

Apichatpong WEERASETHAKUL (Thailand) and  
SAKAMOTO Ryuichi

## “A Conversation with the Sun (VR)”

### Second Report: Observation of Rehearsals and Interviews

KWON Sanghae

#### Observation of Rehearsals

Schedule: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., September 21, 2022

Location: 5th Gymnasium, Athletic Building B1,  
National Olympics Memorial Youth Center

This report describes the rehearsal held at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center on September 21, as well as interviews conducted thereafter.

The rehearsal mainly consisted of multiple VR footage tests, each with slightly different content (Fig. 1). Although the test venue differed significantly from the actual performance environment in terms of spatial area, the material and pattern of the flooring, and video and sound equipment, wearing an HMD made it possible to experience VR footage reproducing the actual performance space. The content of the footage had changed a great deal since August. For example, a scene in which the Sun rises from the ground and gives birth to multiple smaller suns, a scene in which fabric falls down from just above the screen, and scenes of a giant clay statue and a cave had been newly added. The feeling of encountering the lifelike presence of the clay statue that appears at the midpoint and that of slowly rotating inside the cave were physical experiences only feasible with VR, which would have been difficult to achieve in real life.

Thus, both the format and content of the coproduction continued to transform. What was the process through which this collaboration was being carried out? After the VR test, I interviewed Apichatpong WEERASETHAKUL and VR creator TANIGUCHI Katsuya (Rhino Studios) ahead of the completion of the project.



Figure 1: Weerasethakul testing the VR (Photo: Kwon Sanghae)

#### Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul

—There were a lot of changes in the footage from last month’s version. Is this version basically the finished product?

**Weerasethakul:** Yes, it’s almost finished. But we haven’t tried it on the same screen as the actual performance yet, so I think that what you saw today will only be half of the full experience.

—I heard that this is your first time working on a VR project. Is there anything about this production that’s been different from previous ones?

**Weerasethakul:** Yes, it’s been completely different. The collaboration with various people and especially the production using computer technology was very different from filmmaking and full of new things for me. Normally, I make very simple drawings to convey what I want to do during production, but this time, I had to draw lots of storyboards (Fig. 2).

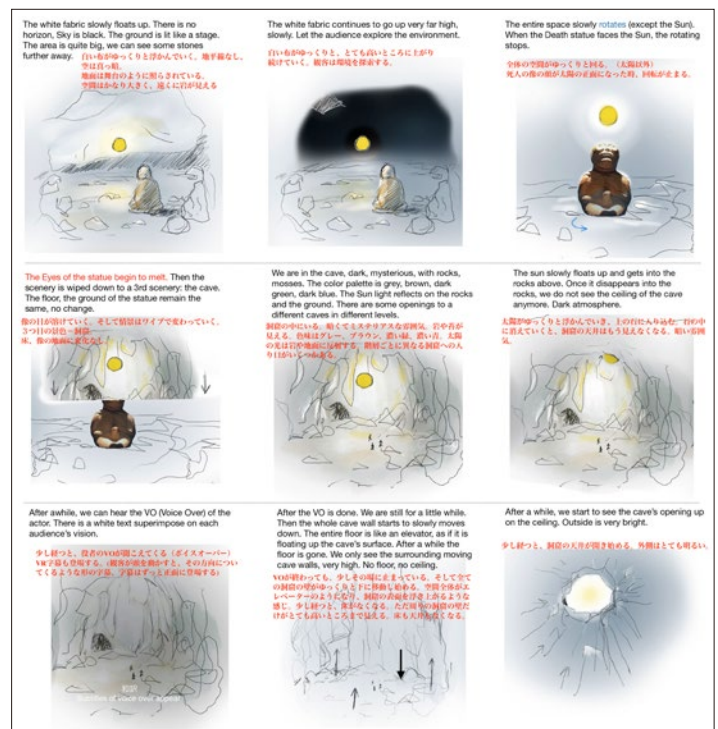


Figure 2: Weerasethakul’s storyboard (Credit: Arts Commons Tokyo)

—This international coproduction was carried out amid travel restrictions, and nearly the entire production process was completed remotely. That being said, I’m sure that on-site rehearsals are important to the overall process. What sorts of things can you only discover in an actual location?

**Weerasethakul:** Most of all, it’s being able to experience that space. This work has a mechanism whereby viewers can perceive each other within the VR as balls of light. By testing the VR in an actual space, you can actually experience this feature. You can also experience the moment when the installation with a movie projected on both sides of a screen switches to VR. Devising how these aspects are perceived by the audience is our current task.

—This project was created through collaboration among people working in various fields, such as Arts Commons Tokyo and Rhino Studios. Is there anything that has left a particular impression on you?

**Weerasethakul:** What's left the biggest impression on me is the process of creative collaboration among three groups specializing in film, VR, and the performing arts. With film, the director can guide the audience to look at something specific, but with VR, you can't control the audience's gaze. In that sense, I feel like VR has a more open aspect.

### Interview with Taniguchi Katsuya

—How was it collaborating with Apichatpong?

**Taniguchi:** It was very interesting. There are ways in which our thinking is similar and also ways in which it's different, so we started by probing those. He works in film, and I work in VR. I found it fascinating how these are so similar and yet completely different. Even though we both work with images, which are something visible to the eye, it was interesting creating them together with totally different ways of thinking.

—I heard that Apichatpong visited Rhino Studios in Tokyo several times in September. What did you work on at those times?

**Taniguchi:** The process was always that Apichatpong would send me a kind of timeline, I'd create footage based on that for him to experience, and we'd discuss the footage (Fig. 3). Then, I'd remake it. Each time, the footage kept changing, as if the previous versions hadn't even existed.



Figure 3: Weerasethakul doing tests at Rhino Studios (Credit: Arts Commons Tokyo)

—What have you found the most rewarding in this collaboration with Apichatpong?

**Taniguchi:** Even though I've created various things in VR, Apichatpong will present ideas that had never occurred to me. When we create those together, there have been times when it revealed a world I'd never seen before, which was really amazing. It's been one thing like that after another. I'm glad to have been given the opportunity to contemplate things I normally wouldn't think about.