of translation itself to consider not only the linguistic and cultural text – the play-script or so-called source and target texts – but also other specifically theatrical challenges faced when translating, translocating, and/or adapting a play to a different performance environment. Translation's multiple cultural constraints and constructs must be considered in relation to one another as part of the translation process itself. Translation in performance,

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 69–82.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan E. Abel, "Translation as Community: The Opacity of Modernization in *Genji monogatari*," in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (eds.), *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 146–58 (at 155). I am also mindful of Homi Bhabha's earlier usage of the translational in conjunction with the transnational to speak of culture displacement and instability. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. 173. Karen Emmerich offers a dynamic metaphor that supports Benjamin's influential concept of the source text's relational instability: "the 'source,' the presumed object of translation, is not a stable ideal, not an inert gas but a volatile compound that experiences continual textual reconfigurations." Karen Emmerich, *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 2. Elsewhere, I develop my own related theory of a "radical relationality." See Jean Graham-Jones, "Daniel Veronese's 'Proyecto Chéjov': Translation in Performance as Radical Relationality," in J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon (eds.), *Adapting Chekhov: The Text and Its Mutations* (London: Routledge, 2013), 203–16.

precisely *because* of its complexity and fluidity of engagement, carries the potential for countering, or at the very least complicating, the limitations of unidirectionality or, worse still, the absence of movement. The translational works conceptually and practically to retain copresence and multidirectionality so that translations do not erase the so-called original but rather stand in relation to other texts and performances. A theory of translationality allows me to maintain that broader and ultimately more productive view of theatrical and performance translation. Key to translation is an understanding and recognition of its ever-shifting, productive relationality.

Etymologically speaking, the English word “translation” – like translocation – suggests a movement from one place to another. This etymological connection is frequently made in critical conversations surrounding translation and migration. As Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter note, “Increasingly a site of theoretical reflection, translation’s role in representing self and other in complicated hierarchies of power, in staging the performance of sexualities, in posing ethical questions, and in constructing linguistic and cultural histories has been increasingly acknowledged.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, translation has never been the simple “carrying across” from one language to another as the word’s linguistic roots might suggest, nor have the standard categories of translation, adaptation, and version accurately accounted for translation practices’ inherent complexities. Like yet another frequently paired term, “trans-cultural,” the translational operates at the site of encounter, not of arrival, and the local negotiations are never-ending.<sup>8</sup> Translation is neither unidirectional nor transcendent, and the translator is never merely a transporter of someone else’s words. Even at a linguistic level, as Paul F. Bandia asserts, “The task of the translator ... is not only to inform but also to transform and ‘add to’ the original, and in the process perhaps modifies the original as well as the translating language.”<sup>9</sup> Bermann

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter, “Introduction,” in Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (eds.), *Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture: Companion to Translation Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 1–11 (at 1).

<sup>8</sup> The reader might also bear in mind that the word and concept of “translation” is itself “untranslatable.” As noted in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, translation – even within the limited context of European languages – is etymologically caught between treason and tradition. Emily Apter, Barbara Cassin, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (eds.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, trans. Barbara Cassin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Paul F. Bandia, “Translocation: Translation, Migration, and the Relocation of Cultures,” in Bermann and Porter, *Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture: Companion to Translation Studies*, 273–84 (at 283).

stresses that said challenge to translation carries an ethical burden: “If we must translate in order to emancipate and preserve cultural pasts and to build linguistic bridges for present understanding and future thought, we must do so while attempting to respond ethically to each language’s contexts, intertexts, and intrinsic alterity.”<sup>10</sup>

In translating Argentinian plays into English, I have often grappled with the ethical consequences of rendering foreign works into a language that has become the global lingua franca and thereby potentially if perhaps unwillingly participating in what comparative literary scholar Emily Apter has termed a “neocolonial geopolitics.”<sup>11</sup> Even though, as Gayatri Spivak reflects (ghosting Jacques Derrida’s insistence on translation’s necessity as impossibility), “translation is a necessary impossibility,”<sup>12</sup> I deem it equally an impossible necessity, an opinion that supplies this introduction’s title. In attempting the impossibly necessary in all my engagements with theatrical and performance translation, I reject policies of parochial monolingualism. This embrace of translation acquires even more importance when considering the contemporary international performance and scholarly networks that still tend to reinforce the so-called Western canon and its cultural capitals as the sole keepers of dramatic literature, theatrical production, and critical scholarship. As translators Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky have persuasively argued,<sup>13</sup> by not translating, we contribute to an ever-growing global monoculture and limit a play’s circulation within the international theatrical and performance networks that already tend toward recirculating a far-too-limited number of already consecrated artists.<sup>14</sup> Performance

<sup>10</sup> Sandra Bermann, “Introduction,” in Bermann and Wood, *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, 1–10 (at 7).

<sup>11</sup> Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 86.

<sup>12</sup> “The impossibility of translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind. It is an active site of conflict, not an irreducible guarantee.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translating into English,” in Bermann and Wood, *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, 93–110 (at 105).

<sup>13</sup> Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky, “Introduction: A Culture of Translation,” in Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky (eds.), *In Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xiii–xxiii.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Versényi addresses this dilemma from the perspective of theatrical translation:

The decision not to translate illustrates as much a way of being and acting in the world as the decision to translate, and English speakers from different cultural contexts may speak the same words though not the same language. To refuse the necessity of translating oneself across the cultural divide is also an epistemological choice. The epistemic nature of translation, however – its constant avoidance of closure to engage with the contingent and its privileging of the journey rather than the destination reached – provides a potential counterweight to the homogenizing effects of globalization.

translation, precisely *because* of the complexities brought about by its linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, and technical engagements, has great potential for complicating the often-assumed unidirectional destiny of a given translation and for exposing the dangerous asymmetries contained within the increasing globalization of English. *Contemporary Performance Translation* constitutes a direct intervention into these artistic and critical trends through a theory of translationality.

I have also come to question the necessity for a clear distinction between translation and its frequent taxonomic foil, adaptation. While regarding the two as separate approaches, J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon locate dramatic adaptation on a spectrum “somewhere between the actual translation of the play from one language to another ... and the creation of a new work inspired by the original.”<sup>15</sup> Geraldine Brodie argues for a third term, version, “to represent an intermediate point along the continuum between translation and adaptation, more creatively interpretive than a morphologically close translation but less inclined to reconstruction than an adaptation.” Brodie also places on this continuum “indirect translation,” thereby rendering visible the UK practice of the commissioned “literal” translation.<sup>16</sup> My own even broader view assumes that translation is always much more than interlingual and that *all* translations reside on that spectrum rather than occupying one of its poles. Margherita Laera notes, in her introduction to a book-length collection of conversations between theatre artists and academics, that adaptation can be “applied to a wide variety of theatrical operations, uses, and contexts, in which a transformation of sorts takes place.”<sup>17</sup> “Application” also suits theatrical translation’s equally varied operations, uses, and contents. But perhaps even more importantly, translation’s own transformational practice can bear political consequences not unlike those posed by Laera regarding adaptation: “[T]ransferring pre-existing material into another language, culture, or medium involves an exercise in self-definition through an act of appropriation of the foreign, which raises issues around a given society’s self-

Adam Versényi, “The Dissemination of Theatrical Translation,” in Magda Romanska (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy* (London: Routledge, 2015), 288–93 (at 292).

<sup>15</sup> J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon, “Introduction,” in J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon (eds.), *Adapting Chekhov: The Text and Its Mutations* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–13 (at 8).

<sup>16</sup> Geraldine Brodie, “Indirect Translation on the London Stage: Terminology and (In) visibility,” *Translation Studies* 11/3 (2018): 333–48 (at 337).

<sup>17</sup> Margherita Laera, “Introduction: Return, Rewrite, Repeat: The Theatricality of Adaptation,” in Margherita Laera (ed.), *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–17 (at 2).

representation and the reiteration of ideological exclusions.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of rehearsing the old debates around two (or more) terms I now find inseparable and even synonymous, rather than opposed, I propose that readers consider all our artistic and scholarly theatrical work as “translational.”

A theory of translationality embraces the vital collaborative process between contemporary translators and other theatre artists.<sup>19</sup> It provides an opportunity to reconsider the labor of translation and acknowledge the artistic contributions of the translator. Indeed, the translator is often considered to function much as a dramaturg,<sup>20</sup> and Kathleen Jeffs has supplied a book-length argument for the indispensability of the translator as an actively participating collaborator in the rehearsal process.<sup>21</sup> I diverge from Jeffs’s otherwise laudable model in its reification of the assumed divide between the scholar and the theatre artist. As seen in the chapters that follow, such hierarchical vestiges are undone by a theory of translationality and its assumption of theatrical translation as an artistic practice intrinsically linked to other artistic practices as playwrights, actors, designers, and directors. While Jeffs makes a case for the value of the “literal translation” (defined by Jeffs as a translation intended only for reading and not acting) within the collaborative process, she passes rather too quickly over what I consider to be the major limitations of the largely UK-based practice: unlike Jeffs, most literal translators are left out of the collaborative process, and they remain underrecognized (indeed, often unnamed – something Jeffs takes commendable pains to rectify) and underpaid, as they are excluded from the box-office percentages that are afforded the credited, higher-profile translators.<sup>22</sup> A translational

<sup>18</sup> Laera, “Introduction,” 9.

<sup>19</sup> As translation scholar David Bellos reminds us, the solitary translator is a myth; all translations are made by communities. See British Centre for Literary Translation, “The Myths and Mysteries of Literary Translation: W. G. Sebald Lecture” (June 29, 2020), YouTube [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnvC8ufhtn8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnvC8ufhtn8).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Katalin Trencsényi, “Chapter 3, Methods: Dramaturgy and Translation,” in *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User’s Guide for Theatre Practitioners* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 53–66.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Jeffs, *Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Geraldine Brodie summarizes the process of literal translation, prevalent within the UK commercial theatre:

The translating name will usually be that of a playwright, director or another literary practitioner who has a track record in commercially and critically successful productions. If the named writer is not an expert in the source text language, he or she will be provided with a literal translation, which may be an extant translation from an earlier production or a published literary translation. However, if the production budget is sufficiently accommodating, a new literal translation will be commissioned from a



approach to performance collaboration brings into critical relief the limitations of that fee-based “literal translation” model: by positioning the subsequent adaptation as the exclusive artistic contribution, the model erases the translator’s artistic labor as well as excludes the translator from sharing in the production’s critical and economic success. A theory of translationality instead positions the translator as an essential artistic collaborator, thus combatting an unnecessarily reduced understanding of translation as text and translator as interlingual transporter. Translationality provides an invigorating and more accurate alternative understanding of the complex network that is contemporary performance translation.

Translational encounters in the theatre bring together different artists and audiences, different bodies, languages, cultures, and expectations; and these encounters often shift the translator’s aesthetic and performance considerations in multiple directions and modes. As all these elements are culturally construed and constrained, I argue that they must be considered in relation to one another as part of the translation process itself. This book explores that argument through my own and other theatre artists’ and scholars’ experiences in translation. I invite the reader to join me in radically rethinking the explorative possibilities in translating for the contemporary international stage.

*Contemporary Performance Translation*’s four central chapters complicate and enrich our translational understanding of contemporary theatrical and performance translation and its potential through multiple cases taken from my experiences as a translator, theatre artist, spectator, and scholar. Chapter 1, “Translationality in Performance,” develops the book’s theoretical frame as well as provides initial experiential examples. In my own practice, theatrical translationality has inspired reconsiderations of actor-training practices, rehearsal processes, and artist-audience expectations, and it has modified my approaches to translation and direction. To illustrate, I return to my decades-long working relationship with Argentinian dramatist Ricardo Monti, our collaborative process in translating and publishing ten of his lyrical and imagery-rich texts into English, and my experience in directing the English-language translation of his play *Visit* with US actors. I then shift toward a scholarly perspective to apply a theory of translationality to the radical revisionary processes at work in Argentinian playwright-director Daniel Veronese’s “Chekhov Project,” a multiproduction endeavor that involved not only his versions

translator who provides substantial notes on linguistic, cultural and theatrical features in the text.

Brodie, “Indirect Translation on the London Stage,” 341.

of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* but also an original play, *Mujeres soñaron caballos* (*Women Dreamt Horses*). I conclude the chapter with reflections on translating Veronese's original play for a New York theatre festival, interpreting its success as largely the result of a translational collaboration between text, author, translator, director, cast, and producer. A theory of translationality accommodates and encourages these interlinked theatrical and performance elements, experiences, and participants.

Chapter 2, "The Over-translated, the Under-translated, the Untranslatable, and the Limits of Performance Translation," turns away from the previous chapter's many possibilities for theatrical and performance translation and toward thinking translationally about the limits of performance translation, drawing my cases from three internationally acclaimed Argentinian theatre artists with whom I have worked closely over the years as a translator, scholar, and longtime spectator. I first consider the "over-translatedness" of Claudio Tolcachir's global sensation, *La omisión de la familia Coleman* (*The Coleman Family's Omission*), a play I co-translated with Elisa Legon into English, first as supertitles for international touring and later as a published and produced play-text. Audience identification with the Coleman family appears to transcend national, cultural difference, and what I dub this "*Coleman, c'est nous*" phenomenon encourages me to assert the possibility of a work's deceptive "over-translatability" that might universalize and thus obscure the localized condition and politics present in, say, *Coleman*'s own radically dysfunctional family. Similar considerations of the "local" raise concerns about the translational limitations of "American realism" and my own challenges in translating and directing plays that carry within them a very culturally bound literary and performance style for which there is no easy or obvious US equivalent.<sup>23</sup> A case in point for those of us working with Argentinian and Uruguayan theatre is the earlier mentioned *grotesco criollo*, a tragicomic genre, aesthetic, and acting style that developed in 1920s Buenos Aires as a vehicle for staging the failed dreams of the region's many immigrants and that still informs local playwriting, acting, and directing. Performance styles such as the River Plate "grotesque" have often remained unproductively under-translated, as has happened with several of internationally acclaimed Argentinian theatre artist Rafael Spregelburd's productions in translation; and I discuss at length our

<sup>23</sup> My use of the term "American realism" is not limited to the early-to-mid-twentieth-century plays of dramatists like Arthur Miller (although they are a clear influence) but more capaciously refers to a contemporary theatrical mix of Stanislavsky's "system" (as understood in the United States) with Strasberg's "method," under the influence of film and television. American realism goes beyond dramatic genre to include performance style, actor and director training, and overall production approach.

collaborative search for creatively countering under-translatedness in bringing his plays to US stages.

At the same time, the “untranslatable” can function as a remarkably productive performance strategy, and so the chapter concludes with an examination of the untranslatable in Lola Arias’s *Campo minado/Minefield*, in which three Argentinian and three British ex-combatants retell and reenact their experiences of the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands War. Translation was built into the production’s *mise en scène*, with supertitles consistently employed throughout the multilingual production to translate the Spanish and English dialogue for its multiple-sited audiences. However, the untranslatable – allusively referenced throughout this play about personal memories of national war – makes itself explicitly present at nearly the play’s end in a moment of decisive untranslatability. I close by reflecting upon the challenges and opportunities presented when heeding Emily Apter’s provocative call to dig into a text’s inherent linguistic and cultural “untranslatability” as a resistantly productive exercise.<sup>24</sup>

The monograph’s final two chapters move from considering the translational as linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, and technological and toward its theoretical and practical potential for the actor and/in performance. To underscore my interest in performing bodies and performance practices, each chapter focuses on ostensibly monolingual productions, thus testing the intralingual potential for my translational approach. In Chapter 3, “Translationality and the Atypical Actor in Performance,” I regard the performer’s own body – mine included – as a collaborative, translational site. Earlier explorations of actor training and performance style, as frequently overlooked but essential components of performance translation, here feed into even larger questions pairing embodiment and translation. This chapter explores how a theory of translationality might expand our critical and practical considerations of performances by what playwright-dramaturg Kaite O’Reilly calls the “atypical actor.”<sup>25</sup> How might current conversations and practices in disability and d/Deaf studies and in theatre, dance, and performance translation studies mutually illuminate and expand? Both disability and translation are terms far too readily coopted as metaphor or leveraged in pursuit of an unquestioned aesthetics of realism, and both are too often regarded as staging obstacles, rather than opportunities. I look to the atypical actor as agent and site for alternative translational encounters, drawing initially upon my

<sup>24</sup> Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Kaite O’Reilly, *Atypical Plays for Atypical Actors: Selected Plays by Kaite O’Reilly* (London: Oberon Books, 2016).

performance work with deaf performance artist Terry Galloway and Galloway's cofounded Mickee Faust Club, a community theatre troupe for Tallahassee, Florida's "weird community" that passionately lives its "ethic of accommodation." I propose an ethic of translationality that bears resonances with disability scholar Alison Kafer's political/relational model of disability and avoids the asymmetric power dynamic inherent in accommodation and its semantic reverberations with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. In the plays and dramaturgical practices of Kaite O'Reilly and her advocacy for the social model of disability, I see translationality operating across individuals, institutions, and cultures. A translational, integrative approach also furthers the critical and artistic potential for the so-called in-performance access devices (such as Sign Language Interpreted Performance and audio description) frequently relegated to the side of or away from the performance. Yet another potential translational site can be found in casting and the ongoing limitations imposed on disabled and d/Deaf actors by still-predominating actor-training approaches that, as disabilities scholar Carrie Sandahl states, "take for granted that a person's inner, emotional state can be read on the physical body."<sup>26</sup> I argue that a translational approach to actor training, casting, and scripting can help disrupt iconic representation and help to more imaginatively populate contemporary stages.

In the third chapter's concluding pages, I consider self-translation as perhaps an even more effective disruptor of disability-as-theatrical-metaphor. I return to Galloway and the 2014 production of her highly physical Punch-and-Judy show-within-a-show, *The Ugly Girl*, commissioned for Liverpool's 2014 Disability and Deaf Arts (DaDA) in the UK. Consciously cast to feature four performers with different abilities playing the four "ugly girls" plus two nondisabled actors (one of them, me) in the remaining roles, the project also brought together performers from the UK and the United States with the US-based playwright and directors. The various challenges recounted in this chapter might fit within Sandahl and Galloway's ethic of accommodation, but in artistic practice they also stand as moments of negotiation, co-creation, and translationality. The chapter closes with my reflections as a spectator watching disability rights activist and well-known British actor and "sit-down comic" Liz Carr (who played one of Galloway's "ugly girls") perform in *Assisted Suicide: The Musical*, Carr's original "TED talk with show tunes" and a master class in self-translation. Carr's demystification

<sup>26</sup> Carrie Sandahl, "The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training," in Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (eds.), *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 255–67 (at 262).

of her own body – as “tragically” succumbing to congenital arthrogryposis – was grounded in the artist’s continuing fight against legalizing euthanasia, specifically of the disabled, as the onstage Carr argued with the videotaped Liz contemplating assisted suicide. Rethinking my and others’ performing bodies translationally not only reveals challenges and opportunities for atypical actors and assistive technologies but also offers another mode for productively and collaboratively engaging in performance.

In *Contemporary Performance Translation*’s fourth and final chapter, “Translationality and the Decolonial Gesture in Performance,” I continue the previous chapter’s translational approach to the performing body but locate it in contemporary Buenos Aires theatre through an exploration of performing the “Other,” the so-called new Argentinian, the non-European immigrant, the refugee, and the internal migrant. To explore the translational potentials – and pitfalls – of what cultural theorist Walter D. Mignolo terms the “decolonial gesture,” I look at three Argentinian productions, all box-office hits, with multiple seasons and various international tours. My purposefully narrow, syncretic focus – I saw all three theatre productions in Buenos Aires in 2014–15 – provides the necessary cultural context as well as underscores my response as spectator and not as artistic collaborator. My examples are not unproblematic, but their gestural complexities, complications, and even limitations provide translational opportunities. Mignolo excludes theatre from his consideration (as part of the coloniality of Western mimetic representational practices he critiques); I instead embrace the translational potential of the decolonial gesture in theatrical performance, taking the performers’ and their audience’s linked participation as the site of our reconsideration of the decolonial gesture’s potential and how the translational might effectively engage onstage with the “other.” In *Dinamo* (*Dynamo*), produced by Claudio Tolcachir’s Timbre 4 company, the decolonial gesture is initiated in a performer’s own dramaturgy of nontranslation. The character Hárma speaks a language invented by the actress Paula Ransenberg. Hárma and her language, unintelligible to the spectators, the other characters, and even the show’s creators, not only impede linguistic communication but also complicate empathy and trigger audience self-awareness of our own attempts at ethnocentrist classification of a perceived “other.” In Guillermo Cacace’s production of *Mi hijo sólo camina un poco más lento* (*My Son Only Walks a Bit Slower*), a Spanish-language production of Croatian Ivor Martinić’s play about a mother’s growing acknowledgment of her twenty-five-year-old son’s increasing physical limitations, the decolonial gesture resides precisely in the director’s translational

reconfiguration of actor-spectator empathy and our collective process of bearing and receiving witness. The production challenges clear-cut categorizations of physical and cognitive ability and disability in casting an ambulatory actor as the wheelchair-bound character while at the same time accommodating an octogenarian actress's inability to remember her character's lines by having the production's assistant director kneel beside her throughout the performance. The decolonial gesture inherent in the conscious casting (and later recasting) of the two roles as well as in the resulting friction between seemingly opposed casting decisions – between the real and the fictional, the presentational and the representational – acquires even more power in a gestural mix that does not allow spectators to easily characterize and thus “translate” our experience. The chapter's final example is *Sudado* (*Sweaty/Stew*), a collectively devised production set in a Peruvian restaurant and presented in a theatre in a Buenos Aires neighborhood filled with Peruvian restaurants. Here decolonial gestuality possesses cultural and geographical significance, as the translocation of the Peruvian immigrant to the Buenos Aires stage is complicated at multiple translational levels: an Argentinian actor “translates” his Peruvian character in performance, the Peruvian character translates himself through performances of various popular icons of an increasingly Latin Americanized and decreasingly Europeanized Buenos Aires, and the resulting play updates a well-known local performance tradition from the previous century's immigration wave. In *Sudado*, decoloniality's gestural potential resides in the character Lalo (and not the actor Facundo Aquinos) and his translational fluidity, as well as in the Abasto neighborhood theatre space and its audiences' genre expectations. Conventional theatre can offer opportunities for attempting the decolonial gesture, but only through acknowledgment that these attempts emerge from within theatre's assembled collective of actors, spectators, and other present bodies. That assembly is translational, and those translational practices determine the creation, construction, communication, and reception of the decolonial gesture.

*Contemporary Performance Translation* concludes on a practical, forward-thinking note that reconsiders how one might engage pedagogically and artistically with translation. To demonstrate how a theory of translationality might function within the rehearsal space and the academic classroom, I describe some of the pedagogical strategies I have utilized in my commitment to what Delia Poey calls “coyote-scholarship,” when scholars participate in transporting marginalized texts into academic discourse and as such must “accept a certain degree of responsibility in how and to what ends we transport texts across

borders and boundaries.”<sup>27</sup> I reflect upon my own challenges faced when teaching Latin American theatre and performance to English-speaking students and provide strategies – my own and others’ – for pedagogical and curricular approaches. I likewise regard the rehearsal room as translational laboratory, to use Kate Eaton’s term.<sup>28</sup> As a director, I briefly return to my approaches when translating what Ricardo Monti calls his “broader realism” for and with US-trained actors. Finally, as a translator, I recall my experience working with Joseph Megel on a staged reading of a play I had recently translated. Megel, a US-based director known for his work in developing new plays, applied his directorial approach to my English-language version of Ricardo Monti’s *Apocalipsis mañana* (*Apocalypse Tomorrow*) for a staged reading. I recount how the director, actor, and I worked together over several rehearsals, translationally I now argue, regarding not only the text and interpretation choices but also the performance aesthetics and actor training that underpinned those choices. The result was a collaboratively driven, full engagement with the entire text as translated, but the process also operated on multiple translational levels, “in-between” language, culture, actor training, and directorial casting and approach. Fellow translator Adam Versényi has argued that thinking of new translations as “new plays” and not as translations of other plays might alter what he calls the prevailing “cultural mindset” whereby translation becomes what Versényi calls “a kind of theatrical cruise ship sailing into ports of call where the language may change but the food and surroundings are all maintained while aboard.”<sup>29</sup> How might thinking of translations as “new plays” expand the possibilities for theatrical translation, its production, reception, and study?

*Contemporary Performance Translation* rethinks theatrical and performance translation – and its many challenges and opportunities – beyond but not excluding the linguistic, the literary, and the cultural. I encourage the reader to engage with all facets of theatrical performance translation through a theory of translationality that acknowledges, embraces, and stimulates the many, many interlinked elements that make up contemporary performance translation.

<sup>27</sup> Delia Poey, *Latino American Literature in the Classroom: The Politics of Transformation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 93.

<sup>28</sup> Kate Eaton, “Turnips or Sweet Potatoes ...?,” in Laurence Raw (ed.), *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation* (London and New York: Continuum/Bloomsbury, 2012), 171–87.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Versényi, “The Creation of a National New Works in Translation Network,” *HowlRound* (September 4, 2012), <http://howlround.com/the-creation-of-a-national-new-works-in-translation-network>.