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## **“Thou art translated”: Remapping Hideki Noda and Satoshi Miyagi’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Post-March 11 Japan**

**Abstract:** Ever since the first introduction of Shakespeare to a Japanese audience in the nineteenth century, his plays have functioned as “contact zones,” which are translingual interfaces between communities and their cultures; points of negotiation, misunderstanding and mutual transformation. In the context of what is ostensibly a monolingual society, Japanese Shakespeare has produced a limited number of performances that have attempted to be multilingual. Most of them, however, turn out to be translingual, blurring the borders of linguistic specificity.

As an example of this, I read *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as adapted by Hideki Noda originally in 1992 and then directed by Miyagi Satoshi for the Shizuoka Performing Arts Centre in 2011. Drawing on my experience as the surtitle translator of Noda’s Japanese adaptation “back” into English, I discuss the linguistic and cultural metamorphosis of Noda’s reworking and the effects of its mediation in Miyagi’s rendition, and ask to what extent the production, adapted in post-March 2011 Japan, can be read as a “contact zone” for a translingual Japanese Shakespeare. In what way did Miyagi’s reading of the post-March 11 events inflect Noda’s adaption along socio-political lines? What is lost and gained in processes of adaptation in the wake of an environmental catastrophe?

**Keywords:** translation, adaptation, translingual theatre, Fukushima, earth-quake, Post-March 11, Hideki Noda, Satoshi Miyagi, Shakespeare in Japan

Ever since the first introduction of Shakespeare to a Japanese audience in the nineteenth century, his plays have functioned as what M. L. Pratt calls “contact zones,”<sup>1</sup> that is, spaces where readers engage in a “radically heterogeneous” (39) web of historic, linguistic and cultural encounters. Contact zones are translingual

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt’s concept of “contact zones” was referenced by Emi Hamana in her paper titled “Toward a Study of Translingual Performance of Shakespeare Worldwide with a Focus on *Henry V*” given at the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual conference of the Shakespeare Society Japan, at Gakushuin University, Tokyo, 12 October 2014.

interfaces between communities and their cultures; points of negotiation, misunderstanding and mutual transformation.

Over a century and a half, numerous Shakespearean productions and adaptations have been performed on Japanese stages and many have attempted to negotiate these cultural intersections. At the same time, in the context of Japan's emergence as a nation state, following the Meiji restoration, a new monolingualistic consciousness was fostered by the authorities. In the construction of this ideology, "internal differences were suppressed whilst difference from the outside world was highlighted in order to define, and thereby create, the idea of a Japanese nation" and a "unitary national language" (Heinrich 3-4). However illusory, linguistic and cultural homogeneity had a strong influence on socio-cultural spheres including the theatre.

Against this backdrop, much of Japanese Shakespeare has been tantamount to Japanese-language translation and adaptation plays. There have been a limited number of exceptions; productions that have attempted to be multi-lingual, and that rethink the position of Japan and Asia from different geo-political perspectives. This is the case of Ong Keng Sen's intercultural Shakespeare trilogy, *Lear* (premiered in Tokyo, Japan in 1997), *Desdemona* (premiered in Adelaide, Australia in 2000) and *Search Hamlet* (premiered in Helsingor, Denmark in 2002) which, inspired by the Singaporean director's own multicultural background, was part of an experimental framework investigating the politics of cultural identity in a globalizing world.

While on one level, Japanese Shakespeare is ostensibly monolingual, on another level, as stated in the beginning, it is always already translingual, not only traversing time and space—Elizabethan England and modern Japan for instance—but moving intralinguistically between translation and adaptation.

In this essay, I will explore the idea of the translingual, not from an overt multicultural perspective, but from what are purportedly monocultural productions. The case I will analyze is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* adapted and directed by Hideki Noda in August 1992 in Tokyo, at the end of Japan's "bubble" era; and later directed by Satoshi Miyagi for the Shizuoka Performing arts Centre (SPAC) in a sell out run that began in April 2011, one month after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Due to popular demand, Miyagi revived the production at SPAC in January 2014.

Drawing on my experience as the surtitle translator of Noda's Japanese adaptation "back" into English for both SPAC productions, I will read Noda's version of Shakespeare's comedy as an example of translingual practice, examining the intralinguistic and intracultural relationship between Noda's text and Miyagi's revival.

In what way did Miyagi's reading of the post-March 11 events inflect Noda's adaption along socio-political lines? To what extent did Miyagi's scenic

translation, with its costumes and set made of newspaper change Noda’s play? What is lost and gained in processes of adaptation in the wake of an environmental catastrophe?

### Hideki Noda

In order to facilitate the discussion of Noda’s adaptation as translingual practice, this section historicizes Noda’s original 1992 adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Noda was born in Nagasaki in 1955 and showed an interest in theatre from an early age. In 1976, while studying law at the University of Tokyo, he founded the theatre company Yume no Yuminsha (Dreaming Bohemian). This was part of the second wave in the so-called “Shogekijyo Undo” (Little Theatre Movement). Noda followed in the footsteps of the movement’s political forerunners, Tadashi Suzuki and Yukio Ninagawa. With Yuminsha, Noda wrote, directed, and acted in high-speed, pun-driven, physical plays throughout the 1980s and early 90s. Among these was *Nokemono Kitarite* in 1982 (*The Advent of the Beast*), which earned him the prestigious Kishida Kunio Drama Award. He was invited to stage the play at the Edinburgh International Festival in 1987, marking his international debut.

Although the play was generally well received, critics noted difficulties of translation, particularly with regard to Noda’s trademark wordplay, which was simultaneously translated as live commentary, saying it was “almost impossible [to understand] given the breakneck pace of both speech and action” (*The Scotsman*, 24 August 1987). Noda returned to the Edinburgh Festival with *Han Shin* (*Half God*, 1990), an adaptation of Moto Hagiwara’s *manga*, which is a story about Siamese twin girls. Despite being at the height of its popularity, Noda decided to disband the troupe. This sudden shift, coincided with the end of Japan’s bubble economy and was motivated by Noda’s desire to explore theatre beyond the limits of Japanese language, the Japanese theatre market, and the confines of the Yuminsha cast.

In the autumn of 1992, immediately after the production of *Zenda Jo no Toriko, Kokemusu Wareraga Eiji no Yoru* (*The Prisoner of Zenda Castle, The Night of Our Moss-covered Infancy*), Noda obtained a year-long Ministry of Culture scholarship to study drama in London. He attended several Theatre de Complicite workshops and developed a key relationship with director Simon McBurney.

Consequently, he was able to expand his physical techniques to include Lecoq-based expression, drawing upon commedia dell’arte and clowning. Upon returning to Japan in 1993, he formed a new theatre company called Noda Map in an attempt to re-map his theatrical direction.

Compared to the Yuminsha period characterized by and to an extent confined to Japanese language and actors, Noda's subsequent work sought to expand his international profile. *Aka Oni (Red Demon)*, Noda's first major international play, was performed in Japan and Thailand in 1999, before opening at London's Young Vic Theatre in 2003. Noda then began a long-term collaboration with Irish playwright and adapter Colin Teevan. Working in English rather than in translation, they co-wrote *The Bee*, Noda's first international hit, which premiered at London's Soho Theatre in 2006, and in 2008 *The Diver*, staged in Tokyo in Japanese and in London in English. From *The Bee* onwards, Noda's work became more politically driven and designed for small stages to enable international touring (Eglinton 2001, 2016).

### **Adapting *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Between 1986 and 1992, Noda produced four adaptations of Shakespeare. For Yuminsha, he directed *Richard III* (1990) reimagined as two rival *ikebana* (Japanese flower arrangement) families. For Toho, one of Japan's major commercial film and theatre companies, he directed *Twelfth Night* (1986) featuring Mao Daichi, a retired *otokoyaku*, or male impersonator at the Takarazuka Revue Company. In 1990, he staged *Much Ado About Nothing* set in a Sumo wrestler family. The final installment in his Shakespeare series (to date) was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which premiered at the Nissei Gekijyo, a major commercial theatre in Tokyo in 1992.

Among the four adaptations, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* marked the furthest departure from the original play and from the principal Japanese translations by Tsuneari Fukuda, Yoshio Nakano and Yushi Odashima. Noda reworked the play's central themes of love and sexual desire through food culture, transforming Shakespeare's Athenian court into a Japanese restaurant called "Hanakin", and relocating the forest to the foothills of Mt Fuji. He turned Demetrius and Lysander into two cooks called Demi and Lai, transformed Hermia into Tokitamago (whisked egg), daughter of the restaurant owner, and renamed Helena as Soboro (scrambled egg), daughter of one of the restaurant workers. While Oberon, Titania and Puck kept their original names, the fairies took on new pun-based names such as "Kinosei", which can be translated either as "tree fairy" or "because of your imagination".

Moreover, the mechanicals' names were Japanized so that Bottom, for example, became Fikusuke, a shoe smith, and their professions were altered to match the restaurant setting.

In addition to the Japanization of the characters, Noda incorporated stories from other literary works including Johann Goethe's *Faust* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, inventing for instance a character called

Mephisto who prompts, exposes, controls and eats up people’s oppressed desires and unspoken dreams. The invisible Mephisto intrudes into Shakespeare’s world and the world of the fairies disguised as an Indian changeling boy intent on causing destruction. He steals the role of Puck in Act 1 Scene 2 of Noda’s version by locking Puck in a cage and declaring, “instead of my cousin, I will show a midsummer night’s dream to human folk”.<sup>2</sup> He presides over the confusing love game for Athenian couples, then later on directs the mechanical’s rehearsals of *Alice in Wonderland* as well as Bottom and Titania’s love romp in the woods. Both Puck and Mephisto are aware of the meta- theatricality of their roles, which is evident in Act 1 Scene 14 of Noda’s version when Puck remonstrates against Mephisto saying, “This is very bad. He stole my lines again, not only my lines, he stole my part”.

Noda conceived of these thematic shifts whilst working on *Much Ado About Nothing* several years earlier. He wrote a memo in December 1989 in which his ideas for the adaptation were just beginning to surface: “What would it be like if I replace ‘to love’ and ‘to like’ with ‘to want to eat?’ To change the relationship between to love and to be loved into the relationship between to eat and to be eaten” (Hasebe 346, qtd. in Minami 149).

Noda’s freewheeling adaptation, with an all-star cast including Shinobu Otake as Soboro and Toshiyuki Karasawa as Demi, bears the influence of the last wave of Japan’s bubble economy. This was apparent in the production’s set design, which resembled an amusement park with bright lights, climbing frames and a giant chopping board revolving like a merry-go-round on stage. It also permeated the play’s language, with its exuberant puns and metaphors.

### Creativity from constraint

Noda’s four adaptations of Shakespeare from the late 1980s to the early-1990s were characterized by radical textual alteration and the Japanization of characters and places. During that period, Noda believed that translation was quasi-impossible. In the case of Shakespeare, Noda said in an interview in 1996 “I think his word play is almost fatally lost in translation” (220). In the same interview, when asked about his own writing style and his relationship with Shakespeare in translation, he gave the following reply:

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Eglinton and commissioned by SPAC for production surtitles in 2011 and 2014. The publication of this translation is forthcoming in the *Asian Intercultural Shakespeare Archive*, <http://a-s-i-a-web.org>. Hereafter, all quotations from Noda’s version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are from my translation.

I read his [Shakespeare's] works only in translation, and I first thought his plays were really good. But when I read his plays with the intention of staging them, I suddenly felt uneasy about his phraseology. This is probably because I have the rhythm of contemporary theatre in me. His similes and metaphors seemed to me beautiful and really absorbing when I just read them, yet when I re-read his plays for staging, they turn out to be different from the first impression I got from reading them (Noda, 2001: 227).

Towards the end of the interview Noda further emphasized the difficulty of translation stating that,

If I am to honour the rhythm of Shakespeare's plays, I will think [*sic*] it necessary to rewrite his long lines. Since wordplays cannot be translated as they are, I will make a free translation of his plays according to my own interpretation" (*ibid.* 228).

There are several key points that surface in these remarks concerning the relationship between translation, adaptation and Noda's cultural and linguistic contact with Shakespeare.

First, the influence of the Shogekijyo approach to Shakespeare is apparent in the way Noda treats the text "not as canonical, but as a material resource to exploit" (Minami 146). This stands in stark contrast to the "Shingeki" (New Drama) tradition of imitating modern western plays. Secondly, and as a corollary of this approach, Noda calls for a "free translation" to accommodate the problem of translating wordplay. However, Noda's desire for freedom is not merely a product of the shogekijyo attempt to displace Shakespeare as an icon of cultural imperialism, nor is it a quick fix to an idiomatic obstacle, it is also the consequence of an encounter with Shakespeare's language; a clash with the text as "contact zone", leading to an "uneasiness" with regard to Shakespeare's "phraseology". Here, Noda alludes to the constraint of preexisting forms and cultural coordinates embedded in the translation.

This notion of constraint can be separated into two strands. The first is an archival constraint, where texts function as maps of the shifting phraseologies and cultural traces that are inscribed through processes of translation and re-edition.

Adaptation processes begin inside the confines of these cultural coordinates, before searching for ways to expand, displace or reterritorialize them. The second is the constraint of authority, which American literary critic Harold Bloom, writing in the context of psychoanalysis, terms the "anxiety of influence". Terry Eagleton notes how Bloom's literary theory—developed in the wake of Freud—"rewrites history in terms of the Oedipus complex. Poets live anxiously in the shadow of a 'strong' poet who came before them, as sons are oppressed by their fathers; and any particular poem can be read as an attempt to escape this 'anxiety of influence' by its systemic remoulding of a previous poem" (183).

This “remoulding” or re-territorializing of the text is apparent in Noda’s adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, both in the geographic shift from the Athenian Court to the Japanese restaurant at the foot of Mt Fuji, but also in Noda’s linguistic shift away from the standardized Japanese translation to what is almost a new dialect. The following scene from the second part of Noda’s adaptation highlights the extent to which he departs from Odashima’s translation—the most popular Japanese translation throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The scene corresponds to Act 3 Scene 1 in Shakespeare’s version, in which Lysander awakes and falls in love with Helena:

DEMI: I’ll jump into fire like *shabu shabu* (boiled pork) for my beautiful Soboro.  
 SOBORO: What’s the matter Demi?  
 DEMI: Oh Soboro, compared to your beauty, caviar is mere deer droppings. Your lips are like ripe cherries seducing these lips to eat them up. Let me kiss your white hand that resembles a transparent fish. No, let me dance madly and eat your white fish.

Each line has been reworked and filled with culinary puns. As Noda himself pointed out, these puns are impossible to translate since the target language (in this case English) cannot accommodate the cultural references to Japanese traditional cuisine. However, even in Noda’s Japanese, the sheer density of language, particularly colloquialisms, was difficult for Japanese-speaking audiences to grasp in its totality.

In an essay titled “The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity”, translation studies theorist, Annie Brisset, claims that the elevation of dialect or vernacular language is a function in maintaining cultural identity through the act of translation: “translation becomes an act of reclaiming, or recentering of the identity, a re-territorializing operation” (346). Noda’s vernacular is so highly personalized, that it is as much an affirmation of personal identity as it is an attempt at constructing a new cultural identity, or a new Japanese Shakespeare. As I discuss later on, Miyagi references Noda’s intense individualism in his production by associating the all-controlling character of Mephisto with Noda himself. Reminiscent of Shakespeare, Noda is known in Japan for his multi-disciplinary roles as playwright, director and actor.

On one level, for Noda to produce an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that was “contemporary”, he found it is necessary to break with past linguistic and stylistic conventions and to be “free” to find a voice in the present. On another level, it was within these elements of constraint that new constraint was already anticipated, so what Noda called a “free translation” was arguably a strategy he used to enable the act of adaptation and establish a new identity from inside old cultural and linguistic coordinates.

### **Between translation and adaptation**

In his seminal essay, “The Task of the Translator”, Walter Benjamin raises the question of whether translation is proper to text:

The question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. Either: Will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: Does its nature lend itself to translation and, therefore, in view of the significance of the mode, call for it? (71)

If as Benjamin claims, the text already contains the seeds for its survival through translation—the text “calls” for translation—then to what extent does a text call for adaptation? In other words is the adaptation process immanent in a text or is it something completely heterogeneous—imposed and contrived? Does the adaptation presuppose the desire for a clean break with what has come before or is it part of the genealogy of the text?

Where the translation operates within the confines of text, within the bounds of an economy of language, the adaptation searches for outbound connections, establishing communications across time, space and other mediums. In a lecture titled “What is the Creative Act?” Gilles Deleuze asked what it meant to have an idea in cinema as opposed to another medium. His response, in part, was that it means to think in terms of the capacities of that medium. A true idea in cinema is immanent in the attributes specific to cinema, which for Deleuze were “blocks of movement / duration” (314). This does not preclude likenesses and links to other media from forming within that specific idea and within that specific medium. On the contrary, just as the text demands to live on through translation, so too does the true medium-specific idea call for its survival through its adaptation to other media.

Noda’s instinct in relation to adapting Shakespeare in the above remarks is to speak in terms of rhythm and sound. His interest is in the musicality and form of language, or what he calls “the rhythm of contemporary theatre”. This dialogue with Shakespeare’s text in translation is a translingual moment; an instance of communication based on a relationship of speaking and listening. In resisting the strictures of textual language, Noda’s communication functions through what Probal Dasgupta calls a “transcode”. Approaching language as a “Transcode” is a “move from a grammar of language (viewed as a rigid Code which includes and excludes) to a Transcode of a speaking and listening dyad.” Dasgupta claims that:

The advantage of such a move is that the listener is free to allow that the speaker may have arrived at her sentence this way or that way. Thus a listening Transcode can allow for one of many kinds of formation processes imagined as responsible for what has been produced. The various grammars thus become optional alternative ways to reach the outcome one is hearing (70).

Noda’s “contact” with Shakespeare in translation reveals a relationship fraught with tension. The encounter reinforces Noda’s suspicion of the impossibility of translation and in the same move triggers an impulse for adaptation, suggesting that adaptation is the translingual double of translation. Noda’s departure from Shakespeare’s text and its translation, takes form beyond the confines of the grammar of language—the in/exclusory code—in a transcoded speaking and listening process expressed through rhythm, sound and physicality—like the character Fukusuke (Bottom) who finds himself “translated” into that attractive ass and dreams “Bottom’s dream” without a bottom.

### Satoshi Miyagi, from Ku Na’uka to SPAC

If Noda’s work during the 1990s was rooted in linguistic exploration, in the playfulness, foreignness and promiscuity of language, then Miyagi’s work of the same period could be characterized by an interest in dramatic expression capable of transcending the barriers of language. Miyagi founded the Ku Na’uka theatre company, which means “towards science” in Japanese, in Tokyo in 1990 and chose *Hamlet* as his debut production. One of the defining features of the company that emerged early on was the division between “speakers” and “movers”, between body and voice. This concept, which can be found in traditional Japanese performing arts such as *bunraku* and *noh*, provided a means of framing and exploring the human condition, torn between thought and action through the acquisition of language. It is Miyagi’s belief that the very languages, which differentiate humans from animals, have made humans lonely creatures, locked in individual, mental prisons that consist of mere words.<sup>3</sup>

Miyagi’s Shakespearean works include the 1990 production of *Hamlet*, which formed the basis for his later explorations; *Macbeth* in Toga Village, Toyama, in May 2001; followed by *Othello* (*Othello in the Spirit of Ku Na’uka’s Noh Dream Play*) in the gardens of the Tokyo National Museum in November 2005. In 2007, the company ceased ensemble work and entered what Miyagi called “a period of solo activities”. In April of that year Miyagi was appointed Artistic Director of SPAC, taking over from Tadashi Suzuki. Although he continued to work with some of the actors from Ku Na’uka and retained some of the intercultural elements of their productions including music and costume, he left the speaker/mover device behind. Instead, he reoriented his practice towards a renewed belief in the power of “poetic language”.

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<sup>3</sup> For further background information and Miyagi’s directorial intentions, see Eglinton “Ku Na’uka’s *Hamlet* in Tokyo: An Interview with Satoshi Miyagi,” *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 234-43.

Miyagi's concept of poetic language is tied to another concept he calls "weak theatre". He posits both concepts in opposition to the male tendency to control language, the human body and mind, and nature. Instead, according to Miyagi, by reviving poetry, which eludes pragmatic individualistic control, all the actors at SPAC are asked to be aware of the vulnerability of their bodies on stage. This aesthetic is almost a reversal of Miyagi's strategy with *Ku Na'uka*, where emphasis was placed on the presence of actors and intensity of language through the speaker/mover division. In an idealistic sense, for Miyagi, poetic language is like something that falls from the sky; it exists beyond the actor's will and desire, but is nonetheless absorbed by the actor before he or she becomes aware of the poem itself.<sup>4</sup> Miyagi began work on this new theatre aesthetic after his arrival at SPAC and it remains a work in progress.

### **The Power(lessness) of Theatre after Catastrophe**

One of the reasons why Miyagi planned to direct Noda's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be the opening show of SPAC's first "World Theatre Festival Shizuoka under Mt Fuji" is related to the power of poetry. For Miyagi, who has followed Noda's work since his junior high school days (Noda is three years senior to Miyagi and both attended the same high school in Tokyo), Noda is one of the few contemporary playwrights capable of writing poetic plays. Miyagi wanted to create a festive musical play out of a Shakespearean comedy. Therefore, Noda's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* set near Mt Fuji seemed to be the perfect choice.

Miyagi had already programmed the production prior to the Tohoku earthquake of 11 March 2011, even though rehearsals began afterwards. Despite strong social and political pressure to cease artistic activities following the earthquake, Miyagi decided to proceed with the Festival. The earthquake and subsequent tsunami led to the meltdown of multiple reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and changed the country's socio-political situation. The event revealed a nation stretched to the limit of its resources and weary of the capacity of the market economy, the government and other authorities to ensure redevelopment. Amid growing public distrust of the mainstream media over misinformation related to government and corporate handling of the Fukushima nuclear incident, Miyagi addressed an audience at a press conference in April 2011 prior to the Festival, reaffirming his belief that "theatre gives audiences a chance to think about challenges in a calm and focused way". His directorial task was not only to adapt an adaptation that would resonate with an audience in

<sup>4</sup> For a full discussion of Miyagi's revival of poetics and his concept of "weak theatre", see Miyagi's interview with Yasunori Nishikawa on the SPAC website: [www.spac.or.jp/12\\_spring/miyagi\\_1.html](http://www.spac.or.jp/12_spring/miyagi_1.html).

Shizuoka in 2011, but also in some way to respond to the earthquake and its aftermath, mindful of the ethical and political tensions it had produced.

As in the aftermath of past earthquakes of similar magnitude, the Tohoku disaster prompted a period of public self-restraint called *jishuku*, which involved reducing energy consumption following the closure of the country’s nuclear power plants. This also led to the closure of numerous theatre venues and cultural events across the country, responding in part to the call for energy preservation and heightened security measures, but also observing the general attitude of *jishuku* and the avoidance of all forms of entertainment. Therefore, at a political level, theatre was viewed as unnecessary in the immediate wake of the catastrophe.

While these periods of self-restraint can produce social cohesion through a concerted rebuilding effort, they can also function as a catalyst for the state to advance its own ideological agenda. In the wake of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, for example, the government of the day seized the occasion to launch a “thrift and diligence campaign”, condemning luxury, excess and individualism, which according to Charles Schencking was an agenda that “remained ever-present throughout the interwar and wartime periods in Japan” (328).

At the same time, national crises present opportunities to re-evaluate the power of the arts. This is the case for example, of Yoshi Hijikata’s construction of the Tsukiji Shogekijo in Tokyo, less than a year after the Kanto earthquake. In a roundtable discussion facilitated by the theatre magazine, *Engeki Shincho*, Hijikata and his collaborator Kaoru Osanai declared that the reason for focusing initially on western drama in their new theatre program was as a means of exploring possibilities for “a future dramatic art for future Japanese plays” (Powell 76). Similarly, the end of the Second World War opened the way for new modes of performance, including *ankoku butoh*, *angura* and other counter-culture movements.

### **Adapting to Post-March 11: No contingency plan?**

During the weeks following the earthquake and subsequent nuclear catastrophe at the Fukushima site, the minutiae of everyday life were seen in light of the disaster. In the context of Miyagi’s production, this led to further remapping of Noda’s text, and revealed a split in the adaptation process between intentionality and contingency. In this section, I will analyze elements of both remapping processes, starting with contingent change and ending with directorial change.

Thus far, this essay has focused on the intralinguistic workings of texts; on conscious decisions in processes of adaptation. The events of March 11 2011 present an „extralinguistic” force that imposes itself on the reading of the play. How was Noda’s text and Miyagi’s production affected by these events? What is

lost and gained in processes of adaptation in the wake of an environmental catastrophe?

After the events, much of Noda's text took on inflections beyond authorial or directorial control. For example, in the opening scene of the production at SPAC, the stark black stage was disturbed by the arrival of Soboro, the play's heroine (played by Maki Honda) and Noda's reworking of Helena in Shakespeare's original. In her opening speech, which was part soliloquy and part invocation of the invisible forest-dwelling fairies under Oberon's command, she questioned the human capacity to subsist in the face of the unknown: "Whenever something mysterious happens, people blame it on the night or they blame it on the summer. [...] Or they think they've had a dream. But trust me, these mysteries are not imagined."

Her solemn speech was quickly followed by a burst of drums from the live musical ensemble. Led by musical director Hiroko Tanakawa, the musicians play a central role in most of Miyagi's productions, fusing world music traditions to drive the atmospherics of the play. The drumbeat cued a sharp change in lighting states, from dark to bright white, revealing a newspaper-made forest that sprawled across the stage inhabited by newspaper-clad fairies.

Soboro's speech framed the play in an environmental register of language—heightened by Noda's relocation of the action to a forest near Mt Fuji—and this resonated with the unfolding ecological catastrophe in and around the Fukushima nuclear plant. In the post-March 11 context at SPAC, the Fairies were not only markers of the blurred boundary between the imagined and the real, but through their newspaper-clad bodies, they symbolized the dislocation between language and its referents; between government issued reports on environmental contamination and embodied experiences of radiation at ground level. Through their (in)visible presence, the fairies also alluded to language's capacity for forgetfulness. That is to say, despite being rooted in the logic of archival memory, language in its diverse modes of mediation can be used to fill a traumatic void and perpetuate a cycle of not-looking. The meta-theatrical device of newspaper costumes and sets foregrounded the powerlessness of language, revealing it as a filter or deferral mechanism that shields subjectivity from the traumatic core.

Similarly, many of Noda's wordplays took on sinister resonances in the production. For instance, in a climactic scene towards the end of the play, Mephisto sets the forest alight in an act of rage. He sees his act of arson as fulfilling a collective, unspoken desire for transgression. His lines present a moment in the play in which the border between the mythological and the everyday begins to blur:

MEPHISTO: As calls for the end of the world swell in number, it's my turn to take action. When you sail in a turbulent sea, all shaken up, you want to vomit. But you're too far to turn back to land. You want to vomit and out of

despair you wish the sea would swallow up the entire ship! These words, which you did not dare speak out, still reached me. I, Mephisto, will take action. I will grant your wish and let the sea swallow you up.

Noda’s image of the “turbulent sea” that “swallow[s] up” its sailors, taps into existing fear that permeates Japanese literary and artistic history. It could, for example, be read as a reference to Hokusai Katsushika’s famous woodblock painting, “The Great Wave off Kanagawa”, which depicts a powerful sea engulfing a fleet of fishing boats full of prostrated fisherman against the backdrop of Mt Fuji. Most likely though, audiences at SPAC would have read the scene in relation to the tsunami of March 11.

These contingent inflections, born out of an ecological reality, penetrate Noda’s text in a way that seems to tie in with Miyagi’s concept of poetic language as something that falls from the sky and lies beyond human will. At the same time, this exchange between text and contingent event cannot be reduced to the simplistic relationship of an imposition of meaning. Rather, the event is the trigger that awakens potentialities already contained within the text, but that are inaccessible, forgotten or overlooked in intentional readings.

In his discussion of the concept of difference, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson used the metaphor of the territory and the map to demonstrate how human perception of topology functions through “difference”. For Bateson, what was inscribed on the map was not territory but difference: “be it a difference in altitude, a difference in vegetation, a difference in population structure, difference in surface, or what-ever. Differences are the things that get onto a map” (457). Drawing on Bateson’s logic, one could argue that what is inscribed in the text, or what gets into the play, is difference. However difference can only be recognized as such to a community of readers able to locate its coordinates. Bateson explains the selection process of difference, which he re-terms as “information,” in the following way:

Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment* [...] asserts that the most elementary aesthetic act is the selection of a fact. He argues that in a piece of chalk there are an infinite number of potential facts. The *Ding an sich*, the piece of chalk, can never enter into communication or mental process because of this infinitude. The sensory receptors cannot accept it; they filter it out. What they do is to select certain facts out of the piece of chalk, which then become, in modern terminology, information. I suggest that Kant’s statement can be modified to say that there is an infinite number of differences around and within the piece of chalk. [...]. Of this infinitude, we select a very limited number, which become information. In fact, what we mean by information—the elementary unit of information—is a difference (459).

The tsunami that struck the east coast of Japan on March 11 2011, also contains an infinite number of facts around and within it, of which, Noda's character Mephisto is a tiny iteration. The same logic can be applied to Noda's language and its potentially infinite number of connections. Therefore, what appears on the surface to be a simplistic contingent encounter can be read as a dialogue of potentialities between a text and its others. This same dialogue is at work in the idea of the text as contact zone.

### Remapping reality

The magnitude of the Tohoku disaster with its near-mythological scale seemed to tie into Miyagi's initial impetus in choosing to revive the play. In his director's note in the production programme, Miyagi wrote the following:

There are two types of theatre genre, the first deals with large philosophical questions, such as the meaning of death in relation to life. The second deals with real-size, everyday life. We can call the former tragedy and the latter comedy. In the case of Japanese traditional theatre, that might loosely translate as the relationship between *noh* as tragedy and *kyogen* as comedy. These two different genres have their own characteristics, however many theatre practitioners try to use both in one play. I believe that Shakespeare also had this kind of desire or ambition. For example in the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are real-sized characters side by side with mythological figures. [...] Also, I believe Noda's adaptation [...] also tries to represent those two types of characters at the same time by mixing mythological language and everyday language in one play. (2011: 2)

Miyagi was able to shape parts of his production to reflect the fast-moving social and political situation. As mentioned earlier, he decided to construct the entire set and the fairies' costumes out of newspaper. This was widely seen as commentary on the popular distrust of mainstream Japanese media in reporting on the nuclear disaster.

For me, it was also a critique of the dislocation and forgetfulness of language. However, it is also possible to read the use of newspapers as an affirmation of language, both literal and metaphoric, along the lines of Titania's remark that "the words human folk swallow are not necessarily all rubbish."

Indeed, one of the central conceits in Noda's adaptation is the emphasis on the power of language. After Mephisto threatens to destroy the forest at the end of the play, Soboro responds calling on the power of words to prevent Mephisto's destructive drive. Soboro's words move Mephisto to tears, which damp out the fire:

SOBORO: The midsummer night forest was burning. The invisible lone monster whom nobody loved was called Mephisto. [...] As he watched the forest burn he became very sad. After the forest had burnt down, he would have to live in the forest forever. As he thought about it, he shed tears in spite of himself. Like the tears shed by Freya, which became pure gold, beautiful tears poured from the eyes of Mephisto. Those tears began to relieve the forest.

At SPAC, the juxtaposition of a set entirely made of newspaper prints dominated by slogans and letters, with a story that moves between mythological and everyday themes, seemed to heighten the ambivalent sense of the power and powerlessness of language. In the post-earthquake context the idea of trusting rhetoric from authority figures was difficult for the public to accept. However, in Miyagi’s production, the sense of human potential to reverse its destructive path, was played out through the character of Mephisto.

In the final scene of the play, Mephisto turned into the image of Noda, the playwright-director himself. He appeared wearing reading glasses similar to those for which Noda has become known after he lost sight in his right eye, and he could also be seen taking notes during Soboro’s speech on the power of language. In a conversation with Yushi Odashima, Miyagi pointed out that Mephisto, the darker playwright-director cousin of Puck, is the shadow of Noda himself. Miyagi argued that Noda’s plays always portray characters who harbor intense disgust of the world and yet that disgust is the very reason of that character’s genius and solitude.

Miyagi’s production ended with an element of hope, suggesting that there is the potential to rebuild after destruction and there is potential in language to regain power and meaning. On a meta level, the production spoke also of the afterlife of a text, a life which evades control, which is subject to the contingent realities of nature, and which is caught between the desire for survival and the impossibility of translation alone being able to fulfill that survival.

### **Lost and Found in translation: Problems and Potentialities of Surtitles**

In the final part of this essay, I propose a return to the thread that prompted my initial interest in Noda’s adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which was my English translation of his text to be projected in Miyagi’s production as surtitles for non-Japanese speaking audiences. What was lost and found in the mediation of the translation as surtitles on stage?

Surtitles serve the obvious purpose of providing real-time translation for audiences unfamiliar with the language spoken on stage. In this functional sense, they are usually designed to be as inconspicuous as possible, not to detract from the performance. At the same time, in an ideal sense, they strive to be what

Benjamin terms “transparent”: “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully” (78).

However, when the medium that carries the translation—in this case a narrow digital display—is in its very design built for constriction, achieving transparency becomes an ever-distant prospect, and it renders surtitles a subordinate other to the main language(s) of the performance. This new element of constraint produces a number of deformations and transformations of the text that provide insight into translation and adaptation processes.

Working on the translation of Noda’s adaptation back into English, it became apparent that there was no “call” for the text to be translated since its excess of puns and wordplays restricted its translatability. All three texts: Shakespeare’s play, Odashima’s Japanese translation and Noda’s Japanese adaptation are known for their abundance of wordplay and in the translation-adaptation process, from Odashima to Noda, the density of wordplay increased, and my translation could not keep up with its degree of proliferation.

Translating Noda’s contemporary adaptation is one of the most difficult tasks I have undertaken to date. It highlighted the complexity of the translingual nature of translation and adaptation, moving between Shakespeare’s Elizabethan English with its patchwork of linguistic registers and cultural references, to Odashima’s early 1980s Japanese translation which attempted to capture that multiplicity through demotic speech, to Noda’s radical culinary pun-based adaptation, back to “contemporary” English intended for an international, globalized, visiting audience at SPAC. In trying to negotiate this contact zone, through the translation process, I recognized a “gradation” of (un)translatability, which can be separated into three levels.

On the first level, translating Noda’s adaptation is possible when he makes use of English sounds. For example, when he translates “Here comes Lysander” into Japanese, he writes “Lai san da”, which repeats the sound of the English word “Lysander” and simultaneously conveys the meaning of the sentence.

On the second level, the reader can guess the meaning of Noda’s puns from the context:

FAIRIES B: What are Kinosei?

SOBORO: They’re fairies that live in the forest. Night Fairies, Summer Fairies and Tree Fairies, they all live in the forest.

As mentioned earlier, the word “Kinosei” was translated as “Tree Fairies”, but in Japanese it also means “because of your imagination”. From this, some non-Japanese speaking audience members can speculate that “sei” in “kinosei” is a marker for fairy.

However, only audiences who understand both Japanese and English can access the second layer of the pun. Noda uses the same pun in his naming of other types of fairies in the play, including “Yorunosei” which was translated as “Night Fairies” but also means “because of the night” and “Natsunosei” which became “Summer Fairies” and also means “because it’s summer.”

In contrast to the two previous stages, which allowed non-Japanese speakers to access parts of Noda’s language through sound and pattern recognition, the third stage becomes inaccessible or untranslatable due to multiple layers of puns with specific Japanese food culture references delivered in rapid succession. Noda’s wordplay intensified after the elopement of Lai (Lysander) and Tokitamago (Hermia) to the Unknown Forest under Mt Fuji, where you forget everything once you leave there. This made the translation even harder. For example, in the scene equivalent to Act 3 Scene 2 in Shakespeare’s text, Demi (Demetrius) and Lai (Lysander) fight over Soboro (Helena):

DEMI: What’s wrong with you? Fleeing to that forest with Tokitamago!  
Talking of fleeing and forests, I will eat Soba.

Here, Noda plays with food based puns, *mori soba*, which is chilled soba served on a dish accompanied with dipping sauce and *kake soba*, soba in a hot soup broth. At the same time, the word *mori* in Japanese also signifies forest and *kake* signifies fleeing.

One of the consequences of this (in)translatability is that Noda’s distinction between poetic, mythological language and everyday language valued by Miyagi in his SPAC production, was lost in the surtitles.<sup>5</sup> Despite these constraints, the surtitles still enabled non-Japanese speakers to access Noda’s version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as evidenced in moments of laughter specific to that community of readers. In those moments, contact was established through the complex web of *inter*, *intra* and *translingual* dialogue, shifting, as we have seen, from Shakespeare to Odashima, to Noda and Miyagi, to the surtitles, the cast and the audience.

### Re-mapping contact zones: “Thou art translated.”

Throughout the three main strands of this essay, which include Noda’s adaptation process, Miyagi’s post March 11 staging, and my translation of Noda’s text back

<sup>5</sup> For detailed information on the difficulty of translating Noda’s Shakespearean adaptations back into English, see Mika Eglinton, “Noda Hideki Junshoku *Manatsu no Yoruno Yume* no Honyaku (Fu)kanousei ni Tsuite (“On the (im)possibility of Translating Noda Hideki’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”), *Gekijou Bunka*, Shizuoka: SPAC, 2011: 4-8.

into English, I have tried to shed light on key translingual functions in adaptation practices.

I approached Noda's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from an intralinguistic and intracultural perspective discovering at its center a dialectics of constraint that gave him "freedom" to create. What Noda described as a search for "freedom" seems to me to be a function of the adaptation process itself. Where the text, following Benjamin, calls for translation to secure its survival in an interlinguistic operation, the adaptation functions translinguistically and is polysemous in its outbound connections across media.

In reading Miyagi's staging of Noda's play after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, it became apparent that there are at least two different approaches to reading texts as translingual contact zones. The first is to look at the internal workings of the text; at the ensemble of traces inscribed through processes of authorship, translation and re-edition. These are the coordinates that the adapter, translator, director, actor and reader engage with. These coordinates are the sum of recognizable differences relevant to the here and now. The second begins externally but engages in dialogue with the text's coordinates. This involves the ensemble of potential communications that surround a text and a contingent event. The event functions as the trigger that reawakens a dormant image or meaning in a text.

The final section reflected on my own personal experience of translating Noda's text and negotiating Miyagi's performance. There, the stringent limitations of technological media coupled with a labyrinth of wordplays revealed the way in which a text continually operates within a tightly controlled matrix of potential readings.

All these processes pertain to remappings of the text. Shifting its boundaries and inbound, and outbound connections. This remapping functions on multiple levels, including geographic, physical, psychological, as well as linguistic. In terms of geography, the tsunami and earthquake quite literally changed Japan's map, eroding part of the coastline and demolishing structures inland. In addition, the nuclear disaster led to the displacement of people in and around the Fukushima area. Indeed, at the time of writing, the nuclear zone remains inaccessible, a void on the map. This geographical remapping affected Miyagi's direction as well as the audience's interpretation of the production.

The physical and psychological remapping is connected to fear and speed, in the sense that the breakdown of the power plants unleashed radioactive particles whose trajectory and whereabouts were invisible to the human eye. Like the Fairies that inhabit the unknown forest, it permeates the landscape without revealing its presence. At the same time, the nuclear incident also brought forth connections with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The sense of fear or terror accompanying this nuclear event remapped the unconscious. As Paul Virilio points out in an interview titled "The Administration

of Fear”, “For someone like me who lived through the *Blitzkreig* and the war of radio waves, it is clear that terror is not simply an emotional and psychological phenomenon but a physical one as well in the sense of physics and kinetics, a phenomenon related to what I call the ‘acceleration of reality’” (21). Even though it would be impossible to draw this unconscious map, the differences that get into the production suggest points of change, which in turn suggests that the contact zone itself is being remapped.

### Notes

This is an expanded and revised versions of the paper read at the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the NTS Shakespeare Forum National Taiwan University, Taipei, the 53rd annual conference of the Shakespeare Society Japan, at Gakushuin University, Tokyo, 12 October 2014. An earlier and partial form of this chapter first appeared in *Gaidai Ronso* 65 (2015) 133-46.

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Soboro entering “The Unknown Forest”.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* production in 2014. Photograph: Koichi Miura, courtesy of SPAC



Fairies in newspaper costumes. Left: Puck, Right: Oberon

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* production in 2014. Photograph: Koichi Miura, courtesy of SPAC



Mephisto directs the mechanicals in a parody of *Alice in Wonderland*. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* production in 2014.

Photograph: Koichi Miura, courtesy of SPAC



Chaos in "The Unknown Forest" where Soboro, Mephisto, Tokitamago (from front left), mechanicals and fairies mingle.

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* production in 2014. Photograph: Koichi Miura, courtesy of SPAC