

Performing Utopia

Innovation Case Study

What was the question?

What new methods can be developed to encourage audience participation in a foreign-language play?

Who were the collaborators?

Simon Hatab; Dr Sanja Perovic; Dr Soizick Solma; and students from the Department of French at King's and Department of English at Université de Paris-Nanterre.

What did we do?

This was a collaborative, student-led translation, adaptation and performance of a one-act utopian play from the French Revolution, *The last judgement of all Kings*, under the direction of Simon Hatab. The project comprised four elements:

- a performance involving the general public aiming to prototype new methods of encouraging audience participation in a foreign-language play;
- a student-led collaborative translation involving final-year King's French students and Masters students at Paris-Nanterre stressing the feedback loop between translation, adaptation to a contemporary context and performance;
- a documentary film capturing the creative/learning process; and
- the use of this project as a case-study for collaborative translations. This is an untested field both for research and student-led teaching which departs strongly from the authorial model of literary translation produced by a single person.

The aim was not to stage a historical curiosity or heritage project, but to reactivate elements of utopian thought germane to a contemporary situation. To this end, student discussion and translation decisions were incorporated into the scenario itself. The play concluded with a discussion involving representatives from contemporary egalitarian movements, including Southall Black Sisters, Occupy and Syriza.

What was the outcome?

The play was performed to positive review in the Chapel of King's College London's Strand Campus on 5 June 2015 to a public of 96 spectators, in conjunction with an academic conference on a similar theme. The performance included bilingual elements and innovative subtitles. A high-quality translation was produced as well, which might eventually be published.

