

Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability

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In the history of translation studies, less has been written on problems of translating theatre texts than on translating any other text type. The generally accepted view on this absence of theoretical study is that the difficulty lies in the nature of the theatre text, which exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that same text and is therefore frequently read as something 'incomplete' or 'partially realized'. In the twentieth century, the notion of a spatial or gestural dimension that is seen as inherent in the language of a theatre text becomes an issue of considerable importance, and a whole series of theoreticians attempt to define the nature of the relationship between the verbal text on the page and the supposedly gestic dimension that is somehow embedded in that text, waiting to be realized in performance.¹

The notion of the gestic text that is somehow encoded into the written in a way that so far has defied any definition is particularly problematic for the interlingual translator. If this concept is accepted, then, as I have argued elsewhere, the translator is being

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1. See for example Keir Elam, *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, Methuen, 1980); Andre Helbo, ed. *Theory of Performing Arts* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1987); Marcello Pagnini, "Per una semiologia del teatro classico," *Strumenti critici*, no. 12 (1970), pp. 122-140; Paola Gulli Pugliatti, *I segni latenti* (Messina/Florence, Sant'Anna, 1976); Franco Ruffini, *Semiotica del testo* (Rome, Bulzoni, 1978); Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* (Paris, Editions sociales, 1978).