

Times of the Signs: translation proper as an analogy for modernity's semiosis

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***Abstract:** This paper examines Roman Jakobson's distinction between three kinds of translations involved in the interpretation of verbal signs: rewording, translation proper, and transmutation. What is revealing here is that Jakobson uses the word "translation" as both the set of all interpretive acts and as one type of interpretative act. This is because, I will argue, there is something about "translation proper" that makes it the most suitable analogy for describing what goes on in the act of semiotic interpretation. Unlike rewording and transmutation, translation does not express sameness or difference, but works through the transformation of signs in a realm that can only be described ultimately as empty and beyond sameness and difference. However, the notion of translation (proper) as the most appropriate analogy for interpreting linguistic signs is a modern one, being based as it is on the idea that signs in the past are equal to our own (there are no sacred sages in modernity) and the key to knowledge is translating the world as it presents itself to us from our own standpoint in a stable present moment.*

Modernity and the hailing of translation proper that goes with it, has been attacked for masking unequal representations and for avoiding the real issues that confront translation proper in the act of interpreting texts. These charges are valid, helpful, but not detrimental. A further argument is that translation proper is impossible because signs leak into one another across languages and texts, and so are never really proper to begin with. However, this argument ignores that to interpret a sign, no matter how plural it may be in meaning, means always for a moment to take a singular standpoint. Translation proper provides coherence to all pluralities.

1. The two understandings of translation

Roman Jakobson states that “the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign. . .”.¹ This translation can take three forms which Jakobson labels as: intralingual translation (“*rewording*”), interlingual translation (“*translation proper*”), and intersemiotic translation (“*transmutation*”). These “three kinds of translation” explicitly “distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign”. What is noteworthy here is the fact that Jakobson has used the same term “translation” to describe two different things: (a) the interpretation of a verbal sign and its transformation into another sign, and (b) translating between two mutually incomprehensible natural languages (“translation proper”).

It is essential to point out at this stage, as strongly emphasized by Umberto Eco in his book *Experiences in Translation*, that the use of translation in both cases should be seen as effectively *analogous*, and that “he does not say that interpreting and translating are always the same operation”.² However, what is important here is Jakobson’s decision to compare the meaning of a sign to translation proper, and not to the alternatives: rewording or transmutation. The analogy works when the assumption is made that understanding a sign and translating between languages are one and the same phenomenon, the latter being merely the most intense and most complete example of the former. In other words, translation between languages is the exemplar, the ideal form of all semiotic processes. It is the mold, the standard, the model from which all other semiotic processes compare themselves and describe themselves.

To understand the special status of “translation proper” in the fuller schema of all semiosis as translation, let us compare it to the other forms of translation (intralingual and intersemiotic) that Jakobson has mentioned. First of all, with intralingual translation there is a certain sameness between the original sign and its transformation. When we reword “dog” as “canine” we are still in the same verbal sign system (in this case, the English language). The sameness between both words is more marked than their difference. To mark their difference an effort must be made by the user of the sign system. The sameness is natural and given (“‘dog’ means ‘canine’”). The difference involves further thinking, further interpretation (“but ‘canine’ has a different nuance to ‘dog’”). On the other hand, a transmutation marks difference more than sameness. In terms of sign systems, there is nothing in common between source and target sign. For example, the word “dog” is just three circles with extra lines when seen as a picture and the picture of the dog is illegible

¹ Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, 114.

² Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, 71.

when read as letters. To describe the sameness between the two it is necessary, again, for the interpreter of the new sign to think further about the (intersemiotic) translation. In other words, it is necessary to involve something exterior to the sign systems the words and the pictures are part of because on their own, without outside intervention, both systems are utterly alien and different to one another. Intralingual translation strives to make a difference between signs that are fundamentally the same (“dog” and “canine”), whereas intersemiotic translation strives to find the sameness between signs that are fundamentally different (the word “dog” and a picture of a dog).

Where does translation proper fit into this scenario? Is it about sameness or difference? It would be nice to describe it as the happy medium between the two but this would be to miss the radical nature of translation, the characteristic that makes it the purest analogy for human linguistic understanding at its core. For with translation there is no ‘medium’. Translation works at that point where sameness and difference disappear into a zero point of pure empty form. When “dog” is translated as “犬” there is no sameness or difference between these signs. Instead there has been a complete shift between sign-systems to the extent that neither system overlaps. Both systems are standalone isolates. Either system (that of the source text or the target text) could disappear and be forever unknown, and the meaning would still remain (This is not the case in transmutation). Any external connections being made between both systems simply become further systems and further translations which are themselves isolates. Connections between the source sign and target sign in translation can only be made within the realm of non-signifiable emptiness, and hence cannot be made at all.

In this way, it is translation proper, and not the other kinds of translation, that demonstrates the bizarre human capacity to completely switch systems of signs while still meaning the same thing. The ‘same thing’ cannot be pointed at (i.e. signified), as this involves a further switch, a further translation. The ‘same thing’, that which a translation preserves, is formless and empty. That is to say, it cannot be given form and still be the same translation. And it is this signification through formlessness that makes translation the ultimate ‘signifier’ of all signification. This is why translation proper is the purest exemplar of all semiotic translations.

To make the same point but with a different concrete explanation, let me ask again what is the difference between rewording and transmutation, on the one hand, and translation proper on the other? The essential answer is that reworded and transmuted texts still need the existence of the source signs to be fully interpretable.

In other words, if I reword the word “dog” as “canine” I still need to have these two words in my text (otherwise the text will not be an intralingual translation but merely a new original text). Similarly, if I have the word “dog” and draw a picture of it, there needs to be some understanding that the picture is referring to or being informed by the word “dog” (otherwise it is simply an isolated and original picture of a dog). However, for me to translate “dog” as “犬” also means for me to erase the word “dog” and have this new word “犬” in its place (otherwise the text is not a translation but a multilingual rewording). Translation proper means that the new sign is utterly independent, textually, from the sign from which it was interpreted.

To explain again from yet another angle, rewording involves the growth of a text in time (new words are added, the text becomes longer to read) and transmutation involves the growth of a text in space (illustrations are added to a text, or an explanation is added to an illustration). However, translation proper, when done properly, is transcendent of time and space. It appears as a sign with its own interpretability unmoored, once it has appeared, to any other signs. Of course the objection could arise that, for example, a graded reader version of a classic novel in the same language is a standalone text which is no longer dependent on the original. Similarly a manga transmutation of a novel is an isolate. However, a graded reader is an impoverished version of the original, and a manga adaptation is an irreversible change (one cannot draw the original novel back into existence). Translation proper, when proper (which, of course is an ideal), will always mean that no impoverishment has occurred in the move from source to target text, and that both source and target texts can reproduce each other through reverse operations (back translations). Neither rewording nor transmutation can make these claims.

2. The modern discovery of translation

Jakobson’s description of translation, to repeat, makes it both the set of all semiotic processes and one element in this set. As such translation is both the universalization of the particular and the particularization of the universal. Proper translation exemplifies what happens in all translations, and all translations are like translation proper. But is the evocation of translation proper as the signifier for all signification something historical and contingent? In other circumstances, could one of the other forms of translation be seen as the dominant analogy? In another vision of semiotics from another time in history, could we be talking about how, to borrow (and distort)

Jakobson's words again, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its *transmutation* into some further, alternative sign?

Here I wish to argue that, indeed, the primacy of translation is something that has emerged in history and is consistent with the rise of modernity. If we look at translation proper in pre-modern history it tended to be a hidden and underemphasized activity. It is not that translation did not happen but that it was a more fluid exercise tending to be either sporadic and unsystematic or something that was let veer into the other categories of interpretation that stand between pure rewording and pure translation.

For example, David Bellos, in his well-received book on translation entitled *Is that a Fish in your Ear?*, uses the example of Christopher Columbus to illustrate the non-systematic nature of translation in pre-modernity. He describes how Columbus could operate in a variety of languages, orally and in writing. Bellos comments:

How many languages did Columbus know when he sailed the ocean in 1492? As in today's India, where a degree of intercomprehensibility exists among several of its languages, the answer would be somewhat arbitrary. It's unlikely Columbus even conceptualized Italian, Castilian, or Portuguese as distinct languages, for they did not yet have any grammar books. He was a learned man in being able to read and write the three ancient tongues. But beyond that, he was just a Mediterranean sailor, speaking whatever variety of language that he needed to do his job.³

The point to note here is that where one language began and one ended was quite vague in those eras prior to modern nationalism and the standardization of vernacular languages that came with it. As such, translation proper would not have been done in any proper systematic sense. What is also noteworthy is the fact that being learned was coterminous to being versed in chosen ancient tongues. Translation's role in the world of learning in this context was that of a tool in the emulation of ancient texts in their own languages, not as a means to present old texts in vernacular language. Ruth Copeland in her book *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* points out the secondary status of translation in the primary goal of understanding ancient texts in their ancient languages. She comments: "Within grammatical study, translation was considered to be a special

³ Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, 5.

aspect of textual commentary; within rhetorical study, translation was seen as a special form of imitation”.⁴

Similarly in Japan the ancient texts were in Chinese and the tradition was to keep them that way. Maruyama Masao points out how it was Ogyu Sorai, the reforming Edo period scholar, who first made the “discovery” that the ancient classics of China were being experienced as translations, a discovery that was only obvious after the fact. Maruyama commented:

What I think is great about Ogyu Sorai is that, with the long relationship Japan had with China, the intellectual class at least anyway could read and write classical Chinese, as though they had been completely educated in the Chinese classics. With that, Sorai makes the astonishing declaration that “the ‘Analects of Confucius’ and ‘Discourses of Mencius’ that we read are written in a foreign language. We have been reading them just as translations from long ago”. It was what they call a Columbus’ egg situation. [My translation]⁵

The denigration of translation in premodernity was, I would argue, very much in keeping with certain basic assumptions that informed the premodern world. Foremost, was the assumption that earlier and later times were not equal. In the premodern world earlier times were more sacred or pure or sagacious. The consequences being that semiosis, the translation of signs into each other, tended to be temporally and spatially asymmetrical. The signs of the ancient texts were more pure than that of any vulgar vernacular translation. In other words, contrary to my earlier description above, translation proper was not to be seen as beyond space and time (i.e. a symmetrical shift in sign systems that are isolates but equals) but an inherent transmutation where that mutation was a profane distortion of a sacred original.

A common view was that the readership history of a sacred text is the history of its constant degradation and obscuration. The sagacity of the ancient Sages could only ever be viewed through the foggy glimpse of a pure past that recedes ever

⁴ Copeland, 10.

⁵ 「ぼくが荻生徂徠は偉いとおもったのは、日本が中国と長い関係にあって、少なくとも知識階級は漢文は読めるし、書くし、中国古典をすっかり自分の教養にしたつもりになっていた。そこへ徂徠は、「われわれの読んでいる『論語』、『孟子』というのは外国語で書かれている。われわれは昔から翻訳でよんでいるだけだ」と爆弾宣言をした。これはいわばコロンバスの卵です。」丸山真男、加藤周一『翻訳と日本の近代』, 24.

further into the dim mists of time. Part of Fukuzawa Yukichi's modernization program, indeed, was to highlight and attack this premodern assumption. In *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* he points out that for the premodern Japanese:

All they could do was lament that their learning fell far short of the sages of old. Therefore, the longer the Way of the sages is transmitted to men of later generations, the more impoverished it becomes. With the passage of time it reduces man's knowledge and virtue while increasing the number of evil and ignorant people. Since the Way has been transmitted from generation to generation until our own degenerate times, it can be shown by calculation that the world has already gone to the dogs.⁶

One plank of Fukuzawa's modernization project was to reverse this assumption and introduce the more positivist perspective that knowledge is something to be gained through discovery of the new, not the old, and is something that increases and improves with the passage of time, and not the opposite, as had been assumed. To discover new knowledge one must signify it. To signify it, one must translate it. And thus for Fukuzawa translation was a potent engine for driving forth the modernization of Japan. The point was not to replace Chinese classics with Western ones but to translate what was to be known into one's own language without any sense of self-disqualification. As Yanabu Akira comments: "Fukuzawa, whilst seeing fully the advanced nature of Western civilization, also always commenced from words that were alive in the reality of Japan. From this point, he constructed words, seeking to open up the perspective of civilization". [My translation]⁷

One way of understanding the transformation from pre-modernity to modernity is to borrow Karatani Kojin's notion in *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* of an "inversion of a semiotic constellation". For Karatani, it seems, much of what we take for granted in modernity, such as the existence of realistic landscapes to be painted, or inner selves to be expressed in writing, are discoveries derived from a new semiotic constellation that sees a singularity and homogeneity in our representations of the world. For instance, whereas pre-modernity allowed for kanji to enjoy figurative value and beauty in their own right and a defiance of

⁶ Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, 199.

⁷ 「...福沢は、西洋文明の先進性を十分認めながら、他方、いつでも日本の現実に生きていることばから出発して、そこからことばを組み立て、その彼方に文明の展望を開こうとしていたのである。」柳父章『翻訳成立事情』, 38.

standard transcriptions, modernity and its inverted semiotic constellation “requires the repression of the signification, or figurative language (Chinese characters) that precedes ‘things’, as well as the existence of a language that is supposedly transparent”.⁸ Modernity, if we are to bundle together Karatani’s various examples, seems to be about seeing an equality between the signs of the world out there (the world in modernity has “a homogenous sense of space, a bourgeois society”)⁹ which means that the value signs must have to be read and intelligible dwell within the interpreter. With this new found status ascribed to the interpreter comes, I would argue, a new found respect for translation proper. For it is translation proper that reveals most ideally how meaning and interpretation can move between interpreters in a world where signs no longer enjoy the hierarchies figurative usage can grant.

Modernity did not bring the invention of translation and of course translation had always existed. Rather, modernity revalued translation. In the modern world, languages are no longer vernacular unwritten dialects that fade into one another as one goes from village to village. Instead, they are clearly defined, separate, standalone, standard languages that straddle entire nations ensuring that the farmers in the villages and the literati in the cities all know what language they speak and what language they do not. In such a world, a translator’s services are easier to peddle and to bill. Similarly, the modern world holds no languages, ancient or otherwise, to be sacred. Translation can move freely between all tongues in this age of equality, reason, and discovery.

Borrowing Karl Mannheim’s insights, we can suggest that modernity has produced two broad styles of thought: Enlightenment and Romanticism.¹⁰ Very generally speaking, Enlightenment thought, which values individualism and rationalism, embraces the modernity project uncritically while Romanticist thought offers a critique of and reaction to modernity through the espousal of group consciousness and the acceptance of alternative non-rational visions. This dichotomy can be seen accordingly in the two main trends in modern translation theory: domesticating French *belle infidèle* and foreignizing German romanticism. The difference can be summarized through Friedrich Schleiermacher’s description

⁸ Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 61. Karatani, in fact, discusses the influence translation had on Meiji writers (who were also often translators), in particular Futabatei Shimei, and describes how they found new voices, genres and styles as they engaged and reflected on their own translation work. This was in contrast to the early Meiji period when translations tended to be rough adaptations. See 『日本近代学の起源』, 86–95.

⁹ Karatani, 62–3.

¹⁰ Mannheim, “Essays on sociology and social psychology”

of translation strategies as being either that which brings the writer to the reader (domestication) or that which brings the reader to the writer (foreignization).¹¹

A domesticating strategy with its emphasis on the reader as an ahistorical individual liberated through membership of a standard language community is very much a part of the Enlightenment mode of thought: the national polity is a contract to protect individual liberty, the national language is a tool to allow individual free expression (and each national language is as good as the other for doing this), and translation is a device to facilitate the enjoyment of world literatures by individuals unhindered by the prescriptive restrictions of collective tradition or cultural affiliations. By contrast, foreignizing strategies are justified through a Romanticist prism. There are no individuals, only collective cultural groupings with their own self-contained semiotic modes. The national polity is strong through collective bonds of nationalist identity which can be broken when the outside world starts to become too homogenized and too transparent. Foreignizing builds differences with the other outside hence strengthening the unity within.

Whilst Romanticism, with its cravings for opacity, may seem like a rejection of modernity, it nevertheless is founded on the same principle as that of Enlightenment modes of thought: that national languages come in unified standard self-contained packages. As such, Romanticism, even in its embracement of foreignizing translation strategies, is always still working within the assumption that interlingual translation is translation proper. Romanticism, whether it be to do with translation, literature, art, or politics, was always too wedded to notions of standardized non-plural national identities to ever fully break free of modernity.

3. The always final standpoint of translation

Modernity, of course, has its critics. And so too does translation when presented in its modern guise, as the equal shift of signification between languages under the rules of universal equivalence. Those who want to go beyond modernity to the posture and condition of post-modernity (which here includes post-colonialism), when they turn their attention to translation, seek to uncover the hidden violence and inequalities that occur with translation proper and its singular obsession with equivalence. Translation proper may occur on a plane of equal signs but it plows on mercilessly according to hidden social power vectors. On three grounds in particular

¹¹ Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translating”, 42.

post-modernity attacks translation proper: (1) its improprieties (2) its impotencies, and (3) its impositions.

First of all, there is the fact that translation takes place in the context of real power relations to the extent that translation will often be an instrument in the subjugation of one language group by another.¹² This is all true and needs to be taken into account when surveying the role and function of translation. The modern view that translation bridges cultures and brings people together needs to be asserted with less naivety. However, this postmodern view of translation does not truly go beyond modernity. Translation proper is still a neutral act in itself. It is its application and social circumstances that is controversial. Besides, one can make the counter claim that translation proper has the potential to keep alive marginalized languages and cultures as much as it has the power to destroy them.

A second criticism is that translation proper is rare. So rare, indeed, that one can wonder whether translation proper is really the proper instrument for dealing with most acts of semiosis, as they have existed in history or as they will appear in our coming future of postmodern multimedia hyper-semiotic fragmentation. Having a clear source text from which to produce a clear target text is a situation that does not truly describe the world of translation where we find such constant cases of translation-defying texts such as speech acts and genre specific lexical formulae. The translation of salutations, knock-knock jokes, or Zen koans, to give some examples, entails ripping the word-signs of the source text from social norms and genre expectations that do not exist in the target text context. Similarly, texts often work through a multitude of sign-systems: modern poetry written in wild fonts, text messages with symbols and graphics, movies with culturally specific body-gestures. This is all true of course, but what such complications reveal is how translation proper can only work truly properly with texts that are rewordable in their own language (note, for example, how knock-knock jokes cannot be reworded in English)¹³ or texts that are purely words without other sign systems interfering (such as illustrations or smiley icons). In other words, the original schemata that

¹² As Niranjana describes it: “Translation thus produces strategies of containment. By employing certain modes of representing the other — which it thereby also brings into being — translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations, or objects without history.” See Tejaswini Niranjana *Siting Translation*, 3.

¹³ Although James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, that great gedanken of translation philosophy does oblige with a seeming attempt: “Knock knock. War’s where! Which war? The Twinnis. Knock knock. Woos without! Without what! An apple. Knock knock.” *Finnegans Wake*, 330.

translation proper is different to rewording or transmutation remains correct and is proven by the difficulties translation proper faces in the real world where many texts are not truly rewordable or devoid of ‘noise’ from other semiotic systems.

The final attack on modern notions of translation proper seeks not to complicate the picture but to reject it completely. This is the idea that the modern notion of translation as a neutral shift of signs is wrong and impossible. When “dog” is rendered “犬” this is not because the signs are equivalent and equal, but because an ideological violence has been committed. Assigning equivalence to both signs means to grant domination to one of the signs. Translation, when done properly, means implanting a new sign on an old one, like Columbus erasing an old world by pretending to himself that he had discovered a new one. Translation is not about equality (since it crushes a source sign), it is not about reason (since it destroys the alternative views and arguments of the other through hegemonic resignification), and it does not produce discoveries (since it destroys that which the source text sought to express).

Post-modernity’s solution to the violence of translation proper is to ensure that translation is always done improperly, that the erased source sign always has a chance to reemerge through the cracks in the improperly translated target text. An example is Jacques Derrida’s pondering over the phrase “he war” in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. He points out how the phrase suggests both doing “war” and he “was” (where “war” is a German verb). He notes how the phrase has already roughly translated itself and how it invites translation as much as it prohibits it.¹⁴ It is this kind of muddle, this mutation in the translation process that postmodernity would want us to make paradigmatic of all translation. These in-between cases are not the exception to the smooth rules of translation proper, but the pathologies that manifest the latent false delusions of a translation ever being proper. What Joyce’s “he war” makes explicit is the fact that all signs harbor within them a multitude of interpretations and when a translator chooses one he or she has erased that multitude, creating the violent illusionary singularity of a target sign. In this account, perhaps, the analogy for interpreting a verbal sign is not translation but transmutation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Derrida, *Ulysse gramophone, deux mots pour Joyce*, 40. See also discussion in Benjamin, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy*.

¹⁵ Derrida, in his article “Des Tours de Babel” explicitly attacks Jakobson’s analogy of translation proper for interpretation on the grounds that it is based on the notion of a transparency in the move between languages. The boundaries between languages are vague and leak into one another and analogies, themselves, (such as “Babel”) are language specific. Translation proper can have no proper universally translatable analogy. Derrida takes this

However, Umberto Eco has commented in depth on the issue of translating *Finnegans Wake* with all its “plurilingual” issues, noting that Joyce himself may have dabbled in translating his own work into Italian and French. Eco remarks:

The fact remains that *Finnegans Wake* is not even a plurilingual text: or, rather, it is, but from the standpoint of the English language. It is a plurilingual text written as an English-speaker conceived of one. It seems to me therefore that Joyce’s decision to translate himself was based on the idea of thinking of the target text (French or Italian) as a plurilingual text the way a French- or Italian-speaker might have conceived of one.¹⁶

The essential point here is that *Finnegans Wake* is “from the standpoint of the English language”, focusing on the key word “standpoint”. What is being recognized here is that any text, to be a text (and not a random array of squiggles) must be based on an experience of intelligibility, of comprehension, of verbal signs decoded. Here, in fact we can reverse Jakobson’s analogy and say that it is not just that interpreting a verbal sign is like translation, but that translation is like interpreting a verbal sign. When we interpret a verbal sign we experience a moment of pure comprehension, otherwise our interpretation would not be coherent and, would be in essence, an act of non-comprehension. And as C.S. Pierce pointed out, when we interpret a sign, create an interpretant, this interpretant, stable as it is, will become a further sign.¹⁷

Of course, this is the potentially eternal game of semiosis which creates the insecurities of meaning deferred and impossibilities of full comprehension of any texts that has haunted and obsessed the post-modern project. And yet all these insecurities, aporias, deferrals and erasures, are, like the plurilinguistics of *Finnegans Wake* built upon standpoints that are grounded in a present act of comprehension. In this way, translation proper, like interpreting a verbal sign, is not

leakage between languages to attack Jakobson’s overall distinction between inter- and intra-lingual language. However, as Vinay Dharwadker has pointed out, this could arguably lead to the absurd assumption that: “In other words, since Derrida cannot distinguish in a philosophically satisfactory manner between, say, the boundaries of Kannada and the boundaries of English, any act of translating a text from Kannada into English is exactly like any act of rewording an English text in English itself, which is indistinguishable from any act of rephrasing a Kannada text in Kannada”. See Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel” and Dharwadker, “Ramanujan’s theory and practice”, 128.

¹⁶ Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, 108.

¹⁷ This is explained in detail in Dinda L. Gorrée’s discussion of C.S. Pierce. See Gorrée, *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation*, 56 *et passim*.

about a lost past or a deferred future but is utterly in the present offering a comprehension that is at once from a unavoidable standpoint but, at the same time, productive of future potentialities for new perspectives. The deeper point is that whilst an act of interpretation is an act of seeing opposites (what is and what is not represented in a sign), it is also about uniting those opposites in a present act of singular comprehension. Post-modernity is correct to remind us that translation proper can only ever be one standpoint. But only one standpoint nevertheless will always be that point from which all the world, with all its pluralities and innate opposites forms itself for us, for our interpretation and from which we are both equally creators and discoverers. As Nishida Kitaro has written:

In the world as unity of opposites, moving from the formed towards the forming, past and future, negating each other, join in the present; the present, as a unity of opposites, has form, and moves, forming itself, from present to present. The world moves, as one single present, from the formed to the forming. The form of the present, as unity of opposites, is a style of the productivity of the world. This world is a world of *poiesis*.¹⁸

Translation is ultimately the analogy for how meaning in this world is ultimately formless but never without its sign. And how recognizing emptiness as not different to form and form as not different to emptiness remains a surprisingly modern standpoint.

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¹⁸ Nishida Kitaro, *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*, 186.

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