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For an Abusive Subtitling

Translators are like busy matchmakers
who praise a half-veiled beauty as being very lovely:
they arouse an irrepressible desire
for the original.

—Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*[1]

All of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theater wanting to kill the translator. Our motive: the movie's murder by "incompetent" subtitle. The death of a text through translation is an age-old trope, but it takes on new meaning with its transposition into cinema. The very possibility of that "death" implies a state of "animation," a state that is, after all, essential to the moving image. As in the case of literature, that death is a discursive condition, but with film it also constitutes a perceptual category. Spectators often find cinema's powerful sense of mimesis muddied by subtitles, even by skillful ones. The original, foreign, object—its sights and its sounds—is available to all, but it is easily obscured by the graphic text through which we necessarily approach it. Thus, the opacity or awkwardness of subtitles easily inspires rage.

I began thinking about the vagaries of the subtitle when I translated my first subtitles for Ogawa Shinsuke and Iizuka Toshio's *A Movie Capital* (*Eiga no miyako,* 1991). It was an experience filled with surprises. Here was an extraordinarily close form of textual analysis where every element of verbal and visual language is read off the image, repeatedly, line by line, even frame by frame. I was fascinated by the way this particular field of film analysis naturally raised theoretical problems in the course of working out practical solutions to seemingly simple problems. But nothing is simple when it comes to subtitles; every turn of phrase, every punctuation mark, every decision the translator makes holds implications for the viewing experience of foreign spectators. However, despite the rich complexity of the subtitler's task and its singular role in mediating the foreign in cinema, it has been virtually ignored. It is likely that no one has ever come away from a foreign film admiring the translation. If the subtitles attract comment, it is only a desire for reciprocal violence, a revenge for the text in the face of its corruption. For as we shall see, all subtitles are corrupt.

It is particularly curious that considering today's celebration of other cultures, this corruption has gone unconsidered, unchecked. I suspect the explanation lies in subtitling's ancillary, even hidden, position in the film's journey from production to exhibition. Fighting this corruption will require pushing the fact of translation out of the darkness. We must understand the limits of the subtitle in order to explore new methods. The violence of the subtitle is unavoidable, but there is no reason that it should necessarily lead to death . . . or that that violence should not be valuable, even enjoyable. In the 1990s we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of subtitling which is by nature positively *abusive*. With all the attention directed toward multiculturalism and diversity, now is the time to reconsider the mode of translation through which our cinematic experiences with the foreign are mediated. Looking closely at translations between English and Japanese, and moving between practical and theoretical poles, this paper will identify some of the dilemmas subtitlers face as well as their responses to these challenges over the past 70 years. Only then can we

move towards creative solutions through strategic abusiveness.

I have elaborated the notion of an abusive translation originally proposed by Philip E. Lewis in "The Measure of Translation Effects," an essay he originally wrote in French and translated into English himself.[2] Lewis analyses another critic's translation of Derrida's essay, *"La Mythologie blanche."* He begins by delineating the differences between French and English languages, arguing that "translation, when it occurs, has to move whatever meanings it captures from the original into a framework that tends to impose a different set of discursive relations and a different construction of reality."[3] The dissimilarity between languages creates differences that simply cannot be overcome, inevitably compromising the activity of translation. This is further compounded by the tendency for translation of essayistic texts to concentrate on meaning to the exclusion of texture and materiality. As both writer and translator of this essay, Lewis discovers a freedom to diverge from the original text unavailable to the typical translator. It is from this position that he proposes a new approach, "that of the strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own."[4] This is to locate the strength of a translation in its abuses. Where an original text strains language through textual knots dense with signification, the translation performs analogous violence against the target language. Corrupt subtitlers disavow the violence of the subtitle while abusive translators revel in it.

Put more concretely, the abusive subtitler uses textual and graphic abuse—that is, experimentation with language and its grammatical, morphological, and visual qualities—to bring the fact of translation from its position of obscurity, to critique the imperial politics that ground corrupt practices while ultimately leading the viewer to the foreign original being reproduced in the darkness of the theater. This original is not an origin threatened by contamination, but a locus of the individual and the international which can potentially turn the film into an *experience of translation.*

A Corrupt Practice

Facing the violent reduction demanded by the apparatus, subtitlers have developed a method of translation that conspires to hide its work—along with its ideological assumptions—from its own reader-spectators. In this sense we may think of them as *corrupt.* They accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text, and in the process of converting speech into writing within the time and space limits of the subtitle they conform the original to the rules, regulations, idioms, and frame of reference of the target language and its culture. It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign. The peculiar challenges posed by subtitling and the violence they necessitate are a matter of course; they are variations of the difficulties in any translation, and in this sense are analogous to the problems confronted by the translator of poetry. It is the subtitler's response to those challenges which are corrupt. Subtitlers say they promote learning and facilitate enjoyable meetings with other cultures, bringing the sense behind actors' speech acts to the viewers through their skillful rendering at the edges of the screen. In fact, they conspire to hide their repeated acts of violence through codified rules and a tradition of suppression. It is this practice that is corrupt—feigning completeness in their own violent world. One of the few attempts at theorizing the subtitle touches on these issues, although is ultimately unsatisfying. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes,

> The duration of the subtitles, for example, is very ideological. I think that if, in most translated films, the subtitles usually stay on as long as they technically can—often much longer than the time needed even for a slow reader—it's because translation is conceived here as part of the operation of suture that defines the classical cinematic apparatus and the technological effort it deploys to naturalize a dominant, hierarchically unified worldview. The success of the mainstream film relies precisely on how well it can hide [its articulated artifices] in what it wishes to show. Therefore, the attempt is always to protect the unity of the subject; here to collapse, in subtitling, the activities of reading, hearing, and seeing into one single activity, as if they were all the same. What you read is what you hear, and what you hear is more often than not, what you see.[5]

We can accept Trinh's gloss to the extent that we recognize how, in this mode of translation, all forms of difference are suppressed and troublesome texts are fitted into the most conservative of frameworks. Take the example of sexual difference. In Japanese gender is clearly marked linguistically, and subtitles dramatize difference through stereotypes of the way men or

women *should* speak. In subtitles this is accomplished primarily through sentence-final particles. For example, the male ending *zo* has a hard, assertive sound, while female speech is softened by particles like *wa* and *no.* As with any corruption, habits are hard to break and behavior is ruled by convention. At the beginning of the Japanese subtitled version of *Robocop,* for example, the female and male cops meet each other just after the female officer beats a rowdy criminal into submission. After this display of no-nonsense brutality the new partners are introduced to each other, they get into a squad car, and drive away. The action is innocuous enough, but the dialogue involves an intense play for power that's entirely linguistic:

> Female Officer: I better drive until you know your way around.
>
> Male Officer: I usually drive when I'm breaking in a new partner.

In Japan this was subtitled in the following manner:

> Female: *Watashi ga unten suru wa.* / I will drive.
>
> Male: *Kimi ni wa makaseraren.* / I can't leave it to you.

Not only is this conversation reduced to its barest, literal meaning, but the power dynamic is changed from a struggle over knowledge to a simple domination. The woman's soft sentence-final particle *wa* contrasts with the male officer's curt verb ending; the difference strongly suggests he occupies a superior position. The woman's subtitle would have been much stronger with a different particle, such as *yo.* Without their accompanying image, the lines read like a gangster talking to his moll. The translator took great liberties, matching the substance of the target language with the image but evacuating the power play.[6]

We may be able to understand the basic, underlying logic of corruption by turning to its most extreme manifestation: dubbing. *The Velvet Light Trap* recently published what amounts to an apology for the practice of dubbing. Its author, Antje Ascheid, argues for dubbing as an exchange of one voice for another which produces a new text free of the constraints on the translator because there is no debt to an original. This allows the translator to bring the reader (read *consumer*) a readily digestible package that easily supplants any ideological baggage carried by the original film. While subtitles are described as purist and elitist, the author argues the dubbed soundtrack is liberating because mass audiences will not resist the foreign film because the dubber can resist the ideological underpinnings that link film to geopolitical struggles. Strange, then, that this is the essay's conclusion:

> Dubbing . . . mostly succeeds in effacing the fact of the film text's foreign origin; or, rather, it gives its new audience the chance to disavow what they really know, hence opening an avenue for cultural ventriloquism through voice postsynchronization. In doing so, the dubbed film appears as a radically new product rather than a transformed old one, a single text rather than a double one. Like a Japanese game computer, a Taiwanese shirt, or a German car, products that have been constructed to fit consumer desires in an international marketplace through the reduction of their cultural specificities, the to-be-dubbed film original initially fulfills an important criterion with which most other international commodities also comply: it foregrounds its function, ceasing to be a "foreign" film in order to become just a film. . . . In the international marketplace the film original thus functions as a transnational decultured product; it becomes the raw material that is to be reinscribed into the different cultural contexts of the consumer nations through the use of dubbing.[7]

Just a film indeed. Aside from an insufficient theorization of translation itself, this suspicious essay reduces the foreign tongue to nothing more than a "cultural disadvantage" where dubbing is perceived as "a strategy of empowerment." This is a fine example of a valorization of postmodern play being coopted by capital. The "exchange" facilitated by the "to-be-dubbed film" is simply of the capitalist variety: money for pleasure. This is the logic of corruption in its dubbed version, the one practiced by distributors for whom translation serves little more than surplus value. Today's subtitles participate in it to an unfortunate degree; any translator who wishes to think otherwise is blind.

These forms of corruption could be critiqued from the ideology of fidelity, which invokes the authority of the original and portrays it as an endangered purity or origin. This would reveal how subtitlers are reluctant to discuss the issue of fidelity, as it would expose their violence and make them appear incompetent. We could also extend the domain of this purity under siege to the terrain of the screen itself, like the Japanese cinematographer who decries ugly, superimposed subtitles for despoiling the image and separating spectators from the beauty of the original.[8] Indeed, any measure of

fidelity is a standard the apparatus itself will not permit. However, even though the term "corrupt" threatens to pose the original as territory unspoiled by subjectivity there are theoretical reasons that the abusive translator steers clear of such easy binaries to take a quite different tack. The first step is to simply expose the act of translation, release it from its space of suppression, and understand what subtitling actually is and how it came to its corrupt condition.

The Apparatus of Translation

The practice of subtitling has been even more obscured than the translation of written, printed texts. Indeed, most people probably have never thought of subtitling *as translation*. There is no question that English-language criticism about foreign cinema has taken the mediation of subtitles entirely for granted. Almost nothing has been written about them. Indeed, the translators themselves, along with their technicians, filmmakers, writers, censors, and the producers that hire them all, go to great lengths to suppress any acknowledgment of their conspiracy. It has been noted more than once that the unlucky translator is an author but not The Author, that her translation is a work but not The Work. But even this dynamic is absent from cinematic translation. This absence speaks doubly of the dominance of the image and the utter suppression of the subtitler's central role in enabling a film's border crossing.

To transport the subtitle from its space of obscurity and uncover the root of its corruption, we must consider what is specific to it as a particular mode of translation. This includes its material conditions and its historical contingency. In the cinema a massive apparatus necessitates a violent translation of the source text. The film's utterances are segmented by time; natural breaks in speech are marked for the temporal borders of the subtitle. The translator determines the length of each unit of translation down to the frame, that is, down to a 24th of a second. As the translation proceeds, the translator strives to match the timing of the subtitle with the sound and motion of the source text. A humorous line, for example, must be arranged to meet its audio-visual punctuation. Once accomplished, the translation moves through the hands of countless technicians, some of whom think nothing of "adjusting" a subtitle here or there for their own capricious, technical reasons. As we will see, this can lead to the kind of embarrassing mistakes that make translators cringe.

Finally, the translation is grafted onto the original text in one of three ways (in the case of film). The subtitles are photographed optically and sandwiched together with the sound and image as a third film strip, literally a third track. Or they are cut into the emulsion itself, incised, scratched onto the very tissue of the image. Or, more recently, they come to be burned into the tissue of the celluloid with a computer-driven laser.

Beyond the difficulties posed by this complicated process, the translator confronts an array of challenges that seem to lead down the path of corruption. The space and time available for translation is decided by the apparatus itself; this may be analogous to the challenge posed by poetry, but is actually a different problem. In film the machine runs at a constant speed and mindlessly unspools its translation at an unchanging rate. The translator must condense his translation in the physical space of the frame and the temporal length of the utterance. The reader cannot stop and dwell on an interesting line; as the reader scans the text, the machine instantly obliterates it. There are protocols for this condensation, but they differ depending on the translator and the apparatus. The number of spaces available for text depends on the format of the film (16mm, 35mm), the lens (1:33, 1:85, CinemaScope), and the subtitling method itself. The translator then determines how many letters or characters are legible in the second or two or three available to each title. It is often said that actors talk twice as fast as spectators can read, but this is hardly a useful starting point for the work of translation. Donald Richie, for example, allows for about one word per foot, or a two-line title per 12 feet.[9] Japanese subtitlers are fond of citing the rule, "Four characters per second."[10] Toda Natsuko explains how this rule was arrived at: the first subtitlers had to determine how fast the typical Japanese could read, so they showed a film to a Shinbashi geisha (!) and came up with three to four characters per second with a 13-character line.[11] Over the years they reduced the line to ten to prevent sloppy projectionists from cutting off the characters at the edges, but soon the four-characters-per-second rule was clad in iron. Actually, this history is far more nuanced than their representation of it. In any case, against this matrix of time and space, the translator submits the original text to a violent reduction that most readers consider inept—if they dodge the translator's feints and pause to think about it at all.

The Japanese language seems ready-made for subtitling: for one thing, Japanese does not waste precious space on gaps between words, and can even break a line in mid-word. *Kanji* (Chinese characters) express the maximum amount of meaning in a minimum of syl-

lables; neologisms and abbreviations are easily accomplished through the creative combination of *kanji*. Even better, Japanese often leave out the subject, direct object, or other parts of speech, saving much needed space. Because this forces speakers to be aware of context, the language itself prepares its readers to seek out what subtitles leave unsaid. Finally, in addition to italics, Japanese has the enviable ability to be inscribed both horizontally and vertically, a resource whose abusive potential is provocative. Finding the source language a richer linguistic world than one's own target language is probably a universal—and frustrating—experience for translators, but we must not let this impression lead toward an essentialist relationship to translation and its tools. A far more powerful ground for developing a translation attuned to its time is a thorough historicization, especially one that takes into account multiple national contexts. To avoid this is to flirt with the dangers demonstrated by the nationalist chauvinism of postwar Japanese subtitlers.

The subtitle has never been entirely ignored in Japan. Since at least the 1930s, *en-face* scenarios of foreign films have been published on a routine basis. However, the bulk of these contain complete translations of the films, and this speaks more for the Japanese film world's appreciation of the art of scenario writing than of subtitling per se. At the same time, there are currently schools devoted to training translators, and the name of the subtitler is always included as a credit in the Japanese prints of foreign films (at least in much of the postwar era). In fact, a number of these translators have achieved reputations among general audiences. Some subtitlers even have fans! The most famous—Shimizu Shunji, Okaeda Shinji, Kamishima Kimi, and Toda Natsuko—have published autobiographies, how-to books, and English conversation via subtitles textbooks.[12]

While many of history's most famous essays on translation have emerged in the course of practice, these authors' writings on "the art of subtitling" are deeply disappointing. Their conception of translation is regrettably simplistic. For example, the Russian cinematic adaptation and subsequent Japanese translation of *Hamlet* naturally raise the issue of the authority of the original text; oblivious to this kind of issue, Toda Natsuko—by far the most popular subtitler in Japan—uses the film only to suggest what a pity it would have been if dubbing had erased the main actor's beautiful, velvety voice.[13] Similarly, her mentor Shimizu Shunji describes his subtitles for Olivier's *Othello*. Noting that the great actor's performance was more theatrical than cinematic, he made much of his going to the unusual length of listening to a tape recording of the soundtrack while translating.[14] Now for most translators, Shakespeare's words provide their most daunting task, a test case for the most basic, pressing theoretical issues in translation. This does not occur to Shimizu or Toda. In both cases the actor and his voice replace Shakespeare as the sources to which the translator owes a debt.

These authors' understanding of film history is just as impoverished; they have done little or no research into the past or present conditions of their field, but they never hesitate to explain or "analyze" it. In his "Philosophy of Subtitling," Okaeda Shinji bases his aesthetics of cinema on a naive equation of silent and sound film narration. He unproblematically compares the narrative function of silent era intertitles to that of sound subtitles in the 1980s—with no consideration of the narrative presence of the *benshi*—to support his aesthetics of cinema: the less words a film has the better.[15] This is a typical example of how simplistic is the conception of cinema with which corrupt subtitlers operate.

Furthermore, their understanding of the relationship of subtitlers to the world film industry and its politics is particularly inadequate. Toda reduces "America's standard practice of dubbing" to the fact that it is a nation of immigrants, a comment that feels uncannily similar to statements a number of ministers have resigned over in recent years. Certainly an adequate explanation would have to deal with a complex overdetermination of forces: the emergence of English as a lingua franca of international business and politics; the world domination of Hollywood, its location within U.S. borders, and its near total domination of the home market; and an education system that places no value on foreign language study. Furthermore, while mass-market films may be dubbed, it is incorrect to say this is standard practice. The actual market for foreign films has historically demanded subtitles, and this has also become true of mainstream releases for foreign films as of the 1980s.

Toda's brand of radical reduction is complemented by tedious gloating over the Japanese language, the sensitivity of Japanese spectators, and the special skills required of the translator of films. Toda: "Japanese people's special tendency to want to see the original created a unique subtitle nation *(yuniiku na jimakukoku);* here, we are happy that every Japanese can read, an extremely special condition anywhere in the world."[16] Okaeda: "Japanese people's intention *(shikō)* towards the original is strong . . . (and one of the reasons) subtitles are the mainstream. . . . Considering this, subtitles are immortal. We could say, 'Japan: Nation of

the Subtitle Culture.'"[17] Subtitling is not in a repressed condition in Japan; rather, it is overvalued through the idealization of Japanese language and its own practice of translation of the foreign. In this case, both the usual repression and Japan's unusual fetishization achieve an identical effect in the end. They deflect or disavow the erasure of difference and the inequality of languages which the act of translation always threatens to expose.

A Submerged History

There is a pressing need to update our approach to film translation and perhaps even to undertake new translations of old film texts. To provide some context for this project—and to further push subtitling from its obscured position—we must uncover its history. Like the workings of the apparatus, this history has been ignored (or, in the case of Japanese authors, reduced to anecdote and gossip). This should not be surprising when we note that subtitles were invented shortly after the coming of sound—the moment when text was globally suppressed from the cinema.

Much has been made of Hollywood's innovative attempts to overcome the obstacles sound posed to business in non-English speaking countries. However, current histories concentrate exclusively on the early solutions: teaching stars new languages and making identical foreign-language versions with different actors on the same set. Surprisingly enough, the invention of subtitles—the greatest innovation and ultimate solution to the problem—is a gap in our history. There were interesting precursors to the subtitle as translators attempted a number of strategies to transport the unwieldy apparatus across the language barrier. In Japan and other parts of the world on the cusp of the sound era, a typical work-around involved silent-film-style intertitles explaining each section of the plot. Rudolf Arnheim, that obstinate critic of the talking film, discussed his frustration with these early attempts at translation in a 1929 essay entitled, "Sound Film Confusion":

> But we are already caught in the midst of a babel of tongues. Erich Pommer wants to mix languages when he makes his next UFA film. This will also force him to judge his actors not only by way of artistic measures, but also those of the Berlitz school. . . . Those with no linguistic geniuses among their actors must either sell talking films as silent abroad, in which case the dialogue scenes are shortened and replaced with laborious inter-titles (a process which is already beginning to raise general protest), or they must shoot the same film twice, as a talkie and as a silent. Both processes are only possible when the film is a piece of industrial waste for the masses and not art. For a work of art is not a shirt with removable sleeves.[18]

Arnheim hoped that such frustration would repel spectators from the talkie and turn them back to the silent film. However, translators were searching for new methods. Luckily, the people that subtitled the first films (and in so doing wrote the rules and conventions of subtitling) have committed their memories to print. Herman Weinberg was the first translator in the world to use subtitles; he is probably their inventor. In the course of his career, he titled over 400 films, including those in Sicilian, Japanese, Swedish, Hindustani, Spanish, Brazilian, Greek, Finnish, Yugoslavian, Czech, and Hungarian . . . obviously, a believer in knowing the target language better than the source language. (Surprisingly enough, this is not so unusual. In his 1989 profile, Okaeda Shinji claims over 1,000 titles to his credit, including *Citizen Kane, Star Wars,* and films in French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.[19] Needless to say, one must wonder about quality in the face of such enthusiastic boasting over quantity.) Here Weinberg explains, in his own way, the experimentation that led to the codification of the practice:

> Someone with nothing better to do one day discovered the principle of the photo-electric cell which made it possible to transmit soundwaves into light waves and vice-versa, and which now made it possible for movies to talk. But when the films I was working with talked it was in French and German. What do we do now? Full screen titles was the first answer, stopping the action and giving the audience a brief synopsis of what they were going to see in the next ten minutes. Ten minutes later, another full-screen synopsis. This was not only silly but annoying as those in the audience who could understand the language could laugh at the jokes in between the full screen titles while those who couldn't (and they constituted the majority, by far) sat there glum, doubly irritated by the laughter of the linguists in the house. Obviously something had to be done to placate the customers before they started asking for their money back. Then someone discovered the existence of a mechanism called a "moviola." . . . It had a counter which enabled

you to measure every piece of dialogue because it, too, was now equipped with that magical photo-electric cell so that you could now measure not only the length of every scene but that of every line of dialogue. And from these measurements we were able, by the trial and error method . . . to determine what we were doing and why. Whew! And when I say "we" I mean *me*, as no one knew any more than anyone else did about it and I seemed to be the only one willing to go ahead with the actual writing and make something out of it. At the beginning, I was very cautious and superimposed hardly more than 25 or 30 titles to a ten-minute reel. . . . Then I'd go into the theatre during a showing to watch the audiences' faces, to see how they reacted to the titles. I'd wondered if they were going to drop their heads slightly to read the titles at the bottom of the screen and then raise them again after they read the titles (like watching a tennis match and moving your head from left to right and back again) but I needn't have worried on this score; they didn't drop their heads, they merely dropped their eyes, I noticed. This emboldened me to insert more titles, when warranted, of course, and bit by bit more and more of the original dialogue got translated until at the end of my work in this field I was putting in anywhere from 100 to 150 titles a reel . . . tho', I must repeat, only when the dialogue was good enough to warrant it.[20]

This new technology of translation is what enabled Hollywood to avoid any interruption in its dominance of the international film market. In Japan, new technology adding canned sound to image caused debates on many fronts, from the *benshi* who saw their livelihoods threatened to thoughtful critics theorizing a new practice for scenarios to leftist critics with industrial critiques. Most relevant to the discussion at hand, Marxist critic Iwasaki Akira argued the talkie was "anti-internationalistic" *(hikokusaiteki)* for the way sound emphasized the national character of films, particularly in the narrative drama. Although not his main point, this unexpected awareness of the source culture through the insertion of the source language/sound is precisely the quality that subtitlers came to suppress. There were alternatives in the very early period. Tokyo's Teigeki and Horakuza theaters experimented with titles projected to the side of the screen and a number of Hollywood films used Japanese Americans for dubbing soundtracks. More often than not, the *benshi* would call translations over the soundtrack, which was turned down to facilitate the narrator's competition with the new sound technology.[21] Theaters adopted differing conceptions of translation. The famous *benshi* Matsui Suisei represented one approach, which restricted the translation to bare-bones plot summaries throughout the film; however, in other Asakusa theaters, *benshi* attended to each individually spoken line. Once every week, Matsui's Shibazonokan Theater held "no explanation talkie days" *(tōkii musetsumei dē)* for those who disliked the *benshi*'s interference with the pleasurable sounds of the original.[22]

However, the method that became standard operating procedure was the superimposed (sub)title—in parentheses because they were not always at the bottom of the frame. Within a year or two of the talkie's public appearance, the major studios brought translators to New York to subtitle the latest films. This included Shimizu Shunji and Tamura Yukihiko, who conducted the first translation with film subtitles in Japanese. The film was von Sternberg's *Morocco*, and this is Tamura's description of the process:

> First of all, the first problem we encountered was whether to use vertical or horizontal lines. For this, I performed various experiments. In the case of vertical lines, three-and-a-half feet of film were required to read one line with 12 characters. However, we found that if we printed the same line horizontally it would be impossible to read without five or more feet. Besides the decision to print vertically, we had to decide to put the subtitle on the right or left side. It was impossible to settle on a position. We'd put them on the right to avoid covering something on the left and vice versa. So we watched previews and investigated the problem scene by scene. . . . About 30 cards per reel was the limit. We were careful to avoid showing the embarrassing sight of titles from one scene running over into the next.[23]

After reading these first-person accounts by the pioneers of film translation, it would appear that the conventions of subtitling have changed little since their invention. This is to say that the rules and regulations that govern the production of subtitles (exclusive of those related to the apparatus itself) were set during the age of the Hollywood studio system. One might think this explains why subtitles look and function the way they do. However, it must also be stressed that while the subtitling apparatus itself has changed little, the

practice of subtitlers has, and the changes themselves are closely tied to the ideological context at the moment of translation. Likewise, any theorization of subtitles must be considered against its historical moment, which points us to the weakness of Trinh's analysis of subtitling. Her understanding of a subtitling buttressing a unified subject position and the implicit call for an oppositional avant-garde is anchored too deeply in 1970s suture theory. While I share her concerns over the ideological dimension of subtitling, I steer away from such essentialized arguments and toward a theorization grounded in a strong historical contextualization.

Let us focus on the example of Japanese subtitling and its historical development. A closer consideration of Tamura's description suggests there are crucial differences between prewar and present subtitling conventions. Unfortunately, most of the foreign films distributed in Japan before World War II were destroyed in the Film Center fire in the 1970s.[24] Other prewar prints of foreign films are extremely rare, and should they exist they would be equally difficult to view. There is, however, a way around this problem.

When a film was imported into Japan, the Home Ministry required the submission of a *ken'etsu daihon* (censorship scenario).[25] *Ken'etsu daihon* typically included a complete translation of every utterance and a description *of* nearly every sound effect. They also included an *en-face* listing of the film's subtitles. Only 3 copies were made, the official copy that received the Home Ministry seal, one for studio use, and one for preservation at the Ministry (with the establishment of the Film Law of 1939, two more copies were created for the Home Ministry's Information Bureau and the Ministry of Education). In any case, it should not be surprising that only a handful of these precious scenarios are extant.

Shimizu Shunji recently acquired the *ken'etsu daihon* of *Morocco*. His analysis is predictably superficial, but provides a useful starting point for exploring the real history of Japanese subtitles. Shimizu counts 297 subtitles in Tamura's version. Tamura's original translation used only 234, but after seeing a test print he felt the extra 63 titles were necessary.[26] Throughout his books, Shimizu often notes that before the war subtitlers used somewhere between a half and a third of the subtitles used today. With *Morocco*'s *ken'etsu daihon* in hand, he attempts to find the difference. First, he parses the scenario according to today's standards and decides his own count would come to 492. Then he counts Kikuji Hiroshi's postwar subbing of the film, which uses 491. Finally, he compares Kikuji's and Tamura's actual translations, concluding that outside of a few old *kanji*, excessively long subtitles, and Tamura's choice not to translate Dietrich's songs, there is no significant difference.

I find this a rather startling conclusion. Putting the actual translation of words aside for the moment, the difference between 297 and 492 strongly suggests we are dealing with two very dissimilar conceptions of translation. Shimizu was pursuing the wrong questions. Rather than wondering about the phrasing of individual titles, he should have been asking, "If Tamura chose to subtitle only half of the utterances, then what exactly was he translating? *What was the object of translation?*"

I have found the *ken'etsu daihon* for King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931), which contains Shimizu Chiyota's subtitles.[27] Consistent with Shimizu Shunji's writing, roughly half of the film's utterances went untranslated. Only 328 of the film's 869 lines received titles.[28] Upon closer examination, the first thing one notices is that the translation pares down the film primarily to narrative movement. This means certain characters which the translator deemed insignificant are virtually (or even completely) written out of the film because their lines go unsubtitled. For example, not only are the lines of Jackie Coogan's half-sister mostly untranslated, Shimizu ignored all references to her. The film never firmly establishes their relationship, so for viewers of the subtitled version she is simply a cute little girl who shows up every once in a while, says something incomprehensible, and then disappears. Her excision from the film via subtitles marks the film with a patriarchal reading of the film placed between text and reader/spectator.

Another crucial criterion for selection appears to be thematic. *The Champ* is well known as an early response to the social effects of the Great Depression. The film's characterization revolves around a woman who divorced her poor husband (the boxer) for a rich man; the mother wants to remove their son from the Champ's custody to save the child from the "poor environment." However, Shimizu's translation tends to leave out verbal references to the class discourse of the film. Virtually the only subtitles that retain it point to visual markers of class which the audiences would not have missed, such as the difference between the Champ's flop-house apartment and the mother's luxurious hotel. Significantly, even class differences in speech itself—inflection, vocabulary, grammar, and the like—are largely unreflected in the style of the subtitles. We can find the real effects of Shimizu's selective translation in a special section devoted to Ozu's *Pass-*

ing Fancy (*Dekigokoro,* 1933) in *STS,* one of Japan's earliest film theory journals. At the time, this film was often compared to *The Champ* for its narrative centered on an intense father-son relationship, and apparently Ozu based the script on Vidor's film. In his *STS* article, Mura Chio attempts a structural comparison of the two films' scripts to investigate the differences between sound and silent film scenario writing. One of his conclusions: "In terms of story telling, Marion's firm, text-heavy scenario style and Vidor's direct, solid directorial method precisely show us the instinctual love of father and child, however, they do not in any way describe the world that lower-middle-class people inhabit."[29] This suggests that the translator regards speech primarily as a vehicle for narrative propulsion, not expression as such, and that many of the choices regarding what to retain as relevant have quite serious ideological implications. However, the most important criterion is also the least obvious.

The Champ has (at least) three moments of melodramatic excess which are fascinating for their translation. By excess I mean elements such as mise-en-scène, sound, acting, and writing which are heightened to complement emotional distress. These scenes are the horse race where Jackie Coogan's horse stumbles just as it is about to win, the jail scene where Wallace Beery rejects Jackie and tells him to go to his mother, and the prize fight at the end. Shimizu's translation sets up each scene . . . and then simply stops. For example, the narrative tension of the horse race comes primarily from the announcer's call. Without his description of Coogan's come-from-behind bid for first place, it is impossible to tell which horse is in which position. There are no subtitles providing this information. The heartbreaking jail scene—by far the most memorable moment of the film—begins with a quiet dialogue between the Champ and his trainer Sponge. Of their nine lines, all but two are translated (and these were easy to guess by context). When Dink arrives, the melodrama gradually intensifies while the subtitle count drops steeply. From here until the moment Dink leaves the jail crushed by his father's explosive rejection, only nine of 24 lines are translated! Near the end, when the two scream at each other and the Champ violently strikes his son through the prison bars, the subtitles stop. This breaks the most cherished rules of today's corrupt subtitlers who "naturally" assign meaning to every utterance as a matter of course.

This returns us to our original question: "If not the meaning of every line, what exactly was the object of translation?" On the one hand, Shimizu was ignoring the parts of speech that contribute to expression and simply translating the narrative meaning behind the words. On the other hand, for moments when the speech act itself was contributing to the overall expression of the film's emotional impact, *he chose not to translate.* Implicit in his decision was the assumption that the grain of the voice was more important than the meaning it articulated. The difference between these two strategies comes down to the two basic patterns first outlined by Cicero 2,000 years ago: sense-for-sense versus word-for-word translations. The sense-for-sense subtitles zero in on the narrative movement of the scenario, root out each line's basic meaning and translate this into Japanese. The word-for-word translation stresses the importance of the materiality of language as opposed to some essential meaning found behind the letter. In *The Champ,* Shimizu generally uses a sense-for-sense translation to the extent that he strips the lines of dialogue to their barest, most literal, function of moving the plot (granted, as he interprets it). *Simultaneously, we find a word-for-word translation in the decision to refuse to translate.*

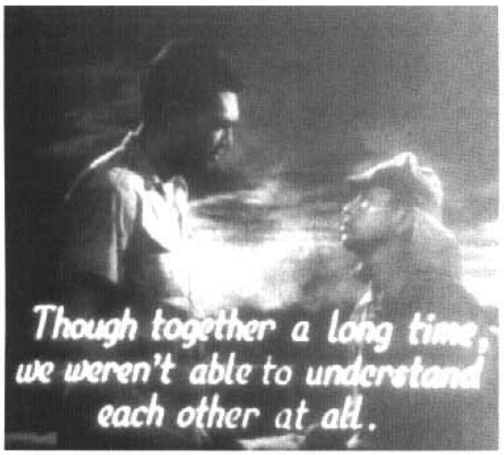
The Champ's example is not an isolated fluke. In fact, other reports concerning prewar subtitling practices suggest a variety of graphic tactics that also exhibit a word-for-word translation style. For example, in *M* there is a scene in which a boy hawks newspapers; as the camera nears the boy, his voice gets louder on the soundtrack. At the same time, the Japanese subtitles translating the boy's voice grow correspondingly larger and larger, providing a graphic representation of the materiality of the speech.[30] Furthermore, Japanese subtitlers routinely placed their titles in different areas of the scene depending on the cinematographer's composition. It was thought that the position of the words should complement mise-en-scène and movement. At the same time, there are indications that subtitle positioning depended upon narrative as well. One story from critic Yodogawa Nagaharu describes a dreamy Hollywood love scene where the subtitles appeared *between* the two lovers.[31] Of course!

The conception of translation in the talkie period circulated between two poles, between a sense-for-sense hermeneutic search for, and transmission of, meaning, and a word-for-word translation of language's material qualities. The reason for this indeterminacy lies in the historical moment. We can detect as much from an article about the subtitling of *Morocco* which Tamura published ten days before the film's public release: "This time, there was the fear that with too few subtitles, the meaning would not come through. At least, I thought that it was necessary to use the same number of titles as silent movies. Spanish and Portuguese

subtitles used far too many subtitles, more than 400 subtitles for one film. However, because Japanese audiences are sensitive to the feelings of films, I believed it was unnecessary to attach more than 30 subtitles per reel."[32] This is an approach to translation that relies on a conception of cinema grounded in the silent era. In *The Champ*'s jail scene, the subtitles initially correspond to the narrative mode of the talkie as it set up the premise for the confrontation between father and son; then it shifted back to silent cinema for the melodramatic finish.

While this seems to be a likely explanation, we must return to the silent era to adequately understand the specificities of this national cinema context and its historical moment. One might say that the *benshi* was the first form of dubbing in the pre-history of the talkie. These screen-side narrators would describe the action on the screen and supply voices for all the actors, eliminating the need for the translation of silent film intertitles. Aaron Gerow's research into the critical discourses surrounding the figure of the *benshi* reveal that reformers of the Pure Film Movement sought to modernize Japanese cinema by renovating the role of the *benshi* and revising the standard use of intertitles.[33] The *benshi,* they felt, should avoid flowery elocution for everyday speech, and stick closely to the filmmaker's plotting instead of their independent elaborations of the narrative. In other words, they hoped the *benshi* would become invisible, much like the corrupt subtitles of later decades. In the end, the *benshi* proved more powerful and popular, setting the stage for the unusual subtitles of the talkie era in Japan. We can attribute the two styles of pre-subtitle *benshi* translation—paraphrase vs. line-by-line—to these very discursive tensions designed by the Pure Film Movement. Secondly, the same reformers called for the elimination of intertitles, since film was essentially a *visual* medium. This could also help explain why so few subtitles were used in the 1930s compared to today. These are probably precedents contributing to an overdetermination of forces bearing down on Japan's first subtitles.

By the end of the decade the shift to the postwar sense-for-sense conventions becomes detectable. In a 1939 article entitled "The Impoverished Japanese of



Dawn of Freedom: In this dreamy sayonara scene from *Dawn of Freedom* (*Ano hata o ute,* 1942), a Japanese soldier says goodbye to his Filipino friend before departing for the battle of Corregidor. By WWII, Japanese subtitles took their place at the edges of the screen, striving to match the sympathies of the audience. The subtitle for the Filipino soldier's line: "Tadashi, I have no idea what you are saying. That's a pity."

Spoken Titles," Ota Tatsuo criticizes contemporary subtitles and calls on translators to study towards a new Japanese language for film translation. He uses tropes for sense-to-sense translations which have circulated throughout the history of translation theory:

> Understanding [a film] means not intellectually, but perfectly matching the feelings, as if one with the same atmosphere, and soaking through to the inside of the hearts of the Japanese masses. Thus we must stop the spoken titles that are messengers brought from a foreign language; spoken titles should be messengers from a meeting with Japanese language. In other words, they are not translations of foreign language, but they must create in Japanese the things that are trying to be expressed in the foreign language.[34]

To this end, Ota calls for the end of direct translation of foreign words and the creation of a new Japanese language specifically for film translation (although a novel idea, he was beaten to the notion of a specialized language for translation by Schleiermacher). Subtitlers must stop relying on the advice of experts hired from university literature departments and write subtitles that speak directly to the soul of the masses. To this end, subtitlers must recognize the limits of *kanji* and restrict their usage of characters to a level attuned to the masses, which he determines is somewhere at or below the elementary school graduate's level. Subtitlers must strive to be like the *benshi,* which is to say become one with the fabric of the film so they may speak directly to their audience in the deepest sense (again a conception of the *benshi* consistent with the reformers of the Pure Film Movement). Above all, their subtitles should not be direct translations of foreign words, but strive for a perfect match with the Japanese soul.

This last assertion is crucial because it expresses the shift, and its historical moment, most clearly. Ota is calling for a subtitling practice that completely dominates the foreign. As with the Romans' relationship to Greek texts and Early Christians' relationship to Latin texts, he hopes to enrich his own language in the process

Left: *Privilege:* "'He hit my breast.' A straight woman would be embarrassed."—Some anonymous, corrupt technician changed the translation of "straight" to *seijō na hito,* or "normal person."

Below: *Peking:* "While photographing your countenance, they will record your voice with this ball."/"Today, thanks to Councillor Tanaka's introduction, the cameramen from our allied nation . . ." —*Peking* was a 1939 Japanese film by Kamei Fumio shot in the city after the Japanese began their occupation. This is an example of how early Japanese subtitles accounted for the composition of the photography. When the man on the left speaks his subtitles appear on the far side of the frame, and vice versa.

of appropriation. St. Jerome stated the premise of this kind of translation most directly: "The translator considers thought content a prisoner . . . which he transplants into his own language with the prerogative of a conqueror."[35] The issue of translation cuts straight through to the relationship of self and other. Ota's essay, written at a time when Japan was penetrating deep into China and contemplating a colonization of Asia, reveals a totalitarian wish for a subtitle that erases difference and incorporates foreign meaning into a perfected, harmonized mass readership. It is a theory of translation tailored to Japan's geopolitical aspirations. Ota's vision of a sense-for-sense translation would evolve into the codes of corruption in the postwar period, a style of translation that effaces its violent, mediating presence by hiding in the margins of the frame and discreetly translating every utterance on the soundtrack.

While Ota calls for a new writing and a new language he still defends most of the prewar conventions, such as the number and placement of titles. However, an example from the other side of the globe may teach us that conventions themselves can be changed most easily at particular moments in history when the rules governing practices are in flux. Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* (*La Maman et la putain,* 1973) is a central post-68 film made in the wake of the French New Wave. This film movement was centered on breaking cinematic conventions and indulging in those things only cinema is capable of—it was essentially abusive filmmaking. This liberated Eustache's translator to deal with the problem of the subtitle's violence with the kind of experimentation that works only at that kind of moment in film history. Throughout this clever film, the transparency of the subtitles would be interrupted with the bracketed note:

[Untranslatable French Pun]

This provides a cogent example of the flexibility of subtitling that is engaged in the cinematic practice of its time. The very conception of this subtitle was possible only because the French New Wave filmmakers were systematically attacking every convention of cinema. The freedom to experiment with textual knots of impossibility made the untranslatable French pun translatable. We must not reject impossibility, but embrace it. Moments of untranslatability—a nearly constant condition for the subtitler—are times for *celebration,* for not only are they privileged encounters with the foreign, but they are also opportunities for translators to ply the highest skills of their craft. They are moments crying for abuse.

The Abusive Turn

There is a potential and emerging subtitling practice that accounts for the unavoidable limits in time and space of the subtitle, a practice that does not feign completeness, that does not hide its presence through restrictive rules. We must reconsider our own historical moment and work toward a subtitling that engages today's sensibilities with a violence which is not corrupt, but abusive.

To sketch out the character of abusive subtitling and establish some sense for how it fits into the context of its own history, I propose we divide sound film history into three epochs of translation, the last of which is only just emerging. The history of translation discourse is full of tripartite formulas to describe different modes of translation, from Dryden to Novalis and Goethe to Jacobsen. The epochs I suggest may be seen as historical phases through which cinema has passed, but they also surpass this synchronic structure and appear simultaneously. The potential for this simultaneity will be particularly important for our understanding of abusive subtitling. Roughly sketched, the three epochs of translation may be described in the following manner.

The first kind of translation occurs in the talkie era. It uses a straightforward prose to introduce the pleasures of foreign texts. The language of the subtitles themselves exhibits a functionality clearly designed to communicate the power of the foreign original as efficiently as possible. In this respect the first era of subtitles brings the foreign text to the spectators on their own domestic terms. At the same time, the translator remains fully cognizant of the material dimensions of language—both its graphic and aural qualities. This is to say it is an approach to translation straddling the theoretical paradigms of sense for sense vs. word for word. It may be that this is a conception of cinematic translation anchored firmly to that transition into amplified aurality. However, while there can be no question of its historical specificity in this instance, we still must resist restricting a given mode of translation *as a possibility* in any period of cinema.

In the second epoch of cinematic translation, the translator pretends to move toward the foreign, dwell there, and bring its wonders to the waiting crowds. This era is replete with rules designed to guarantee a translation's quality, but what this regulation actually accomplishes is an appropriation of the source text and its thorough domestication. The rules also enforce a territorialization and professionalization of translation,

producing stars and experts and excluding all alternatives. This mode of translation, which I have contemptuously called corrupt, conforms the foreign to the framework of the target language and its cultural codes. All that cannot be explained within the severe limits of the regulation subtitle gets excised or reduced to domestic meanings which are often irrelevant or inappropriate. These subtitlers claim to bring their readers/spectators to a pleasurable experience of the foreign, but in fact they please only themselves through these impoverished translations. As for their audiences, they are kept ignorant of the conspiracy and the riches that remain hidden from the cinematic experience.

The final part of this triptych brings us to the abusive. For this epoch of translation, I wish to borrow another phrase from Goethe, both for the power of its image and to specify what abusive subtitling is not. In the third stage of Goethe's own periodization of translation, "the goal of the translation is to achieve perfect identity with the original, so that the one does not exist instead of the other but in the other's place."[36] Here the translator identifies strongly with the source text and the culture in which it was produced, so much so that he cedes the particular powers of his own culture to accomplish a translation that invites the reader/spectator to a novel and rich experience of the foreign. Of course, Goethe's conception of translation is deeply tied to Romantic notions that seek to define the self through its various others—another form of domestication. However, abusive subtitling avoids this kind of erasure of difference, seeking to intensify the interaction between the reader and the foreign. And while the notion of abusive translation originates from a Derridian perspective, the third epoch of subtitling I am identifying also rejects poststructuralism's endless play of signification. Rather, this translation does not present a foreign divested of its otherness, but strives to translate from and within the place of the other by an inventive approach to language use and the steady refusal of rules.

As we have seen, the key differences between the translation of printed texts and the subtitling of moving image media are that the cinema adds the human voice to the equation and is propped up by an apparatus that *requires* a violent translation which in turn exhibits many of the traits Philip Lewis calls abusive. Even the subtitles for the most nondescript, realist film tamper with language usage and freely ignore or change much of the source text; however, corrupt subtitlers suppress the fact of this violence necessitated by the apparatus, while the abusive translator enjoys foregrounding it, heightening its impact and testing its limits and possibilities. To the extent that Lewis' abusive translation partakes in a kind of guilt-free licentiousness, his model is attractive to the subtitler of the emergent third epoch. This theorization will prove particularly attractive in an age where the experience of the foreign is valued, and where abuse helps inject a palpable sense of the foreign—precisely where we must depart from Lewis's theoretical assumptions.

In the Derridian approach to translation which Lewis espouses, abuse is directed at both language and its metaphysical assumptions. While this is a component of the abusive subtitle, the objects and ends of abuse are more than this. Trinh Minh-ha's meditations on subtitling—one of the few examples from the history of film theory—share Lewis's theoretical concerns, as we saw in her previous comment on subtitles and suture. It is an approach heavily dependent upon 1970s film theory and its rather elitist conception of the role of experimentation in combating the evils of Hollywood realism with a deconstructive or Brechtian avant-garde.[37] The problems with such a position have since been argued on many fronts: its Eurocentrism, its elitism, and its inability to account for popular reading modes. Still, we may consider the critiques of poststructuralism the segue between the second and third epochs of subtitling. Thus, the abusive turn I am identifying is also a turn from Lewis and Trinh.

A better measure of its location is Cicero's sense-for-sense vs. word-for-word translations. For all the elaborate theorizations of translation, few writers stray far from this early conceptualization. The corrupt subtitles of the middle epoch are solidly sense for sense, for the translator looks behind the word and ferrets out an essential meaning that she transports to the "equivalent" meaning in the target language. Abusive subtitles encroach on the word-for-word end of the spectrum because they take into consideration the array of qualities that make up the material basis of language, many of which call the specter of untranslatability to the fore. On this count, Trinh comes closer in spirit to the third epoch in the following quote from a different essay: "Language as voice and music—grain, tone, inflections, pauses, silences, repetitions—goes underground. Instead, people from remote parts of the world are made accessible through dubbing/subtitling, transformed into English-speaking elements and brought into conformity with a definite mentality."[38] Abusive translations are also sense-for-sense translations to varying degrees, as a truly word-for-word translation—a literal substitution of one word directly for another—would result in meaningless gibberish. However, one of the most important values of the third epoch is a respect for other cultures and a willingness to confront their otherness

without domination or erasure. Abusive subtitles embody this spirit, and thus circulate between Cicero's poles without settling in either extreme.

Let us look at a number of concrete examples that suggest that corrupt subtitling practices are obsolete and the time for abuse is ripe. Donald Richie, who has subtitled some of the most famous Japanese films, is the translator of Kurosawa's *Ran,* one of the most abusive translations ever undertaken (with the possible exception of the Marxist appropriations of kung-fu films in post-1968 France or the dubbing of Woody Allen's *What's Up, Tiger Lily?*).[39] With the coming of talkies, Japanese *samurai* films found it necessary to codify a version of what pre-Meiji Japanese language should sound like. They ended up with a *samurai* version of King James English, which has remained a central feature of the genre up to the present. This poses an interesting dilemma for the subtitler, who is well aware of the generic importance of this specialized language—one can hardly imagine a period film without it (indeed, to replace it with "standard Japanese" would probably be perceived as daringly experimental). However, there is no way to bring this important element of the genre to a foreign spectator without breaking the laws of corruption, which is exactly what Richie attempted. He writes, "Carried away by all the pageantry I relaxed my guard and thought to intrude a bit of period color of my own. . . . I left out the occasional prepositions in a way common to formal court English. Something like 'I want you to go,' I foolishly rendered as 'I would with you go.' Not incorrect but, in dialogue titles, completely inappropriate."[40] Obviously regretting his experiment, Richie finally exemplifies the sensibility of corruption when he calls for a "scrupulously anonymous kind of English." He continues, "I feel that the translation should be invisible. . . . Any oddity, any term too heightened, as well as any mistake, calls attention to this written dialogue. I won't even use exclamation points. The language should enter the ear as the image enters the eye."[41] I couldn't disagree more. Actually, these subtitles were quite wonderful for the way they approximated the generically tortured Japanese of the film itself, but subsequent video versions have substituted Richie's subtitles with an obscenely anonymous translation. Richie self-censors his smart impulse to abuse the text.

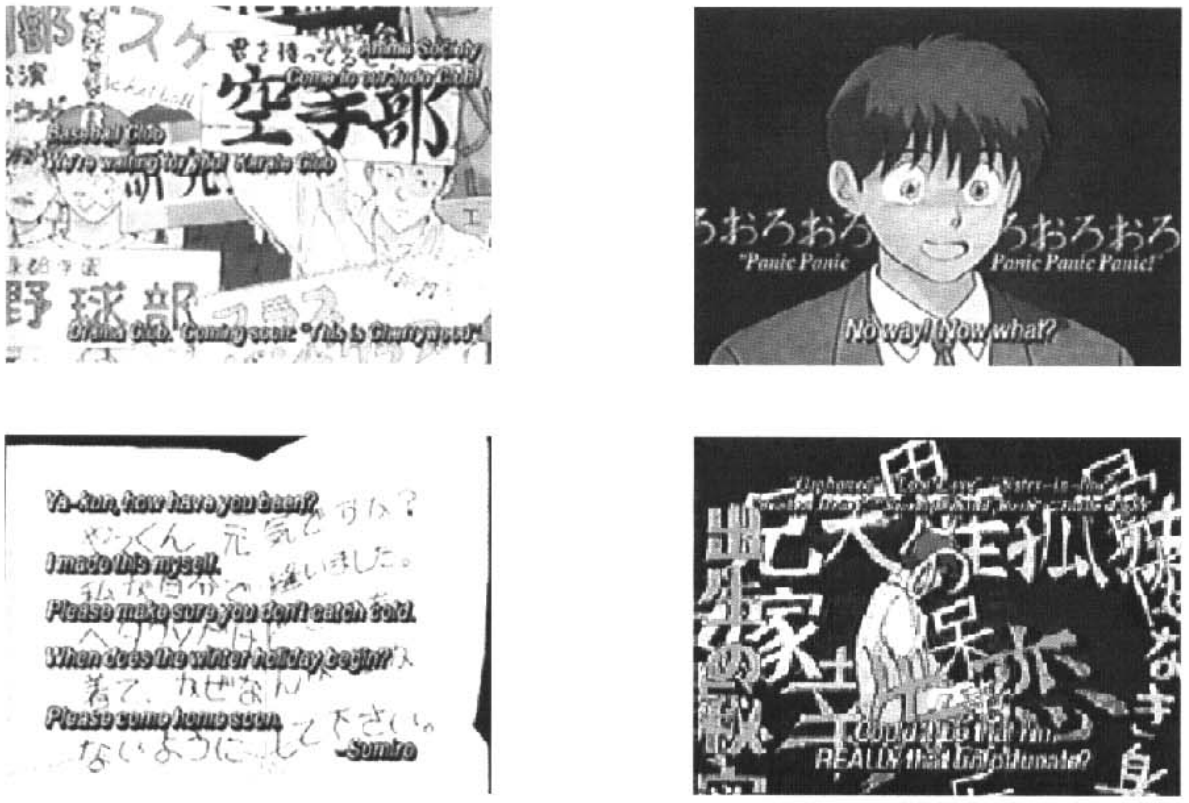
Otaku no Video (*Otaku no bideo,* 1991) is a pseudo-documentary about fan cultures in Japan. Produced by a large *anime* production and distribution company, half the documentary is animated. Its subtitles use the abusiveness of the amateur translators they market to.

Rob Young confronted similar issues with Yamamoto Masashi's *Tenamonya Connection* (*Tenamonya konekushon,* 1991), which celebrates Osaka's culture and dialect. This film is subtitled "Fools Cross Borders" *(Aho wa kyōkai o koeru)* and in the course of its 90-odd minutes it criss-crosses between Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Osaka, blurring the boundaries between Hong Kong/Tokyo, fiction/documentary, Hong Kong comedy/Japanese comedy, male/female, and even inside movie/outside theater. Young takes this rowdy playfulness as license to experiment ever so slightly. He manipulates his English in a manner analogous to Richie, filling his text with excessive contractions, slang, and "bad" English where the scenario deploys an analogous fast-and-loose approach to speech, or where it celebrates linguistic markers of class and regional difference. Another tactic he uses comes far closer to the spirit of abusiveness. Obscene expressions like *konchikusho!* and *konoyarō!* are translated !%&$#!@!! We can learn several things from Young's example. First, this is not the kind of censorship we expect of corrupt subtitles, which often leave "foul" language untranslated. Rather, it is the translator's attempt to experiment with language in ways that are analogous to the linguistic playfulness of the original scenario and its verbalization. Secondly, faced with the seemingly untranslatable, the abusive subtitler may seek to produce polyvalencies and knots of signification that may not coincide precisely with the problem in the source text. There may not be a one-to-one correspondence between all of Young's subtitles using "improper" grammar and similar utterances on the soundtrack, nevertheless his approach cues the spectator to the elaborate playfulness of the dialogue that would have been completely erased by corrupt titles. Third, despite his instinctual abusiveness, Young, like Richie before him, also restricts himself to the time/space/graphic limits of the standard subtitle. Attuned to his historical mo-

ment in the third epoch, Young hints at the possibilities; but a truly abusive subtitling would have been as wild as the original film. *It would have truly brought the spectator to the film.* This would appear radical from the perspective of the second era, but surely you, who live in the emerging third era, can feel the problems with convention.

There are more daring and thrilling examples of the emerging abusive subtitle elsewhere, places where capital does not enforce the rules and regulations of corruption. In the spring of 1993, Professor Laurel Rodd of the University of Colorado assigned her Japanese translation class the task of translating subtitles for the opening of Itami Jūzo's *A Taxing Woman Returns* (*Marusa no onna 2*, 1987). This short sequence includes strings of *kango* (Chinese words) and snatches of classical Japanese. The class quickly learned to appreciate the difficulties facing the translator of films, but their intuitive solutions to confronting the practical issues had little to do with the corrupt rules of the second epoch's subtitlers. They regretted their "inability" to experiment and put subtitles in different colors and in different parts of the frame. In fact, their exercise was hypothetical and nothing was preventing them from indulging in the most outrageous innovation (the new technologies of video which link the apparatus with computers can easily manipulate the material aspects of the subtitle through colors, fonts, sizes, and animation). The tools are in place, but the professionals, like the students above, check themselves, held back as they are by the inertia of convention and the ideology of corruption.

Actually, this has not restrained one group of translators from whom we may learn much. In fact, this article was inspired by their work. In the past few years, a massive fandom has developed around Japanese animation *(anime)* throughout the world. A substantial portion of the fan activity concentrates on translation. Scripts are posted on internet newsgroups and circulated among clubs and individuals. Fan hackers write software for the Amiga and other computer platforms, software that enables them to take the subtitling apparatus into their own hands. Groups collaborate on not-for-profit subtitled versions of their favorite *anime*. Working outside of the mainstream translation industry, lacking any formal training, these fans have



Four frames from a fan-subbed video tape of *Ranma 1/2: This Is Greenwood (Ranma 1/2: Koko wa Guriin uddo).*

produced abusive subtitles *quite by instinct.* In scenes with overlapping dialogue, they use different colored subtitles. Confronted with untranslatable words, they introduce the foreign word into the English language with a definition that sometimes fills the screen. Footnotes! Some tapes include small-type definitions and cultural explanations which are illegible on the fly (here we find a completely new viewing protocol made possible by video where the viewer halts the apparatus's mindless march and reads subtitles at leisure). They use different fonts, sizes, and colors to correspond to material aspects of language, from voice to dialect to written text within the frame. And they freely insert their "subtitles" all over the screen. It is as if history folds back on itself and we find a resurgence of the subtitling practice of the talkie era, but the underlying differences put the two worlds apart.

The example of *anime* fandom reveals the distance between the often elitist valorizations of anti-Hollywood experimentation and the abusive subtitle. Both may be canny on ideological problems, both may innovatively break convention, but the latter attempts to engage readers' sensibilities with the same sensibilities with which the readers engage their texts. Just as the spectator approaches films from far-away places to enjoy an experience of the foreign, the abusive translator attempts to locate his or her subtitles in the place of the other. Rather than smothering the film under the regulations of the corrupt subtitle, rather than smoothing the rough edges of foreignness, rather than converting everything into easily consumable meaning, the abusive subtitles always direct spectators back to the original text. Abusive subtitles circulate between the foreign and the familiar, the known and the unknown, just as they shift between sense-for-sense and word-for-word modalities. Were we speaking of the translation of printed texts, the third epoch would most likely be filled with interlinear books. And is this not a characteristic of the foreign film's structure? The subtitled moving image is a constellated figure; both the original and the translation are simultaneously available, as if they were *en face.* Most important, viewers work off the original text whether they understand its language or not. Although corrupt subtitles work strongly against this reading practice, abusive subtitles encourage it.

The time is ripe for abuse, if only because we are in an age where moving image literacy includes the ability to manage complex text/image relations. Audiences bring those talents to the foreign film, but they go entirely unused. Indeed, what once was radical experimentation is now the stuff of Hollywood cinema, MTV and pop-up video, commercials, sitcoms, and the nightly news. Complex image/text relationships are a normalized textuality from everyday experience (exceedingly so in Japan). From this perspective, corrupt subtitling is actually archaic. Thus, "abuse" is directed at convention, even at spectators and their expectations. And when abusive subtitling becomes normalized, we will think of other terms . . . or simply drop the adjective. It is likely that abusive translations will begin with animation, comedies, the art film, and the documentary—texts that are themselves transgressive or essayistic—but there is nothing holding us back from subjecting the most non-violent films to abuse. The only other choice is corruption.

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Notes

1. Quoted in Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic German,* trans. S. Heyvaert (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1992), p. 53. Thanks to Darrell Davis, David Desser, and particularly to Makino Mamoru and Aaron Gerow for their help and comments while writing this essay.
2. Philip E. Lewis, "The Measure of Translation Effects," in *Difference in Translation,* ed. Joseph F. Graham, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 31–62.
3. Ibid., p. 36.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
5. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 102.
6. An analogous reversal of power may be found in the translation of *The X-Files* for Japanese television, in this case through the apparatus of dubbing. Mulder is dubbed by a man with a husky, deep, tough-man voice, while Scully's relatively low, business-like tone is replaced with the high-pitched voice one usually associates with soap operas and weather report announcers. This manipulation of the material qualities of language—in this case the grain of the voice—reverses the sexual play and politics of the show. While less dramatic, the *Robocop* example displays the same dynamic. As I will argue below, standard subtitles ignore the material aspects of language.
7. Antje Ascheid, "Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing in the Cinema as Cultural Ventriloquism," *The Velvet Light Trap,* no. 40 (Fall 1997), p. 40.
8. Fujinami Fujiaki, *Nyūsu Kameraman—Gekidō no Shōwashi o Toru* ("News Cameraman—Shooting the Turbulent History of the Showa Era"), (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1977), pp. 81–84.

9. Donald Richie, "Donald Richie on Subtitling Japanese Films," *Mangajin,* vol. 10 (1991), p. 16.
10. See for example, Toda Natsuko, *Jimaku no Naka ni Jinsei* ("A Life in Subtitles"), (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1994), p. 27; Okaeda Shiji, *Sūpā Jimaku Nyūmon—Eiga Honyaku no Gijutsu to Chishiki* ("Introduction to Subtitles—Film Translation Technology and Knowledge"), (Tokyo: Baburu Puresu, 1988), p. 18; Kamijima Kimi, *Jimaku Shikakenin Ichidaiki* ("Biography of a Subtitler"), (Tokyo: Pandora, 1995), p. 22.
11. Toda, p. 27. Toda is reporting hearsay; it appears she has done no real research for her history.
12. Biographies include Toda (1994), Kamijima (1995), and Shimizu Shunji, *Eiga Jimaku no Gojūnen* ("Fifty Years of Film Subtitling"), (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 1985). The latter is the most famous, but Kamijima's is the most interesting of the bunch. How-to books are popular among translators looking to add variety to their usual slate of boring business translations; a few of them are apparently used as textbooks in classes offered by some of the more high-profile subtitlers; see Kamijima (1995), Okaeda (1988), Okaeda (1989), *Shimizu Shunji, Eiga Jimaku no Tsukurikata Oshiemasu* ("Teaching the Way to Make Movie Subtitles"), (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 1988), and Shimizu Shunji, *Eiga Jimaku wa Honyaku de wa Nai* ("Film Subtitling Is Not Translation"), ed. Toda Natsuko and Ueno Tamako (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 1992).
13. Toda, p. 10.
14. Shimizu (1992), pp. 61–62.
15. Okaeda Shinji, *Jimaku Honyaku Kōgi no Jikkyō Chūkei* ("On-the-Spot Transmission of Subtitle Translation Lectures"), (Tokyo: Gogakushunjusha, 1989), pp. 194–195. Far more disturbing is his ignorant homophobia when he prefaces a section on homosexuality and subtitling with a bizarre aside implying America has "homos" and Japan does not, and explicitly blaming AIDS on American homosexuals.
16. Toda, p. 11.
17. Okaeda, p. 6.
18. Rudolf Arnheim, "Sound Film Confusion," in *Film Essays and Criticism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), pp. 33–34.
19. Okaeda (1989), p. 229.
20. Herman Weinberg, *Booze, Cigars, and Movies* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1985), pp. 107–108.
21. This strategy continued well into the postwar period in many parts of Asia that used narrators throughout the silent period.
22. Tachibana Takashirō, *Tōkiitsū* ("Authoritative Knowledge of the Talkie"), (Tokyo: Shiroku Shoin, 1930), pp. 118–119.
23. Tanaka Jun'ichirō, *Nihon Eiga Hattatsu-shi II* ("The History of the Development of Japanese Cinema II"), (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1980), p. 207.
24. According to Shimizu Shunji, Films Inc. in Tokyo holds a 35mm print of Tamura's *Morocco.*
25. The subtitler's collaboration with structures of censorship is an important form of corruption I do not have time to explore in this context. In Japan, subtitles were strictly censored in both prewar and postwar eras. More recently, censorship has largely been directed at the image exclusive of the soundtrack. Shimizu served for many years on the board of Eirin, one of the primary censorship authorities in Japan. Okaeda has a curious passage in his "lectures" about subtitling pornography. For example, he warns his students not to translate "Oh, that feels so good" directly over the utterance/sex act because the translation would never pass censorship proceedings; however, if the subtitle appears before or after, as in "I'll make you feel good," there should be no problem. How this practice affects the translation of mainstream texts is left unexplained. Okaeda (1989), pp. 201–202.
26. Shimizu, (1988), p. 350. While Shimizu's account says this version never reached public theaters, a contemporary article suggests otherwise. In "A Quick Note on the Talkie," Hayashi Chitose went to the trouble of counting lines of dialogue and subtitles. Hayashi's count: 387 spoken lines/229 subtitles with 4 "inserted subtitles," for an average of 32 lines/19 subtitles per reel. While he notes that the most dialogue-heavy scene of the film uses more subtitles (41 for 52 lines), Hayashi stops his analysis with the basic argument that "less is better." I argue below this is nothing other than a silent era-specific conception of cinema carried over the sound barrier. Hayashi Chitose, "Tokii ni Kan Suru Hashirigaki" ("A Quick Note on the Talkie"), *STS* no. 5 (10 May 1931), p. 39.
27. These and other *ken'etsu daihon* are preserved in the Makino Mamoru Collection. Shimizu Chiyota was, along with Tamura, one of the founding members of *Kinema Junpō,* the premiere film magazine from the teens to the present-day.
28. Longer lines required multiple subtitles, making the total number of subtitles 360. The other *ken'etsu daihon* I inspected appeared to have similar subtitle counts. They may be found in the Makino Mamoru Collection.
29. Mura Chio, "Ozu Yasujiro no Geijutsu Taido" ("Ozu Yasujiro's Artistic Attitude") *STS no.* 13, p. 25.
30. This was related to me by Komatsu Hiroshi, who saw the print while working at the Film Center.
31. Toda, pp. 26–27.
32. Tamura Yukihiko, *"Morocco," Kinema Junpō* (1 February, 1931).
33. I would like to thank Aaron Gerow for helping me flesh out these points after reading an early draft of this article. His dissertation is groundbreaking work on the Pure Cinema Movement: A.A. Gerow, *Writing a Pure Cinema: Articulations of Early Japanese Film* (Dissertation for the University of Iowa, 1996).
34. Ota Tatsuo, "Sūpā Impōzu ni Okeru Nihongo no Hinkon" ("The Poverty of Japanese Language of Spoken Titles"), *Nihon Eiga,* vol. 4, no. 5 (May 1939), p. 51.
35. Quoted in Hugo Friedrich, "On the Art of Translation" ("Zur Frage der Ubersetzungkunst"), trans. Rainer Schultze and John Biguenet, in *Theories of Translation—An Anthology from Dryden to Derrida,* ed. Rainer Schultze and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 12–13.
36. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Translation" ("Ubersetzungen"), trans. Sharon Sloan, in *Theories of Translation,* p. 61.
37. Antje Ascheid's article on dubbing attempts to avoid these traps, but falls into others because of an inadequate theorization of translation itself.

38. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 60.
39. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat report the following: "In the late 60s and 70s, French leftists reportedly 'kidnapped' a Kung Fu film as *La Dialectique peut-elle casser les briques?* ('Can the Dialectic Break Bricks?') with incendiary subtitles. A sequence of devastating karate blows would be subtitled: 'Down with the bourgeoisie!'" See their "The Cinema after Babel: Language, Difference, Power," *Screen* vol. 26, nos. 3–4 (May–August 1985), pp. 35–59. *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* is actually a low-budget Japanese detective film with Allen's parodic dubbing on the soundtrack. One could also imagine an abusive dubbing, although ultimately dubbing is mired in corruption because it completely erases the experience of foreign sound, one of the most crucial material aspects of language. These examples are also curious for their parody, which indulges in the abusive translator's pleasure in experiencing the foreign, while sharing the corrupt translator's domination of the source text.
40. Donald Richie, "Donald Richie on Subtitling Japanese Films," *Mangajin* 10 (1991): p. 16.
41. Ibid., p. 16.