

# AFTER TRANSLATION

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First and foremost, the problematic of translation is the allocation of the foreign.

Sakai Naoki<sup>1</sup>

## I. BODY, SPEECH, TRANSLATION

Asian Shakespeare productions typically create an 'intercultural' action by introducing a gap between the verbal and embodied dimensions of the performance. As distinct from the older, looser notion of adaptation, intercultural performance strategies reflexively emphasize and capitalize upon the differences between the disparate cultural systems of theatre forms. In these stage encounters between cultures, Asian theatres have played a central role, and the classical forms in particular offer striking opportunities for juxtaposing their formalized conventions of music, singing, gesture, dance, costume and make-up, as well as their cultural and aesthetic foundations, against Western theatre conventions. By comparison with many theatre forms in Asian cultures, Shakespeare presents an exorbitantly word-heavy theatrical idiom. When the RSC *King Lear* played in Singapore recently with Ian McKellen in the title role, I was conscious of hearing the language as a startling, ringing dimension of a foreign culture, quite unlike how it sounds to me in London or Stratford-upon-Avon, simply because I was watching the performance within a community to whom it would not just be an archaic form of English but a culturally alien mode of performance. A comment overheard in the audience: 'Hey, I thought we coming to watch Gandalf – what is this

Shakespeare? We'd better go eat supper in the interval.' At the same time, a popular local television and film actor later said that McKellen's performance had been a revelation to him of how much the actor's voice could do. Reciprocally, Western reception of Asian performances has focused on their physical expressivity, beauty and spectacle, since these aspects necessarily captivate attention over speech in a language one doesn't follow. The review of the 2006 Craiova Shakespeare Festival at the online 'Theatre Record – The Chronicle of the British Stage' begins by quoting Stanley Wells: 'Before you put something of your own in [Shakespeare's] place,' he warned, 'make sure that you have something worthwhile to say.' While the review observes that the Japanese production of *The Winter's Tale* by the Ryutopia Noh Theatre Shakespeare Series 'delightfully exemplified the Wells problem', in what sense it did so remains highly ambiguous: '[the director] Kurita offered a style triumph very much his own, with his beautifully disciplined actors moving throughout with a rare grace. Almost all of Shakespeare's comedy had been ruthlessly excised, with no sign of Autolycus, or the young shepherd and his girlfriends; in its place was a coherent world of mythic, Japanese intensity.'<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the problem of having something worth saying in place of Shakespeare is not a question of what to say, but of how to

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<sup>1</sup> Sakai Naoki, 'Translation', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.2–3 (2006), 73.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.theatrerecord.org/Archives/2006/archive08-2006.html#top](http://www.theatrerecord.org/Archives/2006/archive08-2006.html#top), accessed 29 December 2008.

speak – or translate – embodied effects of this kind without resorting to stereotypical displacements onto a foreign, mythic intensity.

For Asian theatre practitioners to choose Shakespeare now, and for their productions to return with Shakespeare to the West, something more of their own is expected, by both producers and audiences, than Shakespeare's play in translation. The most obvious difference that Asian practice can make to Shakespeare is to recast the action with a more powerful visual dimension and sensory impact. The greater weight given to embodiment in performance traditions provides not only the resources of traditional forms such as formalized acting and musical conventions, but alternative theatrical values, such as the presentational over the representational, that shape newer approaches. The altered equilibrium between speech and embodiment that arises from performing Shakespeare in interaction with these traditions and values necessarily foregrounds the Asian body over the verbal action translated or adapted from, or just notionally identified with, Shakespeare's play. Where a contemporary or international, rather than classical, performance idiom is used in such an intercultural strategy, it is nevertheless the aesthetic choices of stage presentation and acting style that define and dramatize local terms of engagement with the play and the original author Shakespeare, and that attract attention and critique, over the script – perhaps even more so where those choices are adapted from western performance styles.<sup>3</sup> This heightened corporeality is as much a matter of spectatorial positionality in reception as it is of theatre forms in production: to audiences habituated to logocentric western drama, the foreign appearance, sounds and 'world' of a different theatre form present a greater difference to Shakespeare than his words in a different language, idiom or social context, especially where that form has a highly developed vocabulary of costume, movement and music. Thus intercultural Asian Shakespeare inevitably recreates the familiar Orientalist polarization of body/mind as an East/West dyad. To bring the contrastive theatrical modes of Shakespeare and Asian performance into conjunction is to employ an old,

broad channel of cultural trade and expectation along which such productions circulate and whose terms they renegotiate and reanimate. What has been overlooked in this binary opposition of verbal to physical action, and literary versus theatrical values, is the third node of intercultural performance: that of translation.

Translation is commonly thought of as extraneous to the performance proper: a process of textual transfer completed prior to the performance and/or a facilitating aid for foreign audiences during its progress. It is worth noting, though, that the relatively recent technology of screened surtitles that concurrently translate the onstage dialogue has played a key role in the mobility of intercultural productions across linguistic boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Without this provision for following the words being spoken or sung, a spectator lacks access to the characters' minds and must remain an 'outsider' to the action,

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Shen Lin contextualizes Lin Zhao Hua's adoption of European avant-garde methods in his production of *Richard III* (Beijing, 2001) within current trends in China where Shakespeare performance carries the symbolic value of English as the medium of the global market economy ('What Use Shakespeare? China and Globalization', in Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan, eds., *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance*, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> The term 'surtitles' originated in the 1980s with the practice of presenting translations of the verbal content of European stage operas. See Peter Low, 'Surtitles for Opera: A Specialised Translating Task', *Babel*, 48:2 (2002), 97–110; Yvonne Griesel, 'Surtitles and Translation: Towards an Integrative View of Theater Translation', in Heidrun Gerzymisch-Arbogast and Sandra Nauert, eds., *Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra – Saarbrücken 2–6 May 2005*, [http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005\\_Proceedings/2005\\_Griesel\\_Yvonne.pdf](http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Griesel_Yvonne.pdf), accessed 10 December 2008. In Asian contexts of performance, surtitling has also supported forms within their own language communities – for instance, it has replaced the scripts that used to be distributed during the performance to enable Beijing opera audiences to follow the lyrics, since the singing is not tonally matched to the words – or across different Chinese languages within a local community, where the Mandarin script allows other Chinese language groups to follow regional opera in Singapore; see Chua Soo Pong, 'Translation and Chinese Opera: The Singapore Experience', in Jennifer Lindsay, ed., *Between Tongues: Translation and/or in Performance in Asia* (Singapore, 2006), p. 173.

precisely at the level of their physical presentation. At the same time, to treat the practice of translation during the performance (surtitling) as a kind of bridging convenience or concession for foreign audiences, a para-text to the primary theatrical presentation, is implicitly to conceive of intercultural performance as a monolingual event, one whose normative situation is 'inside' its 'own' linguistic and cultural community, 'out' of which it is translated. This representation of translation, as a process of 'source' to 'target' languages and situations, assumes that languages and cultures are discrete, enclosed spaces, according to which equivalences can be drawn between Asian treatments of Shakespeare and the English original, and on account of which productions designed for international circulation are regarded with suspicion as lacking an authentic cultural identity.

On the contrary, of course, bilinguality or frequently multilinguality is inherent in any reference to Shakespeare's text in an Asian language production (as well as in English-language Asian productions), where the co-presence of at least two (and usually more) languages and cultural systems is structural to the effect of that reference. Here one may adapt the distinction Sakai Naoki makes between a heterolingual address as opposed to a homolingual one. Sakai argues for the need to avoid assuming that in a situation where the speaker and listener share the same language, they are both presumably embraced within the unitary community of a single language – 'for such a group can only be posited imaginarily and *in representation*' (author's italics). In contrast, heterolingual address recognizes a 'non-aggregate' community, in which the 'mingling and cohabitation of plural language heritage in the audience' predicate varying degrees of communication, including the zero degree.<sup>5</sup> Considering, first, that audiences of many traditional Asian forms attend performances without expecting to follow some or even all of the words, second, that internal translation is also common and produces pleasure in the performance of translation, for instance in the Balinese dance drama *arja*, where each line sung in high Balinese by an epic character is repeated in contemporary Balinese by

a servant or clown,<sup>6</sup> and third, the cosmopolitan constitution of audiences in the urban Asian centres where intercultural and multilingual theatre practices are growing in number and diversity, then the cultural environment for performing Shakespeare in Asia at once accommodates, and suggests ways to exploit, the discontinuities between languages, and between language and embodiment.

My concern in this article is to restore the balance between the embodied and the verbal modes of performance in the reception of Asian Shakespeare, partly because the role of verbal language has been readily overshadowed by attention to the corporeal, but also in order to explore the changed status of Shakespeare's dominant, signature mode of verbal action in intercultural performance. In exploring the performativity of translation, I aim to illuminate the intersections between three fields: Shakespeare, intercultural theatre and translation studies. I consider several instances of Asian Shakespeare performance in which the spoken or sung dimension of the action, the translation of the verbal text in surtitles, and the corporeal, physical performance, do not merge into a cohesive whole, but sustain a separation and incongruence between each other. I propose that it is in the tension between them that the intercultural relation to Shakespeare and, conversely, Shakespeare's value for intercultural performance, are constituted. These productions all take place 'after translation' in the historical sense of coming after, and reacting against, well-established practices within their own countries for both translating Shakespeare's text and reproducing it in adapted Western realist theatrical conventions.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the clearly delineated horizon of interpretation

<sup>5</sup> Sakai Naoki, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 4–6.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'internal translation' was coined by Mary Zurbuchen, 'Internal Translation in Balinese Poetry', in A. L. Becker, ed., *Writing on the Tongue* (Ann Arbor, 1989), pp. 215–79. See also Ward Keeler, 'Balinese and Javanese Performing Arts', in Lindsay, *Between Tongues*, pp. 204–23.

<sup>7</sup> *Shingeki* in Japan, and *hua ju* in China. In colonial Singapore, conventional English Shakespeare was a staple production of expatriate theatre groups. In all three countries productions of Shakespeare's plays in these forms are still regularly mounted.

and audience competence expected in these earlier genres, intercultural practices, by virtue of bringing together elements from several disparate performance genres as well as Shakespeare, are extremely unpredictable and variable in reception, because they invoke and often challenge the spectator's sense of cultural belonging, ownership and history, as well as the aesthetic values invested in specific components. These unconscious investments perhaps only surface and acquire definition when provoked by such incongruence, and in this way enter into the intercultural event. Thus Asian Shakespeare performance can posit no ideal spectator, and instead requires a critic to recognize and treat her own culturally subjective position with greater self-reflexivity than has often been the case.

## 2. PARADOXES OF FAITHFUL TRANSLATION

I began to notice the performativity of translated surtitles during Ninagawa Yukio's 2003 production of *Pericles* at the National Theatre in London, when I realised that the English surtitles were screening Shakespeare's text, not a counter-translation of Matsuoka Kazuko's modern Japanese translation into its modern English equivalent. This practice created a curious paradox of faithfulness to Shakespeare. In the normative hierarchy of reception, surtitles are a second-order text that supplements the primacy of live, direct speech on stage, particularly if the surtitles are translating the spoken language. They thus remind the spectator (who reads them) that she is apprehending the action at one remove. But in this production, the precedence that the speaking human being ordinarily takes over a translated version of his or her speech was reversible, since the surtitles framed that speech as a live translation of a prior script – which at one level, of course, was exactly what was happening.<sup>8</sup>

The striking effect of a reversible two-way translation being enacted in Ninagawa's practice of closely following and surtitling Shakespeare's text is significant in several ways. First, the presence

of Shakespeare's original text acts as a guarantee of the performance's authenticity in terms of its fidelity to his play. A useful analogy here is the policy of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London of treating the opera libretto, not the specific stage performance, as the source text for the translated surtitles. This separates the progress of the surtitles from that of the stage production, and marks the 'neutrality' of the surtitles as a parallel text uncommitted to a specific production's interpretation, unimplicated in its contingency and ephemerality.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the non-translation of the surtitles in Ninagawa's practice reassures audiences of the unchanging, uncontested stability of Shakespeare's text, and recreates the original order of its translation into Japanese.

Yet once this guarantee is in place, the surtitles are often superfluous, because the density of Shakespeare's language combined with the speed of the Japanese stage delivery make it impossible to watch and read simultaneously without missing something. And a spectator unused to reading Shakespeare may find herself little the wiser for the surtitles. On the other hand, without either following the spoken Japanese or reading Shakespeare's English, Ninagawa's stage images and stage business layer the basic plot situation with a great deal to watch and engage in. His sets frequently consist of multiple levels between which the actors move, so that single scenes and speeches are punctuated by a sense of transition to a different stage of the action, literally and figuratively. The

<sup>8</sup> Ninagawa's practice of surtitling based on the original text is not singular in theatre translation. Yvonne Griesel points out that 'the reference level contains existing canonical dramas or drama translations and plays a key role in T[heatre] T[ranslation]. My findings have clearly shown that a German original text performed in French translation, which reappears in its source language in the surtitles enjoys the highest authority. It is treated as a so-called sacred text, and the translator does not dare to make serious interventions in the textual structure, so as not to change the style and language of the original' ('Surtitles and Translation', p. 10).

<sup>9</sup> The two approaches to surtitling opera, focusing either on the libretto or the stage production, are discussed by Riitta Virkkunen, 'The Source Text of Opera Surtitles', *Meta*, 49 (2004), 89–97.

theatrical spectacle of the motifs and devices he employs, like the breathtaking cherry tree version of Birnam Wood, transfigure moments of inner drama, like Macbeth's later solitary speeches, with a potent visual force and suggestiveness. Throughout, the combination of choral and instrumental music, and of traditional Japanese with Western aural accompaniment, interweave contrastive emotive cues. All these interwoven or layered elements assert a vivid presence distinct from both the spoken level of the action and Shakespeare's English in the surtitles. The presence of Shakespeare's text, to which the dialogue is tied, but not its embodiments or its settings, demarcates the separation between speech and its presentational context. The surtitles thus *create* the untranslatable, which remains beyond the bounds of language in the way another cultural aesthetic can imagine, visualize and vocalize the 'same' play.

In Ninagawa's productions that have toured abroad, such as *Ninagawa Macbeth* (1985), *Tempest* (1988), *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus* (2006),<sup>10</sup> the untranslatable is most often couched as the marvellous and fantastic, through the emphasis of his presentational style on exceeding the bounds of realism, and its surprises of scale and dynamic movement. The incongruence between Shakespeare's speech and elements of fantasy in the stage presentation challenge the kinds of meaning that are based on character realism and interpretation; that is, on the written text simultaneously present in the surtitles. The acting bridges Shakespeare's text and the stage presentation, and ranges from stylized to naturalistic, but often leans toward the former with formalized movements and melodramatic expression. In short, the surtitles pit the cultural authority of Shakespeare's text against a cultural environment of splendour, fantasy and suggestiveness that Ninagawa's style adds to and expands alongside the text. As many have noted, this powerful visual style depends less upon Japanese theatre traditions than a virtuoso synthesis of elements drawn from disparate sources.<sup>11</sup> Thus the wider implications of his practice are not for a meeting of Shakespeare and Japanese theatre, but of the conjunction of the verbal code – Shakespeare

performing through the surtitles as the 'original' language – and the growing ascendancy of the image, that is at once marked as Japanese and as a composite part of the shift in globalized, cross-cultural communications.

In the Ryutopia Noh Theatre Shakespeare Series' production of *Hamlet* in 2007, on the other hand, the sustained tension between Shakespeare's text in translation and its embodiment in different cultural systems served the opposite need for restriction in the presentation. This performance began with a shaven-headed figure in dark clothes (Hamlet) sitting cross-legged down-stage centre on the six-metre square *noh* stage, at a diagonal facing the audience seated around two sides of the stage, and dimly lit by a single spot on the diagonal. The stage brightened as the other characters filed in along the 'bridgeway' (*hashi-gakari*) to stand behind Hamlet and sit along the bridgeway. Like him, they wore modern kimono in sombre colours, mostly covered by a robe-like over-kimono that presented a less distinctively Japanese, more international appearance coordinating with the mixed hairstyles (Claudius, Polonius and Laertes all had contemporary-styled blond hair). Their acting was formal and restrained, while Hamlet remained seated, motionless, with eyes cast down. When Gertrude spoke to him he opened his eyes and looked up, but not at her, and delivered his 'Tis not alone my inky cloak of black' speech without moving his head, looking straight out over the audience.

Hamlet's immobility at first appeared to present his detachment from the court, as in Shakespeare. But as Horatio described his encounter with the Ghost, and Hamlet continued to act his role exclusively through his intense speech and facial

<sup>10</sup> Dates refer to the first overseas tours of the productions, not the generally earlier Tokyo run.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Tetsuo Kishi, 'Japanese Shakespeare and English Reviewers', in Sasayama Takashi, J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, eds., *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 110–23. Different ways of reading Ninagawa's images of nature are discussed in Kennedy and Yong Li Lan, 'Why Shakespeare?' in *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance*.

expressions without moving his head or body, remaining silent onstage in the same position during Laertes's farewell to Polonius and Ophelia that went on behind him, I kept feeling the pressure for him to move. When he spoke to the Ghost, who stood upstage on the bridgeway, without turning to face him it became clear that Hamlet's stillness was the pivotal device that not only defined his character but altered the kind of action taking place. To a spectator accustomed to relating to a realist Hamlet, this simple, striking device magnetized the action around Hamlet's consciousness, juxtaposing his consciousness against action in scenes where he is normally absent and erasing any distinction between his private and public selves which is usually a crucial point of dramatic tension. Instead, the actor's sustained immobility had the effect of suggesting that some part of Hamlet's reactions and feelings were continuously present but contained and unexpressed, while it also opened up the action to displaced embodied modes of presenting that action. As Hamlet and the Ghost spoke, three figures (adapted from *Karakuri Ningyo*, traditional Japanese mechanical dolls) who had been seated at the back of the stage rose to stand between them in a line of fixed, wooden, doll-like postures, creating a tableau that mimed the connection between Hamlet and his father's Ghost at a level distinct from the dialogue. At this moment, and throughout the performance at critical points, a repetitive, rhythmical western melody played by a live pianist built the momentum of the scene.

The production stayed close to Shakespeare's text, though it was heavily pruned, and a spectator familiar with *Hamlet* could follow the performance without difficulty. Hamlet did not physically engage the other characters except at one point when he turned to look at Ophelia standing immediately behind him: this appeared to present the moment when he appeared in her closet. The audience could not see his face, but her reaction in a scream prompted one to imagine what their exchange of looks communicated. This moment signalled that Hamlet's stillness could be broken, and heightened the tension of uncertainty as to when it might recur. Contrasted with the

other characters' bodily movement and interaction, Hamlet's immobility resisted the empathetic identification with his character that his speech invited, and implied his theatrical mastery as the centre of the action, quite the opposite of the Shakespearean Hamlet's notorious passivity. Thus the verbal expressiveness that is central to Hamlet, and to Shakespeare's dramatic mode, was juxtaposed against the force of concentrated stillness used by *noh* drama. The two opposed modes were co-present in one body, each putting pressure on the other to break. The director Kurita Yoshihiro explains in an interview:

I had come to feel a basic contradiction in the act of performing a play from a translated script that was not written originally in your native language. Even if you got the actors to use lines that had a natural sense of daily life, the historical background would still be missing and that in itself is enough to undermine the reality and make a production hopeless. But, with Shakespeare's plays there is a sense of un-reality or other-worldliness to the words to begin with, and that can make it all more poetic, musical and fanciful. You also have jesters and ghosts and nymphs and witches making appearances, so that it is in effect a world of the imagination from the outset.<sup>12</sup>

The Ryutopia Shakespeare Series aims to hybridize Shakespeare and *noh* to produce a unique third form. In the production of *Hamlet*, individual character and archetypal presentation, Shakespeare's dramatic expression of character in words, and *noh* drama's distillation of experience in form, were mutually altered and estranging.

It is thus inevitable that understanding the language should be crucial to the spectator's participation in the resolution of this tense pressure exerted by words and embodiment on each other. In the final duel, the acting of the remaining four characters – Claudius, Gertrude, Horatio and Laertes – closed the gap with Hamlet as they took positions

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Kensuke Yokouchi: 'Artist Interview: A meeting of Eastern and Western classics: The Noh-staged Shakespeare of Yoshihiro Kurita', ed. Tomoko Tajima, *Performing Arts Network Japan*, at [http://www.performingarts.jp/E/art\\_interview/0503/1.html](http://www.performingarts.jp/E/art_interview/0503/1.html), accessed 10 December 2008.

in a straight processional line extending across the width of the stage, and spoke their lines while they walked very slowly from the back edge to the front, then turned and walked back. Meanwhile the doll actors mimed fight sequences narrated in voice-over while repetitive chords were heard on the piano. Hamlet had turned to face the audience squarely, but otherwise remained unmoving. At the climactic moment, he shouted, pressed his arms sharply against his knees and the other characters, now all at the front edge, dropped slowly down to kneel in a line (Horatio remained standing). I watched this performance on an un-subtitled video-recording of it and, without following the words, I was unclear of the function of the interpolated narration, though the scene was differentiated from the rest of the action by a greater degree of formalization that shaded into ritualization. I later realised that the narration reprised the Pyrrhus speech, which had also been dramatized by the doll actors:

HORATIO      Treason! Treason!  
 NARRATOR    *The city of Troy felt this fatal blow, through its senses, and collapsed in flames, and the crash captures Pyrrhus' attention.*  
 HAMLET       Now, you incestuous murderer, drink up this poison. Is your little pearl in there? Follow my mother. (*King dies*)<sup>13</sup>

The splicing of this reprise into the scene could be seen to juxtapose epic narration with the contained enactment of Noh and, by metatheatrical implication, the final scene of confusion and misfired intrigue in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* here proceeded inevitably towards its climax in the same way as the death of Priam; both scenes, like Noh, perpetually restaged, re-enacted and folded over each other as cultural rituals.

Ninagawa's style and Ryutopia's *Hamlet* demonstrate opposite ends of the spectrum of staying faithful to Shakespeare's text while embodying it in different cultural, theatrical and/or aesthetic systems. Whereas Ninagawa places sensory, spectacular effects alongside Shakespeare's dialogue, Kurita removes realistic bodily behaviour from the verbal expression of Shakespeare's words. Although

it may seem self-evident, both strategies require English surtitles for the spectator to distinguish that the Japanese speech is translated from Shakespeare. Without the English, a spectator (whether Japanese-speaking, English-speaking or neither) is not faced with the tension between that speech and its presentation, and between the cultural and theatrical values they represent. Thus the spectatorial position that is the third point in the transaction can remain submerged. The performance of translation in surtitles, which is actually a counter-translation, makes explicit the first translation (English to Japanese) that has taken place before the performance, by reflecting and corresponding to it.<sup>14</sup> In this way the stage action and audience reaction mirror each other in the distortions of their own reflections.

### 3. TRANSLATION IN CIRCULATION

If the practice of surtitling brings the audience into view, then its performative function is not to enable a foreign audience to enter into another culture but, rather, to introduce the spectator's relational position into what she is watching. In this section I shift from the embodiment of Shakespeare's text to new plays derived from Shakespeare's, and the more direct participation of translation and surtitling in the stage action. The Ku Na'uka Theatre Company's *Nô Play of Spirit Othello*, directed by Miyagi Satoshi in 2005, and the Japan Asia Foundation Center's *LEAR*, directed by the Singaporean Ong Keng Sen in 1997, both presented the unquiet ghosts of Shakespeare's characters who relive and revise the course of events in Shakespeare's play; both treated language as a referent to Shakespeare. *Nô Play of Spirit Othello* adapts *Othello* to the *Mugen Noh* (fantasy *noh*) structure in two acts, with the

<sup>13</sup> Japanese script from the Ryutopia company translated into English by ACTC Translation Centre, Singapore.

<sup>14</sup> For a monolingual spectator listening to a new script in his/her own language, heterolingual address is at its minimal; whereas the non-aggregate community of English Shakespeare performances is ironically more plural, say, in London, where they play to audiences with different Englishes (as well as non-Anglophone tourists).

premise that a traveller to Cyprus meets the ghost of Desdemona, who tells him her story. The performance began with the traveller in European monk's habit introducing the beauty of Cyprus by re-imagining the night scene in the traditional Japanese garden of the Tokyo National Museum, where the open-air *noh* stage was mounted:

Under the light from the setting sun the dense olive  
mountains on the left draw towards the shore.  
The deep blue Mediterranean sea is on the right.  
The two complement each other perfectly.  
The landscape of Botticelli's masterpiece must be like  
this,  
the crisp shadows of the trees captured  
in the ocean forever.<sup>15</sup>

Four women in peasant dress entered carrying jars on their heads, at which he marvelled that they should be singing a gondolier's song in Venetian, which he, a Venetian, recognized. These reflexive references to a doubly foreign language foregrounded the fiction of Japanese actors playing Venetians on Cyprus, where the ghost of Desdemona lingers. Costume was eclectic, including modernized plastic *kariginu* (commoner's clothes in pre-modern Japan), Asian masks and Western long dresses. A group of actors dressed uniformly in white was seated onstage throughout and doubled as chorus, musicians and additional performers.

Fragmented references to Shakespeare's lines ranged from direct quotes to adaptations spoken by the characters and the chorus. Recalling her marriage to Othello, Desdemona said, 'A bright sword, that spring eve', and broke off. The chorus responded by repeating the phrase with rising urgency until she completed the sentence, 'Passed through my body'. Key words and lines were also written on a small screen at the back as if by an invisible hand. Thus multiple modes of citing Shakespeare were presented simultaneously: as choric speaking, as a different Desdemona reliving her past life and as the writing and translating of Shakespeare's words into the Japanese script. The English subtitles on the DVD recording insert the location – or the language community – of non-Japanese spectators as a point

in the routing of repeated cultural estrangements and displacements: from Italy (via Cinthio) to London (where Shakespeare's *Othello* was performed), through Tokyo (where this production was conceived and played), back to Cyprus and Venice (imagined by Shakespeare and re-imagined here), and around the world (to New Delhi on tour). For a Japanese spectator at the Tokyo performance, the Japanese language and location may assume transparency, in the suspension of disbelief; but once translated, the imaginings and memories of race, culture and belonging redouble.

Verbal invocations of race and location were contrasted against the central moment at which Desdemona's ghost re-enacted her strangling by Othello wordlessly, through an extended dance sequence in which a large dark glove on her right hand represented the memory of the other. Performed as a visceral, unspeakable re-experiencing of that terrible end, which gradually dissolved almost imperceptibly into a transcendence of that memory in prayer, this climactic moment was capable of traversing cultural boundaries without language, through the concentrated expressive power of the actress's movements as she danced to the accompaniment of a rhythmic drum and the eerie sound of the flute. Its transmission through corporeal performance, however, was set in tension against the self-reflexive framework of re-playing, that paradoxically enabled it to emerge as a shared cultural memory of Shakespeare's play – out of time, place and language. It was the traveller who demands to hear her story, and to whom she appeals to pray for her release, who indexed the multiple displacements involved in the literal translation of languages and the figurative translation of cultures. A Japanese woman playing a Venetian man, in the role of a traveller disguised as a pilgrim, this unnamed figure to whom Desdemona's ghost told the story of *Othello* and who acted as mediator and representative for the audience, enacted the indeterminate subject position of intercultural Shakespeare on the move.

<sup>15</sup> English subtitles in the DVD recording from Ku Na'uka Theatre Company.



## AFTER TRANSLATION

An extreme instance of the structural principle of translation is the Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen's intercultural strategy in his Shakespeare-based productions, where each character or group of characters was played in a different language and performance form. The first of his three productions was *LEAR* (1999), in which a *noh* actor played both the Old Man (Lear) and the Mother (the ghost of Lear's wife) in Japanese, a Beijing Opera actor played the Older Daughter (combining Goneril and Regan) in Chinese, and a Thai dancer played the Younger Daughter (Cordelia). The Retainer and the Loyal Retainer (Edmund and Kent respectively) spoke in Indonesian and acted in movements adapted from *puncak silat*, a regional, ceremonial martial arts form of Minangkabau in Sumatra. The music was interculturally matched, such that the Javanese gamelan orchestra or a modern pop ballad accompanied Umewaka's *noh* performance, and the *shakuhachi* (the Japanese wooden flute) accompanied Jiang's arias. The new script by the Japanese playwright Rio Kishida centred on the Older Daughter as the protagonist who kills her sister, lover and father at different stages in order to finally assume sole sovereignty. The performance was surtitled in the majority language of each venue on its tours through Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta, Perth, Berlin and Copenhagen.

Depending on the spectator's level of familiarity (if any) with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *noh* drama, Beijing opera, and/or Thai *khon* dance, what she saw and how she reacted to it would differ, sometimes markedly, from what someone else noticed, found interesting, attractive or objectionable. As a Singaporean Shakespeare scholar, with a close knowledge of the text of *King Lear*, and some – but not extensive – knowledge of the Asian forms used, I have watched the video-recording of this performance, subtitled in English as was the Singapore performance, with several inter-cutting reactions: a) I am conscious that I half listen to the Mandarin and Malay that I partially follow, and half read the translation of these and the Japanese, thereby tracing a constant movement in comprehension closer to and further from the action; b) I register through the dialogue the echoes and points of departure

from Shakespeare's text; c) I note details of the different costumes, gestures, vocal styles, both for how these re-create and resemble the roles of *King Lear* (I am quite secure in this identification), and where they depart from the conventions of the Asian forms (I am less sure of these); d) above all, I am acutely aware that the grand display of Asian forms defines and stages a unique presentation, equally unfamiliar in English Shakespeare or Asian performance traditions.

I thus watch this production from parallel inside/outside positions, at the unstable interstice of a passage that I make back and forth between Shakespeare's original and Asian theatre traditions. Neither *King Lear* nor any of the Asian forms is fully present on stage, but they are mentally invoked by the connections I make between them, and in the process I alternate between seeing each from the other side. This interstitial position would be different from one spectator to another, changing as the production toured to a different country. During the performance, I was aware of the margins of my own reaction, that those around me in the Singapore performance were watching and hearing with distinct differences from myself – the friend I attended the performance with, who was educated in Chinese rather than English like myself, found the Older Daughter very uncomfortable to listen to, as (he said) her expressions violated Chinese conventions of appropriateness. No doubt the gaps between how I reacted to what I saw and another spectator's reaction widened and proliferated with other audiences abroad, and I was conscious that, while these reactions were unavailable to me, they contextualized mine.

Verbal expression in *LEAR* concentrated on images that could attach to the visual, bodily images presented, and be transported with them across linguistic barriers – correspondingly, idiomatic distinctions capable of differentiating the multiple languages disappeared. The vocal style conventional to each form was heightened as the defining character of speech and culture. Without the evocation or inflexions of local reference specific to a cultural milieu, the languages did not signify places, but, rather, language communities. As such, each

language virtualized belonging in a country of origin as competency in its language. These competencies are not specific to geographical location, but, as in Singapore, they have been dispersed through migration and the transnational mobility of globalized audiences. Language acted as a surrogate for, rather than as an embodiment of, locale. The several languages spoken concurrently on stage invoked access to, rather than being in, a location or culture, and thus drew attention to the performance of translation. Particularly since diction and syntax were kept fairly simple, the simultaneous languages related to an audience's partial bi- or tri-linguality. For instance, the Mandarin 'zhuren', Indonesian 'raja' and neutral enough English 'ruler' evoke vastly different histories, images and styles of command, yet in their simultaneous presence as spoken or read terms they acted as performative doubles of one another. The script was printed throughout in two languages, including a third set of lines with Arabic phoneticization of the Mandarin and Japanese *kanji* characters in the Chinese and Japanese portions. It was along what is usually understood as the margins of the performance, through the surtitles that translated the multilingual script into the predominant audience language at each location, that a spectator became conscious of her geographical location, and of belonging in or coming from outside that place. Since the action could be substantively followed through visual and aural cues, the surtitles drew attention to translation as an issue rather than a necessary function, as the performance of translation, where words are always read or heard as correlatives to other words, and thus no longer existed in the system of a language as such.

#### 4. SCHOLARS, FANS AND INTERCULTURAL TIME

The simultaneous translation of a performance in written surtitles – or audio transmission over headphones (as in the Kabuki-za in Tokyo) – is an extension of the onstage performance made possible by modern technology, which thereby alters

that production's performativity. An appropriate coda to thinking about the triangulation of speech, embodiment and translation in live performance is the technological reproduction and circulation of Asian Shakespeare performance in digital media. The two examples sketched below focus on the agency of subtitling in the globalized distribution of digital performances. They highlight the mixed cooperative and interventionist roles that the medium of the Internet now plays, not as an interface between cultures that are thought of as discrete spaces of production and reception, source and target locations, but as a zone that both transforms and generates cultures conceived, in Anthony Pym's words, as 'a set of factors creating resistance to the movement of information; or more exactly, sets of factors that alter the status of information as it is moved'.<sup>16</sup>

My own role in the first example shifts from that of a spectator to a collaborator in an online archive of performance resources: the *Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (ASIA)*, which is an intersection between practitioners, individual scholars and three Asian Shakespeare projects – the *MIT Shakespeare Project*, *Relocating Intercultural Theatre* (National University of Singapore) and *A Web Archive of Asian Shakespeare Productions* (JSPS Kaken/Gunma-Doho Universities). *ASIA* aims to bridge the language and access barriers that currently make it difficult for practitioners and scholars of Shakespeare performance in different Asian countries to interact with each other and the rest of the world, by assembling an online corpus of production footage accompanied by translated scripts, and by pooling local expertise in the creation of detailed data on each production, its forms, reception and references. The process of creating this archive has brought into view a number of broader considerations that bear upon this discussion.

First, the archive is itself an interculturalizing enterprise in that it transforms live performances into the globalized medium of digital materials, and

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Pym, 'Four Remarks on Translation Research and Multimedia', in Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb, eds., *(Multi)media Translation* (Amsterdam, 2001), p. 278.

redistributes a performance's potential audience from a concrete location/locations to the virtual, indeterminately plural and indefinite temporality of access on the internet. Both these functions are extensions of theatre companies who make commercial DVDs of their productions. The difference that *ASIA* stands to make to the reproduction and distribution of live performance is in the archival aim of bringing materials together as a corpus, to be studied and compared across language and cultural communities through the translation of scripts and collation of data. To establish structures for sharing and organizing these materials, continuous negotiation between the specific cultural and institutional contexts of the collaborators that determine their priorities is needed, as well as between the differing kinds of knowledge brought by practitioners, audiences and academics interacting with those materials from distinct cultural positions.

Second, in formal terms, such an archive extends and alters the accessibility of audio-visual material through corresponding verbal understanding (translation) and information (data). The relationship of this verbal mode to the sensory impact of the performance footage is that of a discursive supplement to the processes of recording, editing and digitization by which the live performance is altered at different stages to produce a changed horizon of intersection between audiences and modes of reception. The structure of the data and the ways in which it facilitates searches for comparative studies, design layout decisions and priorities for translation all shape the discursive field of interaction with audio-visual modes of transmission. For instance, the translated script may relate to the video image in several ways: if subtitle text is superimposed over the image in the manner of film or television subtitles, the performance is approximated to those media and requires the least effort by the viewer to assimilate the translation; whereas if a text block is placed alongside the image and switches to the next block once the time code correlating to the last line is reached by the recording, the interactions represented by both making and using translations are distinguished as a separate activity from that of watching the image.

Different languages entail different orders of verbal knowledge. To translate diverse Asian productions into English alone would forego the lateral connections between cultures geographically and historically close to each other in favour of their vertical relation to the global language of English, placing them like the spokes of a wheel whose hub is English. Instead, multiple language translations into different Asian languages make the borders between the people and situations producing Shakespeare in Asian countries permeable to one another and enable an intercultural discourse to develop.

Thus, third, the construction of such an archive blurs the boundary between production and reception present in the initial act of theatrical production through its reproduction of the performance in a radically different format. For example, the Singapore team, which is responsible for translations, has commissioned an English translation of the Ryutopia *Hamlet* script for which the company has kindly given copyright permission to the archive along with its production footage. The company has reciprocally requested to use that translation in their tour and/or commercial DVD release of the production. That is, the reproducibility of the production (in digital streaming media) brings into play other modes of transmission (on the internet, subtitling) that create new circles of reception which may, in turn, interact with those modes of transmission and the original production.

My second example illustrates a related circuit which is looser, more informal and ad hoc than a scholarly archive, and has a much wider popular reach. From April to September 2007 the Japanese television station CBC aired an *anime* (Japanese animation) series *Romeo X Juliet* loosely based on Shakespeare's play, produced by *anime* studio Gonzo, in twenty-four half-hour episodes.<sup>17</sup> Each episode was subtitled in a variety of languages (English, Spanish, French, Italian, Greek, Israeli, Arab) by *anime* fan groups in an internet

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<sup>17</sup> The official website address of *Romeo X Juliet* is <http://anime.goo.ne.jp/special/gonzo/romejuli/>. The English website address is <http://romejuli.jp/english/>

sub-culture known as ‘fansubbing’. The subtitled files were available for viewing on YouTube as well as for download through the P2P protocol, and the series was closely followed and widely discussed on internet blogs, forums and chat sites.

The intersections that occurred in *Romeo X Juliet* between the iconicity of Shakespeare’s quintessential star-crossed lovers, the cult appeal and icon formation of *anime* and fan cultures of participation must be understood through its serialized form, whereby the original play was elaborated over six months of weekly instalments – a 12-hour *Romeo and Juliet* would be inconceivable in any other genre and format! Fansubbing thus interacted with the complicated twists of the plot in a currency of demand and anticipation circulating over a virtual international network, often made explicit by individuals’ requests on fan forums. The hybridization of Shakespeare with *anime* generates the frisson of unexpected conjunction between two very different genres and cultures of appreciation. A post on an American blog reads:

A Romeo and Juliet anime = a naked attempt to shove shakespeare down the throats of otakus [*anime* fans] who gagged on the original play and wouldn’t be caught dead with it. And I was right. But I’m now captivated by the [sic] how they seem to be laughing in the face of Brit-Lit purists everywhere. Especially the characters being able to say ‘Neo Verona’ with a straight face. You start to love the plot twists and story until you realize . . . you know how it’s supposed to end.<sup>18</sup>

The series attracted praise for its detailed drawing and high quality animation in a European period style, and features flying horses and the comic character of a playwright Willy who lives in the backstage quarters of the theatre where Juliet also grows up in secrecy. Juliet is the sole survivor of the Capulet line in a class-bound society ruled with an iron hand by Lord Montague, and is disguised as a boy by the surviving Capulet followers and not told her identity until she comes of age just after the story begins. Her character amalgamates the cross-dressing conventions of Shakespeare’s comedies and of *anime* and *manga*, even as she also resembles a female Zorro in red cape, hat and mask in her self-

appointed role as Red Whirlwind, a masked crusader for justice. The intercultural hybridization of the series is epitomized by its romantic theme song, whose melody is better known as the Irish song ‘Danny Boy’, here covered by Lena Park, a Korean-American R&B singer, in Japanese lyrics evocative of tragic, ideal love. It plays as a kind of signature-trailer at the start of every episode with karaoke-style subtitles that were translated into English with substantial divergences between the different fansub versions.

The community of fans, like that of scholars, positions itself in a relation of expertise to a specific site of cultural production. But fans carry out their role of supporter with a passionate attachment and desire to participate actively in the primary production. The subtitled Japanese *anime* programmes originated in *anime* fan clubs in the 1990s as a way of sharing this otherwise difficult to obtain genre among local enthusiasts. The products are distributed free, initially on videotapes, and require only knowledge of Japanese and technical know-how in using the subtitling software. The agency of fansubs in adumbrating the original production is an explicitly translative one that manifests the foreign in language, locale and ownership – of both the original and the fansubbed versions – by crossing linguistic and media platforms. It occupies a legal and production grey zone: the fansub groups claim credit for the huge international popularization of *anime* over the last decade, and generally recognize a gentleman’s code according to which fansubbing stops once the title is released for commercial distribution in their country.<sup>19</sup>

The participation of fansub groups in extending and multiplying the performance event of *Romeo X Juliet* differed strikingly from the careful distance foreign audiences normally maintain from Asian Shakespeare in the theatre, because the fans claim the foreign status of *anime* as their own; yet that

<sup>18</sup> Post #24 by ‘Hope Renate’, *Hop Step Jump*, <http://anime.jefflawson.net/2007/04/07/romeo-x-juliet/>

<sup>19</sup> Jorge Díaz Cintas and Pablo Muñoz Sánchez, ‘Fansubs–Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment’, *JoS-Trans* 6 (2006), [www.jostrans.org/issue06/art\\_diaz\\_munoz.php](http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_diaz_munoz.php), accessed 10 December 2008.

## AFTER TRANSLATION

participation also closed the circuit of competing and pluralized cultural positions enacted through Shakespeare. The majority of English posts situated the viewer's affiliation to and appreciation of Shakespeare and *anime*; everyone wanted to know if it would end the same way. So of course, long before it actually acquired the distribution rights to *Romeo X Juliet*, Funimation Entertainment issued a cease-and-desist request to the English group Shin-sen Subs after episode 23 was aired, as a consequence of which all other groups fansubbing the series ground to an abrupt halt, and fans outside Japan were not able to access the last two episodes.

An online performance archive and the fansubbing of serialized *anime* together illustrate the extent to which linguistic translation is inseparable from technological conversions that not only extend the place of a performance, but also alter its 'real' time as an event. The reproducibility of Shakespeare in Asian performance gains its intercultural definition through the counter-translations that mirror the first translations of his plays out of

English. This mirroring of translations brings into view the temporality of an intercultural relationship to Shakespeare, which is usually conceived in spatial terms. Translation manifests the old divide between language and the body, and draws a spectator's attention to her positionality in the oriental-ization of the one as western and the other as eastern. Self-reflexively incorporated into new plays based on Shakespeare's, translation foregrounds at once the circulation of Shakespeare and the mobility and virtuality with which we now imagine cultural locations in Asia – or indeed elsewhere. As an interstitial time zone that loops production and reception in a continuous circuit by means of digital technology, translation changes the synchronic and diachronic axes of the performance, and its status as event and artifact. Finally, the performativity of translation returns Asian Shakespeare to our continuing investments in the value of language for engaging the full range of receptions which can be optimal but not singular, objective or complete.