

Company Derashinera, LEE Ren Xin (Malaysia),
LIU Juichu (Taiwan), and Jung Young Doo (Korea)

“Hourglass”

First Report: Preparation

SUZUKI Rieko

Creation at the Intersection of Body and Language

The Global Theater Project “Ba (Place)” (the project name at the time of application) was launched as a platform for Company Derashinera, led by ONODERA Shuji, to come together with various artists based in other parts of Asia to engage in dialogue, creation, and presentation of their work. Derashinera has regularly engaged in international co-productions since conducting workshops and performances of *Another Story* and *An Occurrence of a Night* in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2016. In December 2021, they welcomed KAJIHARA Akiko, who is active in Europe with France as her base, LEE Ren Xin (Malaysia), and LIU Juichu (Taiwan), and premiered *Toge*, a work inspired by George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, at the Kanagawa Arts Theatre (KAAT) as the first phase of this project. This fiscal year, building on these achievements, they plan to hold an intensive 10-day workshop and a work-in-progress showing in late December 2022 for their new piece, *Hourglass*.

Onodera said of the impact of the first phase, “I have the feeling that the experience with *Toge* will serve as a launchpad in a big way. International co-productions are often highlighted for the cultural exchange aspect, but I feel this project is more than that; it is an opportunity to extend the base of what I’ve been doing even further. There are many ways to describe what we do—non-verbal theater, physical theater—but I want to solidify the uniqueness of our work. Meeting the members with whom I worked in 2021 and 2022 is definitely a plus for staying true to this ambition.”

Derashinera’s style, which isn’t strictly dance or mime, allows for individual bodies to converge and create narratives by setting up scenes while building relationships. Even though there is a textual guide (original work), they don’t strictly follow the plot. This approach seems to have brought various discoveries for the participants from abroad as well. Lee Ren Xin, based in Malaysia and actively creating and presenting her own works, reflected on *Toge*, saying, “I feel that different parts of the work offer different experiences. In some parts, we invite the audience to experience the texture of the body, and in others, we show social connections. I found it interesting that each scene was distinct, yet seamlessly connected.” Liu Juichu, who met Onodera at an audition in Taiwan in 2018 and is participating for the fourth time, had been trained in dance from elementary to high school, and majored in theater in college. “Our studies focused on physical training for dance and academic

theories for drama, so we might not have had much experience in mixing language and body in expression. Derashinera’s works are non-verbal, but there are scripts, and each scene has its own color. I have to understand those shades and think about how to use my body. Having the script gives me a sense of what I should do and where to start, and I find it comfortable being able to express that freely. There is also the aspect of carrying out various tasks as performers in the live performance, and I was surprised at how watching the streamed version of *Toge* had stimulated my imagination differently from what was written in the text,” Liu added.

Although Derashinera had previously used pieces based on an “original work” or took literary works as motifs, *Toge* was actually the first time they had created a textual script before the production. It started as an attempt to share an image of the piece as soon as possible, as the planned rehearsal period had been shortened due to quarantine measures against the spread of COVID-19. However, it helped expand ideas and enrich the creative process.

Hourglass, currently in preparation, is structured around Bruno Schulz’s short story *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. The narrative of a person, “I,” who visits a sanatorium in the suburbs to see his father and finds himself wandering in a time and space where the past and present, and reality and fantasy, mix, rejects logical understanding and explanation. At the same time, it includes many elements that stimulate bodily sensations, such as repeated depictions of sleepiness and sleeping. Onodera said, “I felt a desire to tackle poetic language, and I feel motifs like dreams and memories are close to what we’ve been doing at Derashinera. Given that this is a work-in-progress, I think the focus is more on creating several pieces rather than assembling a complete work.”

Online meetings with each cast member began in early December, just before the residential rehearsals in Tokyo. Discussions revolved around how to elevate the original work into a performance. Onodera and company member FUJITA Momoko explained the vision, including the conditions of the venue, stage design and lighting, and the use of space (which can be seen as the start of image exchange through “language”). They also gave “homework” related to ideas for movement and choreography. There were some intriguing words heard here, such as “multiple people playing a single role,” “Noh,” and “male–female duo.” An experiment was about to begin, where the images of language left by Schulz would clash and mix with the language of physical art that Derashinera has constructed, and the body language of the participants from different backgrounds, including Jung Young Doo from Korea, who is participating for the first time.

* Online interview with Lee Ren Xin on September 6, interpreted by IWASAKI Mark Yudai

* Online interview with Liu Juichu on September 6, interpreted by YAMAZAKI Rieko

* Online interview with Onodera Shuji and Fujita Momoko on November 14



From an online meeting