

ABSTRACT

This research project is concerned with 'the untranslatable', which I identify as that which, in art, resists translation into everyday language yet touches me lovingly and truthfully. Through a manner of 'poetic translation' that is experiential and reflective as well as semantic and material, and by questioning how an artwork can embody the untranslatable, the project develops concepts to think about the untranslatable and to articulate its presence within an installation artwork that allows for new meanings to enter through audiences' engagement with the work. Informed by philosophical, theoretical and artistic works that share concerns with the oppositional and draw our awareness towards neutral, subtle and nuanced appearances and understandings of the world, the research investigates the poetic works of art that liberate and provoke our perception and sense of being in this life-world.

The research is undertaken through my experiencing and reflecting on these elements: my grandmother's poetic enunciation about Mt. Aso, shifting shadows of an acrylic cube (a remnant), and Jacques Derrida's interpretation of *chora* and *ma* as a place for translation/transference, which is untranslatable. This process, which in turn draws resonant voices from various disciplines, not limited to either Western or Eastern knowledge, to ancient or contemporary time, to one side or one sex, is manifested in my art-making and thesis writing; my artworks inspire *and* test my thesis, together investigating these five key concepts: 'Pure Language', the 'Poetic', 'Shadow', 'Transference' and 'Embodiment'.

Chapter One explores philosophies of translation with a focus on Walter Benjamin's concept of 'pure language' considered untranslatable. My first installation work *Understanding of misunderstanding*, joins images of different landscapes in a manner akin to literal translation of my grandmother's enunciation. Chapter Two discusses 'poetic use of language' as articulative of the ineffable (untranslatable), through elaboration on Friedrich Hölderlin's theory of poetry, Toshihiko Izutsu's philosophy of Zen articulation, and Luce Irigaray's philosophy of linguistic and psychoanalytic practice. My video work, *Topologies between the Three*, poetically translates conversations about Mt. Aso by opening silent and metaphoric spatiality between expression and perception. Informed by intersecting studies on elusive appearance and perceptual ambiguity in philosophies of translation and perception, Chapter Three examines shifting 'shadow' (image) as an artistic medium, exemplified and discussed in art, including works by Agnes Martin and Junichiro Tanizaki. In my installation works, *Distancing for Opening*, *Watakushi ame* and *Mokudoku*, 'shadow light/light shadow' visually and spatially transfers across images faintly printed or surfaces embossed with the acrylic (a remnant). Chapter Four articulates the 'transfer' process as the embodiment of the untranslatable, inspired by the Greek-Latin and the Japanese derivations, illustrating the 'transfer' (*utsuru*). In this process, the positive is engendered from the negative, which is aligned with art historical and philosophical views that images metamorphose and knowledges transform in 'distance' or 'movement' between the works and the spectators. In response to Derrida's interpretation, my final exhibition, *ここがどこなのか_ where it is here_ どうでもいいことさ_ it does not matter_ どうやって来たのか_ how I have got here_ 忘れられるかな_ can I forget*, intends to open 'a poetic place', with my built walls and visual works, where images transfer (*utsuru*: reflect, project, trace, emerge) within rooms (*ma*) through audiences' experience and reflection. This is captured in the

film, *The Untranslatable, A Poetic Place*, shot through the gazes of others, in keeping with how my grandmother's enunciation 'transfers' the life of Mt. Aso. The chapter further elaborates on this life as what conveys knowledge (sensitivity) of 'love and longing for motherhood', in the light of the *Mirokubosatsu* statue clad with nuance of shadow as in love, Rainer Maria Rilke's articulation about life and longing, and philosophical claims that *chora* is both motherhood and untranslatable. Chapter Five articulates one's experience of 'embodiment' of the untranslatable as temporal, receptive and generative, in reference to other bodies and words: my grandmother, *Mirokubosatsu*, *hokabi* (containing *utsu*: hollowness and emptiness) and the Chinese ideogram of poetry 詩 (word-temple, latently filled with chant or shadow), and through proximate examination of the female artist's body (mine). My video work, *Gesture of Shadow*, externally captures metamorphosis of her shadow from a mountain to a butterfly. The excerpts of my journal writing, during the final research residency, witness a temporal transference of something external (*hoka*) into her body, anticipating its emergence as a birth of art.

As anyone struggles with that which resists translation in art, *The Untranslatable, a Poetic Place*, is written for both artists and audiences. Within the context of this thesis, 'the untranslatable' can be best defined as the life that drifts as it metamorphoses and transforms our experience in and reflection on the world in a more rich and poetic manner. As it 'transfers' in variant ways, it can only be embodied temporarily by the poetic work of art; in a poetic language that contains 'fertile silence', an architectural *body* that internalises emptiness/hollowness, or an enduring form of love that longs for motherhood. This embodiment is perceived and experienced as 'shadow light' (as truthful, an aid to knowledge) that shifts; an ambiguous image that shimmers; a nuance of love that trembles; or a poetic place that opens.