

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

“Hourglass”

Report 3: Reflection Interview

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Interview: ONODERA Shuji × FUJITA Momoko

—The showing for this project, *Hourglass*, was a short work in the Company Derashinera style, depicting, with a focus on bodily expression, the strange dream world composed by Bruno Schulz. Including the scenic design, sound, and lighting, it turned out to be highly polished for a work-in-progress.

Fujita: We had actually planned to take more time to experiment than ever before. However, as we also had plans to present a somewhat finished piece through video streaming, we inevitably went in the direction of completing it in a hurry. Even so, I’m satisfied that these 10 days were very well spent. In particular, we’ve worked with both LEE Ren Xin and LIU Juichu before, and just giving them a small seed of an idea, they’d expand upon it vibrantly, so I felt once again that we could create great work together.

Onodera: The relationship between a director and actors or dancers tends to follow a pattern of “convey à reproduce.” So, after the show, I was pleased that in the post-performance talk with the members who came from overseas, there were comments like “I wanted to make the strange world of the original author and the director even stranger” and “I was able to exercise my imagination.” Juichu, who came from Taiwan, said that in her local scene, most projects only demand either dancing or acting, so she finds it very enjoyable to do both at Derashinera. In this workshop, what each person wanted to do and our desires matched well, so I think we were able to form a wonderful relationship.

Fujita: I’m glad we were able to continue this project with *Knife* in 2020, *Toge* in 2021, and now into 2022. While learning from others about contract documentation and overseas remittances, we’ve managed to do these things on our own, albeit with some unfamiliarity. Along the way, it was encouraging that all the participants always had a positive perspective on this project. While we don’t have a concrete plan, after the COVID-19 situation improves, I’d like to present this work abroad.

—The first time I observed the intensive workshop for *Hourglass* was on the second day. At that point, I think the movements and flow for the opening scenes were beginning to jell. It was a fairly fast pace, but what kind of work and discussions led up to that?

Onodera: I think the second day was when we held a workshop led by KAJIHARA Akiko in the morning, grasped the theme of the work, and began to create specific scenes. The idea of having a dancer hold a workshop came about when I contracted COVID-19 during the project before last, *Knife*, and was quarantined in a hotel. As the rest of the cast tested negative and were able to rehearse, I had each of them lead a workshop that I watched online. Derashinera member SAKIYAMA Rina, Kajihara Akiko, and Juichu all led workshops. At that time, I realized that

this method could be used to gather movement elements and create textures, apart from what I wanted to do as a director. By examining each person’s skills—for example, if Kajihara leads the workshop, then sticking to her skills—we can in a way share more of what we want to do. I had previously asked Kajihara to hold a workshop for the contemporary Noh Collection IX *Taketori* to help explain to the performers what I wanted to do, and it went very well. So, I asked about doing this again as an evolution of that, and when they conducted the workshops, everyone started moving and creating elements for the scenes.

—I think what you just said made me better understand that what you’re doing in this project is *directing*, not *choreographing*. The performers must develop their own *body language*, that is, what they can express with their own bodies, in the rehearsal studio and propose it.

Onodera: Yes, that’s right. Also, how they deform or abstract their body language will, I think, become the color of the company. The members this time had good chemistry, even in terms of how to develop everyday gestures, for example. Although Ren Xin and Juichu may have regulated themselves somewhat by looking at the bodily expression of Fujita, Kajihara, and Sakiyama, who have been working with me for a long time, it was very interesting to me how those two, they created a subtlety and energy that no Japanese person could embody. For instance, when Ren Xin appeared on stage and breathed heavily, I felt that “there’s no Japanese person like this.” Even with a slight gesture, the way she reveals her body is different. That kind of energy and strength is something you don’t see often in Japan, especially among women. Of course, whether that’s due to cultural differences or individual differences, I still don’t know. However, meeting such people has enriched my life, and I consider this project to also be a journey in search of such encounters.

—So far, the destination of this journey is set in Asia, isn’t it?

Onodera: I feel that I’m focusing on the region of Asia as a sort of research subject. As I mentioned earlier, the question of how physicality and the culture behind it are connected is not something that can be answered simply by working together a few times. That’s why I want to focus on Asia and keep examining this question. Then, if possible, I would like to show our work in Europe someday to see what kind of reactions we would get there. When creating with people from overseas, I always have a feeling like “we’re all the same,” but there must be some kind of originality or identity of our own behind that, and we must not forget to think about that. Isn’t extolling diversity leading to monotony? So, I feel that clinging to what is being blurred by that may provide clues for creating new expressions.

—During rehearsals, communication was in Japanese and English. IWASAKI Mark Yudai, the interpreter, is also an actor, and his approach of supporting rehearsals while sharing the content and flow of the work was impressive. I felt that the use of “language” here was a key to bringing out the “body language.”

Onodera: There are parts that can be understood even without words, but I think the reason the participants from overseas can say “I see, that’s what it means” is that Mark was there. Also, and this is something I felt when I had Mark join us in the previous work *Toge*, but once we go through an interpreter, I feel that a black box in a good sense is created.

Listening to my talk with the sense of “it seems that’s what he’s saying” may stimulate their imagination. So, even if I were to become able to use English, I think it would still be better to have Mark there.

—So, you are saying that having an interpreter as a third party not only arouses imagination, but also guarantees a certain objectivity that what the director is saying may not be the only correct answer.

Onodera: Exactly. Pina BAUSCH’s company (Tanztheater Wuppertal) is made up of members from various countries, and although they are each proficient in languages, I feel that more than that they have a strong sense of wanting to “share the same image.” I think that’s a good way to be.

In the first place, in international co-productions, we often have to try hard to communicate in English, but as a result, we may get caught up in explanations, or lose sight of what we have expressed with our own languages and bodies. NUNG Van Minh, a previous participant from Vietnam, and I used to communicate almost intuitively without using English. He had good intuition and could participate without any problem, but gradually the people around him started to learn Vietnamese and they would try hard to explain things to him. I thought that process was very important in such projects. In fact, Jung Young Doo, who participated for the first time this time, is very proficient in Japanese, but because of that, I ended up relying on him and making him feel uneasy at times. Superficial explanations came first, and I feel like that might have confined his body. As he takes things very carefully and seriously, I think it would have been better if I had been more creative in how and how much I explained things, even in Japanese.

—In the post-performance talk mentioned earlier, you said that through this project, you aim to acquire a new “body language” and eventually establish an expressive field beyond categories. If there is an environment to further spread the core of Derashinera’s expression, its thoughts and methods, and to cultivate talent, what would it look like?

Onodera: Dance has various elements, and it’s a legitimate enjoyment to see how far you can go in terms of difficulty, how visually imaginative you can make it, and how much you can improve technique. But I don’t aim for such superhuman and technical goals; I want to focus on and pursue body expressions that make people feel the beauty of everyday life, relationships, flow of feelings, and sometimes even clumsiness. To do that, I want to unravel as much as possible the things that have become habitual and commonplace.

After the performance, Ren Xin said, “What I’m doing is not dance.” When Juichu heard that, she said, “It’s Ren Xin style.” Whether or not you can have your own style is the greatest strength in expression. So, if we can convey the message that we should not only hone our skills within a certain category, but also take them to the point where we can change them into our own style, the future of education and the establishment of an environment may change as well.

While preparations for the overall concept, such as meetings with the scenic designer and stage manager, had been underway since around January 2022, the performers had only 10 days to build a relationship with the prepared environment (stage set, co-performers), weaving the story’s time with their bodies. During this process, the fact that “language” (including the script) became an important tool for sharing the image of the work and a challenge is intriguing.

Also, the purpose of this project, which was to explore new possibilities of expression by bringing together differences in physicality based on cultural and social backgrounds, is abstract, and the results are hard to grasp unless you are an expert or a connoisseur who knows what to look for. However, that is exactly why there is significance not only in Onodera’s endeavor to persistently cling to it over and over but also, although it may be self-flattery, in recording the process of this experiment in this way.

