舞台芸術国際共同制作事業
INTERNATIONAL CREATIONS IN PERFORMING ARTS

FY2024 International Creations in Performing Arts

Process Observer Reports

Kuro Tanino & T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National (France) “Maître Obscur” / Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos) (Taiwan)“Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains” / KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre & Vanishing Point (UK)“Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey” / Jun Kawasaki & Wonki Jeong (Korea)Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan-Yonaguni-Jeju “Then Dance with Souls” “Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO - Song of diaspora” / Sugatsu Kanayama & S. Lee (US) Work-In-Progress “K-TTR” / Momoko Shiraga & Lattanakone Insisiengmay (Laos)Asian Object Theater: Laos-Japan Collaboration among Deaf and Hearing Performers “Things Alive From Darkness / ສິ່ງທີ່ມີຊີວິດ ຈາກຄວາມມືດ”

JAPANFOUNDATION
国際交流基金

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The Japan Foundation
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Preface

The Japan Foundation has been implementing **International Creations in Performing Arts**, a program that supports efforts by artists based in Japan and overseas to create new performing arts productions through exchange, since FY2021.

The program focuses on an **observer** system that records the processes from the early stages of production to the performances through third-party perspectives. By making the production processes of international creations more visible, the observer system aims to benefit future collaborations. At the same time, we hope to raise audiences' awareness of international exchange by taking them behind the scenes of international coproductions, to which they would normally have limited exposure.

This year, the fourth since the program was launched, six highly unique works were produced. Reports from the observers who followed the production process of each work have been compiled.

When artists with differing values and sensibilities collaborate with one another, various discussions and sometimes even frictions emerge. However, it is by overcoming these and engaging in creative work with a spirit of tolerance that new forms of expression are born.

We hope that these reports will demonstrate the richness and potential of exchange through performing arts and, at the same time, lead to the further development of international exchange projects between artists based in Japan and overseas.

The Japan Foundation March 2025

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"Maître Obscur"

Minako FUKUOKA

Born in Toyama Prefecture; resident of Toyama City. After working at a travel agency, she joined the Toyama City Cultural Foundation, which operates Aubade Hall (Toyama City Theater for Performing Arts), in 1996. Since then, she has been involved in self-produced, citizen-participation-type, and overseas/domestic artist-in-residence performances in various genres including opera, musicals, drama, and dance. Her recent work includes "Museum on the Stage in Aubade Hall," "Tanino Kuro & All-Toyama," "Theater Yoga," and "Rakuichi Rakuza." She currently serves as head of the foundation's administration and planning division.

Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos) (Taiwan)
"Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains"

Maaru HIYAMA

©Yuji Oku

Curator born in 1994 in Osaka. She has been working as a curator since 2023 at the art center BUG, operated by Recruit Holdings Co., Ltd., and currently serves as the guest curator for a special exhibition series at the Museum on Echigo-Tsumari MonET (2023–2026). Her recent curation projects include the Ai Tanaka solo exhibition *Reverse String* (Museum on Echigo-Tsumari MonET, Niigata, 2024) and the Yousuke Amemiya solo exhibition *A Q & I* (BUG, Tokyo, 2023).She also explores curation methodologies beyond exhibition practices, such as by designing and running the online program for art workers "CRAWL" (BUG, 2024).

KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre & Vanishing Point (UK)
"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey"

Aki ICHIKAWA

Writer and editor. She graduated from the Faculty of Letters of Keio University with a degree in philosophy. After working for a theatrical journal, she now edits, researches, and writes for performance programs and theater public relations magazines and works on personal interviews. She has edited and written programs for *Kafka on the Shore* directed by Yukio Ninagawa and based on the novel of the same name by Haruki Murakami since it premiered in 2012. Present at the scenes of many creative endeavors, from classic works to contemporary plays both foreign and Japanese, she delivers the words of people involved in expression and creation. The works she has authored include *Kato Takeshi Talks about Acting: Whatever Karma Gave Me This Able Body* (Chikumashobo Ltd.).

Jun Kawasaki & Wonki Jeong (Korea)

Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan-Yonaguni-Jeju "Then Dance with Souls"
Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO - Song of diaspora"

Hajime OISHI

Writer born in 1975 in Tokyo Metropolis. He is the president of B.O.N, an organization dedicated to travel and festival writing and photography. After working for the editorial department of a music journal, he became a freelance writer in 2007. Since then, he continues to research and write about themes related to local culture. The main works he has authored include *Encountering Other Worlds* (Sangyo Henshu Center Co., Ltd.), *The South Sea Songline* (Kilty Books), *A Postwar History of Bon Festival Dances* (Chikumashobo Ltd.), *Going to Meet Residents of the Deep Tokyo* (Shobunsha), *Japanese Matsu-rhythm* (Artes Publishing), and *Nippon Dai-Ondo Jidai* (Kawade Shobo Shinsha Publishers). The works he has edited include *An Exploration of South Korean Rock* (DU BOOKS).

Sugatsu Kanayama & S. Lee (US)

Work-In-Progress "K-TTR"

Ran DOMON

©Itsumi Okayasu

Writer. Born in 1985 in Hiroshima; resident of Kyoto. She writes literary works such as novels and poems as well as interview articles. The works she has authored include *On the Day 100 Years from Now When Neither of Us Exists* (coauthored with Mayumi Terada), *Loneliness of the Manager, War and Five Women*, and *Somosomo Exchange Diary* (coauthored with Naoko Sakurabashi). In April 2023, she published the essay *Diary of Living until I Die* recording her own counseling sessions. It won the first-ever "Living Book Award."

Momoko Shiraga & Lattanakone Insisiengmay (Laos)

Asian Object Theater: Laos-Japan Collaboration among Deaf and Hearing Performers
"Things Alive From Darkness / ສິ່ງທີ່ມີຊີວິດ ຈາກຄວາມມືດ"

Mariko MORI

After working at the Performing Arts Research Center of Kyoto University of Art and Design and other institutions, she became a freelance producer in the fields of theater, dance, music, etc. Since 2009, she has been developing art projects in Maizuru City, Kyoto, involving local governments, welfare facilities, special needs schools, etc. In addition to working as a program director for Roppongi Art Night 2014 and Saitama Triennale 2016, she has worked as producer of the True Colors Festival at The Nippon Foundation DIVERSITY IN THE ARTS since 2017. In 2022, she assumed a position at the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare as an Officer for Advancement of Cultural and Art Plans for Persons with Disabilities.

Project “Maître Obscur”

Kuro Tanino & T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National (France)

Kuro Tanino ©T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers

Daniel Jeanneteau ©Olivier_Roller

“Maître Obscur" is a groundbreaking theatrical collaboration between Kuro Tanino, leader of the theater company Niwa Gekidan Penino, and the Théâtre de Gennevilliers (T2G), Centre Dramatique National, where Tanino has been an associate artist since 2021. The play is set in a facility designed and controlled by a solitary artificial intelligence that is desperately attempting to emulate human cognitive abilities. At its core, the work explores themes of control and manipulation of consciousness. Part of the setting is a middle-class apartment from the 1970s to the 1980s, complete with a living room, dining room, and kitchen. In this meticulously reconstructed environment, the residents participate in a program to reclaim their daily lives, guided by a disembodied voice. As time passes, the protagonists develop an increasingly complex relationship with “the voice” through their everyday routines. These relationships grow more personal and intimate while an unsettling atmosphere gradually permeates the space. The artificial intelligence, simultaneously benevolent and disturbing, takes center stage in a work that lays bare the paradoxes of human nature. Through innovative sound and video design, the piece examines the political and social implications of these new technologies, blurring the lines between science fiction and dystopia.

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Thursday, September 19 - October 7 (Mon.), 2024 (15 times in total)

Performance Duration: 85min.

Venue: T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National

Credit

Written and directed by: Kuro Tanino
Performed by: Stephanie Beghain, Lorry Hardel, Jean-Luc Verna, Mathilde Invernon, Gaëtan Vourc’h
Translation：Miyako Slocombe
Scenography：Michiko Inada
Lighting design：Diane Guérin
Sound design：Vanessa Court
Video：Boris Van Overtveldt
Artistic collaborations：Masato Nomura, Kyoko Takenaka
Set construction：Theo Jouffroy – Ateliers du Théâtre de Gennevilliers
Costumes：Laura Lemmetti
Props：Zoé Hersent
Stage manager：Kei Furukata
Stage director：Jean-Marc Hennaut
Production Coordinator：Emmanuelle Poyard, Camille Charretier, Chika Onozuka
Organizer: the T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National, Arche LCC.,the Japan Foundation
Production: T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National
Co-production: Comédie de Genève, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Bonlieu Scène Nationale d'Annecy, the Japan Foundation
With the support of the Arche LCC.

Created from 19 September to 7 October 2024 at the T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, with the Festival d'Automne à Paris

Top left, middle row, and bottom right:©Jean-Louis Fernandez

First Report / Minako Fukuoka
Launch of Project

報告書 福岡美奈子 第1回

Maître Obscur is the first international coproduction between T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Centre Dramatique National, in France and Kuro Tanino, who became one of its associate artists in 2021. It is a brand-new work that Tanino wrote by completely reinventing the setting and story of his own play *The Dark Master*, which he has restaged several times with alterations since its premiere in 2003, for a French cast. This report will look back on the two-year production process for *Maître Obscur* through interviews with those involved.

Background to the Coproduction

Daniel Jeanneteau, one of France's foremost contemporary theatrical directors, has served as the director of T2G since 2017. In Japan, he is known for having a close relationship with the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC), where he directed four productions: *Blasted* (2009), *The Glass Menagerie* (2011), and *The Blind* (2015) with Japanese casts and *The Cherry Orchard* (2021) with a Japanese and French cast. Having visited Japan numerous times, he is very familiar with the country.

Since taking over as director, Jeanneteau has staged three works written and directed by Tanino at T2G: *Avidya – No Lights Inn* and *The Dark Master* as a double feature in 2018 and *Fortress of Smiles* in 2021. It was through this that he developed a friendship with Tanino and invited him to become an associate artist. I interviewed Jeanneteau about the background to the coproduction (interpreter: Kyoko Takenaka).

Jeanneteau: "France's 38 national centers for drama [the same size as T2G or equivalent] are required to have

An opening presentation for the 2024–2025 season held at T2G. The public was invited for an announcement of the annual program. Miyako Slocombe is seated to the left of Kuro Tanino, and Daniel Jeanneteau is to Tanino's right. Frédérique Ehrmann is seated at the right end, and Juliette Wagman is next to her.

associate artists. The aim of this is essentially to present works. However, giving back to the community through workshops in schools, creating opportunities to meet local residents, and so on is also encouraged. T2G currently has seven associates including directors, musicians, actors, and playwrights. Their primary goal is to enrich the theater by bringing in external artistic perspectives.

I invited Kuro to become an associate because he's amazing both as an artist and a person, and I'm fond of him on a personal level. Relationships with associates are built over a long period of time, and I believe that's what it really comes down to.

I wanted Kuro to create a work inspired by France and based on extensive research. The mission of the national centers for drama is to serve as creative environments for the creation of works. There are some theaters that put all their energy into attracting audiences by inviting lots of troupes, but T2G sticks firmly to its mission. It supports artists and emphasizes the co-creation process while also considering the working environment. In Japan, SPAC provides a similar environment to its artists, and I was able to experience Kuro's creative process there."

Context of the Work and the New Play

The Dark Master, which is based on a short manga, takes place in a diner. Depicting a young man whose personality is molded by the commands of the diner's owner, the work questions the manipulation and control of the mind and the relationship between master and subject. It has become a hit thanks to highly immersive elements such as live on-stage cooking and earpieces worn by the audience to hear the owner's commands directly.

Tanino has altered *The Dark Master* four times at moments of social change such as terrorism, urban development, and a viral pandemic. The alterations reflect the problems brought about by those social changes. For example, *The Dark Master 2019 TOYAMA*, set against the backdrop of population decline in a sparsely inhabited area, holds a warning message for capitalism.

While *Maître Obscur* has the same underlying themes as *The Dark Master*, it explores human existence from a futuristic perspective in the context of AI, which has made huge advances in recent years, and the impact of that evolution on society.

The play is set in an AI-managed facility where participants (played by the performers) with criminal records and mental disorders learn about human communication. As the facility manager instructs the participants vocally and through monitors, its instructions are also directly audible to each audience member via headphones.

Left: Juliette Wagman
(Assistant Director and Producer of *Maître Obscur*)
Center: Daniel Jeanneteau
(Director)
Right: Frédérique Ehrmann
(Assistant Director, Project Development)
*Wagman and Ehrmann have worked with Jeanneteau since before he was made director of T2G. The three of them are currently at the center of the theater's operations.

Stage photo of *The Dark Master 2019 TOYAMA* ©Hirokazu Takayama

Tanino: "While I was imagining how humans might live as AI evolves, I came up with the idea of an AI-designed 'human rehabilitation program' aimed at socially reintegrating a group of outcasts. I wrote the script by envisioning what kind of algorithm would serve as the basis for the program and 'becoming' the AI."

Process Leading Up to the Writing of the New Play

The first meeting about the coproduction was held online in June 2022. The content of the work was left entirely up to Tanino. Sufficient time was set aside for him to write the script, and two research trips to France were also scheduled. Tanino initially envisioned a remake of *The Dark Master*, but having such a long creative period led him to write a brand-new play.

I asked producer Juliette Wagman about what T2G empha-

sized during the creative process (interpreter: Kyoko Takenaka).

Wagman: "All artists have their own working styles. The challenges on the theater's side are how to support the artists with respect and be flexible rather than imposing our way of doing things. We asked Kuro to please do everything his own way and told him that he was free to use whatever methods he came up with. There weren't any conditions that we imposed on him. We told him he could use Japanese performers if he wished, but he chose the more difficult option of working with a French cast."

I asked Tanino what he considered in writing the play.

Tanino: "I wanted to try something challenging, and I thought I'd start out by creating a brand-new drama. Rather than contemporizing Shakespeare or Chekhov, I wanted to write my own brand-new play, and what's more, I wanted it to be a humorous work without any exoticism or stereotypically Japanese touches.

I also wanted to create a work that demonstrates the efforts of the theater. In our diversifying society, the roles of the theater are becoming more diverse as well. I don't know whether the theater will be able to remain an important place for people, because in the future, people's reality is going to become more and more virtual.

The work involves using headphones to listen to not just vocal commands but also complex sound effects. Through this, I wanted to create a mysterious experience that will appeal to the digital native generation. My aim was to present something you can only experience by actually coming to the theater.

I'm interested in the big question of what it means to be human. The philosopher Henri Bergson defined life as "an effort to remount the incline that matter descends." His assertion is strongly expressed in this work. As a former psychiatrist, I'm also interested in the realms of the conscious and unconscious, influenced by Michel Foucault. This is another central theme of the work."

Casting and Writing the Script for the Performers

Auditions were held in May 2023 in France. T2G created a list of 35 performers suitable for the roles, and Tanino conducted 60-minute interviews with each of them (for a total of over 35 hours!) before settling on a cast of five performers. I asked the cast to describe the interviews.

Lorry Hardel: "I had a great time during the interview. We talked about all sorts of things, from our favorite foods to psychology. Since Kuro hasn't seen any of my past work, an audition would normally involve demonstrating my acting ability, but Kuro was all about dialogue."

After writing a first draft, Tanino interacted with the cast through meals and other opportunities so he could get to know the performers on a personal level. Then, he finished the script with the actual performers in mind.

Translation of the Brand-New Play

The play was translated from Japanese into French by translator Miyako Slocombe. Her past translation work spans numerous genres and even includes other works by Tanino.

Slocombe: "In the past, I've only translated completed works, so this was my first time translating a brand-new play. There were a lot of lines without a clear subject, which is a feature of the Japanese language, but since it was hard to grasp the nuance or visualize the scene, finding the right words was difficult. My experience interpreting in the auditions was helpful, because I recalled the personalities of the performers as I was translating."

Exterior view of T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers

A barbecue party for the cast and crew was held on the terrace of the courtyard at T2G. The courtyard has a vegetable garden, flowerbeds, and even beehives. ©Charlotte Nicolini-Pothier

Second Report / Minako Fukuoka

Scenery Production / Rehearsals

福岡美奈子　第2回 報告書

Scenery Production

One distinctive characteristic of Tanino's work is elaborate stage designs. For the "AI-managed facility" in this work, the design was based on a French middle-class apartment building from the 1970s. Tanino explained the scenery concept as follows.

Tanino: "Looking at a set inspired by a past decade will make the audience feel a sense of nostalgia. Since emotions invoked by memories or recollections are something unique to humans, they're an important part of this work."

The scenery was designed by scenographer Michiko Inada, who has worked on several past designs for Tanino, and the actual construction work was done by the French set-building team. After finalizing the design, Inada communicated directly with the team and traveled to France three times for theater inspection (October 2023), set building (June 2024), and finishing work (August 2024). She described the production process as follows.

Inada: "I checked a precise three-dimensional model created by the set-building team in online meetings, which was an efficient way to resolve inaccuracies and misunderstandings on the spot. Communicating about color reproduction was more difficult, so I had to send color samples from Japan. I learned a lot about France in the 1970s from the props team. They were very familiar with French history, culture, and trends, and I was surprised by their depth of knowledge about their country."

Inada, who has extensive experience with set production, collaborated with the set-building team on construction during her second trip to France. Since an interpreter was not always available, the two parties communicated in their nonnative language, English. While there had been difficulties when communicating online, talking face to face led to great progress in mutual understanding.

Inada: "As I worked, I wondered how I should engage with the French crew. The scenic design process and level of expertise differ between France and Japan. In France,

Producing set pieces　©Zoé Hersent

Three-dimensional model of the scenery created by the set-building team

the scenographer designs the scenery and leaves the production of the set pieces up to professionals, but in Japan, the scenographer may be asked to check and give instructions at each stage of production.

At first, I didn't know about this difference and tried to keep in line with the French standard, but I soon realized that in order to get scenery I was satisfied with, I couldn't be passive. I needed to convey what I wanted and ask about things that weren't clear—to engage in dialogue."

On her third trip to France, Inada secured time to use the theater and carried out painting revisions and "dirtying" of the set to represent age-related deterioration herself.

Inada: "Thanks to the long creative period, I was able

to examine the scenic design from various perspectives, which led to some changes. Even though 'AI' is a key concept of the work, I made the set more 'human-oriented' and 'human-friendly.' The process of collaborating with the French crew aligned with the spirit of the work and was a deeply moving experience."

First Round of Rehearsals

The first round of rehearsals was held over the course of three weeks from June to July 2024. One week was devoted to script reading and two to run-throughs, but the rehearsals consisted mainly of checking and modifying the lines, and the delicate work of adjusting the nuances of the words dragged on. The interpreter during the rehearsals was Paris-based actress Kyoko Takenaka, who also served as a director's assistant.

Takenaka: "When translating, misunderstandings come with the territory. These are the products of differences in culture and customs rather than plain old errors, and the work of correcting them fosters cross-cultural understanding, but it takes a lot of time! Kei Furukata, a Japanese stage manager who was born in Paris, joined from the script reading, and he was a big help. I couldn't have handled all the interpreting on my own. I also corresponded with the translator over 30 times to check the words. I was so impressed by everyone's patience."

Meanwhile, Tanino described the difficulty of directing a script that was not in his native language as follows.

Tanino: "When you're directing a play that uses words, but it's not in your native language, there are some things you can't get a sense of. The audience accumulates information with each scene, but without understanding the language, it's hard to get a feel for how much information

Script reading ©Charlotte Nicolini-Pothier

they've stored so far. Even when the tone of the words needed to be changed, I didn't understand the nuance. During the first round of rehearsals, I sometimes couldn't even tell which part was being acted (*laughter*)."

Second Round of Rehearsals

After a monthlong hiatus, the rehearsals resumed on August 19, 2024, with the technical crew joining as well. I arrived in France a week before the opening performance and observed five days of rehearsals. Although I only got a small glimpse of the production process, I was struck by the teamwork everyone displayed in how they respected each other and embraced various ideas. They didn't look like a guest director from a foreign country working with a French cast and crew, but rather like a theater company with fully forged relationships of trust.

Among the cast members, who are all trained actors with conservatory backgrounds, one stands out—contemporary artist Jean-Luc Verna, who is covered in tattoos from head to toe. Looking for a performer who would make a strong impression on the audience, Tanino traveled five hours by train during a trip to France to meet him and offer him the role. The following is a conversation I had with Verna during the rehearsals.

Left: A rehearsal Right: The technical crew

Verna: "I was surprised when Kuro came all that way to meet me and offer me a role, even though I'm not a trained actor. But after talking to him, I was inspired to try something I'm not so familiar with. I'm learning a lot every day in the rehearsals. I do choreography and dance, but I've only acted once before. Kuro works by listening fairly to everyone's opinions and never wields his authority. The company is a diverse collection of talents, and it's a very comfortable group to work with."

Observing the rehearsals, I got the sense that Kyoko Takenaka and her seasoned knowledge of French culture and theater played a key role. I asked her what she kept in mind throughout the international coproduction.

Takenaka: "One area where I tried to share a common awareness with the director is the uniquely French concept of *reconnaissance* or 'acknowledgement.' It also has a connotation of appreciation. In France, it's important to verbally acknowledge things that wouldn't necessarily be expressed in Japan. For example, telling the performers which parts worked well before suggesting changes is a kind of acknowledgement.

Having worked in France, the lack of acknowledgement when I return to Japan sometimes makes me feel insecure about my worth or why I was chosen. The concept may seem childish or feel strange in Japan, but it applies to various relationships, not just the one between a director and performers. 'Acknowledgement' is crucial in the French theater world to allow everyone to work comfortably, which is really different from Japan.

Another thing is that the interpreter has the peculiar power to manipulate opinions. You subconsciously create a hierarchy by faithfully conveying the views of the key players and understating those of younger members, for example. But Tanino isn't the kind of director who creates hierarchies; he was willing to listen to everyone's opinions respectfully. That's why I was very careful not to manipulate opinions as an interpreter."

Rehearsals lasted eight hours each day, and revisions continued until the opening. With ideas proposed by the cast and crew as well, the precision of the work increased rapidly. The crew in charge of lighting, sound, and video were all *intermittents*[1]. Due to the difficulty and importance of the production's technical aspects, T2G had assembled a team of outstanding personnel.

The sound design in particular was extremely complex. Diverse effects were used to enhance the level of theatrical immersion and show the blurring of reality and fiction, including sound transmitted directly to the headphones, faint noise, sound output from speakers, and sound audible to only part of the audience. Both the director and designer put out ideas, surprising me with their sensibilities and the speed at which their proposals were realized. I was even more shocked when I learned that the sound equipment would be operated by only one crew member during the performances, as this was a job that would require two or three people in Japan.

Proposals, reproduction, and processing were carried out swiftly for the video as well. The operation of the three cameras installed on stage and monitor output would be handled by one crew member during the performances. The stage manager was also doubling for production aspects and would run the entire backstage alone. I was overwhelmed by the small but elite crew.

On the other hand, there was also an incident where the costume team, who had been hired with an upper limit on their working hours, couldn't go out to buy necessities outside their contracted hours. If this were Japan, they probably would have handled the matter ambiguously despite their contracted hours, but T2G did not allow them to do so, and theater staff took over the task.

*1 *Intermittents*:
Formally known as *intermittents du spectacle*, a system in France to protect freelance workers in the performing arts, television, and film industries. *Intermittents* are paid unemployment benefits based on their actual work in the previous year.

Third Report / Minako Fukuoka

Performances / Summary

報告書 福岡美奈子　第3回

Opening Night Draws Near

Just before the performances, I asked Jeanneteau to look back on the creative work so far (interpreter: Kyoko Takenaka).

Jeanneteau: "Kuro is a rare kind of artist who incorporates input from the cast and crew in his work and builds a team with love, rather than authority. I feel like Japanese performers tend to defer to the director, but French performers are always talking and voicing their opinions. I was worried that asking for input from these kinds of people would hold up Kuro's creative work. Listening to input and opening up dialogue may sound simple, but it's actually something extraordinary. Even though it's a really good environment, it's hard for the director. Kuro's way of doing things is more unusual in Japan, isn't it?

On the production side, having the director decide everything reduces the budget and gives a greater sense of progress. But creative work that wouldn't be possible with that approach is going on right before our eyes. We're being influenced and learning a lot as well. I think it's having a great effect."

T2G also focuses on local education and awareness. Five days before the opening, 30 15-year-old students observed some of the rehearsal as part of a class. When I asked them for their impressions afterwards, their eyes sparkled. "It was really entertaining! I want to know what happens next!" Their stream of questions for the director in the subsequent Q&A session reflected their strong degree of interest.

Two days were left before the opening. After watching a full rehearsal, Jeanneteau muttered, "Kuro's work is as bizarre as ever." I heard him offer Tanino directing ideas. "The introduction is great. To amplify the sense of unreality, how about using the lighting to give the sky an impossible color?"

The day before the opening, a dress rehearsal was held for an audience of 130 people including staff from local schools and support centers and the cast members' families.

Exchanging gifts

The audience responded keenly to the audio from the headphones and laughed out loud at the humorous scenes. Afterwards, production coordinator Emmanuelle Poyard had a grim expression on her face. "The response was great, but almost everyone in today's audience was involved in the production in some way. A lot of critics and festival directors will be attending tomorrow and will judge the work more strictly. Tomorrow will be crucial."

Opening Night

After the final feedback session, the cast and crew exchanged gifts in the dressing room to show gratitude for everyone's creative work, celebrate the work's completion, and wish for the success of the performances. In Japan, it is customary to have sacred *sake* delivered on opening night, but the exchange of individually selected gifts felt intimate and euphoric rather than ritualistic. The theater's restaurant was completely packed before the doors opened, with many audience members enjoying a meal as they waited. Although there was no reserved seating, the audience slowly trickled in after the doors opened, rather than waiting in line like in Japan.

Maître Obscur

Maître Obscur begins meditatively. In the darkness, a voice through the headphones asks the audience to take a deep breath and widely open the doors to our memories and imaginations. We concentrate and become immersed in the fictional universe as the curtain quietly rises.

The characters are not named. Titles that almost seem to preview the upcoming scenes are displayed on a monitor on the stage: "Have a conversation." "Exchange bodies." "Laugh." These titles indicate the course of the rehabilitation program. After they disappear, the behavior of the participants (played by the performers) is displayed in real time on the monitor, showing how they are being observed by the facility manager.

Guided by an unseen voice, the participants go about their daily activities and communicate with each other. In the latter half of the story, a certain phenomenon causes changes in the AI-managed facility. And quietly, change comes to the characters as well...

When the curtain fell, the venue was filled with loud applause, followed by several curtain calls. Afterwards, nearly the entire audience moved to the restaurant on the first floor of the theater to discuss their thoughts over drinks. The restaurant was packed, with people even spilling into the

lobby and outside the theater. Program directors, critics, and audience members swarmed Tanino to give him their feedback. The cast and crew joined, busily chatting with the audience. Smiling company members conversed until closing time at midnight. Even Poyard, who had a grim expression the day before, was laughing merrily.

Reviews

A number of reviews were published in France. Their takes varied, with some raving about the play and others giving it only three out of five stars. Selections are presented below.

◆*Pleins Feux*

Guided by a voice and outstanding sound design, the splendid introduction in the darkness stirs our imaginations. It is our relationship with technology and how technology permeates our daily lives and behavior that is the focus of inquiry in *Maître Obscur*. Filled with gray areas, this work raises many questions. Its meaning appears simple but is actually complex and multilayered. *Maître Obscur* is an innovative work that will remain on our minds for a long time and guide us like a compass. Kuro Tanino is an artist of astonishing sensitivity and intellect.

◆Anna Sigalevitch

Tanino is a former psychiatrist, and this work is extreme-

Top: One of the performances　©Jean-Louis Fernandez
Center: A curtain call
Bottom: The restaurant bustling after a show

ly psychological in nature. The id, ego, and superego[1] are represented by a soft voice. The work is very interesting in terms of both its content and format and offers good food for thought, but I would not consider it Tanino's most successful work.

T2G's Reflections on the End of the Coproduction

After the end of all 15 performances at T2G, Jeanneteau and Wagman responded jointly to my request for their overall thoughts. Some excerpts are presented below.

We gave Kuro carte blanche[2]. Our challenge was providing French audiences, journalists, and program directors with a greater understanding of who he is as an artist. He chose to work with French performers, which made us both nervous and happy at the same time—nervous, because we know how difficult it is to create the conditions for a real meeting between a foreign director and French performers, and happy, because T2G's director, Daniel Jeanneteau, discovered new strengths as an artist through his creative experiences in Japan.

The performances leveraged all the expertise of the T2G team and drew large audiences. The work was very well received. Many high school and university students watched the play and now want to visit T2G again. About 40 journalists attended on opening night. This reflects the great curiosity about our hybrid experiment.

The day after the final performance at T2G, we felt a sense of nostalgia. Kuro's world has occupied T2G for almost two years, forcing all of us to adapt and change, and it was the same for him.

What disappointed us was the lack of tour locations. European producers didn't seem to find the Japanese-French coproduction as appealing as Kuro's works created in Japan.

The French cultural sector is facing an economic crisis, so performance schedules are being cut everywhere. A project as ambitious as this one, including in its technical aspects, can only be viewed in a large theater. This is another factor that limited the range of possibilities.

Nonetheless, both the Japanese and French teams shared a moving experience. All of us finished the coproduction with a sense of change within ourselves.

Kuro Tanino's Reflections on the Coproduction

I also asked Tanino for his thoughts.

Tanino: "From the lead-up to the rehearsals and performances, I never expected to establish such a close relationship with T2G or to live in France for such a long time. Feeling closeness and attachment to a city outside Japan will definitely be instrumental in helping me develop a more multifaceted view of the world. I can say for sure that it will have a significant and positive effect on my creative activities."

Looking Back on the Coproduction

I work for a public theater in Tanino's hometown, Toyama City, where I have been in charge of three theatrical projects in the "Tanino Kuro & All-Toyama" series that he creates with citizens as a solo artist in residence. There are big differences between works produced with ordinary citizens in Japan and this one, which involved a professional cast and director. However, I will share my impressions of the coproduction in light of my production experience with local public theater in Japan.

◆Start of the International Coproduction

Empathy and respect for the artists and mutual friendship and trust were at the foundation of the coproduction. These trusting relationships raised the level of the creative environment and strengthened the production framework. Jeanneteau says that he gained new energy as an artist through his creative work in Japan, and he brought the entire T2G team together to support Tanino so that he could do the same through creative work in France. Tanino also created a work connected to the future of T2G by looking ahead to the digital native generation. It was a project where you could sense the deep regard on both sides. As in the well-known past Japanese–French coproductions by Oriza Hirata and T2G's previous director, Pascal Rambert, and by Satoshi Miyagi at SPAC and Daniel Jeanneteau, the friendship and trust cultivated by the parties over the years provided unshakeable momentum. I hope that this exchange will be passed on to the next generation.

◆The Work

Maître Obscur abounds with information and weaves together many different layers of speculation. Viewing the play had a lasting effect on me, and it still lingers in my mind.

Through its depiction of humans being monitored and experimented on in a world where the roles of AI and humans are reversed, the work examines the effects of overreliance on technology and control. It asks the questions, who are we really? What determines our behavior? What are the capabilities that truly make us alive and human? By invoking a future that is overly reliant on technology, the work calls on humanity to reclaim our inherent potential. In

an interview, Tanino stated that the work strongly expresses the ideas of the great French philosopher Henri Bergson. Although I am not too well-versed in philosophy, Bergson apparently asserted the limitless potential of humanity. Tanino demonstrates this human potential through a drama created by human imagination. It is one that I will continue to contemplate and turn over my mind.

◆The Creative Process

Although the creative process lasted two years, most of this was for research, writing, and preparation, and the actual rehearsal period was only seven weeks. One thing that surprised me was the theater occupancy period. The work occupied T2G's largest theater (350 seats) from June until the final show on October 7, 2024. While the inclusion of the off season and a monthlong hiatus, as well as the fact that T2G was devoting all its efforts to the work as the main season opener, were also factors, such an occupancy period would be unthinkable in Japan. This gave me a sense of how France's national centers for drama function as creative environments, and I was impressed by T2G's dedication to that mission. Most public theaters in Japan have to keep their facilities open for rental, and the number of days available for use may be limited, even for the theater's own productions. While there are clearly big differences in cultural policy between France and Japan, cultural budgets are an issue even in France. Jeanneteau said that with production by a single theater becoming difficult, multiple theaters often coproduce in recent years, but the budget any one theater can allocate has decreased, making a large project like this one difficult to pull off.

What struck me most about the rehearsals was how the group creatively worked like a "company." Although I couldn't have imagined it from my observations, shortly after the start of the rehearsals, there were apparently performers who wouldn't even use English (their only shared language) with Tanino.

I heard one anecdote from Takenaka, who served as the interpreter and director's assistant. "For the first full rehearsal, the feedback took six hours. I thought it was inefficient of Tanino to just patiently keep on listening to everyone's input, but after the rehearsal ended, he sounded happy. 'Let's have a wrap! What a great day!' He really valued that kind of 'exchange that doesn't lead to consensus' during the rehearsals as effective and important for communication."

"Deepening mutual understanding through repeated dialogue" actually takes a lot of time and effort. This is a work in which people of different nationalities, cultures, and ideas

The director and director's assistants

were able to communicate well and feel comfortable enough to deeply probe the shared question of what it means to be human. I firmly believe that it was the establishment of a "company" that raised the quality of the work.

I would also like to mention the staffing setup. The production had two director's assistants. One was Kyoko Takenaka, and the other was Masato Nomura, a director himself.

Takenaka's role was to coordinate between the director, cast, and technical crew as a director's assistant and interpreter, focusing on the progress of the rehearsals. Having someone who understood the director's intentions mediate as an interpreter was very reassuring. She is also deeply familiar with the theater and worked with Japanese stage manager Kei Furukata to share information in both Japanese and French, establishing a shared understanding throughout the company. Instead of exclusively hanging out with the Japanese team, she got close to the French cast and crew during lunchtimes or on the way home and seemed to be deeply trusted by them as well.

Meanwhile, Nomura steadily advanced the creative work at Tanino's side. He roomed with Tanino during his stay in France and supported him on all fronts, such as by reviewing things together after rehearsals. Since the produc-

tion required elements of "humor," Tanino said that having Nomura as someone with whom he could consult in his native language was invaluable. Partly thanks to the fact that the two director's assistants thoroughly fulfilled their respective roles, this setup was very effective for the creative work.

In international coproductions, different senses of time can result in stress. Japanese production coordinator Chika Onozuka and French production coordinator Poyard were in frequent contact via email, replying to each other quickly in consideration of deadlines. Although they communicated in their nonnative language, English, it later turned out that both had actually been using a translation app, as they recalled with amusement.

◆Post-Show Socializing

The sight of audience members discussing their thoughts in the theater's restaurant after the shows left a strong impression on me. In Japan, post-performance talks by artists predominate, and there are no venues or opportunities for audience members to share their thoughts with each other. In the case of nighttime shows, it is especially difficult to linger in the theater because of the closing time. Having a place and time to share their thoughts can greatly amplify the audience's viewing experience and even lead to future audience collaboration.

We once held a post-show audience meet-and-greet for "Tanino Kuro & All-Toyama." Even though it included a talk with Tanino, I recall that the participating audience members were more engrossed in chatting with each other. I am now convinced that giving the audience time to socialize after the show creates a closer relationship between the theater and the audience, and I would love to implement something like this at the theater where I work.

◆Observer's Impressions

I did not actually begin observing rehearsals on the ground until five days before opening night. Since full rehearsals were already underway, and the work was nearly complete, my impression was that the actual rehearsal process did not differ too much from that in Japan. However, T2G has a uniquely tolerant atmosphere, and I learned a lot from how the staff members respected each other on an equal footing, even outside the rehearsal room. In theaters and other creative environments for the performing arts, it is ideal for various people including audiences to form equal and nonauthoritarian relationships. Perhaps thanks to Jeanneteau's efforts, this attitude could be found at T2G, making it a suitable environment for creative work. Everyone could work with good humor and without coercion in a relaxed and comfortable manner.

I believe that Tanino's leadership in reconciling diverse talents and sensibilities and T2G's partnership in building this creative environment and supporting his work were both ideal.

*1 Id, ego, and superego:
The three components of the structural model of the mind proposed by the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. The id is the unconscious, the ego thinks and makes decisions according to reality, and the superego internalizes ethical standards and social norms.

*2 Carte blanche:
Permission or freedom to act as one wishes

Project “Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains”

Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos)(Taiwan)

Nanako Matsumoto ©Shingo Kanagawa

Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos) ©Julia Lin Kingham

Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains is the first collaborative project by Nanako Matsumoto, a Tokyo-based dance artist and member of team chiipro, and Anchi Lin, a contemporary artist from Taiwan also known by her Indigenous Atayal name Ciwas Tahos. This was created in Kyoto and Taiwan and performed at Kyoto Experiment: Kyoto International Performing Arts Festival 2024 (KEX).

Since ancient times, the deep mountains have often been depicted as a place inhabited by marginalized and unknown beings. In Japanese folklore, Yamamba is a type of yokai (supernatural being or spirit) that appears in the form of an old woman living in the mountains. In the Taiwanese Indigenous Atayal oral story, a community of women live deep in the mountains in a place called Temahahoi. What if these mountains of Japan and Taiwan were connected across borders, and Yamamba and the Temahahoi people met?

Matsumoto’s “yokai body” methodology, which constructs texts and choreography based on meticulous research, combines with the queer approach through which Lin explores culture and gender identity, to create a transnational mountain in the theater. What voices will these women use to tell their stories?

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Saturday, October 12 – Monday, October 14, 2024 (4 performances)

Performance Duration: 80 min.

Venue: THEATRE E9 KYOTO

Credit

Artistic Concept & Performance: Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos)

Choreography: Nanako Matsumoto

Video Concept & Design: Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos)

Video software Design & Technical Support: Bih Ru Wang

Surtitle design & Technical Support: Daichi Abe

Atayal Language Consultant: Apang Bway

Choreography Support: Kengo Nishimoto

Sound Design & Operation: Mina Hayashi

Lighting Design & Operation: Kana Watanabe

Stage Manager: Kodachi Kitagata

Production Coordinators: Yuko Kuroda, Mana Okuyama (THEATRE E9 KYOTO)

Mediaturg, Visual Technology: Richi Owaki

English surtitles editing: Lillian Canright (Art Translators Collective)

Research Cooperation: Alak Akatung, Junya Kouno, Kobayashi Zoen Co., Ltd., Sakujiro Shimomura, Keita Tanaka, Jing-Yao He, Yasuko Yokoshi, Jian-Xiong, Huang, Temu Nokan

Residency support: KYOTO ART CENTER

Support: Ningenza

Organizer: Kyoto Experiment

Co-Organizer: The Japan Foundation

Co-Production: Kyoto Experiment, The Japan Foundation, Taipei Performing Arts Center

Support: Japan Foundation for Regional Art Activities [Thinking about the body, history and identity through the performing arts]

Taipei Performing Arts Center has supported the research process of “Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains” as part of the ADAM - Asia Discovers Asia Meeting for Contemporary Performance in 2024

"Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains"(2024) Photo by Haruka Oka, Courtesy: Kyoto Experiment

First Report / Maaru Hiyama
Lead-up to the Performance

報告書 檜山真有 第1回

Nanako Matsumoto and Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos) first met at the 2023 ADAM Artist Lab. Since 2017, ADAM (Asia Discovers Asia Meeting for Contemporary Performance), run by the Taipei Performing Arts Center (TPAC), has served as a platform connecting performing arts practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region. Ciwas participated as a curator, while Matsumoto was a participating artist, and they grew close during what they describe as "an ADAM program full of drama."[1]

Ciwas, who has roots in Taiwan's indigenous Atayal people,[2] is a visual artist presenting not only performances but also video works and installations. Meanwhile, Matsumoto is a dance artist and member of team chiipro, which produces dance projects that interweave multiple contexts evoked by a particular dance step or gesture and the physical sensations and memories of the performers. At the ADAM Artist Lab, Ciwas, who prepared the theme "Watering Intimacy," and Matsumoto, selected as a participant, were brought together by their shared interest in representations and narratives of women who have faced oppression, as well as "storytelling" as a creative method.

Ciwas continues to create works that overlay her own roots and queerness with the Atayal oral tradition of Temahahoi, a place formed by the gathering of women. Matsumoto creates dance pieces by exploring "what has remained untold" in history, folklore, and her own bodily memories, integrating these elements into her movements and physical gestures.

The creative journey of these two artists largely involves opening paths through words and affirming each other's understanding, rather than creating something through physical means or tools. I have witnessed only a small part of this process. However, documenting what they have shared with me in my own words holds value, if only from the perspective of having observed the work and its development from a certain distance. This is because, just as the stories of oral traditions are altered over time and through different methods of transmission, I strongly sensed during the production

"Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains" key visual

process that this work would continue to shift and evolve until, and perhaps even after, its performance.

February 2024, Kyoto

Before meeting in Kyoto, the two artists shared the keywords "*yokai*" (supernatural beings or spirits in Japanese folklore) and "camphor tree." They visited various places connected to yokai and camphor trees, including Kifune Shrine, known for its legend of the "Hour of the Ox Visit" (in which women would go to the shrine in the early hours of the morning to lay a curse on someone), and the camphor tree at the main gate of Kyoto University. Through their conversations at these sites, they developed the work's basic concept of Temahahoi and *yokai* (specifically yamamba) meeting in the mountains.

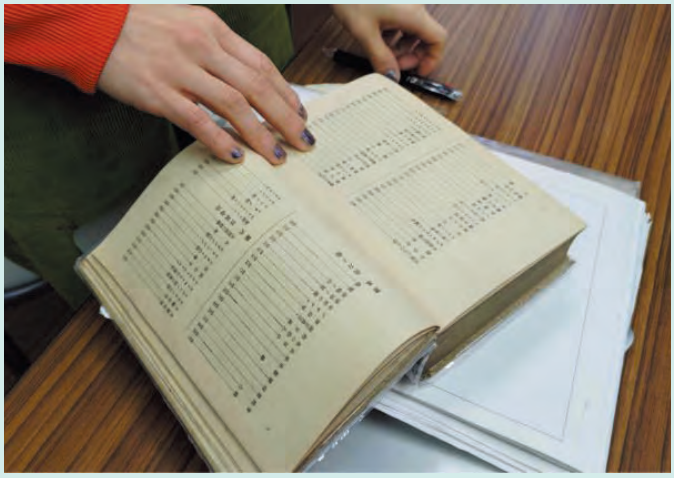
Yokai has been a continuing interest for Matsumoto, who proposes the concept of "*yokai* body" as a connection between folklore and the physical body. At the same time, the camphor tree can be regarded as having played an especially significant role in uniting the various interests of the two artists: as a raw material for camphor production on plantations during Japan's colonial rule of Taiwan, as a symbol of rapid-growing giant trees, and as a representation of forests and trees being lost to development and climate change.

The two also traveled from Kyoto to Tokushima to see an Atayal candlestick that anthropologist Ryuzo Torii had brought back from his research of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples.

In this work's creative process, research was not the accumulation of knowledge to verify and prove hypotheses, as is commonly imagined. Instead, it was an accumulation not only of knowledge but also personal experiences, memories, intangible textures, and more, which the two artists experienced together to develop a shared perspective.

Among the discoveries made during their journey, one that stands out as a prominent image in the work is the Munakata Shrine located within the grounds of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, where two sacred camphor trees stand—one 600 years old and the other 400 years old. The key visual for the work (see the page on the left) shows the two artists peering through a hole in a piece of camphor tree bark, shaped like a boar, which is enshrined there.

What their two faces encounter through the hole is the word *pipi* overlapping with mountains upon mountains. These mountain images were collected by the two artists, over which the word *pipi* is scattered. In the Atayal language, *pipi* means vagina,[3] and they happened to discover this word in *Collection of Gaoshan Legends*, a book published during the Japanese colonial period, in their research



Photos courtesy of Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin

process.

Nature has been treated in myths, anthropomorphized, and symbolized, and simply by existing, it has generated stories. Academic study separates and relativizes stories and nature when attempting to transcend individual perception and the literacy that can be felt from stories.

It appears that their research aimed to create new narratives by re-weaving these elements that had been skillfully separated and narrated. Their challenge shows a certain respect for cultural anthropology—an academic field inextricably linked with colonialism—while also attempting to reveal the complexity of social and historical structures by making visible the existence of previously suppressed minorities.

Discord[4] Storytelling Session

Separated by distance, the two continued communicating via Discord. In addition to business communications in which the staff also participated, mountain photographs that would become material for the work, along with extensive documentation, keywords, and references—which might or might not appear in the work—flowed from bottom to top. It was like an exchanged diary accumulating everyday snippets until they became part of the work. Even as they used English in their communication, it naturally included instances where certain words were more quickly understood in Chinese characters than in alphabetic writing, such as "私有林 and 公有林 = both are the results of neoliberal capitalism",[5] demonstrating how written characters strongly bind cultures together.

Those of us working within the framework of transnational cultural arts engage with non-verbal artistic expression and use English as a matter of course. We are also citizens raised in the same sphere of written character culture, albeit transmitted differently in our respective countries. To reach the viewpoints we need to examine, we require various metaphors and stories.

In July, Ciwas and Matsumoto held a storytelling session via Zoom, during which they shared stories they had created about Temahahoi and *yamamba*, respectively. They read their stories in English, with Ciwas having written hers directly in English, while Matsumoto had translated hers from Japanese.

Ciwas's story, continuing from her previous work, followed "Ciwas" (her fictional alter ego), who escaped from kidnapping and sought the utopia of Temahahoi. Matsumoto's story followed an elderly woman, descended from a group of courtesans who couldn't dance, as she encounters new companions while wandering alone in the mountains. The interests that each artist individually nurtured intersected in the details of their respective stories. Regardless of how the two characters would meet in the story, their encounter was ensured at this stage.

This work is built through communication involving translations across various languages, including Japanese, Mandarin, Atayal, and English. Beyond linguistic translation, text transforms into oral narrative, research becomes storytelling, and these evolve into performance through video, drawing, and physical expression. Through these numerous back-and-forth "translations," the subtle gaps between words and meanings are expanded, connecting different elements or filling those gaps with new content.

From this point, over about six months of journeys, research, chat exchanges, and texts, the artistic concept was formed by refining the direction of reflections from various ephemeral sparkles, gradually crystallizing into performance.

*1 For more details about Matsumoto's 2023 ADAM residency, see Shiori Sahara's "Taiwan Moyamoya Travelogue" in *Pan no Pan 04 3rd* (pp. 94–101, 2024, published by Kiritori Mederu; in Japanese).

*2 Population of approximately 75,000, living in the mountainous regions of northern Taiwan. (Source: "Indigenous Peoples' Culture of Taiwan," Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan, 2023-01-04, https://www.roc-taiwan.org/jp_ja/post/202.html (accessed: November 20, 2024); in Japanese)

*3 Depending on the context, this can be a curse word telling someone to fuck off.

*4 A communication service for exchanging messages, voice, and video, allowing multiple threads within a single group.

*5 Quoted from Ciwas's statement in Discord (May 15, 2024, 9:15). The two words in Chinese characters mean "privately owned forest" and "publicly owned forest," respectively.

Second Report / Maaru Hiyama
Up to Research in Taiwan and Work in Progress at ADAM's Kitchen

檜山真有　第2回

August 7–10, 2024, Taiwan Journey

Matsumoto stayed in Taiwan for a month to present a work in progress at ADAM's Kitchen, held at TPAC in late August, and to prepare for the world premiere at Kyoto Experiment: Kyoto International Performing Arts Festival 2024 (KEX), in October. This residency was supported by TPAC. Since Ciwas had an exhibition scheduled in Australia, only Matsumoto would perform at TPAC, with Ciwas participating remotely. During the ten days before Ciwas's departure to Australia, they spent the first half conducting research in Taiwan and the latter half involved in studio creation.

Taiwan, with its towering mountains running through the center of the island, can be seen as one large mountain itself. Their journey traversing Taiwan from south to north—releasing, absorbing, and integrating everything they had cultivated—encompassed all the themes this work sought to address.

Their research began in Tainan. They visited the National Museum of Taiwan History to meet with Professor Chien-Hsiung Huang, who is working to nurture small biosphere domains, akin to biotopes, designed to foster environments that can support forests even in urban areas, to learn how to establish a biosphere domain centered on camphor trees.

The next day, they traveled slightly north by train to meet activist Alak Akatung, who researches the culture and traditions of the Siraya people[1] while advocating for their official recognition as an Indigenous people by the Taiwan government. He shared information about Siraya "yokai" and their ritual practices.

In Taichung, they met novelist Ho Ching-Yao, who studies *yokai*-like phenomena and legends in Taiwan. He showed them his collected materials and discussed how he, as a Taiwanese person, relates to the uniquely Japanese word "*yokai*" and similar phenomena and representations that exist in Taiwan. They also talked about Temahahoi and *yamamba*.

After a day's rest in Taipei, on the fourth day, they headed to the area of Puli, a township in the central part of Nantou County. Deep in the mountains of Puli lie Ciwas's roots and a community with which she has formed relationships over many years. Matsumoto was one of the few first outsiders ever to have been invited there.

During their stay, they engaged with the community through activities such as barbecues and homestays, gaining insights into local lifestyles and modes of communication. While accompanying young community members when they went to speak with a *yaki* (which means "elderly woman" in Atayal), an unexpected form of communication emerged:

Culture and Health station in Alang Sasi (Qin-Ai community in Nantou, Taiwan) Courtesy of Nanako Matsumoto, Anchi Lin

The two visited the fortune-telling alley at Lungshan Temple to divine the fate of their respective stories. Matsumoto had her fortune told through rice divination, while Ciwas received a reading that involved conversation. Photo by the author

when Matsumoto addressed the *yaki* in Japanese, she replied in Japanese, prompting Matsumoto to interpret into English for Ciwas and the young people. The *yaki* went on to offer stories in Japanese (surprisingly), ones the young people had never heard before.

While most people in Taiwan today understand and generally speak Mandarin, there is still a considerable number who speak Japanese due to the assimilation policies enacted during Japanese colonial rule. Although historical facts like this can explain this communication background, as Ciwas told me, "under patriarchal imperialism, women, Indigenous and queer people are under the same structural oppression.

We should look at these groups of people's individual life experiences as a way to critique this invisible dominating structure," what should be observed here is not the structure itself but the individual exchanges that overflow from it.

August 12–27, 2024, Taiwan Studio

After finishing their research in Taiwan, the two artists immediately met at TPAC's studio. Since Ciwas was leaving Taiwan on the 17th, their joint studio rehearsals took place until the 16th, after which Matsumoto used the studio only as necessary.

In the production process up to this point, Matsumoto and Ciwas encountered many people and moved on. However, from this moment until the work's completion, numerous staff members with various specialties would pause before them to collaboratively build the piece, even though they wouldn't appear on stage. One of them, Bih Ru Wang (known as Bibi), always came to the studio in the evening.

Bibi created a program that extracts mountains from photos with mountain backgrounds collected by Ciwas and Matsumoto on Discord, layering them using AI. The finished program stitches mountains together with AI in a manner that ensures the same scenery never appears twice, creating unrepeatable encounters as the landscapes flow from right to left. They also conducted daily experiments as a trio to set up an audiovisual system that changes shape in response to voices. This audiovisual element was initially used by Ciwas in a presentation for the Truku (Taroko)[2] community and drew inspiration from the plants and landscapes she observed in the mountains.

In the studio, the two discussed and reflected on their journey up to this point. Occasionally, I or a Japan Foundation staff member would play the role of listener. As the countless ideas generated in these discussions began to coalesce, they sometimes connected logically, while at other times connected intuitively later on.

"I want to see the taro or yams in Taiwan." "Taro? Yams?" "Is *satoimo* taro?" "Japan has a traditional vegetable called *yatsugashira*!" "I'll go to the market in the morning!"

Such conversations led to two or three taro and yams lying around on the studio floor. When Ciwas mentioned wanting to create a small forest in Kyoto, something they learned in Tainan, the two considered purchasing young camphor tree saplings to do so.

While their roles weren't clearly defined, Ciwas, the visual artist, and Matsumoto, the dance artist, clearly differed in their approaches to the work. Ciwas aims to deepen thought and demonstrate how concepts and stories have continuity and meaning, while Matsumoto absorbs concepts and stories into her body while examining weight shifts, showing the body to others' gazes, and considering the movement of narratives.

During their final days in the studio before Ciwas's departure to Australia, the two made very simple decisions. They planned how things would be arranged in the studio and how text would be spoken and exchanged. After some discussion, they decided to project Bibi's mountain images onto a screen instead of a wall.

The audiovisual system was set to respond not only to Matsumoto's voice but also to Ciwas's voice transmitted from Australia. A yam wrapped in red thread by Ciwas would hang from the studio's high ceiling. Would Matsumoto move her body using its swing.....? Also, how each would read

Photo by the author

their prepared stories was left to mutual trust.

August 28, 2024, TPAC ADAM's Kitchen Work-in-Progress Performance

Two monitors are in the studio: one displays the voice-responsive audiovisual, while the other monitor and a free-standing screen show images of mountains. A red string suspends a yam from the ceiling. Only Matsumoto, wearing a white T-shirt and jeans, is present in the venue, while Ciwas participates from Australia with just her voice. The stories they read out alternate, with *pipi* as the watchword.

The audiovisual changes in response to both Matsumoto's and Ciwas's voices. When reading her story, Matsumoto moves her body. Rather than making specific gestures, she moves cautiously as if confirming her body's range of motion and the presence of gravity. She rolls the yams on the floor and plays with the suspended yam. She hooks a grater to her foot and moves while grating the yam. This might be called a dance move.

In the story informed by their exchanges thus far, Ciwas repeatedly utters the word *hijin*. This word, meaning bee in Atayal, intertwines with Ciwas's sighs.

While Matsumoto tells the *yamamba* story, she also speaks about methods for creating small forests in urban areas of Taiwan that the two learned during their research, and she touches on the history of modernization and camphor trees, including the development of the Meiji Shrine forest. The stories presented do not necessarily seek continuity or consistency. Things that cannot be articulated or are ineffable also become objects of audience perception, each imbued with significance.

She steps in a trembling manner that disrupts the trail left by the grated yam. While telling the story, her body moves with limbs falling obediently to gravity, yet also appears to resist it. Suddenly, she walks quickly toward the audience seats and vanishes. The lights go out—blackout. The screens remain lit—end.

Ciwas's body will also be on stage in the October performance. How will Ciwas's body and Matsumoto's body meet? This is a work in progress. Surely, when the two reunite in Kyoto, many things will change again. Their creation, which presents the excitement and earnestness of freshness achieved simultaneously with quality improvement, is approaching its final stages.

*1 As part of the Pingpu (plains Indigenous peoples), they were spread throughout the plains of southern Taiwan. (Source: "Discovering Siraya," Siraya National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, MOTC, https://www.siraya-nsa.gov.tw/en/about-siraya/discover (accessed: November 20, 2024))

*2 Their population of around 35,000 resides in the coastal regions of Hualien County in eastern Taiwan and the mountainous areas of Nantou County. (Source: "The Tribes in Taiwan" Council of Indigenous Peoples, https://www.cip.gov.tw/zh-tw/index.html#tab_12 (accessed: January 10, 2025))

Third Report / Maaru Hiyama
Rehearsals at Ningenza stuido and THEATRE E9 KYOTO / World Premiere at Kyoto Experiment

檜山真有　第3回

Not long after finishing their work in progress in Taiwan on August 28, the two artists convened in Kyoto on September 17 and stayed there until the final performance on October 14.

The performance venue was THEATRE E9 KYOTO (E9) in Kyoto's Minami Ward. From September 17 until their move into the theater on October 6, they rehearsed at Ningenza Studio in Sakyo Ward.

Of these sessions, I observed the full run-through on September 24, the dress rehearsal on October 11, and two performances on October 12 and 13. Please note that what is written in this report is also a narrative stitched together from various fragments.

September 17–October 11, 2024, Rehearsals at Ningenza studio and THEATRE E9 KYOTO

The taro (kashira-imo) and camphor tree that Matsumoto and Ciwas had discussed in Taiwan were promptly delivered to Ningenza, with the camphor tree absent in the Taiwan work in progress making its stage debut.

Their rehearsals at Ningenza started by discussing what to set up on stage and how. At this point, they already had the concept of papermaking, which wasn't found in Taiwan, and Matsumoto had prepared a large tub called a *torobune*.

The first full run-through took place on September 24. Everyone, including the technical staff, gathered to work through the production. Kyoto Experiment (KEX) Co-director Yoko Kawasaki, production coordinator Yuko Kuroda, stage manager Kodachi Kitagata, sound designer Mina Hayashi, mediaturg and visual technologist Richi Owaki, and KEX short-term intern Ayane Mitsumoto collaborated to make various adjustments and offer advice, outlining the contours of the work being created by the two artists.

Photo by the author

In contrast to the Taiwan work in progress, the black box venue now contained pulpy waste paper in Matsumoto's *torobune*, waiting to be made into new paper. Stage right had a cooking stove, while stage left had a pile of curled handmade recycled paper, with a microphone set up nearby. Center stage held a young camphor tree in a box, which also contained taro and branches.

The two had manifested on stage a set for creating the small biosphere they had learned about in Tainan. Above the boxed camphor tree, tree branches were suspended by red strings. The strings, which looped over a ceiling beam, could be manipulated to raise and lower the branches. A taro suspended at stage right could be manipulated similarly. Additionally, a radio cassette player and monitor were set up on stage, presenting a completely different aspect from the Taiwan work in progress.

Notably, the papermaking setup deployed on stage appeared to weaken the previous focus on Japan–Taiwan relations viewed through the lens of camphor trees, instead suggesting a heightened interest in the broader global issues of resources and ecology.

While the run-through focused on establishing the two artists' on-stage sequence, it was striking to see Kitagata, Hayashi, and Owaki sitting in a circle to hear what the two wanted to achieve. Although the work was being created through joint direction by Matsumoto and Ciwas, planning and design were handled by Hayashi for sound and by Kana Watanabe for lighting, while stage manager Kitagata oversaw everything and coordinated progress. Production continued until the performance in a democratic manner, allowing staff members to propose their own interpretations to the two artists while being careful not to compromise the work's concept.

The audiovisual element operated by Bibi in the work in progress would not be used in the main performance, instead being reserved for the post-performance talk.

The second run-through on October 1 was attended by subtitle designer Daichi Abe and choreography support Kengo Nishimoto, along with KEX Co-directors Kawasaki and Juliet Reiko Knapp, joining Kuroda, Kitagata, Owaki, and Watanabe.

Following feedback from the run-through, they decided to make significant spatial changes. To clarify the roles of Matsumoto and Ciwas as artists while emphasizing their relationship in weaving stories, they tightened the stage installations instead of spreading them across the entire stage.

This allowed the *torobune* to function as a metaphor for a river and suggested a meeting place for the two. As a result, scenes where both figures gathered around the central *torobune* and camphor tree increased.

On October 6, they left Ningenza and relocated to E9. Six days were left until the performance.

At the October 11 dress rehearsal, Matsumoto appeared in a white T-shirt and jeans, while Ciwas wore navy blue overalls. Ciwas was barefoot, while Matsumoto wore a shoe on one foot and was barefoot on the other. The navy blue was chosen to emphasize the yams and paper, and their costumes enhanced each body's appearance.

The deadline that inevitably accompanies any expression shown to others (whether it's a performance date or the time to leave a venue) serves to ground concepts in reality. Instead of being finalized and becoming unchangeable, it is temporarily fixed and passes before the audience in a slightly different form each time.

If a dress rehearsal is about adjusting operational conditions shared among those creating the work under the gaze of "appreciation," then the operational condition in this work could be said to be feedback.

All staff attended the post-dress rehearsal feedback session except for Nishimoto and Owaki, along with KEX Co-directors Kawasaki and Yuya Tsukahara, and KEX short-term intern Moe Tanaka.

Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos), "Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains" (2024) Photo by Haruka Oka, Courtesy of Kyoto Experiment

While comments were made about technical aspects beyond Matsumoto and Ciwas's performance, such as lighting design and speaker placement, there was neither time

to digest them and adapt them into something else to more closely match the intended form nor time to accept all comments. Instead, they confirmed and adjusted what could be improved by the next day's performance, including fundamental aspects of the work, such as how to show the relationship between Matsumoto and Ciwas on stage.

Although Matsumoto and Ciwas shared the role of co-directors, the work's production method was flat and ecological. That is, the impact that their respective roles and behaviors had on the work was carefully weighted through feedback. This feedback shaped the work, and their roles were adjusted accordingly.

October 12–14, 2024, World Premiere at Kyoto Experiment

The work was divided into three chapters as indicated by the projected subtitles: "In the Deep Forest No One Knows…," "Finding 'Pipi' in the Mountain," and "Nebaneba," along with "A New Oral Story" placed between chapters 2 and 3, making four parts in total.

The storytelling commences with Ciwas's narrative about Temahahoi. As Ciwas chooses a sheet from the pile of rolled papers on stage left and reads it like a scroll, Matsumoto sits cross-legged in front of the stove on stage right. Matsumoto's storytelling begins with a tale of *ubasute* (abandoning the elderly, usually women), which transforms into a story of *yamamba*.

However, rather than Matsumoto speaking for herself, her story, following Ciwas's, is presented as subtitles in both Japanese and English. As she stands, she begins a shuffling motion, gradually incorporating twists into her movements and adding hand gestures. While the movement somewhat evokes Noh theater, given that the story's protagonist is Hyakuma-Yamamba, the name of a character in the Noh play *Yamamba*, it likely alludes to that play. Chapter 1 mainly consists of their respective storytelling styles.

Chapter 2 opens with their storytelling, and as the mountain images generated by Bibi flow by, Ciwas carries a stone to center stage behind the camphor tree, places it between her legs, and makes caressing motions. In unison, work gloves suspended above the *torobune* quiver. Ciwas then manipulates the red strings, causing the tree branches that hang above the camphor tree to sway as well. Ciwas's somewhat sensual movements transmit to the stone and strings she handles, transferring to the responding work gloves and tree branches. Matsumoto peels a taro while moving forward from the back of stage right. It is a very quiet time.

As the mountain images end, subtitles soon start to unfold the continuing story. Matsumoto sits at center stage and begins another narrative using the microphone. She explains that the box holding the camphor tree at center stage is not merely a planter but a "small society" that represents the relationships among the living creatures and objects within it.

Afterward, Matsumoto starts the radio cassette player, puts a taro in the boiling pot, and stands facing the *torobune*. The stage darkens, and the *yamamba* story continues in subtitles. However, while until now the story was conveyed through subtitles or voices, from this point on, the movements of Matsumoto and Ciwas themselves become the story, with subtitles serving as a supplement.

As Matsumoto's voice repeating "What's on your back?" plays from the cassette player, she steps her bare foot into the *torobune*, quickly withdraws it, sits down, and makes sliding motions repeatedly. Ciwas moves the stone she has been caressing between her legs into the *torobune* and splashes water over it repeatedly. The traces of Matsumoto's sliding movements are clearly visible as watermarks on stage right. Matsumoto and Ciwas finally face each other across the *torobune*. Matsumoto pours hot water from the stove along the traces, takes the taro from the pot, lies down, and places it on her lower abdomen, just above her uterus.

Ciwas takes a taro wrapped in red string from the back of stage left and places it on the back of her neck. As she moves, one of the work gloves floating above the *torobune* alternately submerges in and emerges from the water. While they each move on stage with the taro, Matsumoto crawls on the floor, narrating the *yamamba* story.

When the narration concludes, the stage goes dark, and the subtitle "A New Oral Story" appears. Whereas the story until now depicted women living in the mountains during an ambiguous time period, this part focuses on women living in contemporary cities. Although no names are mentioned, it is clearly about Matsumoto and Ciwas. Discarded paper possesses a special power to transform into mountains when recycled into new paper, and when an incantation is chanted, the mountain of recycled paper becomes a real mountain!

When Ciwas's narration concludes, the stage gradually brightens. She creates sounds by bringing her knees close to the microphone and rubbing them together. In front of her, Matsumoto moves slowly, face down. Ciwas's movements appear not to hold meaning in themselves but rather serve to gather sounds with the microphone. The sounds Ciwas captures gradually layer multiple times like a looper, resulting in an increasing noise on stage. Matsumoto grates a taro with a grater, as she did in the work in progress.

The stage also becomes increasingly busy visually. Exchanging the grater for a handheld microphone, Matsumoto repeatedly makes movements like sliding or stepping on the grated taro while narrating the story (though not clearly audi-

Nanako Matsumoto & Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos), "Sticky Hands, Stitched Mountains" (2024) Photo by Haruka Oka, Courtesy of Kyoto Experiment

ble). Ciwas's sound-gathering movements grow larger and larger. She puts stones in the water and drops them on the floor.

Eventually, Matsumoto's voice saying "mountain, mountain, mountain..." and Ciwas's "*lahuy [forest], hlahuy [togetherness]*" cross over, and Chapter 3's title is projected. After Ciwas finishes narrating the story, she retrieves the stone from the water, which also pulls up a work glove, and the two then start making paper together. The pulped waste paper in three tatami-mat-sized papermaking frames on stage will transform into recycled paper when dried by their hands. Presumably, this will become a part of the pile of paper on the stage.

Once these tasks are finished, a bouncy band tune begins to play. In rhythm with the music, the two move their feet sinuously on the grated taro covering stage right. Are they sliding, dancing, or both? Eventually, they push and shove each other to the beat, falling and splashing water on one another. When the music concludes, they stand up in their own time and exit the stage.

Following the October 12 performance, time was again set aside for feedback. Not only staff members but also Nishimoto and River Lin, the curator of the Taipei Arts Festival and ADAM, participated. TPAC, the organization behind the Taipei Arts Festival, had supported Matsumoto's stay in Taiwan and served as a co-production partner for this work. The two, who had missed the dress rehearsal, reinterpreted and unraveled the movements of Matsumoto and Ciwas and the scene meanings in detail, suggesting ways to clarify their relationship within the scenes and contexts. From the feedback session conducted in a circle, everyone smoothly transitioned to their respective positions for adjustments and rehearsal for the following day.

Not everything that happens in nature has meaning, and even when it does, it may not be universally understood. Words that slip out can become stories, and foot movements that seem about to slip while walking can eventually become dance steps. Making everything on stage into some kind of motif makes interpretation easier, but it also transforms the stage into a social condition.

Is it truly novel to assert that "quality has improved" when everything occurring on stage can be clearly interpreted? Is it really ecological when working hours can consume most of the 24 hours if it's for the performance? Nevertheless, as Nishimoto and River carefully accompanied the rehearsal while organizing scenes and contexts, it appeared that both Matsumoto and Ciwas gained a clearer understanding and barometer of what they were doing.

While many small changes were made during the rehearsal, the major ones included introducing themselves at the start to share some context beforehand, Ciwas's method of caressing the stone and pouring water, and the method and timing of one of the most symbolic scenes, where Matsumoto makes contact with the water.

The performances in the following days reflected the changes made during the rehearsal, and precisely because the overall framework remained unchanged, these small adjustments gradually influenced how the entire piece came together. Although I couldn't watch every performance, each one was presumably slightly different, even while performing the same material. The constantly evolving nature of the work arises from the democratic character of the production circle that continued to expand around Matsumoto and Ciwas at its center.

During the post-show talk after the evening show on October 13, the audiovisual element reemerged through Owaki's operation. With Kawasaki moderating, they discussed how Matsumoto and Ciwas met, along with the oral stories of *yamamba* (*yokai*) and Temahahoi, which became key themes for the work.

What is consistently emphasized in this work is the meeting of two women's bodies. This refers both to Ciwas in Temahahoi and the *yamamba* as characters in the stories, as well as to Ciwas Tahos and Nanako Matsumoto on the stage. While it may sound simple and easy when expressed in words, having traced through their research how women and minorities have been trampled and alienated within existing frameworks and systems, the two must have intuited that they needed new stories, new narratives, and new frameworks to fully connect.

Thus, they positioned at stage center what they referred to as a "small society," a mechanism still evolving and brimming with possibilities, and the encounter between the *yamamba* and Temahahoi is not articulated through words. Words would connect the story too neatly and too clearly, as before.

The production method of this work, which emphasized practice, research, and discussion beyond text, opens up new values impossible under conventional top-down production methods. This should be ecological and based on what the two described in the post-show talk as "allyship beyond patriarchy."

Project "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey"

KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre x Vanishing Point (United Kingdom)

This project is an international co-production between the Scotland-based theatre company Vanishing Point and KAAT (Kanagawa Arts Theatre). Vanishing Point, acclaimed as "one of the UK's most singular theatre companies" (The Guardian), continuously engages in international creative work. KAAT is a theatre that aims to be "open" to all and is committed to creating and sharing a diverse range of performing arts, including theatre, musicals, and dance.

The production began with discussions in 2021, followed by workshops held in both Yokohama and Glasgow. It was brought to life through the collaboration of Japanese and British actors and creative staff.

This work is based on Haruki Murakami's short stories *A Shinagawa Monkey and Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey*. Its core is the tale of a monkey that falls in love with human women and steals their names in an attempt to fulfill his desire. Beneath this premise lie layered themes of coercion, guilt and redemption, memory, and identity.

With bilingual dialogue that fluidly shifts between Japanese and English, the distinctive visual language, and the integration of surtitles into the spatial design, we were able to create a new form of multilingual theatrical expression.

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Thursday, November 28 – Sunday, December 8, 2024 (10 performances)

Performance Duration: 95 min.

Venue: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, Large studio (Yokohama, Japan)

Credit

Based on stories by: Haruki Murakami (From the short story "Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confession of a Shinagawa Monkey")

Conceived, Staged & Directed by: Matthew Lenton

Associate Direction: Sandy Grierson

Adapted in English by Sandy Grierson & Matthew Lenton with Written by Sandy Grierson & Matthew Lenton

Japanese Translation & Dramaturgy: Nozomi Abe

Cast: Rin Nasu, Sandy Grierson, Satoru Date, Elicia Daly, Yuya Tanaka, Sam Stopford, Junko Kano, Aisha Goodman, Ailie Cohen (Puppeteer)

Scenography: K Ishihara (BLANk R&D)

Lighting Design: Simon Wilkinson

Sound Design & Composition: Mark Melville

Costume Design: Sacico Ito (BRÜCKE)

Hair, Wigs & Make Up Design: Eri Akamatsu (Esper.)

Puppet Design & Making: Ailie Cohen

Associate Artist: Joanna Bowman

Interpreter: Yoko Tokita

Stage Manager: Chinatsu Iwaya

Production Manager: Toru Hirai

Stage Manager: Gillian Richards

Technical Manager: Josh Brown

Assistant Stage Manager: Kohtaro Yokozawa, Tomoka Yamada
Chief Electrician: Maki Ueyama
LX Board Operator: Katsura Inada
Rehearsal Lighting Operator: Maina Kitagami
Sound Engineer: Daisuke Hoshino
Sound Operator: Yu Takeda, Kana Eguchi
Wardrobe: Akemi Kinoshita
Hair & Makeup: Michiyo Ueno
Surtitle: Keiko Nagata
Technical Interpreter: Sonoko Ishii
Production Staff: Izumi Ohtomo
Associate Set Designer: Sayako Makino (BLANk R&D)
Costume production: Aya Tsuzuki
Costume Assistant: Kotoko Sekiguchi, Mayumi Ito
Stage Carpenter: C-COM Kiyoji Ito, Shinobu Sakurai
BIJUTSUKOBO TAKUTO Kunihiko Matsumoto
Props Masters: Takatsu Sousyokubijutsu Taishi Nishimura
Video: Magnux Satoshi Kuriyama
Special Effect: GIMMICK Tomohiro Sakai
Illumination: Shuichi Odagiri
Costume Cooperation: Shumi Abe, Noriko Yamaguchi, Yuki Kubota
Hair & Makeup Cooperation: Esper.
Interpreter: Michiyo Sumida
Understudy: Miyabi Kitagawa

Cooperation: SEINENZA FILM PRODUCTION, Gorch Brothers, Office PSC, OFFICE THREE I's, Knockout, BLANk R&D, LIGHTING COMPANY Akarigumi, BRÜCKE, ILLUMICA TOKYO, ycoment, Mitsuaki Adachi, Sayaka Yoshimura, Megumi Kumoda

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Kanagawa Arts Theatre
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Ticketing: Ryoko Kobayashi
Production Staff: Osamu Suzuki, Hiroko Kaneko
Chief Producer: Sonoko Fueki, Bunichi Ito
Managing Director: Mahito Horiuchi
Artistic Director: Keishi Nagatsuka

Vanishing Point Theatre Company
Artistic Director: Matthew Lenton
Executive Producer: Severine Wyper
Production Manager: Niall Black
Administrative Producer: Eleanor Scott
Associate Producer: Neil Murray
Marketing Manager: Niall Walker

Organizers: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, The Japan Foundation
Planning: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, Vanishing Point Theatre Company
Co-Productions: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, The Japan Foundation, Vanishing Point Theatre Company
Co-Host: Yokohama International Performing Arts Meeting Executive Committee (YPAM2024 Joint Program)
Partnership: Tramway (Glasgow)
Subsidy: British Council, Creative Scotland, The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation

Photography: Shinji Hosono

First Report / Aki Ichikawa

Taking the Long Route to Climb Mount Fuji

報告書 市川安紀 第1回

A Long Journey to Co-Production

The origins of this story trace back 15 years. In spring 2009, Keishi Nagatsuka, the current artistic director of KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre (hereinafter KAAT), was in London on the Agency for Cultural Affairs' Program of Overseas Study for Upcoming Artists when he was deeply moved by a performance he happened to attend. It was *Interiors* by Vanishing Point, a theater company based in Glasgow, Scotland, that operates internationally.

The performance depicted people gathered at an indoor party as snow fell silently, with a woman watching them through the window. Everything occurring indoors was expressed through wordless mime, the only speaker being the woman outside narrating the scenes and emotions. Nagatsuka was so captivated by this magical performance where visuals, sound, and story merged seamlessly that he went to see it a second time. This production, which continues to be performed worldwide as one of Vanishing Point's signature works, made a profound impression on Nagatsuka. This personal memory would become the seed for an international co-production, finally germinating after more than ten years.

In 2019, with his appointment as KAAT's artistic director approaching in two years, Nagatsuka was involved in selecting the annual program as an artistic advisor and wanted to bring *Interiors* to KAAT. The theater made direct contact with Matthew Lenton, the director leading Vanishing Point, and discussions about the performance had just begun when the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world in late 2019.

Although the project was temporarily halted, discussions continued via email, and Lenton proposed performing *Interiors* with Japanese actors. Nagatsuka himself had already been thinking, "Rather than simply hosting an invited performance, wouldn't it be interesting to adapt the work for Japan?" A path began to emerge toward authentic international co-production that would lead to future development aligned with KAAT's identity as a "creative theater."

Choosing the Challenging Path: Starting from Scratch

Workshops with Japanese actors were set to begin in May 2022 to develop the Japanese version of *Interiors*. However, in early 2022, Lenton made an exciting new proposal: "Considering the significance of international co-production, I'd like to start from scratch."

For Vanishing Point, this was an offer from a country (Japan) with which they had no previous connection. The easiest approach would have been a touring production of *Interiors* if the conditions were right. It's the company's signature work, highly acclaimed worldwide, and familiar territory for the cast and staff. Japanese audiences would surely feel the same excitement Nagatsuka experienced upon first seeing it. Success would have been virtually assured.

Yet, commendably, they chose to build relationships from scratch with Japanese actors, who have a different language and cultural background, challenging themselves to take on a completely new, unknown work. Nagatsuka, placing his trust in Vanishing Point, remarks, "They don't choose projects with easy answers. They explore what lies beyond,

staying with works for long periods and choosing the more difficult path. That's what makes them so trustworthy." While a thrilling adventure partnership might benefit from the balance provided by one partner being more cautious (sometimes courage is needed to turn back), KAAT would presumably take on this careful role.

Actors Participating in the Selection Process

What kind of work would they tackle? Lenton initially proposed ideas featuring Japanese ghosts, but after discussions, they settled on basing the work on a contemporary Japanese novelist's writing. The final candidates included *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, and *After Dark* and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" by Haruki Murakami. All are works by authors whose books have been translated into numerous languages and read by many people worldwide.

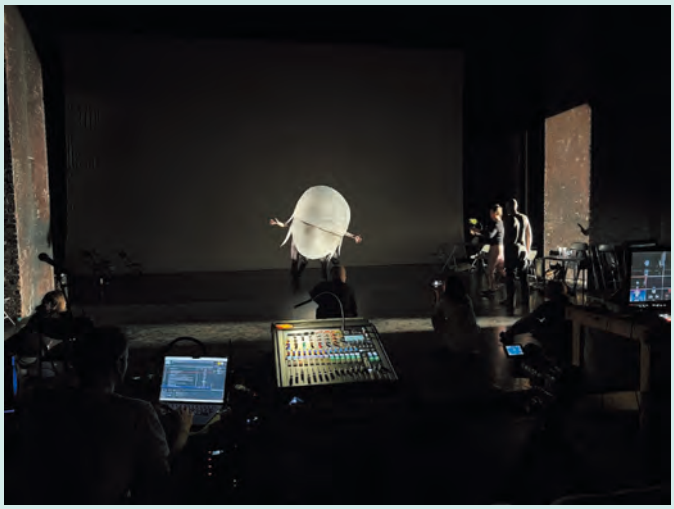
Since Nagatsuka became artistic director in April 2021, KAAT has launched the *Kaihatsu* (Development) project, which aims to nurture the core of its creative activities. The workshops between Vanishing Point and Japanese actors are part of this project.

In May 2022, the first workshop (Stage 1) began at KAAT. Five Japanese actors selected by KAAT participated alongside director Lenton, actor Sandy Grierson, and sound designer Mark Melville from the UK. They spent ten days reading candidate novels and examining the meaning of scenes and the works overall. It is uncommon for actors to be involved in the selection process from the beginning, even outside of international co-productions. For the Japanese actors, the experience of "building a work from scratch" with a director from a different language and culture must have been invaluable.

Taking on Haruki Murakami's Work

After this first workshop, Nagatsuka and Lenton discussed and agreed to create a stage production based on Haruki Murakami's short stories "A Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey." As Nagatsuka suggested, taking on Murakami's work, which has passionate fans known as "Harukists" worldwide, would be no easy task.

Murakami has several works featuring animals, including "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo." The two selected stories feature a monkey that speaks human language and plays an important role: "A Shinagawa Monkey" was published in *Five Strange Tales from Tokyo* (2005, Shinchosha), and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" in *First Person Singular* (2020, Bungeishunju). Although published years apart, they



seem to involve the same monkey, connected by a "world line."

"You might all wonder why a director would be interested in Haruki Murakami's animals," Lenton says with a mischievous smile. Indeed, the animated film *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (2022), directed by Pierre Földes, which was recently released in Japan, is also based on several Haruki Murakami short stories, with "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" forming a crucial part.

Regarding the two stories selected for this production, Lenton says, "First, I simply found the concept of a human and monkey conversing interesting. I was thinking about how we could stage this while reading it." I will delve deeper into the themes the director explores in a subsequent report.

Given that Lenton was already a fan of Murakami's work, this selection was both natural and perhaps inevitable.

Full-Scale Rehearsals Begin

In June 2023, a second ten-day workshop (Stage 2) was held in Glasgow, Vanishing Point's home base. One purpose was to explore the challenges of a bilingual performance with Japanese and English dialogue, which revealed fundamental differences in language structure and distinctions in conversational and behavioral habits and values. While it's easy to say "mutual respect," genuine convergence between people from different backgrounds requires imagination about one another.

From this workshop, Nozomi Abe, who works in the UK, joined as a text translator and dramaturg to support the literary aspects. Someone like Abe, who understands both Japanese and English languages and cultures, plays an essential role in international co-productions.

A ten-day pre-rehearsal (Stage 3) took place at KAAT from late February to early March 2024, based on the first draft of the script (Japanese-English version) prepared by Sandy Grierson and Lenton. Two prospective actors, a lighting designer, and a puppeteer from the UK also participated, spending time thoroughly confronting the work with five Japanese actors. However, there were instances when the director, caught up in the moment, acted without waiting for interpretation, which they aimed to improve during full rehearsals.

Finally, on October 21, 2024, full rehearsals began in KAAT's large studio. Addressing the assembled cast and crew, Lenton said, "I'm very excited. Let's make this a space filled with creative possibilities over the next six weeks."

Lenton considers Haruki Murakami's essay collection *Novelist as a Vocation* to be his soulmate. Quoting from this work where Murakami describes himself as "the type who can't understand what Mount Fuji is like without actually climbing to the summit on my own two feet," Lenton concluded: "There's no efficient way to climb; the more we climb, the more confusing it might get. But for me, that's what creation is about. I want to move around a lot and, hopefully, eventually reach the summit." The adventure, filled with childlike curiosity, has only just begun.

Second Report / Aki Ichikawa

Creating Our Story

連載 第2回 市川安紀

A Script Updated Daily

Full-scale rehearsals began on October 21, 2024, in KAAT's large studio, which will also serve as the performance venue. For most plays (excluding musicals), rehearsals typically start about one to one and a half months before opening night, although sometimes longer periods are required.

This rehearsal period is approximately six weeks. While not exceptionally long, it is likely an advantage that the production has undergone three preparatory stages—two workshops at KAAT and Glasgow, plus pre-rehearsals at KAAT—and has already moved past the "fumbling" and "meeting halfway" phases of cross-language and cross-cultural collaboration, fostering a "team" feeling among the mixed Japanese-British crew and cast.

A bilingual script was prepared for the first day of rehearsals, but it was described as merely provisional. When Vanishing Point creates new works, they often begin rehearsals without a script at all, and in this production, I was surprised to see the script being updated almost daily.

After all, this is a stage adaptation of Haruki Murakami's work, which has countless fans worldwide. Merging the two short stories, "A Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey," into a single script seemed to be the most important point, and I imagined that establishing a solid framework early on would provide a firm foundation for the creative process.

However, director Matthew Lenton says, "What's probably important is not the 'words' but the 'play'." In other words, while the script is certainly an important element, it's just one component; his emphasis is on how to depict Haruki Murakami's world as theater through the three-dimensional work as a whole, including actors' physical expressions, sound, lighting, and other elements.

What Flows Beneath the Surface

Lenton has always been a great Haruki Murakami enthusiast. He became captivated after reading *Sputnik Sweetheart* and has since read all of Murakami's novels and essays as they've been translated into English. With this background, he likely wanted to tackle Murakami's work "since we're in Japan anyway" (as he mentioned during a post-performance talk), but after going through the workshop process, he decided on "A Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" because, as mentioned in the previous report, he was "simply drawn to the interesting concept of a monkey and human talking" and "couldn't imagine how to depict those scenes on stage."

This curiosity about challenges without easily foresee-

able results resonates with KAAT's artistic director, Keishi Nagatsuka, who proposed this co-production. Having creative partners who share fundamental creative approaches must be tremendously reassuring.

What Lenton first identified in reading the short stories "A Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" were themes of "crime and punishment," "atonement," and "salvation." The monkey learned to speak human language because his owner, a professor (human), taught him. Although this may have been done with good intentions, even if a monkey can speak human language, it cannot become human. Instead, it becomes an outsider, alienated from monkey society.

Can humans avoid responsibility for destroying something essential about "being a monkey" by teaching it human language and culture? Lenton says he was drawn to this work precisely because such diverse themes "aren't clearly depicted on the surface but flow beneath it." This applies not only to these two short stories but also reflects a charm that runs as a basso continuo through many of Murakami's works.

Music Playing Various Melodies

When adapting this work for the stage, what Lenton values is not allowing any single one of the many themes to become too prominent. He uses music as a metaphor: "'Crime' and 'atonement' are in D minor, 'loss of identity' is in C major, 'male-dominated patriarchal society' is in E minor... Rather than having one main melody, I want the appropriate sounds to be heard at the appropriate times. All these themes exist within the story, but I don't want to extract just one and explain to the audience, 'This is the theme of this play.'"

What is ambiguous is left ambiguous. With various melodies present, it comes down to the audience which of them will resonate. This basic creative stance of Lenton and Vanishing Point—"consciously creating 'blank spaces' where audiences can use their imagination and find connections to themselves"—pairs well with Murakami's works, which leave readers with many mysteries and lingering impressions.

That's precisely why the script continues to be updated even after full rehearsals have begun, with new realizations and discoveries by Lenton and the actors reflected daily. Changes to scene structure or sudden additions of new scenes are commonplace. Even at a stage when actors would normally have memorized a finalized script, the script revision process continues. While the actors surely feel some pressure, they seem to find joy in the process of everyone

working together to create a unified work.

The Struggle to Translate Murakami into Theatrical Language

Nevertheless, I can only imagine the hardships faced by the staff members responsible for updating the unresolved bilingual script each day. Nozomi Abe, who participates in this production as a translator and dramaturg, laughs while carrying a thick script folder, saying, "We still don't know what it will become," even about two weeks into full rehearsals.

In the early stages of the script, she mentions that there was a difference in impression between the screenplay co-written by Lenton and Sandy Grierson and the original work. For example, regarding the role of Mizuki, played by Rin Nasu: "When I read the initial English script, Mizuki, who doesn't stand out much in the original, seemed to have become quite an extroverted woman. However, I was conflicted about whether aligning character impressions with the original was really my role as a dramaturg… In any case, I tried to frankly discuss my feelings with Matt (Matthew) and the others."

The pressure of translating Murakami's work into a Japanese script must have been immense. Initially, she attempted to restore Japanese dialogue to align the original text as closely as possible for sections corresponding to the source work. However, as workshops and discussions progressed, the entire team arrived at a crucial concept.

"We concluded that our goal wasn't to faithfully adapt Haruki Murakami's original for the stage, but to collaboratively determine what theatrical language was necessary to tell 'Our Story.' Until then, there were many clashes and discussions along the lines of 'in the original, it's like this,' but afterwards, my stance changed to 'okay, I'll translate this into the Japanese needed for Our Story.' As a result, there are many parts that aren't exactly the same Japanese as in the original."

Can We Communicate in "Human Language?"

Through such trial and error and conflict, various patterns of "answering in Japanese to English" were tested during rehearsals to determine if bilingual conversations could truly work, even with subtitles. Sandy Grierson, who plays the monkey "who can speak human language," initially challenged himself to deliver many lines in Japanese but ultimately adopted a bilingual approach where he "basically speak[s] English but speak[s] Japanese at key points." Yuya Tanaka, who portrays a man conversing in Japanese, accepts the monkey very naturally, and interestingly, this doesn't feel unnatural to viewers either.

Mizuki's counselor, Tetsuko Sakaki, is portrayed by Elicia Daly in English, while her husband, Yoshiro Sakaki, is played by Satoru Date in Japanese, and his colleague, Sakurada, is depicted by Sam Stopford in English—conversations continue in two languages even among intimate relationships, such as spouses and colleagues. Aisha Goodman, who plays Yuko Matsunaka, Mizuki's high school junior holding a crucial key to why Mizuki forgets her name, is bilingual in Japanese and English, so she speaks both languages.

According to Abe, the company's second key concept is "Human Language." "We're all talking about how it would be very theatrical if we could show all languages—English, Japanese, and monkey language—magically being mutually intelligible."

After an intense and fleeting six weeks, the preview performance opened on November 28.

Third Report / Aki Ichikawa

The Common Language Exists on Stage

書き起こし　市川安紀　第3回

Names as Heartwarming Flames

Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey had its preview performance on November 28, 2024, and officially opened the following day. I attended the opening night, and the production, which had undergone additional changes since the preview, was frankly marvelous.

Before the performance begins, music plays from a record player at the side of the empty stage. Then a man (Yuya Tanaka) appears from behind a beam of light cutting through the smoke. Years ago, this man encountered a monkey that could speak human language at a hot spring resort. This dreamlike experience of a single night remains for him as an unforgettable memory.

Meanwhile, Mizuki (Rin Nasu), who keeps forgetting her name, is prompted by her counselor, Sakaki (Elicia Daly), to trace her memories of her name, which brings back mysteri-

ous recollections of a junior classmate (Aisha Goodman) who took her own life. As the two stories intersect, Mizuki confronts "the monkey who steals names."

Centered around the extremely surreal "character" of a talking monkey, the play leaves lingering thoughts about what constitutes identity for people (and monkeys), the mysterious attraction of names with their dual aspects, love and solitude, and more. I felt a deep emotion at the finale when the monkey, who lives in solitude because he can speak human language, disappears into a snowstorm with the name tag of the woman he loves pinned to his chest—the light of a name becoming a heartwarming flame illuminating the darkness.

The Original Work's World Realized in Three Dimensions

The more than 20 scenes—moving back and forth between past and present, everyday life and the extraordinary, reality and dreams—unfold seamlessly, with actors playing multiple roles while also moving furniture and props with smooth, flawless movements.

The lighting (Simon Wilkinson) and sound (Mark Melville) that invite you into an otherworldly realm, the contrast of light and darkness, the action sequences resembling an old-fashioned detective story to catch the monkey lurking in the city's underground passages, Bruckner's Symphony No. 7 beloved by the monkey, and the mist fantastically expressing the world of memory and dreams—all these elements stimulating sight, hearing, and imagination were mobilized to brilliantly bring Haruki Murakami's original world into three dimensions.

The performances leave an unforgettable impression, from Sandy Grierson's astonishingly natural portrayal of the talking monkey (with Ailie Cohen's excellent tail manipulation!) to Tanaka's consistently calm tone as he converses with the monkey as naturally as he would with a human, while also serving as a storyteller, to Nasu's delicate portrayal of Mizuki's transformation as she recovers her name and herself.

The bilingual Japanese-English performance, which seemed like it would be a major challenge, neither felt unnatural nor presented any barriers, partly thanks to the subtitles projected in both languages simultaneously (though viewers in the front seats might have found it somewhat troublesome to shift their gaze up and down to read the subtitles positioned above the stage). The simple, unadorned dialogue likely contributed to this success.

Even in exchanges between English and Japanese, I could focus on what was being discussed, the issues arising, and the content of the events and communications themselves. The occasional Japanese phrases like "*kyōshuku desu*" (That's very kind of you) and "*komatta koto ni narimashita*" (This is a difficult situation), spoken by the monkey who primarily speaks English, were charming and flavorful.

The "Shinagawa Monkey" as Depicted in the Original Work

Let's examine more closely how one stage production was created from two short stories by Haruki Murakami: "A Shinagawa Monkey" and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey."

The original "A Shinagawa Monkey" is a story about Mizuki Ando (née Mizuki Osawa), who cannot remember her name. The counselor, Sakaki, who takes on her case, draws out a memory of Mizuki's junior schoolmate, Yuko Matsunaka, who entrusted her name tag to Mizuki before taking her own life. Yuko's name tag, which Mizuki had kept for a long time, along with Mizuki's own name tag, was stolen at some point, and the culprit was a "monkey" hiding in Shinagawa Ward.

This monkey, who could speak human language, had a condition where he stole the names of human women he fell in love with. Because the monkey, who continued to yearn for Yuko, stole Mizuki's name tag along with Yuko's, Mizuki couldn't remember her name. Mizuki forgives the monkey but must confront the "darkness" connected to her own name that she had kept covered and ignored.

On the other hand, "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey," which can be considered a sequel, is a recollection by a man who met a talking monkey at a hot spring resort. The monkey appears in the bath of a rustic inn, washes

All photographs in the Third Report by Shinji Hosono

the man's back, brings beer to his room, and tells his life story—how his owner taught him language, how he had to flee his home in Shinagawa after causing an incident, and how he doesn't fit into monkey society. However, by the next morning, the monkey had disappeared.

Years later, the man witnesses a female work associate being unable to remember her own name, and his memory of the "Shinagawa Monkey," which he had never revealed to anyone, resurfaces.

Careful Reconstruction of Events in the Stories

When creating the script for the stage version, Matthew Lenton and Grierson began by arranging the events from the two original stories in chronological order. The question was how to combine them and make them work as a single stage production. They wrote events on a whiteboard in the Glasgow studio during the second workshop, debating back and forth, often reaching impasses and feeling close to giving up.

Haruki Murakami's world is one where improbable, mysterious stories unfold as if completely natural. The key was to maintain that charm as much as possible while creating a script with enough persuasiveness so as not to lose the audience. Though they said the script is just one element that makes up the show, it is undoubtedly an important framework.

The script, which continued to be adjusted in rehearsals until just before opening night, covered all the events from the original works while highlighting Mizuki's relationship with her mother, which wasn't detailed in the originals. A scene was added showing Mizuki, her mother (Junko Kano), and her husband Takashi (Satoru Date) eating in the kitchen, creating a tense family portrait of communication breakdown by overlapping their dialogue.

The scene of the mother repeatedly calling Mizuki by her sister's name was unbearable to watch. Introducing an "outside perspective" with Sakaki observing through an acrylic panel established an appropriate distance for the audience, preventing the scene from becoming overly serious.

Another key point in the stage version is the addition of the man visiting Sakaki and revealing the story of the Shinagawa Monkey, a situation not found in the original works. This leads to the development where the monkey story told by the man to Sakaki becomes the key to solving Mizuki's problem.

In the original, the specially gifted Sakaki somewhat supernaturally arrives at the bold hypothesis that "a monkey stole her name," but the flow in the stage version would

have satisfied even audiences unfamiliar with the original work. They successfully deconstructed the two short stories and reconstructed them organically.

Importantly, there were no constraints or requests from Haruki Murakami regarding this stage adaptation.

"Murakami Love" Overflowing Throughout

I was particularly impressed by the reverence for Murakami's work evident throughout the production. Murakami's works often depict the darker aspects of human nature, such as jealousy and malice. His characters quietly face "what is happening" in the space between dreams and reality while carrying profound sadness, pain, loneliness, and negative emotions that they cannot control.

Yet the atmosphere of his works never becomes too heavy, partly because of the sense of humor that enables characters to view themselves with detachment. In this production, the exchanges between the Shinagawa Monkey and the man were quite surreal and comical, often eliciting laughter from the audience (the monkey performing Japanese sake-serving etiquette perfectly was brilliant!). The team of Sakaki's husband (Satoru Date) and his subordinate, Sakurada (Sam Stopford), who play an active part in the mission to capture the monkey, also provided comic relief, creating a warm feeling whenever they appeared.

While maintaining this overall tone, motifs characteristic of Murakami's works—light and dark, the underground darkness (sewers) connecting to the spirit world, classical music, fading shadows of the self, ink dropped into a glass of water—were skillfully woven into the dialogue, even including elements not directly appearing in the original stories, revealing Lenton's deep "Murakami love" throughout.

As translator and dramaturg Nozomi Abe said, it is interesting how the process of sincerely engaging with Murakami's works through an interpretation as "our story," rather than being fixated on faithfully adapting Haruki Murakami's original works for the stage, paradoxically resulted in the emergence of a genuine "Murakami world."

"I love Murakami's work, but I didn't want to be merely Haruki Murakami's servant. It was important that while it was a Haruki Murakami work, it was also our work. If we didn't freely interpret the original, we would lose its essence," says Lenton, whose sentiment seems to have been shared by the entire company.

The Benefits of an Extended Creative Period

Above all, the key to the success of this production lies in the attempt to express the world of Murakami's works not just through words (dialogue) but, as mentioned repeatedly, through all theatrical elements, including the actors' physi-

cal expressions, lighting, sound, and other stage effects. This was made possible largely by the extensive span of two and a half years during which the work was carefully nurtured.

Theater practitioners from Japan and the UK meeting for the first time considered what they could create together. Various actors were involved from the workshop stage before the work and cast were determined, including some who didn't end up performing. An immense amount of time was spent on script development, and language and cultural differences were transcended to build trusting relationships.

Once full rehearsals began in Japan, they engaged in trial and error for even the briefest movements, thoroughly "just trying" every minor idea. While this creative method was standard for Lenton and Vanishing Point, it was a novel experience for the Japanese actors and crew, providing significant stimulus.

Creation Where Trying and Failing Are Possible

Rin Nasu, who plays Mizuki, participated from the early workshops, and this marked her first time in an international co-production.

"I wanted to know about Vanishing Point's creative method, which is said to be innovative, and the differences compared to Japan. During the Glasgow workshop, I was impressed by how often Matthew and others asked us about Japanese culture. Matthew was thorough in his approach of not being satisfied until he could see everything, including sound and visuals, never dismissing an individual actor's opinion, and intuitively proceeding with a 'Let's just try it once' attitude. His persistent stance of selecting interesting elements from all possible options remained consistent throughout the main rehearsals in Japan, and I was deeply impressed."

She also reflects that the lengthy shared time fostered bonds among colleagues, enabling her to be more proactive in expressing her opinions.

"I think Japanese actors, including myself, tend to be hesitant with directors. But through this experience, I came to understand that presenting my own ideas without fear of failure is part of team creation. Above all, as fellow theater people, we can communicate what we're thinking even when language doesn't get through. Learning that our common language exists on stage was a major realization."

Yuya Tanaka also mentions "being able to try and fail" as a difference from Japanese creative processes. "Matthew and others created an atmosphere where everyone could share opinions, so the differences in customs, culture, and language between Japan and the UK didn't become major obstacles. The process of testing each possible option one by one leads to richness in the work, and I was able to reaffirm the potential of theater to become more interesting. It was a wonderful experience."

A Monkey with an Eloquent Tail Speaks of Love

Sandy Grierson, a key member of Vanishing Point's creative team alongside Lenton and the actor who played the lovable Shinagawa Monkey, also says, "Creating with the Japanese, who have sharp sensibilities toward dialogue and body and great hospitality, was very enjoyable. The fact that the Japanese actors and creative team became more vocal during our shared process is evidence of trust built over time. This is true collaboration."

Incidentally, Lenton initially imagined the monkey would be portrayed by a puppet (which is why puppeteer Cohen participated), but it was Grierson who objected. According to Lenton, "Sandy said, 'Puppet shows are done all the time in London—I'll play the monkey!' (laughs). I couldn't give an answer at that point, but our mysterious journey began, including whether a puppet or human would play the role."

After various experimentations, they ultimately established a unique style of "human + puppeteer" in which Cohen manipulates only a long tail. His movements, grooming, and scratching gestures are exactly like a monkey's, yet he

speaks human language, drinks beer with his tail standing straight up in happiness, and then speaks of the essence of love in a way that resonates with the heart—creating a one-of-a-kind "Shinagawa Monkey."

Cohen's skillful tail manipulation expressively conveys emotions like a living creature and is truly unforgettable. "I remember when Sandy said, 'I have an idea' and showed us a tail made from a hose, I said, 'You might be right.'" (Lenton, laughing)

Stage Results Created by "Blank Spaces"

Lenton, who notes he was greatly influenced by Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), states that he prefers works that, like this profound film, do not provide answers to the audience. "This work depicts complex themes like true beauty and humanity, as well as darkness and fear within a simple story. But the 'answer' isn't depicted. For me, that's precisely what being 'human' is."

Audiences can expand their imagination in the "blank spaces" intentionally created to enhance the work. This stage production, refined over a long period, stands out as exceptional among the many stage and screen adaptations of Murakami's works. As an international co-production, it can also be said that KAAT and Vanishing Point formed an ideal partnership.

Reviews also praised it, with comments like "A stimulating show worthy of concluding 2024" and "I never imagined Murakami's worldview could be expressed so well through lighting and smoke. I'd like to bestow the title 'Mist Magician' on director Matthew Lenton" (both from the Yomiuri Shimbun evening edition, January 7, 2025), and "The lighting (Simon Wilkinson) that shows deep darkness resonates with the play's theme" (Asahi Shimbun Digital, December 5, 2024)—which presented generally favorable reviews for direction and performances that captured the core of Murakami's work.

Additionally, Rin Nasu, who played Mizuki, received the Individual Prize at the 59th Kinokuniya Theatre Awards for her performances in this work and in Seinenza Theater Company's *Ketsuburoyo: Ito Noe Tadaima Kiseichu*.

With performances in Scotland, Vanishing Point's home base, scheduled for late February to early March 2025, I'm curious about the reception there. I sincerely hope this work, born from international co-production, becomes a valuable asset and an important part of the repertoire for both Vanishing Point and KAAT, continuing to evolve in the future.

Project

Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan-Yonaguni-Jeju "Then Dance with Souls" "Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO - Song of diaspora"

Jun Kawasaki & Wonki Jeong

This music-poetic drama is an international joint production by the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory (led by Jun Kawasaki), which has staged performances of Eurasian Opera across the continent, and composer Wonki Jeong (South Korea), who has created numerous theater pieces on the theme of diaspora. Focusing on the maritime cultures of the East Asian islands, it features a mélange of singers with roots in the indigenous Taiwanese people, singers from Yonaguni and Jeju, and chamber music performed with Korean and Taiwanese traditional instruments, accompanied by dance, art, and film. Then Dance with Souls (written by Wonki Jeong) spotlights "migration" as a consequence of war, centered on the story of a shaman on Jeju Island. It is both a documentary and a requiem—a documentary of those who perished at sea while seeking a haven after enduring colonial rule and national division, and a requiem that resonates at the boundary of life/death and the present. Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO – Song of diaspora (written by Jun Kawasaki) is a musical drama depicting cultural exchanges between Japan, Korea, and Taiwan from a rare perspective connecting the three regions. The soloists include Eri Liao, a singer of indigenous Taiwanese descent, and Moon Seokbeom, a renowned actor from Jeju Island. Aika Higashimori, a filmmaker and actress from Japan's westernmost Yonaguni Island, plays Shio, who embarks on an endless journey of drifting. During her journey, Shio encounters untold tales of cultural plunder and interactions between indigenous peoples and newcomers. The traditions that have been lost to history intersect with the diaspora of people who have historically been cast aside by the nation-state. In this project, unknown musical cultures and endangered languages mutually resonate and cast light on the souls that have vanished into history and the sea. In doing so, it poses a question to our increasingly exclusionary modern society: What does it mean for people to live together?

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Saturday, December 7- Sunday, December 8, 2024(3 performances) Venue: Tenbusu Hall, Tenbusu Naha, Okinawa

Performance Date: Tuesday, December 10- Wednesday, December 11, 2024(3 performances)

Venue: Nippori Sunny Hall, Tokyo

Credit

Part 1: "Then Dance with Souls (premiere)" Direction, Composition: Wongi Jeong

Part 2: Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO "Song of diaspora (premiere)" Direction, Composition: Jun Kawasaki

Script: Jun Kawasaki, Satoshi Tsuboi

Cast: Aika Higashimori (lead actress), Eri Liao (vocal), Moon Seokbeom (vocal), Arihiro Yamada (butoh dance), Hiroyo Miura (dance), Aya (butoh dance), Akira Yoshimatsu (Japanese traditional vocal, actor), Satoshi Tsuboi (Vocal, Script), Erika Ueda (performance) Ensemble: Chang Jaehyo (percussion), Park Soon-A (gayageum), Li-Chin Li (sheng), Aki Ozawa (guitar), KyongA Im (cello), Akiko Imamoto (flute / Okinawa performance), Sayaka Kaneno (flute / Tokyo performance), Kota Arai (percussion)

Staff: Hideto Miyuki (Video and Art director), Chong Ri Ae (Installation art), Go Takayama (Video)

Organizer: Jun Kawasaki, Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory

Co-Organizer:The Japan Foundation

Co-Production:Jun Kawasaki, Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory,The Japan Foundation

Produced by Jun Kawasaki, Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory,Tomo Saito (Marmelo, inc.)

First Report / Hajime Oishi

Background to the Production and Research on Yonaguni Island

Overview of *Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan–Yonaguni–Jeju*

Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan–Yonaguni–Jeju is a theater piece presented by the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory. It is scheduled to be performed in two locations, Tokyo and Okinawa, in December 2024. Produced in collaboration between two composers/directors–Jun Kawasaki, director of the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory, and Wonki Jeong, who works based in Jeju Island, South Korea–the production consists of two parts: *Then Dance with Souls*, directed by Jeong, and *Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO – Song of Diaspora*, directed by Kawasaki. The drama draws on the folklore of the islands along the Kuroshio Current, specifically Taiwan, Yonaguni Island, and Jeju Island, as the title suggests, and features actors and musicians with roots in these islands among its cast.

Kawasaki is actively involved in a variety of stage productions, including theater, dance, and musical drama, and has also participated in various projects in Japan and overseas as a contrabassist. Crossing the boundaries between music, theater, and dance and traversing the world from Europe to Russia to Central Asia, Kawasaki could be said to be an artist who transcends all sorts of boundaries.

Kawasaki founded the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory in 2015 as a platform for his creative pursuit. He defines his concept for the laboratory as follows on its website:

> Based on traditional arts and folklore from all over the world including Japan, we invent and use our unique choral system without relying on any ethnic or religious or classic music. The theatre music is said to be 'Asian Magic Realism' relating to creations of Latin American artist Gabriel García Márquez or Spanish poet Federico García Lorca and so on. (Cited from the website of the Jun Kawasaki, Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory)

The *Eurasian Opera* series, which began in 2018, encapsulates this philosophy.

Eurasian Opera as the Starting Point

Kawasaki says he developed the core concept behind *Eurasian Opera* while traveling through Russia and Central Asia as a musician and interacting with local artists. In his book, he writes as follows:

> Ancient roads that connected the East and West in erstwhile times, such as the Silk Road, are no longer visible. However, sounds lie dormant, hidden along these trackless roads. I wanted to hear these sounds and create artistic works with people who walk those paths. This desire has culminated in what I named "Eurasian Opera." (Cited from Jun Kawasaki, Eurasian Songs – Homelands and Strangelands)

There have been three productions so far in the *Eurasian Opera* series. These are *Continental Isolation* (September 2018), featuring vocalists from Ukraine, Tuva, Turkey, and Russia; *Sansho the Bailiff* (March and October 2019), performed in Kazakhstan and South Korea; and *A Night The Sky was Full of Crazy Stars* (November 2022), based on *The Tale of Chunhyang* of the Joseon Dynasty Era and featuring Mina Ji, a South Korean singer of the Korean traditional music known as *jeongga*. In the third project, Kawasaki also alluded to Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey, creating a performance resonating with songs sung in multiple languages, including Korean, Taiwanese, Kurdish, Russian, and Japanese.

The *Eurasian Opera* series questions the meaning of bending an ear to the voices of the voiceless, which are about to be obliterated by the grand stories of nation-states and ideologies, and turning our eyes toward ancient roads that have emerged through encounters between people. Using sounds, words, and dance, all three projects in the series attempt to bring to the surface what is being repressed by modern society. The series also explores the possibilities of passing on to the future folklore that is gradually disappearing. Kawasaki mentions this in his book by defining *Eurasian Opera* as "a journey = music that connects folklore with the future beyond the boundaries of traditional music, traditional culture, ethnicity, and nation-states."

Kawasaki noted the following in my interview with him.

> "Our projects all have the same structure. One element is the presence of an imaginary ethnic group. You'll

The Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory's The end does not end, performed in Tokyo on October 20, 2015 ©bozzo

notice that the story always unfolds as this imaginary ethnic group encounters folklore that exists in reality." (From my interview with Kawasaki)

Without exception, *Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan–Yonaguni–Jeju* also inherits the above-described theme and structure.

Encounter between Jun Kawasaki and Wonki Jeong

The precise beginning of *Kuroshio Current Project Taiwan–Yonaguni–Jeju* was when Kawasaki and Jeong met for the first time.

Jeong is a director and composer garnering attention as a bearer of next-generation stage arts and traditional music in Korea. Based in Jeju Island, he engages in fieldwork on the island's shamanistic rituals known as *gut* and folk songs.

Kawasaki and Jeong first met in May 2023. They quickly connected over their shared interest in the themes of folklore and diaspora and soon began moving toward a collaboration. From the outset, they envisioned Jeju Island as one of their key settings. However, despite his strong ties to Korea, Kawasaki had long hesitated to spotlight the island when considering its distinctive culture and tragic history, as represented by the Jeju 4.3 Incident. Meanwhile, to Jeong, the collaboration marked his first experience working with a foreign director. Thus, the project presented a significant challenge to both men.

In August 2023, Kawasaki traveled to Jeju Island with members of the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory to research the island. Eri Liao, a vocalist with roots in the Atayal, one of Taiwan's indigenous peoples, accompanied them. Eri has played vital roles in previous projects, and Kawasaki said he was thinking of casting her again in the *Kuroshio Current Project* and centering the story around her.

Jeju Island and Taiwan were connected by a sea route. Along its extension was Yonaguni Island, Japan's westernmost island, just 111 kilometers from Taiwan. Kawasaki re-

From the top: Continental Isolation (September 2018) ©mikomex
Sansho the Bailiff (March and October 2019)
A Night The Sky was Full of Crazy Stars (November 2022) ©mikomex

flected as follows:

"Initially, we were considering focusing on the similarities of the maritime cultures of East Asia and had Okinawa in mind from the project's outset. We were developing a story featuring a woman as the main character under the tentative title *The Flower of Life*. We thought the production would be an ideal opportunity for the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory to attempt something new." (From my interview with Kawasaki)

In January 2024, Kawasaki and Jeong embarked on a weeklong research trip to Okinawa Main Island, Ishigaki Island, and Yonaguni Island. It was during this trip that the sea route connecting Taiwan, Yonaguni, and Jeju came into view.

Research and Creative Pursuits on Yonaguni Island

Alongside Eri, another principal cast member was selected—actor and film director Aika Higashimori from Yonaguni Island. Higashimori garnered attention for the movie *Bachiranun* (2020), which she herself directed and starred in as the main character. In recent years, she has also been active as a rap artist who sings using the Yonaguni language, which is in danger of disappearing. Kawasaki explained as follows about his decision to cast Higashimori:

"Ms. Higashimori is not a singer, and I had never seen her film, but my intuition told me to contact her. At that time, the script was more narrative than the present version, so I thought someone like Ms. Higashimori, not a singer, should play the main role." (From my interview with Kawasaki)

From late July to August 2024, the principal cast and production team engaged in full-fledged research on Yonaguni Island.

While learning about the island's folklore at the Yonaguni Folk Museum and Yonaguni Town Traditional Crafts Museum and listening to the islanders' stories directly from them, the group uncovered "small stories" never before told. Additionally, at a rich harvest festival they encountered, they joined the circle of local residents, singing and dancing along with them. Eri, a native of Taiwan, situated just a stone's throw from Yonaguni Island, said the festival reminded her of the harvest festival in her hometown.

Top left: Jeju Island, South Korea, August 2023 Top right and bottom left and right: Research on Yonaguni Island, Okinawa, July – August 2024

Videos and images for use in the drama were taken throughout Yonaguni Island—at Kuburafurishi, a coastal terrain spreading along the northwest coast of the island; Kuba Forest, designated a primeval forest reserve; and Ubudumaihama Beach, where diverse rubbish from all directions washes ashore, carried by the Kuroshio Current. Kuburafurishi used to be the site of a ritual to send the spirits of insects to a distant utopia called Andunuchima, and the other locations likewise have their own stories. The cast and production team immersed themselves in these folklore sites and filled their imagination with images of a sea route connecting Taiwan, Yonaguni, and Jeju.

In parallel with these research activities, Kawasaki had been working on the project's script, but he had come up against a wall. Due to differences in opinion with Jeong, he had to review the script he had already written. Their differences became even more conspicuous during their research trip to South Korea in August.

Second Report / Hajime Oishi

Research on Jeju Island and Preview Performance in Seoul

書き起こし　大石始　第2回

Research on Jeju Island, South Korea

In August 2024, the production staff and performers engaged in research on Jeju Island, located at the southernmost point of the Korean Peninsula. Wonki Jeong, who has been actively pursuing his creative endeavors on Jeju Island for many years, served as a guide and introduced the group to the island's folklore and history, which distinctly differ from those of mainland Korea.

One focus of the research on Jeju Island was the Jeju 4.3 Incident. The incident occurred on April 3, 1948, when members of the Workers' Party of South Korea and left-wing residents of Jeju Island who were opposed to an election that would divide the Korean Peninsula armed themselves and staged an uprising. Pro-government forces, including the Korean army and National Guard, suppressed the armed groups in a violent repression that led to the massacre of several tens of thousands of non-armed civilian islanders in the process.

The group of production staff and performers visited a village that was annihilated in the incident and listened to the precious testimonies of its survivors, including a woman named Chunho Hong. They also visited the former site of Altteureu Airfield, which the Japanese army built and used as a base from which to bombard the Chinese mainland and which was the scene of the massacre the 4.3 Incident is notoriously known for.

At the old airfield site, Eri Liao, Aika Higashimori, and Seokbeom Moon each performed a song. Higashimori sang "Dunan Sunkani," a folk song from Yonaguni Island; Eri sang "Beautiful Grains of Rice," a song of the Puyuma people; and Moon sang "Yeongisori," a requiem commonly sung at funerals when carrying the casket. This scene, in which the three performers expressed their sentiments of repose in their respective ways, marked a significant moment in the production process.

Moon, born in 1960 on Jeju Island, is a singer of the island's folk songs and an actor. He described the folk songs as follows:

> "Because Jeju is a remote island, folk songs developed characteristics that are unique even within Korea. Most of all, they differ from the songs sung in Seoul in that they are sung in the island's dialect. Another difference is their unstructured rhythm. In the past, the people of Jeju Island sang these folk songs while they worked, to distract themselves from their hard labor." (Seokbeom Moon)

The group also visited the Jeju Keungut Preservation Society's training center to learn about the shamanistic rituals called *gut*, which are performed throughout the country. There, they interviewed Director Soonsil Seo, who has served the society as a *simbang* (shaman) for 50 years since the age of 14.

> "*Gut* rituals are normally performed not out of desire but out of moral need. In my case, my mother was a *simbang*, so it seemed natural for me to follow in her footsteps. Many people who participate in a *gut* come seeking the help of a simbang to cure a physical ailment or to end a string of misfortune. A *gut* must never be performed out of the desire to make money." (Director Soonsil Seo)

As the last agenda of the two-day research, Jeong guided the group to the 4.3 Peace Memorial Hall at an alcohol factory-turned-detention camp. The place was originally an alcohol factory established by Japan's Oriental Development Company, but it later became a place for detaining large numbers of islanders during the 4.3 Incident. At the end of the visit, Jeong shared his thoughts as follows:

"During the 4.3 Incident, people who were detained were first brought here and ultimately sent to the mainland. Many of them subsequently went missing. Even people who had not committed any crime were taken in for preliminary investigation and executed. I want to incorporate these memories into our collaborative project. I want to engage in this project with an awareness of how the historical 4.3 Incident impacted the lives of individuals and affected each person's identity." (Wonki Jeong)

To set a stage production on Jeju Island, the process of learning about and contemplating the bitter history of the 4.3 Incident was inevitable, though it caused inner conflict among the members at times. How could they overcome these feelings of conflict and turn them into energy for creative expression? The research left everyone with difficult questions.

Preview Performance in Seoul and Thereafter

On August 23, a showcase performance was given at an art space called Banjul in Jongno District, Seoul. This event held significant meaning for the project as it served as a preview for the main performance scheduled in December.

On the day of the preview performance, the members who gathered at Banjul held a meeting. After confirming the flow of the performance, they went on to discuss the upcoming main performance. The discussion initially took place in a friendly atmosphere. However, the differences in opinion between Kawasaki and Jeong, which had been brewing for some time, began to surface. The rift probably stemmed from several factors, but from my perspective as an observer, it appeared to reflect their differing views on how to address historical events and issues of ethnic identity within a narrative. As both men would later reflect in an interview conducted after the performance, while they had a common interest in the themes of folklore and diaspora, they differed in their approaches and perspectives.

The preview performance began amid a tense atmosphere. Eri sang songs of the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, such as the Taiyal, Puyuma, and Amis, while playing the piano. Next, Higashimori performed "Dunan Sunkani" and other songs from Yonaguni Island. She ended her part by forming a circle with other members and singing and dancing to "Dunta," a song that commonly marked the end of a festival on Yonaguni Island. The last solo performer was Moon. He sang folk songs accompanied by gestures mimicking farming and fishing movements. It was an intriguing performance that conveyed the traditional song culture of Jeju Island.

After an intermission, a session unfolded featuring Kawasaki on contrabass. Eri wove her vocals into the music accompanied by Kihwa Lee (harp), who runs Banjul, and Hanjoo Lee (guitar), known for his inventive performances. They were joined by Hiroyo Miura (dance), adding Noh-like movements to the performance, and Higashimori, who danced to the music with movements resembling Moon's farming gestures.

While it was an impromptu performance, the songs and dance reflected each performer's deep thoughts on the project's theme.

Daham Park (producer, DJ, and representative of Helicopter Records) provided the following comment after watching the performance.

"I was moved, first by the songs of the indigenous peoples sung by Ms. Eri, then by the songs from Yonaguni Island sung by Ms. Aika Higashimori, and finally by the songs sung by Mr. Seokbeom Moon, whose performance was

Meeting at Banjul in Seoul

Altteureu Airfield on Jeju Island

like watching a living drama of life on Jeju Island. They all deeply embodied the long history and lives of the islanders. It was a precious experience to listen to such songs rarely heard in everyday life, all in one place." (Daham Park)

Feedback from the audience included the following comments:

"It's been a while since I listened to Oriental music performed live, and I'm glad I did. I would come again if such performances were given more frequently." (20s)

"I am truly grateful for this meaningful gathering of artists from Jeju Island, Okinawa, and Taiwan. Even while experiencing discrimination and oppression amid a historically difficult relationship with their respective countries or mainland, the people of these regions have fostered a unique and valuable culture." (50s)

"The intimate atmosphere of the small venue and interaction with the artists were wonderful. I give a big applause to everyone involved in the project's planning, arranging, and performance." (50s)

Sudden Change in Structure and a Lecture by Jeong in Japan

After returning from their research trip to South Korea, Kawasaki and Jeong endeavored to address the differences that had emerged between them during their time in Seoul, through online exchanges. As a result, the original plan was revised. Instead of having Kawasaki and Jeong each compose the songs and having Kawasaki direct the perfor-

Group photo taken at Banjul in Seoul

mance, the project was restructured into two parts: Jeong would direct the first part and Kawasaki the second part. Following this, Kawasaki and Jeong exchanged ideas for sharing instrumental techniques and costume plans and linking their choreography.

In line with this collaborative process, Jeong spent some time in Tokyo in late October. On October 27, a talk event titled "Welcoming Composer Wonki Jeong from South Korea: The Jeju Island Culture and Jeong's Creative Pursuit" was held at Kokokita Studio in Kita Ward. Dancers and musicians involved in the main performance also attended and learned about the folklore and history of Jeju Island, as well as the plans for the part Jeong would be directing.

Having witnessed the tense exchanges in Seoul, I was surprised that discussions were unfolding on a relatively positive note. In hindsight, I see that the process of exchanging frank opinions and acknowledging each other's differences was crucial to realizing a collaboration between composers/directors from two different countries—Japan and South Korea.

Third Report / Hajime Oishi

Okinawa and Tokyo Performances and Reflections

報告書 大石始 第3回

The production was staged six times across two cities—Okinawa and Tokyo—in December 2024. The performances in Okinawa took place on December 7 and 8 at Tenbusu Naha Tenbusu Hall, located along Kokusaidori Street, the main tourism area in Okinawa. The Tokyo performances were held on December 10 and 11 at Nippori Sunny Hall, just a short distance from JR Nippori Station.

The Okinawa performances attracted an audience that included people related to Yonaguni Island, who offered their feedback from the standpoint of those directly concerned with the theme of the production. Meanwhile, the


©mikomex

Tokyo performances were held in a venue that also had significant meaning to the theme of the production, as Nippori Sunny Hall is located close to Mikawashima, the oldest Korean Town in Tokyo where many Koreans from Jeju Island settled from the 1920s to the postwar years.

Part 1 "Then Dance with Souls"

(directed and composed by Wonki Jeong)

Part 1 is about a family in a seaside village on Jeju Island. Their lives have been caught in the turmoil of history, from the colonization under Japanese Imperialism to the Jeju 4.3 Incident and the outbreak of the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula. Beside them wander the spirits of those who died an unjust death.

Upon entering the venue, I was immediately intrigued by the many rings placed on and below the stage. They were arranged in parallel as though to form a path. Wonki Jeong explained that his part of the production is inspired by the *Siwangmaji* on Jeju Island, a ritual of welcoming the ten kings of the netherworld. In the *Siwangmaji*, the *simbang* (shaman) creates ten gates and guides the ancestral spirits along a path through these gates. Therefore, the path marked by the ring-shaped props apparently symbolized the spiritual path of the *Siwangmaji*.

Jeong's part features five suites of songs, including the opening. "Calling the Souls," sung by Seokbeom Moon, is a song that laborers worked to, digging and carrying soil. It is also related to gravedigging and funerals and is sung to summon and pray for the souls of the dead. This suite also includes the song "Jilchim" (literally meaning "street cleaning"), which is about sweeping and clearing the path to the netherworld.

"Through the Narrow Path" is a song about spirits that have gone missing after migrating to Japan from Jeju Island. As though taken over by such a spirit, the shaman, played by Moon, sings with lament.

"Crying and Crying Some More" marks the climax. This suite is composed of several songs, including "Soeksaluri-um," in which the mantra "Hail Amitabha Buddha" is repeated over and over again in prayer to Amitabha, and "Seoujetsori," which contains the lyrics "You have so much resentment built up. Let us clear it all away." Lastly, "Then Dance with Souls" is performed as the ending theme.

Jeong wrote as follows in a pamphlet distributed at the venue:

> After commencing fieldwork on Jeju Island, a new insight gradually came to me: I began to see songs as offering hints for navigating a world of loss. What, then, does it mean to sing? What kinds of songs do we sing? I wish to call singing a kind of ritual. (Cited from Wonki Jeong, program pamphlet)

As Jeong himself explained, he saw "a world of loss"

Part 1 ©mikomex




Part 2 ©mikomex

in the history of Jeju Island and sought to face that world through song and dance. In the drama, the dancers' movements appeared to me as an expression of freedom from suffering. I now also see it as an essential process for overcoming the world of loss.

Particularly worthy of special mention in this production is the excellent ensemble that performs the music composed by Jeong. Jeong's vision of weaving diverse cultures into a single tapestry of music has been realized for the first time by an ensemble that could be described as "pan-Asian." Centered on Aki Ozawa (guitar), who has performed with Kawasaki in numerous performances, the ensemble features several guest artists: Jaehyo Chang, who plays the traditional two-headed drum of the Korean Peninsula called *janggu* and other percussion instruments; Soon-a Park on the *gayageum*, a twelve-string plucked zither; and Li-Chin Li, a *sheng* performer from Taiwan. Kota Arai (percussion) from Aogashima in the Izu Islands played on a drum set that included a Korean gong, and the other musicians similarly brought their ideas to the production.

The ensemble became increasingly refined with each performance. It could be said that it reached perfection by the final day.

Part 2 "Eurasian Opera Op.4 SHIO – Song of diaspora" (directed and composed by Jun Kawasaki)

Part 2 revolves around a character named Shio, portrayed by Aika Higashimori. From a nameless, fictitious island, Shio's journey takes her to Taiwan, Yonaguni Island, and Jeju Island, where she encounters their folklore, songs, and dances. This experience leads her to question her identity: "Who am I?" The narrative is composed of 14 acts, like a collection of short stories centered on each island.

Eri Liao plays a vital role in the Taiwan act, titled "Live in Taipei." She portrays a Taiwanese singer giving a live performance in Taipei and sings songs of the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, including a lumberjack song and "Beautiful Grains of Rice." Between songs, she speaks to the audience in Taiwanese Mandarin.

In an interview conducted after the last performance, Eri spoke about her hesitation in carrying the weight of the Taiwan act all by herself, as follows:

"Taiwanese society and culture are very complex, with a diversity that can't be easily explained. Throughout the project, I felt ambivalent about representing something as large as Taiwan. While the narratives for the Yonaguni and Jeju acts focus on the islands as a part of their respective countries, the Taiwan act focuses not on a specific region but on Taiwan as a whole, where multiple ethnic groups reside. Yet, no research was conducted in Taiwan, and there were no occasions for discussions. The subtitle contains the word Taiwan, but I didn't feel it received the attention it deserved. The little regard given

to Taiwan bothered me to the end." (Eri Liao)

Just as Eri represented Taiwan, Higashimori was entrusted to portray Yonaguni—an essential element of the production—while playing the leading role of Shio. Symbolic of this is the scene where Higashimori performs a rap in the Yonaguni language. She sings a song titled "Stars Fill the Sky," whose lyrics she wrote herself.

Where are the words we learned from our grandparents?
Oh, god of the island, please don't cry.
Brothers, please listen to this song.
Where is our soul?
The Yonaguni soul is right here.
Please cross the sea.
I miss you.
("Stars Fill the Sky" written by Aika Higashimori)

Kawasaki also acknowledged the riskiness of having individuals represent a whole ethnic identity, but noted as follows:

"I knew I might be placing a burden on the soloists—Eri Liao, Seokbeom Moon, and Aika Higashimori—by having them represent an entire ethnic or national identity. I have mixed feelings about that. I question whether it is acceptable to equate Aika Higashimori to Yonaguni Island. However, even premised on a common understanding of the significance of expressing individual lives over ethnicity, I needed them to carry the burden so I could more strongly illuminate the theme of the drama. It was a dilemma." (Jun Kawasaki)

The drama incorporates not only the folklore of each island but also the words of various poets, including Sijong Kim, a Korean immigrant in Japan; Dongju Yun, a Korean born in Manchuria; Shinichi Kawamitsu from Okinawa; and Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa from Hawaii. While highlighting ethnic and national identities, the drama adds depth to the narrative with the words of these individuals—words that are free of any identity.

In the final act, "Shio ~Song of Diaspora~," the venue reverberated with a recording of a Kurdish folk song performed by a Kurdish singer in Japan, Kawasaki, and Erika Ueda at a spring folk festival called Newroz, as a political statement appeared on screen beginning with the words "The new amendment bill would maintain a system based on a presumption of detention." This scene seemed somewhat abrupt, but Kawasaki said it expressed his inner thoughts.

"I knew a Kurdish man living in Japan who had been a singer in Turkey. He used to sing at festivals and weddings for the Kurdish community in Japan. In June two years ago, he took a short trip back to his country where he had left his family, but he was arrested at the airport in Turkey on his way back. He ended up being detained for five years. This incident occurred in June, so when planning this production around the theme of diaspora, I decided to carry over the message from the previous Eurasian Opera to this production." (Jun Kawasaki)

In the final scene of the act, Higashimori dances vigorously as she delivers the line, "As lonely islands, we struggle to form atolls and archipelagos, which help us survive and live." Her delivery gained intensity with each performance and peaked in the sixth and final show.

This final scene was moving, leaving behind a profound resonance. However, all the more so, the story about the Kurdish man clearly deviated from the Kuroshio tales and did not sit well with me.

Reactions to the Okinawa and Tokyo Performances

The Okinawa and Tokyo performances both sparked a wide range of reactions. Norie Okabe, a writer living in Okinawa, provided the following review:

"In a world of darkness that is like reliving the journey of souls drifting through a chaotic deep sea, the songs of the island sparkled vividly and powerfully. It felt as though they were calling forth the countless voices tossed about and buried in history in this land of Okinawa and allowing their messages to resound. Clearly, there was meaning to staging this performance here in Okinawa.

Upon hearing 'Dunta,' a festival song from Yonaguni Island, I recalled how I had recently sung and danced to it at a local festival, forming a circle hand in hand with friends. My personal experience overlapped with Shio's journey, and it hit me that 'I'm alive.' It was a strange yet reassuring sensation." (Norie Okabe, writer)

Higashimori, whose friends and acquaintances, including people connected to Yonaguni Island, had come to watch the performance, shared her thoughts about the audience's reactions.

"It seemed that the audience's reactions differed according to their age group. A friend around my age looked at me with sparkling eyes and told me how proud

she was of me for sharing so much about Yonaguni with such a large audience. Many people of my parents' generation understand the Yonaguni language, so some said they cried when they heard my rap in the Yonaguni language. When it came to the older generation, though, some said they found the drama hard to accept. They said they couldn't understand what was going on." (Aika Higashimori)

The Tokyo performances, which drew a larger audience than the Okinawa performances, also received a wide range of responses. Mirai Oosawa, a filmmaker known for his documentary films that trace the history of folk performing arts, including *Mawari Kagura* (2017), noted as follows:

"I was surprised and stunned to see how small acts of prayer that have long been judged, fixed, and manipulated through the gazing eyes of the larger land to which they belong could create such plentiful ripples by returning those gazes from the other side of the sea. The way the sounds and songs of the different islands intersected while clashing and asserting themselves evoked an image of waves and whirlpools merging. I felt the project was open to diverse possibilities." (Mirai Oosawa, filmmaker)

Performers' Reflections

As I described so far, the path to staging the performance was not always smooth. The two directors had differing ideas, and the project stalled each time they collided.

Jeong had collaborated with foreign artists before, but this was his first time engaging in a joint production overseas. "I had concerns about communication from the beginning," he said and continued as follows:

"Korea and Japan have differing historical and political backgrounds, so I anticipated we would encounter some points of conflict. However, I believed deep dialogue would be essential to overcome those challenges, and Kawasaki and I were able to spend a lot of time communicating with each other. I am very grateful to him for sparing that time.

To begin with, the team was not necessarily a united whole from the start. It was a gathering of people with diverse backgrounds, such as Taiwan and Yonaguni Island, so I assumed from the beginning that it would be a challenge for all of us to become completely one with each other. I believed communication would be foremost important among people with different identities." (Wonki Jeong)

After a performance ©mikomex

Group picture ©mikomex

Eri and Higashimori, who played key roles in the production, also reflected on the process leading up to the performance as follows:

"Frankly, I found working with people from different countries challenging. The largest issue was the language. I know Kawasaki and Wonki repeatedly engaged in deep discussions, but it couldn't have been easy, handling such a sensitive theme." (Eri Liao)

"Personally, this was practically my first time performing on stage, and I had no experience singing and dancing in front of an audience, so it was a bit frightening at first. I also worried how the Yonaguni people would see me.

The members of the Music and Poetic Drama Laboratory are good at improvising. Everyone in the cast, excluding me, is a musician or dancer, and they are used to adapting to any situation. However, I am neither a musician nor a dancer, so I wasn't sure I could keep up with everyone. Yet, I noticed that everyone was enjoying creating something spontaneously, and Jun-san (Kawasaki)

would decide things by asking everyone their opinions, like 'How would you dance this part?' I was very comfortable with this style of everyone working as one.

Everyone was easy to work with. We'll probably have opportunities to work together again, and I look forward to it. I'm certain that the people I've met through this project will become a significant part of my future activities. I'm glad we met." (Aika Higashimori)

Summary

How should a region's history be interpreted and shaped into a production? Kawasaki and Jeong have worked on this theme for many years. Kawasaki has, at times, woven folklore buried in history into a fictitious framework of imaginary people and places. As both directors acknowledge, this approach differed from Jeong's cautious approach to creating a narrative based on history.

Consequently, the production was presented in two parts without merging as one. Nevertheless, both parts clearly embodied the outcomes of the discussions held repeatedly between Kawasaki and Jeong. It is also worth noting that the fruits of the research conducted on Jeju Island and Yonaguni Island echoed throughout both parts like a basso continuo. The collaboration of two directors/composers from different ethnic backgrounds, who overcame their inevitable misunderstandings and conflicts to stage six successful performances together, is a truly notable achievement. This successful result might well serve as a guide for future collaborations between Japanese and Korean directors.

Lastly, I wish to end this report with remarks by Kawasaki and Jeong.

"Similar to relationships between people, there were moments when making music together allowed us to connect easily and other moments when we could not understand each other so easily. It was challenging, but I'm glad we took the challenge. I've engaged in various international collaborations, but I feel Wonki and I were able to collaborate at the deepest level. There is always something to gain beyond difficulties. This insight is something I hope to continue sharing hereafter." (Jun Kawasaki)

"We are composers and artists, but before anything else, we needed to understand the values and historical backgrounds of both our cultures. We could not overlook the period of Japanese Imperialism in discussing the relationship between Japan and Korea, so Kawasaki and I talked about it at length. While our musical collaboration was a beautiful endeavor, it also involved confronting such uncomfortable truths. Naturally, there were moments when we misunderstood each other.

However, we were able to understand each other in the end because everyone who was part of the project opened their hearts to us. By doing so, they also helped me to reflect on a personal issue, like who I am. I was made aware that I had preconceived notions about Japan, and this realization was a significant moment for me." (Wonki Jeong)

Project Work-In-Progress “K-TTR”

Sugatsu Kanayama & S. Lee (US)

Sugatsu Kanayama ©Daisuke Tanaka


S. Lee ©Carlos Montano

Sugatsu Kanayama (Tokatsu Sports) brings fresh perspectives to the contemporary theatrical world with his style bridging reality and fiction and weaving in social satire while introducing a hip-hop approach to theater. S. Lee is a next-generation artist who continues to take on unique projects, such as the fusion of theater and mental health, as an actor and playwright in New York’s off-Broadway theater. Through their international collaborative project, which involved research in both New York and Tokyo, they closely examined their identities as well as the social conditions beyond those identities and the present state of multicultural society. The project culminated in a work-in-progress performance.

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Tuesday, December 10 - Wednesday, December 11, 2024 (4 performances)

Performance Duration: 60 min.

Venue: PLAT SHIBUYA

Credit

Playwright / Director: Sugatsu Kanayama

Playwright: S. Lee

Casts: Sojin Lee, FUNI

Translator: Art Translators Collective (Kyle Yamada, Yume Morimoto, Ben Cagan)

Researcher: Kyunghoo Kathy Lee

Sound designer: Kaito Onigiri

Video recording: Takaki Sudo, Ryo Mikami

Producer: Tamiko Ouki

Project Manager: Miyoto Okuyama (LOLO)

Cooperation: Chikage Yuyama, Kogoe

Organizer: P

Co-Organizer: The Japan Foundation

Co-Production: P, The Japan Foundation

Supported by Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture)

Management: precog co., LTD.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First Report / Ran Domon
Launch of Project / Research

報告書 土門蘭 第1回

Two Artists of Korean Descent, Living in Japan and the US, Respectively

What does it mean to live in a country different from that of one's ethnic background?

Sugatsu Kanayama was born a third-generation Korean immigrant in Japan's Chiba Prefecture. He works as a playwright and director in Tokyo while also running his family's pachinko parlor business. S. Lee is a playwright, director, and actor who was born to Korean parents in Boston and grew up moving between different US states, currently residing in New York.

Although the two artists were born in different generations and grew up in different places, they share the commonalities of being of Korean descent but born and raised in another region, speaking very little Korean, and expressing their identities through drama.

If these two artists met and gained a deeper understanding of the countries where they live and each other's life stories, what sort of work would be born? That is precisely the question that inspired their international collaborative project.

In 2023, Kanayama won the 67th Kunio Kishida Drama Prize for *Pachinko, Part 1*, which incorporates rap to depict the life of a third-generation Korean immigrant whose family runs a pachinko parlor business, based on Kanayama's own experiences. While he has adopted a hip-hop approach previously as well, Kanayama's first work applying his own ethnic heritage was the preceding one, *A-② Performances for the Continuation/Resumption of Activities*. When that work, his first one reflecting his own background while also incorporating his experiences with the devastation caused to the theater industry by the Covid-19 pandemic, was shortlisted for the aforementioned prize, Kanayama says he sensed a good response and pursued the same themes further in *Pachinko, Part 1*. The current project was launched in the wake of that work's impressive win.

Meanwhile, Lee has published works reflecting their own heritage and experiences as a playwright while also acting in productions such as the 2023 Obie Award winner *The Nosebleed* written and directed by Aya Ogawa and building up a track record of working with New York's most talented directors and playwrights. Their body of work incorporating unique perspectives as a Korean American, a child of immigrants, and a nonbinary person includes *Me No Know Korean*, which explores their identity as a person of Korean descent who cannot speak Korean.

It was *Pachinko, Part 1* that first brought Kanayama and Lee together. Lee was one of the members assigned to the script translation project. Faced with the unique task of translating Japanese rap into English, the translator asked Lee to perform the work for verification purposes. This brought the commonalities between Kanayama and Lee into focus and led them to launch the project.

The Korean presence in Japan and the US has changed dramatically in recent years. The impact of K-pop is particularly striking, with BTS becoming the first Korean artists to reach the top of the US charts in 2020. The K-pop fanbase is exploding in both countries, and numerous merchandise shops have opened.

How have the position of Korea and the identities of people with Korean heritage changed in the two countries? This seems like the perfect time to take a closer look at such issues.

Incidentally, I myself have Korean ancestry on my mother's side. What sort of work will be born from the meeting of two artists with the same ethnic background who grew up in different countries? This project is one that interests me on a personal level, as well.

Perceptions of "Koreans" on a Vast Continent and in a Small Island Country

On August 4, 2024, Kanayama and producer Tamiko Ouki (P) visited New York and met Lee in person for the first time. Korean advisor Kyunghoo Kathy Lee, who resides in South Korea, also joined. During the team's six-day stay, they interviewed eight people. Nearly all of the interviewees were Asian Americans, and most were Korean Americans like Lee.

I sat in on interviews with three individuals: Emily Bal-

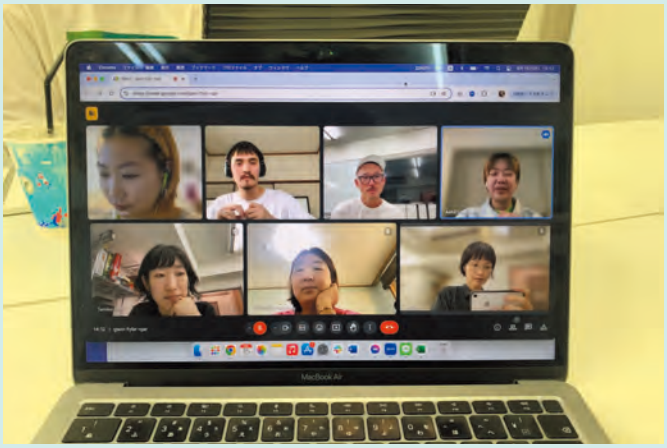
Upper left: During an interview
Upper right: Interpreter Mayu Nakamura and S. Lee
Center left: Watching Hamilton
Center right: Exploring an Asian neighborhood in Flushing
Bottom: Group photo on the final day of research in New York

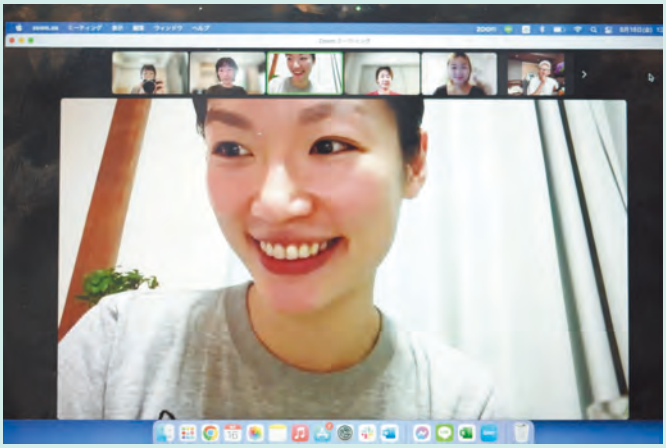
lou, who was born to Korean parents and adopted by a white couple in the US; Alice Kim, who was born in South Korea and grew up in South Africa; and Naomi Okada, who was born in Japan and attended international school there but has been living in the US since university.

What first stood out to me in the interviews was the difference between how "Koreans" are seen in Japan and the US. In Japan, people of Korean descent tend to be perceived in relation to the binary of "Japanese versus Korean." However, in the US, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese people are prone to being collectively lumped together as "Asian." All of the interviewees talked about their experiences of being treated as "Asian" rather than "Korean" or "Japanese." In Japan, since Koreans look similar to the rest of the population, the differences in nationality, language, and culture are more noticeable. On the other hand, in the diverse melting pot of the US, those differences are painted with a broad brush.

One thing that took Lee by surprise was Kanayama's statement that Koreans are stereotyped as "emotional and passionate" in Japan. Lee laughed and said, "I've always been judged by the American stereotype of Asian people as 'mild-mannered and shy,' never as Korean specifically. What's more, I'm surprised to hear that Koreans are seen as 'emotional,' but that does actually ring true. It's an interesting stereotype." Kanayama noted, "The difference between a continent and an island country stands out to me. I'm surprised that perceptions of 'Koreans' differ so much."

The team also experienced aspects of New York such as its Asian and Korean communities and hip-hop by visiting K-Town, seeing the hip-hop musical *Hamilton*, and exploring Asian neighborhoods in Flushing.





Interviews in Tokyo
Upper left: Leon Koh Yonekawa
Upper right: Sojin Lee
Center left: FUNI
Center right: David Yano
Bottom: Otagiri

Unique Stories Highlighted by Similar Backgrounds

The research in Tokyo began on August 14. Lee unfortunately became infected with Covid-19 and had to join online.

In Tokyo, five people were interviewed: actor Leon Koh Yonekawa, who was born to a British father and Japanese mother and grew up in Japan; actor Sojin Lee, a second-generation Korean immigrant; rapper FUNI, a 2.5-generation Korean immigrant (born to a second-generation Korean father and first-generation Korean mother); musician David Yano, who was born to a Japanese father and Ghanaian mother and grew up in Japan; and Japanese rapper Otagiri, who has experience living in New York. Despite this diverse lineup, what all of the interviewees had in common was living (or having lived) in a country different from that of their ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, nearly all of them described experiences of feeling lonely due to "not belonging anywhere." Factors in this may be Japan's limited immigrant community and lack of a strong immigrant culture, which means that people tend to be set apart based on differences in appearance or name. Some of the interviewees had sublimated this doubt about "What am I?" in their own ways, such as by creating identities unbounded by nationality or ethnicity.

Lee expressed empathy, saying, "It feels like being treated like an outsider." Kanayama, on the other hand, said, "I've rarely felt discriminated against or alienated. I don't have a strong attachment to being Korean, either."

I realized that in such different environments as Japan and the US, impressions will vary depending on the individual. Some things may differ, and others resonate. Over the course of the interviews, the uniqueness of the countries and communities that will serve as the work's setting and the stories of the individuals who live there came into focus.

After finishing the research in Tokyo, the two artists

discussed the production work ahead. Kanayama said, "I've never experienced discrimination or conflict, so I don't want to write as if I know about those themes. I think I should write from my own perspective, and you from yours." Lee agreed and added, "We don't need to narrow it down to a single theme. We should write based on our own perspectives and experiences. The research allowed me to see the US from a Japanese perspective, which gave me a deeper understanding of my own culture."

Going forward, the two artists will assign parts and begin writing a script in turns. They are adamant that even though different themes and approaches may emerge, they will be able to find common ground. This is also the sense I got from the research in Tokyo and New York. Having made new discoveries and reexamined themselves at a higher resolution, what sort of work will these two create together?

Second Report / Ran Domon
Script / Rehearsals

書き起こし

土門蘭　第2回

K-TTR Set in a "Korean Barbecue Restaurant"

After conducting research in early and mid-August, Sugatsu Kanayama and S. Lee began writing their scripts. In the meantime, Kanayama sent Lee an "idea sheet" that read as follows.

"During my stay in New York, I was searching for some aspect of Korean culture that the city shares with Tokyo. On the evening of my arrival, I visited Koreatown (K-Town) in Manhattan. The streetscape looked just like Shin-Okubo in Tokyo, making me feel like I'd found a safe haven."

Kanayama cited Korean barbecue restaurants, convenience stores, karaoke parlors, and stalls selling sweets as "establishments shared by both K-Town and Tokyo's Koreatown."

"By 'shared,' I mean that once you step inside these establishments, they're the same, whether they're located in New York or Tokyo. Korean convenience stores sell the same brands of cosmetics in both New York and Tokyo. Korean barbecue restaurants offer the same items, and the food and service provided are almost exactly as expected. A key point is that they're all run and staffed by Koreans (or at least people with Korean backgrounds). This is different from Japanese restaurants, which are often run by non-Japanese Asians. I feel like the Korean diaspora is disproportionately robust relative to its size."

Kanayama proposed two options for the play's setting: a "Korean store" (a store that sells all kinds of Korean products) and a "Korean barbecue restaurant" (the authentic Korean style, in which restaurant staff grills the meat, rather than the Japanese style, in which customers do the grilling). He suggested that by Lee depicting such an establishment in New York and him one in Tokyo, the work would take on an interesting perspective.

He also proposed a title for the work: "K-Theater.," abbreviated as "K-TTR."

"'K-TTR' sounds like *kei* theater, which in Japan refers to comedy that places entertainment first and the story or message second (similar to Western slapstick). Looking at videos of performances of your work, I felt like *kei* theater echoes some aspects of your mentality, so it has a double meaning with 'K-TTR,' the drama that we'll create based on our Korean backgrounds."

Lee agreed on both the setting and title and made their own request: "A 'Korean barbecue restaurant' would be easier to write." Then, the two began writing their scripts for *K-TTR* and also conducted casting. Two of the interviewees from the research in Tokyo were selected as performers: actor and second-generation Korean immigrant Sojin Lee and rapper/poet and 2.5-generation Korean immigrant FUNI.

Rehearsals were held from November 26 to December 8 at Yamabuki Factory in Edogawabashi, Tokyo.

Two Scripts with the Common Theme of "Korea in Other Countries"

I sat in on two days of the rehearsals, December 1 and 2. There were five participants: Kanayama, performers Sojin and FUNI, producer Tamiko Ouki, and project manager Miyoto Okuyama (LOLO). Since S. Lee couldn't watch the rehearsals in real time, the decision had been made to hold

online meetings afterwards instead. By the time of my observation sessions, the scripts were already almost finished, but fleshing out Kanayama's rap and how to combine the two scripts remained issues.

The main settings of both scripts were Korean barbecue restaurants, as planned. Although locations were not specified, the scripts gave the sense that Kanayama was depicting a restaurant in Japan and Lee one in the US. The artists' respective styles were strongly evident, the characters and stories diverged, and most of all, the differences between the Japanese and American perspectives and cultures were clear. At the same time, there was a strange sense of cohesion along a common axis of "Korea in other countries."

Kanayama's script followed his past approach, consisting of ironic, humorous monologues and rap. Sojin and FUNI played the roles of "Sojin Lee" and "FUNI," respectively. Kanayama demonstrated his usual style by incorporating the two performers' backgrounds and statements from their interviews into their lines and rapping, mingled with his own inventions.

For example, he included the facts that Sojin does not have a Japanese alias and FUNI is a "rapper despite not being black." Kanayama developed the roles of "Sojin" and "FUNI" based on the performers' unique stories while mixing in fictional elements. He also applied many realizations from the research in New York and Japan and his discussions with Lee, such as how white people appraise various things worldwide, views of "Asians" in the US, and the perseverance of Korean immigrants.

Lee's script, meanwhile, consisted of four short stories in which characters engage in humorous dialogues in the setting of a Korean barbecue restaurant. The characters in the dialogues included the restaurant's staff, a classic K-drama couple, an American and Korean mother and baby, and even the dried sardine and kimchi appetizers, incorporating many fantastical elements.

There were also lots of relatable experiences for Koreans in the US, such as stereotypical phrases from K-pop and K-drama, the distinctive service at Korean barbecue restaurants, and how the position of "kimchi" has changed in the US. In the script, Lee depicted these as "new trends."

In fact, both scripts took place in a world where such "relatable Korean experiences" have become "new trends." Although it might seem like Korean culture such as K-pop, K-drama, and Korean food is now accepted in both the US and Japan, it has merely become recognized as a subculture along the axis of appraisal by the majority. But the immigrant "Korea" uses even this to its advantage as it tenaciously continues to lay down roots in other countries.

This resigned perseverance was vividly conveyed by the two scripts.

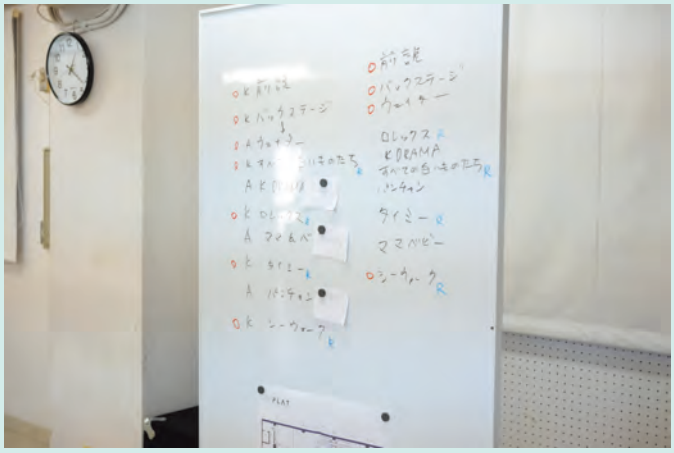
Fresh Possibilities Born from the Scripts

On the first day that I observed the rehearsals, FUNI was absent, so a solo rehearsal was conducted with just Sojin. The second day's rehearsal was conducted with both performers. Partway through, Kanayama added a new rap. The two performers worked on memorizing the lyrics while listening to the track and finally put the words and music together.

Sojin usually works as an actor and has no experience with rapping, while rapper FUNI has little acting experience. In addition, Sojin normally plays the "roles" of others, but this time she is playing a fictional character named "Sojin Lee" who is based on her actual self. FUNI, on the other hand, usually talks about his own experiences in his rap, but here he is playing "FUNI," a role that interweaves many fictional elements.

In taking on new fields diverging from their past trajectories while also sharing a common ethnic heritage, the performers, too, seemed to share a common axis despite their differences.

When I asked Sojin her impressions of the scripts, she replied: "They're so entertaining that they make me forget some aspects are actually based on my own personal life." Regarding the acting mixed with rap, she said: "I've never been conscious of the fact that I'm a person of Korean descent on stage before, but I feel like this is an opportunity for me to perform while being really conscious of that aspect. I want to take on the challenge of performing these lines compellingly as a Korean."



FUNI, on the other hand, said that when he first read the scripts, he found them eye-opening. "I was surprised to see things I'd always thought but never been able to say out loud so clearly verbalized. Hip-hop has a lot of constraints, so there are things that you can't fully express. Seeing even those sorts of things put into words gave me a fresh reminder of the possibilities of theater." Comparing the two scripts, he said: "Even though the environments are completely different, there are lots of commonalities. I found it interesting that things are so similar in the US."

Producer Ouki said: "Lee and Kanayama took in creative inputs through various exchanges in Tokyo and New York. Even though their scripts are different in nature, several commonalities stand out—not just the Korean aspect, but also things like white people's views of Asians and perceptions of cuisine such as kimchi. When you combine the scripts, they fit together in a strange way."

What sort of "K-TTR" would Lee, Kanayama, and the performers create? Rehearsals continued ahead of the work-in-progress performances on December 10 and 11.

Third Report / Ran Domon
Work-in-Progress Performances

書き起こし 土門蘭　第3回

Two Artists Living on "Opposite Sides of the World," Connected by Food

Work-in-progress performances of the international collaborative project *K-TTR* by Sugatsu Kanayama and S. Lee were held on December 10 and 11 at the event space PLAT SHIBUYA in Harajuku, Tokyo, with two performances per day, in the daytime and evening. Despite being on weeknights, the evening performances were in front of a full house, a testament to the high expectations of audiences, especially fans of Kanayama's group Tokatsu Sports. For the daytime performances on both the 10th and 11th, which I watched, most of the seats were filled, and there were even audience members from overseas.

The venue's seats were arranged in a U shape around

the stage. There was a long, narrow red carpet on the floor of the stage, and a table topped with a grill for meat stood in the center. No other props could be seen.

The pamphlet about *K-TTR* that I was handed at reception contained the following comments from Kanayama and Lee, respectively.

"S. Lee was a true New Yorker. Their walking speed, conversational energy, and gushing enthusiasm were all the very picture of a New Yorker. Besides their physical appearance, which was clearly Asian, I didn't perceive any aspects to them that one could call Korean. Conversely, if they knew the definition of a Tokyoite, they would probably recognize me as one. Our lives are very adapted to New York and Tokyo, respectively. But whether we like it or not, we can't help but feel our heritage when it comes to food. We crave Korean food on a genetic level. (...) I hope watching this performance will make you want to stop for Korean food or barbecue on your way home. (...)" (Kanayama)

"Kanayama-san and I are both ethnically Korean artists who were born and raised outside Korea - this is greatly where our demographic similarities end. We live 'across the world' from each other, we are different in regards to generation, gender, familial and parental status, and we do not share a language.

But Kanayama-san and I very quickly connected over food. This connection came right on the heels of a conversation about shame - the kind of shame that arises when the place you're from, the only place you've known as home, pushes you perpetually to 'go back where you came from'. We spoke about a feeling of disconnect, difficulty, feeling genuine pride for something we'd never consciously claimed ownership of. (...)" (Lee)

What connected these two artists who have no commonalities other than the fact that both are "Korean artists born and raised outside Korea" was the food that gives them a sense of their shared heritage, namely, Korean food. Reading their comments, I could imagine that the lone prop in front of me would be playing a key role in the upcoming *K-TTR*.

What kind of work had been born from the combination of the two artists' scripts? Since Lee wasn't able to travel to Japan, Kanayama greeted the audience before kicking off the work-in-progress performances.

"Nobel Michelin Academy, All the White Standards"

The first performer to appear on stage was Sojin Lee. She was wearing some kind of mask, which upon closer inspection turned out to be a skincare sheet mask. With no explanation to the audience of the reason for this, it created a slightly unsettling atmosphere as she began speaking. The lines were projected on the background wall in both Japanese and English. The play began with an act written by Kanayama.

"We have to earn money in foreign currency, you know?

This country's low on resources. That's why we have to produce and sell whatever we can to other countries to earn money.

And that's why the show had to be this weekend."

This was the reason for the timing of the performances given right from the outset. Sojin explained the producers' ulterior motives, such as how they wanted the performances to coincide with the ongoing Yokohama International Performing Arts Meeting (YPAM) and selected times that would be easy for overseas producers to attend—in other words, how they wanted to market the play overseas. Sojin revealed other aspects behind the scenes of the project, such as grants and the content of the research, with humor. This topic, which was of particular interest to those involved in theater and drew laughter, was also a perfect way to clarify the unique nature of the work as an "international collaboration."

Still, Kanayama's act was in his usual style.

"People tend to think that I'm trying to promote the fact that I'm Zainichi Korean. I, myself, wasn't aware that people thought this about me. I use the name Sojin Lee when I act, but that's my real name. I don't have a Japanese name."

The role of "Sojin Lee" had emerged from one of Sojin's responses when interviewed during the research in Tokyo, that she had no "Japanese alias." These lines made the audience aware that both the character and the performer herself were ethnically Korean residents of Japan.

"Sojin Lee" began talking about the American casting website Backstage. This website had been shared by actor Ryoka Matsumoto, who served as an interpreter during the research in New York. Sojin had filled out items such as her gender, age, and skin and eye color, for which detailed selections were available. But when she finally reached "Eth-

nicity," she could only select the broad category of "Asian." Not "Japanese" or "Korean," but "Asian." This was the positioning of Japanese people and Koreans in the US that she had learned about in New York. Kanayama had promptly applied it to his work.

Next, FUNI joined Sojin on stage. The atmosphere shifted dramatically as the two performers began reading out from their smartphones.

"For the last time, no."

"I'm not asking to not play it at all, I'm just asking to also play some other stuff once in a while."

"(Gesturing to the restaurant) It doesn't make sense for the vibe."

"They play American music in Korea too."

Okay well, we're in America and people coming here are looking for some *cultural immersion*."

The two Korean barbecue restaurant waiters began arguing about the restaurant's background music near the tabletop grill. Their exaggerated gestures and highly inflected delivery created an American ambience, making it clear to the audience that we had moved on to one of S. Lee's acts.

Then, the work immediately switched back to one of Kanayama's acts. "Sojin Lee" began speaking.

"Hip hop soared to its current status as 'mainstream' after white people started listening to it. K-pop wouldn't be so popular today if white people hadn't started getting into it. It was white people who gave Parasite an Academy Award. It was white people who gave Han Kang The Nobel Prize in Literature."

Slowly peeling off the sheet mask she had been wearing on her face, she murmured: "For all who want to be white." Then, she began performing a rap:

Step into the conference room
All the white ones
Nobel Michelin Academy
All the white standards
(From the rap song "All White")

"The Same People Who Treat Me Like a Cliché Now Are the Ones Who Were Calling Me Smelly Back Then."

In this manner, Kanayama and Lee's scripts switched back and forth over the course of the play.

Lee's act "KDRAMA" parodied typical K-drama lines and dialogue using the stereotypical K-drama trope of a woman who had lost her memory in an accident and her lover. In Kanayama's act "Rolex Marathon," "FUNI," who had come to purchase a Rolex Daytona, and "Sojin Lee," who was seeking to buy the rare offal *yang* (the reticulo-omasal orifice) at a Korean barbecue restaurant, traded their exclusive items.

Then, in Lee's act "MOMS & BABIES," an American and Korean mother brought their babies to a Korean barbecue restaurant, with the system and cooking methods of Korean barbecue depicted in the manner of an educational TV program. In Kanayama's "Timee," FUNI performed the song "Black Korea" about a 1991 incident in which a young African American girl suspected of shoplifting was shot to death at a liquor store owned by a Korean family. Then, stating that Korean immigrants often started family businesses when they couldn't find jobs, he launched into a rap.

24/7, 365
Working ourselves to the bone as a family
'round here, us Asians, we're a minority
Tease us, we tease back, that's our mentality
Can't return, no home on the peninsula
Can't give up this blood, this place, homeland's now our roots
(From the rap song "Family Market")

In Lee's last act, "LEFTOVER BANCHAN'S[1] LAMENT," the dried sardine *banchan* (FUNI) always left uneaten by white diners was encouraged not to give up by the ghost of the already-eaten kimchi (Sojin). Wearing a red *chima jeogori* skirt and top, the ghost of the kimchi said:

There was once a time,
Bringing me in public,
Was near to a crime.
So much that now they're sick
Of that "same old, tired stinky lunch trope"
The ones saying it now, are the ones back then who made it so.

Soon as it's mainstream to love me,
You'll soon look back and be amazed at all your evolutions.
And you may quickly find yourself 'the new thing'
Patience Anchovies, take it from me.
If there's something kimchi knows best,
It's to sit and wait and sit and ferment.

The final act, Kanayama's "C-Walk," began with "Sojin Lee" asking, "Someone like me, who is not Black, rapping…

Is that cultural appropriation?" This debate was one that Kanayama had with S. Lee in New York.

"For us Zainichi, we've got the C-word—'chon.'

I'm thinking we could use it like how Black people use the N-word. It'd be copyrighted by Zainichi. A cool word only Zainichi can use. If we do a 'C' hand sign to go with it."

Then, the Korean barbecue restaurant's cook (FUNI) appeared in a bloody apron and rubber boots and performed footwork that spelled the letter C on the ground in blood from cutting meat, an imitation of the dance move known as the C-Walk (Crip Walk), This move is derived from the Los Angeles Crips' custom of writing the letters C-R-I-P in blood on the ground with their feet after killing a rival gang member.

C WOO! Be honest
Are you jealous of us "chons"
when you also look like a minority?
And you're collecting filthy royalties
(From the rap song "C-Word")

It was with this final rap that *K-TTR* ended.

Words Only They Can Speak

What shocked me the most was the final rap song "C-Word" performed by "Sojin Lee" and "FUNI" wearing a *chima jeogori* skirt and top and *saeng-hwal jeogori*[2], respectively.

Chon is a slur directed at Koreans in Japan. Naturally, it is not a pleasant word for someone with Korean heritage to hear, and I myself find it offensive. At the same time, the line about turning it "into something like the N-word" blindsided me and made me burst into laughter. Listening to the two performers rap while dressed in traditional Korean attire, I felt like it was indeed a word only people of Korean descent like them can use, just like only black people can use the N-word.

The derogatory term *chon* was transformed into some-

thing "cool" within the work. This took me by surprise, and I realized that it is the sort of "minority privilege" granted by hip-hop.

When I mentioned this to Kanayama after the performances, he replied as follows.

"Hip-hop lets you put forward your negatives as positives. Even your embarrassments and insecurities are turned inside out in rap. That's the function of hip-hop, which is why I wanted to create lyrics only we can say for *K-TTR*, as well."

I made similar remarks to Sojin, and she responded with an account of her own motivation.

"*Chon* is a word that stings hard, and I feel like I'm still sort of sweeping that under the rug when I perform the rap. But I think the coolness of hip-hop lies in bringing out yourself, so I want to make the work stronger by digging into the meaning of my performance as an ethnic Korean, not just in 'C-Word' but throughout."

Finally, FUNI gave his thoughts as follows:

"In hip-hop, the N-word is not just self-deprecating but also an expression of camaraderie and solidarity. That's what we're doing here by calling ourselves *chon*. I want to go further in bringing out this context from the perspective of those oppressed by the majority."

The reason why I've fixated on "C-Word" is because it's so emblematic of *K-TTR* as a whole.

Since *chon* is a Japanese slur, S. Lee was most likely unfamiliar with it. But there might be a similar slur where they live. This seemingly negative word directed at a minority, and by extension, the image of "immigrants" was flipped into something positive and alternative. It made audiences laugh and blew their minds, and in doing so, earned the privilege of a story that "only we can tell." This is echoed in Lee's final portion of the script, when the ghost of the kimchi says, "You'll soon look back and be amazed at all your evolutions.

And you may quickly find yourself 'the new thing.'"

K-TTR is, without a doubt, a story that could only be told by these artists with immigrant roots. They have brought forth a new perspective by observing, satirizing, and depicting contemporary society from a special vantage point alienated from the majority. Being able to witness this process was meaningful for me, too, as a descendant of immigrants.

"The Most Personal Is the Most Creative."

After the work-in-progress performances of *K-TTR*, an audience member left the following writeup on social media.

"Although Tokatsu Sports has previously told stories about people of Korean descent living in Japan, this work highlights the daily lives and history of Koreans in the US, the forefront of white society, as well as their position in the entertainment industry. When we consider the Oscars or the *Michelin Guides* as forms of authorization by white people,

even if Asian content is occasionally validated in the West, this could be described as merely a recursive expansion of the structure of white supremacy. In this context, the story of how Koreans in the US have maintained their family businesses and robust gastronomic culture (while occasionally generating friction) was, as always, a fascinating one right down to the details, and I felt the pleasure of learning something new to me."

Other comments included the following, giving a strong sense of anticipation for the actual performances: "There is a spirit of experimentation and proposition befitting a 'collaborative project.' Mysterious crossings create a novel theatergoing experience. This is the appeal of such a project, and the new insight gained is something I appreciate." "Not to be missed. While bordering on the usual style of Tokatsu Sports, it vividly depicts 'K- (Korean) culture' from a more global perspective." [3]

In addition, *The Asahi Shimbun* (evening edition, December 19, 2024) featured the project alongside big-name productions in its "Review of Contemporary Theater 2024" despite being only at the stage of work-in-progress performances, praising it as "probing deeply into the distortions of Japanese and American society through the diverse forms of 'K-culture.'"

Producer Tamiko Ouki reflected on the performances as follows: "The fact that something only these two could write was presented as a concrete work is an achievement, I think. We've also received positive feedback from audiences." She identified "how to more effectively structure the difference in perspective between the two" as a future challenge and added: "I want to clarify the work's audience and discuss which of the elements currently scattered throughout it to develop."

Kanayama expressed a similar sentiment: "Since we have the clear goal of holding actual performances overseas, we need to further integrate the two scripts as a collaborative work. We have to create something that exceeds the sum of its parts."

When Kanayama won the Kunio Kishida Drama Prize for *Pachinko, Part 1*, he gave the following acceptance speech.

"There's a quote I always keep in the back of my mind when creating drama. 'The most personal is the most creative.' These are the words of the great Martin Scorsese, which were in turn the words of director Bong Joon Ho when he gave his Academy Award acceptance speech."

"The most personal is the most creative." This seems to be the mindset underlying *K-TTR* as well.

Kanayama and Lee share the same Korean heritage but live and engage in creative work in different countries. In this project, they sublimated their own "personal" aspects, with their lone but powerful commonality of "food" serving as a key element. As they further reconcile and refine their scripts in the future, something even more creative is likely to emerge. What kind of work will it be, and how will it be received overseas? I can't wait to find out, both as an audience member and personally, as a descendant of immigrants.

*1 Korean for "side dishes." They are usually portioned out in small dishes and served free of charge at Korean restaurants. A classic example is kimchi.

*2 A casual *jeogori* top

*3 Sources:
https://x.com/KenjiNishinaka/status/1866497805046702292
https://x.com/doughnutwork/status/1868254201794732437
https://x.com/y___shun/status/1866695160526205279
When quoting, some line breaks were removed and punctuation changed.

Project Asian Object Theater: Laos-Japan Collaboration among Deaf and Hearing Performers "Things Alive From Darkness/ ສິ່ງທີ່ມີຊີວິດ ຈາກຄວາມມືດ"

Momoko Shiraga & Lattanakone Insisiengmay (Laos)

Left: Momoko Shiraga ©Kitagawa Sisters
Right: Lattanakone Insisiengmay

The collaborative effort between the deaf and hearing theater companies Khao Niew Theater (Laos) and Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi (Japan) invited choreographer and director Momoko Shiraga renowned for her innovative approach to creating new spaces, to join forces with Lattanakone Insisiengmay (founder of Khao Niew Theater) for a two-year international collaborative creation spanning from 2023 to 2024.

What does it mean for an object to "live"? It is the act of imbuing an inanimate object, which would otherwise remain lifeless, giving a sense of vitality. While the approaches to objects in Laos and Japan are different, through a process of mutual exploration and suggestion, the creators engaged in profound dialogue with the objects and their interactions with the body, ultimately overcoming these differences to forge a new form of expression.

In this performance, ten scenes are developed around everyday objects such as fishing tools and mosquito nets, in which the objects seem to come to life and move with a vibrant energy, as if they were alive themselves.

Outline of Performances

Performance Date: Saturday, December 21-Sunday, December 22, 2024(2 performances)

Performance Duration: 65 min.

Venue: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, Medium Studio

Credit

Composition and Direction: Momoko Shiraga (Momonga Complex)

Direction: Lattanakone Insisiengmay (Khao Niew Theater)

Cast: Lattanakone Insisiengmay, Khamneesone Liyang, Chongyee Gnouttittham, Ketsana Insisiengmay (Khao Niew Theater), Toru Enomoto, Keiko Yanase and Aya Suzuki (Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi), Saki Adachi (Hitomiza Theater), Dakei, Risa Tsuruta (Hakuchu-mu)

Lighting: Hiroyuki Ito
Sound: Masayuki Tomiyama
Assistant Director: Yu Kitagawa (Momonga Complex)
Stage Manager: Kaori Moriyama, Yoshiko Haraguchi
Stage Section: Jun Maeda

Interpreting Lao: Chizuko Asanuma, Southyphone Douangpaseuth, Chanthakhot Dalavone
Laotian Sign Language: Ketsana Insisiengmay
Japanese Sign Language: Tomomi Komatsu, Suzuko Furukawa, Mami Seita
Laos-Side Coordinator: Chizuko Asanuma
Photography: Hitoshi Furuya, Masato Sakano
Producers: Chiemi Tsukada, Iyo Yoshimura, Tsuyoshi Ikeuchi, Manni Xie

Organizer: Foundation Modern Puppet Center
Co-organizer: The Japan Foundation
Co-production: Foundation Modern puppet Center, The Japan Foundation
Partnership: KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre
Subsidy: Kanagawa Prefecture Magcul Expansion Promotion Subsidy
Support: Japanese Federation of the Deaf, Kanagawa Federation of the Deaf, Tokyo Federation of the Deaf, Yokohama Federation of the Deaf, Kawasaki Association of the Deaf, UNIMA Japan

Photo by Hitoshi Furuya (top, bottom) / Masato Sakano (center)

First Report / Mariko Mori

Background of the Coproduction and Prior to Khao Niew Theater's Visit to Japan

報告書 森真理子 第1回

This project is a second-year initiative that brings together Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi (hereinafter "DPTH"), produced by the Foundation Modern Puppet Center, and Khao Niew Theater, based in Laos, with choreographer, director, and dancer Momoko Shiraga overseeing composition and direction.

Last year, members of DPTH and Shiraga's team spent about five days in Laos conducting workshops and research. Afterwards, members of Khao Niew traveled to Japan. Following 13 days of rehearsal, they presented a work-in-progress performance at Kagurazaka Session House. For details of the 2023 activities, please refer to "Asian Object Theater: Laos-Japan Collaboration among Deaf and Hearing Performers" by Miyuki Tanaka in the Japan Foundation FY2023 Process Observer Reports.[1]

In the second year of activities, building on the first year's coproduction, Khao Niew members will visit Japan again for about three weeks in December for a creation period leading up to performances at KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre. This first report will revisit the background of the coproduction and outline the online communications and workshops conducted by DPTH and Shiraga's team prior to Khao Niew's arrival in Japan.

The Meeting of the Three Parties

The encounter between DPTH and Laotian puppet theater dates back to 2005. However, preceding this, the Foundation Modern Puppet Center had been introducing numerous Asian puppet performances to Japan since 1993 through their "Asian Puppet Theater Series." They have made significant contributions by presenting diverse Asian puppet theaters, including shadow puppetry from South India, traditional puppet theater and masked dance from Indonesia, as well as marionettes from China and Myanmar—"crystallizations of each region's unique spiritual culture, stories, art, and music that could be said to represent the identity of these peoples."[2] Building on this tradition, in 2005, they organized a Tokyo performance by the Lao National Puppet Theatre Troupe Kabong Lao. While maintaining this relationship, they began exchanges with Khao Niew Theater, which was formed in 2008 by younger members who had become independent from Kabong Lao.

Meanwhile, the encounter between DPTH and Shiraga took place in 2022. In recent years, DPTH has frequently invited external directors to create works. Following various playwrights and directors such as Hiroshi Koike and Hiromi Tateyama, in 2022, Shiraga, who has a background in dance, participated as the director for *Hyakumonogatari*. Chiemi Tsukada, the producer of this coproduction, was impressed by Shiraga's ability to convey the world of Hinako Sugiura's short manga, which depicts *yokai* (ghosts and goblins) and humans of the Edo period, in a single stage work, her seamless integration of puppet theater with physical expression, despite her being new to puppet direction, as well as her flexible adaptability.

According to assistant producer Iyo Yoshimura, in DPTH's usual productions, there are often clear technical "right and wrong ways" of operating puppets. Believing that DPTH needed to achieve freer, more personal expressions instead of the fixed expressions that puppet theater tends to fall into, she felt that coproduction with Khao Niew, which would bring a fresh perspective, would be meaningful. Shiraga was selected as she was deemed the ideal person to bridge the gap with Khao Niew, which has its own unique qualities developed in a different context from Japan.

Prior to Khao Niew's Visit: Approaches to Objects

Between July and November 2024, there were: (1) online workshops and meetings with DPTH, Khao Niew, and Shiraga, and (2) workshops in Japan with DPTH and Shiraga. In (1), significant time was dedicated to exchanging opinions on the direction of the work and the "objects" to be used in the performance, while (2) concentrated on exploring possible approaches to "objects" for the members based in Japan.

What do we mean by "objects" here? Let's consider the definition of "object theater," which appears in the project title. The program from last year's work-in-progress performance (November 26, 2023) includes the following description of object theater (partial excerpt):

A genre created in European puppet theater, it is a style of expression through objects and the human body without using humanoid puppets. Beginning in the 1950s, it flourished in the 1970s. It is difficult to define strictly, and the term has been used to refer to various new forms of expression to this day, with the name "figure theater" also being used.

In the 1950s–1960s, "object theater" emerged in Europe as a new technique in puppet theater that incorporated everyday items and materials such as paper, fabric, umbrellas, and shoes, creating a trend that expanded the concept of traditional theatrical puppets. Through coproductions with a French puppet theater company from the 2000s onward, this technique influenced Laos, which developed its own unique expressions that strongly reflect the spiritual world of animism[3] that was deeply rooted in Laotian daily life.

Khao Niew, following this tradition, creates works that bring to life movements and expressions by "putting life into objects." For example, the sticky rice that is the staple food in Laos is viewed as "life" itself, and the *thip khao* (similar to a Japanese rice container, made of bamboo skin) that holds sticky rice is considered sacred and spiritualized (inhabited by Phi[4]). This year, Khao Niew presented a work in Laos using *thip khao* to convey aspects of their familiar everyday life, including cultural characteristics like *Phi* and their sensory experiences.

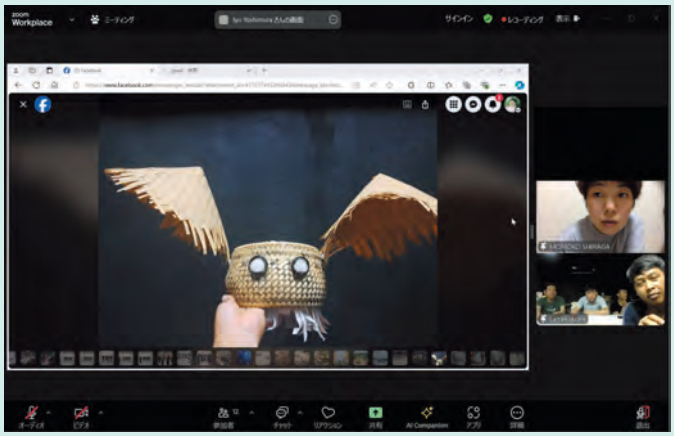
By contrast, DPTH's approach to creation begins with a script, followed by exploring how to move puppets to weave the story, and how to visually direct the combination of sound, light, and objects. When asked about the coproduction in the first year of collaboration between these two groups with different approaches, Shiraga responded:

"While we were conducting workshops with each other, I thought we could create something, but when we tried to create a work with themes like 'boundaries' or 'gates/windows,' concepts such as 'crossing lines or frames' were difficult to convey to Khao Niew members. It was challenging to research or create work on common themes when our fundamental starting points and approaches to creation were so different."

At Khao Niew, instead of sharing a story or theme in advance, they begin their creative process with objects—how

August workshop scene

October workshop scene



Online meeting scene (Khao Niew presenting objects inhabited by Phi)

an object might move, or how an object might move influenced by the kind of *Phi* it embodies. As a starting point for this year's activities, Shiraga felt that each performer on the Japanese side needed to cultivate their own philosophy toward objects for a successful collaboration. Additionally, driven by her own desire to better understand the diverse relationships between objects and people, she decided to conduct experiments in Japan to "explore relationships with objects."

Prior to Khao Niew's Visit: Exploring Relationships with Objects

From around July, online meetings were held with direc-

tors from both Japan and Laos, and the idea emerged to bring together "objects that evoke *Phi*" from both Japan and Laos as a starting point for the performance. Beginning in August, workshops with just DPTH and Shiraga started in Japan. As a first step, at Shiraga's suggestion, they invited Yuri Yamamura, a juggler who studied circus in France, to teach DPTH members juggling while "listening to the voice of the ball." While learning this third methodology, which is distinct from both the DPTH and Khao Niew approaches, they brought "objects that evoke *Phi*" and conducted workshops where individuals confronted objects in September and October.

Since Japan does not have the same concept as *Phi*, they used Japanese ideas such as *Yaoyorozu no Kami* (the myriad gods that dwell in all things in nature) and *Tsukumogami* (the belief that tools acquire spirits after many years) as hints. Members brought objects that "caught their attention" in daily life, and workshops were conducted repeatedly.

In a workshop I observed, members brought various materials, including a long-used cloth bag, a mop, newspaper, a traffic cone, and tree bark, and they conducted exercises such as:

- Finding movements that arise from the relationship between an object and an individual and its variations, followed by solo presentations
- Observing objects from different distances and angles
- Gradually engaging with objects using different parts of the body to awaken one's physical senses and discover movements originating from the objects

In these sessions, I observed members carefully exploring their relationships with objects on their own. Their approaches could be roughly categorized as follows:

- Movements created from interest in texture, mass, and transformation (melting, tearing, etc.), along with a sense of play
- Movements exploring distance with the "other person" by personifying an object (for example, a process from rejection to gradual familiarity)
- Methods of breathing life into objects by seeing them as something else (such as making a fan become a bird)
- Methods of exploring and creating new relationships based on past experiences with objects and oneself

In online meetings, many opinions were exchanged about "objects that evoke Phi." Eventually, over 80 objects were listed. The photo shows part of the object list meticulously compiled by assistant director Yu Kitagawa.

These relationship exercises were accumulated, sometimes by switching objects and people, or by combining objects with multiple people.

*1 FY2023 International Creations in Performing Arts Process Observer Reports (The Japan Foundation, March 27, 2024, https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/culture/perform/creation/pdf/icpa_report_r5_e.pdf)

*2 From the Foundation Modern Puppet Center website (in Japanese) http://www.puppet.or.jp/puppetArchives/catarchive/001/110/111/

*3 The belief that spirits or souls dwell in all things, whether living organisms or inorganic objects.

*4 A Lao word meaning "spirit" or "ghost." They dwell in various places like houses, forests, and mountains, protecting people's lives while also causing misfortune, illness, or disasters in response to disrespectful behavior. They are worshipped and cherished. For Laotian people, they are familiar figures with a significant influence on their lives and culture.

Second Report / Mariko Mori
Communication in the Rehearsal Space and Co-Direction

観察者報告書　森真理子　第2回

This second report will focus on the rehearsals that began on December 4 at Hitomiza Theater[1] after Khao Niew's arrival in Japan.

Communication in the Rehearsal Space

Khao Niew's participating members remain the same four as last year: representative/director Lattanakone Insisiengmay (a.k.a. "Toh") and three performers, one of whom is deaf. Six performers from Japan are also participating: Toru Enomoto, Keiko Yanase, and Aya Suzuki from DPTH; Saki Adachi from Hitomiza Theater; and two external performers, Dakei and, new this year, Risa Tsuruta. Two of them are deaf.

Let me review the communication methods in the rehearsal space. Japanese Sign Language interpreters and Japanese–Lao language interpreters are always present, and members communicate using Japanese, Lao, Japanese Sign Language, and Lao Sign Language.

For example, when someone speaks in Japanese, it is translated into Lao and Japanese Sign Language, and Khao Niew members then interpret from Lao into Lao Sign Language. Conversely, when someone speaks in Lao, it is translated into Japanese and Lao Sign Language, which is then interpreted into Japanese Sign Language. Naturally, when communication occurs in sign language, it is translated from each sign language into the Japanese or Lao spoken language and then into the other sign language.

While this process might seem complicated when written out, in practice it unfolds naturally. Members are attentive to one another, promptly notifying anyone who might have missed spoken words or signs, indicating when someone is about to start speaking, and showing thoughtful consideration throughout. This is probably not even recognized as "consideration" but merely as normal communication. However, when concentration in the space intensifies and becomes tense, there are instances when interpretation is not fully realized. Even at such moments, I was impressed to see that someone would speak up to ensure that no communication was missed.

At the same time, the creative environment was also flexible. During one day's rehearsal, teams of three discussed how to move a large mosquito net. Here, performers communicated within their teams without interpreters, using Japanese (sometimes English), sign language, gestures, and written notes. Members had learned simple signs or words from each other's languages, and active exchanges took place amid a mixture of various languages.

DPTH regularly creates work involving deaf and hearing individuals. Similarly, Khao Niew includes deaf members and those from ethnic minorities who may not speak Lao fluently. Both groups consistently share creative time with people who speak different native languages, and they seem ready for the reality that they will "communicate" even when words do not suffice. Observing their rehearsals, I felt that the space naturally opens up as the means of communication and exchanges increase. I was reminded that the essence of diversity lies in people from different backgrounds sharing space, even though they cannot always fully understand each other.

Members discussing how to move the mosquito net, using sign language and gestures

Trying exercises to "bring objects to life" by combining multiple objects

The Nature of Co-Direction

There is a significant change between the first and second years of this coproduction: the difference in how Shiraga and Toh are involved in "directing." One original aim of this project was to learn how to move objects in object theater through Toh's involvement in direction. However, last year, although Toh was involved as director, the members didn't quite reach the point of properly engaging with objects.

From what I gathered from those involved, last year's creative process included Shiraga's proposal to share themes and images in words before creating the work, which differed from Khao Niew's creative style, and both sides didn't quite come to terms with this difference. In other words, perhaps last year's achievement was experiencing this difference firsthand.

With this in mind, before the full-scale collaborative creation began this year, the production team, Shiraga, and Toh consulted and decided to refocus on "engaging with objects" and revise the framework to enable both Shiraga and Toh to be more easily involved as directors. As a result, Shiraga took on "composition and direction," overseeing the overall structure, while Toh became more actively involved in scene creation as "director."

In the first year, Shiraga felt like an outsider working with two different groups, while Toh experienced the difficulties of coproduction due to cultural differences between Laos and Japan. As producer Tsukada emphasized at the beginning of rehearsals, when she said, "The significant thing about the second year is that we began creation acknowledging that *we don't fully understand each other*," I felt that this reconnection of their relationship was an essential catalyst for members from Japan and Laos, with their differing experiences in creative methods and approaches to objects, to engage in a more fulfilling collaboration.

Let's explore how the two directors were involved, based on the rehearsals I witnessed. In the early stages, performers repeatedly engaged in exercises to "bring objects to life" under Toh's direction. When Toh expressed dissatisfaction with the movements of Japanese performers, saying, "It's still not working! Don't think with your head, connect with the object through your senses," Shiraga proposed a new exercise.

The performers, divided into two teams, would run and take turns coming to the center one by one to play rock-paper-scissors followed by "Look over *there*!" Then, instead of pointing with a finger, each person would quickly choose and show an object from the space, gradually increasing to two or more objects and intuitively combining them into poses. Shiraga was attempting a different approach from

Toh, trying to encourage improvisation and playful engagement with objects through speed and intuition rather than overthinking.

After that day's rehearsal, Shiraga frankly told Toh, "I honestly can't tell whether 'life has entered the object' or not just by looking." Nevertheless, sensing Toh's dissatisfaction with the performers, Shiraga had proposed the exercise mentioned above.

As the rehearsal period progressed into its latter half, the framework of each scene for the performance began to take shape based on ideas that had emerged during rehearsals, and the exchanges between Shiraga and Toh became closer. In one scene, Toh instructed performers moving a human-like object to "back away as if surprised when approaching the audience," to which Shiraga added the direction of dumping scrubbing brushes from a wooden bucket on the human-like object. This addition brought rhythm and realism to the movement that Toh was seeking, and understanding the intention, Toh approved it.

In another scene, proposed by Shiraga, a mosquito net is hoisted high with poles, and small objects fall from the net, which sways like a large ghost or animal. Here, Toh understood Shiraga's aim and designated Laotian performers skilled in handling objects to maintain the height while creating movement, making appropriate role assignments based on the performers' abilities and characteristics. Many moments revealed that the clear division of roles between Shiraga and Toh, along with their mutual respect, was proving effective.

As assistant director Yu Kitagawa noted when she commented, "I want to convey the excitement of the rehearsal space," the rehearsal space is where creativity is most vigorously generated. Members put forth various ideas each day and engage in repeated trial and error. Performing arts are essentially artistic expressions premised on public presentation, and audiences only witness the staged performance itself.

Due to the limited time for performances, creators generate numerous ideas, picking and choosing among them while continuously refining and improving them. Naturally, even among the ideas that must be discarded, many seeds of creativity remain. Their rehearsal space was truly a place where countless creative ideas were exchanged across national and positional boundaries in preparation for the live performance.

*1 A puppet theater company established in 1948. In the 1960s, they handled puppet creation and manipulation for NHK's TV puppet show *Hyokkori Hyotan Island* and other productions for stage and television. Currently, they primarily perform puppet theater nationwide for children and families. The Foundation Modern Puppet Center was established from this company in 1969. Website: https://hitomiza.com/

Toh conveying instructions about object movement to performers

Members and crew discussing preparations for the performance using sign language

During a run-through rehearsal

Third Report / Mariko Mori

From Theater Move-In to Performance – The Meaning of International Coproduction

報告書 森真理子 第3回

After rehearsals from December 4 to 17, creative work began at the Kanagawa Arts Theatre on December 18. In this third report, I would like to reflect on their activities from the theater move-in to the performance and reconsider the meaning of coproduction in this project.

From Theater Move-In to Performance

During the week leading up to the performance, the lighting, sound, and stage crews joined the team, and creation continued until just before the live show. Toh said in his post-performance comments, "The final push after entering the theater was incredible," and indeed, the transformation of the work after moving into the theater was remarkable.

On the day I visited the theater, while the crew was making final adjustments to the setup, there were intense exchanges between the performers, Shiraga, and Toh. Shiraga was thoroughly focused on the overall directorial adjustments for each scene—sound, lighting, scene transitions, etc. Just before the performance, I was struck by her remark to the performers: "We are all creating this space together. Think about the stage as a whole and the invisible space around you." Her comments, emphasizing how to present the objects, performers, and entire space to the audience, were particularly notable.

Meanwhile, Toh meticulously checked the handling of objects with performers during the gaps between scene dress rehearsals. As Toh described his role as "teaching the essence of handling objects," he never cut corners. When I asked Toh about his impressions after the theater move-in, he replied:

"Both the Japanese and Laotian teams faced challenges in handling objects, but at the same time, each had something to learn. I was moved by how quickly the Japanese members responded and adapted to suggestions. For the Laotian team, using so many objects, selecting from among them, and moving objects individually were new experiences in many ways.

As sound and lighting were incorporated, more ideas emerged, and despite the short period, everyone was able to catch each other's ideas and move to the next stage."

The Ten Scenes

What were the various scenes created not from existing stories or scripts, but from the relationships between everyday objects and performers? The "call sheet" shared by members lists the following ten scenes (with my scene summaries

(1) Opening: Carefully observing and showing each object, gradually bringing them to life
Photo by Hitoshi Furuya (All photos on this spread except (10) by the same photographer)

Scene from (1) (2): Enomoto gradually breathes life into the cushioning material and moves it

(3) Three Forms: Performance with objects made by combining cushioning material and steamer baskets

in parentheses; please also refer to the photos in this book):

1. Opening (Just before the performance begins, a crew member appears to clean the stage with a mop, but is gradually replaced by performers. The entire cast appears and places all the objects to be used in the performance on stage, resembling a *kaomise* (an introductory kabuki performance to introduce the actors). After introducing everything, the performers breathe life into the objects, and they begin to move. The performers exit, leaving only Enomoto with a single piece of cushioning material.)

2. Enomoto + Sone (Enomoto breathes life into a long piece of cushioning material and moves it. Khamneesone from Laos appears and creates a human-like object using the cushioning material and a steamer basket.)

3. Three Forms (Two more objects made of cushioning material and steamer baskets appear, and a performance with the three forms unfolds.)

4. Situation (In the latter half of the "Three Forms" scene, two performers holding shoji screens appear. Dakei with a kimono paper wrapper, and Toh with a large compass, emerge from between the screens. A duet begins. After a while, performers with silk wadding, a toaster, a bamboo whisk, and other objects appear. They exit, leaving only the toaster behind.)

5. Fallen Things (Performers moving a Korean barbecue grill, key-

(4) Situation: Duet scene with Toh and Dakei

(7) Fish Traps: Performance with fish traps by five performers. In the background, performers make sounds with objects. The live sounds stand out.

(5) Fallen Things: Scene unfolding around the toaster

Scene from (8) (9): Scene using large mosquito nets and a plastic sheet

(6) Swinging and Butterfly: Chongyee, with a car sunshade resembling a butterfly, approaches Dakei, who is playing with the hanging fish trap

(10) Ending: Performers placing objects back on stage at the end
Photo by Masato Sakano

board, and beaded curtain appear. The timer on the toaster that was set goes "ding," surprising the other objects. After a while, Adachi appears, moving a mannequin torso. While a performance by these four unfolds, Dakei appears wearing a fish trap on his head. The others exit, leaving only Dakei.)

6. Swinging and Butterfly (Dakei hangs the fish trap from a rope that dangles from the ceiling and plays with it as it sways. Then Chongyee from Laos appears, fluttering a car sunshade like a butterfly. A duet occurs between Dakei and the butterfly.)

7. Fish Traps (Around the swaying fish trap, five performers with small fish traps appear. They use the traps to create a giant, creature-like form and move it. The fish traps gradually lose their form, and Toh performs a solo with the large fish trap.)

8. Mosquito Net (Using mosquito nets from Laos and Japan, three performers each move the nets widely as they perform. The mosquito nets resemble living creatures, and when paired with a plastic sheet, they create an effect similar to ripples on the sea. In the end, only Chongyee remains, moving the plastic sheet.)

9. Birthing Mosquito Net (A large, creature-like form using a mosquito net appears. From within the net, various small and medium-sized objects, such as paper lanterns and a tea table, drop to the floor as if being born.)

10. Ending (All performers appear and, in addition to the dropped objects, place all the other objects used in the creation back on stage. The objects accumulate into one large object, and the performers stand gazing at them. Blackout.)

The Circular Stage

While some objects were also used in the first year's work-in-progress presentation, and some scenes may have been partially similar, the composition and direction changed significantly from last year. What was impressive was that these scenes were performed on a circular stage with the audience surrounding it. Based on the first year's experience, Shiraga wanted to showcase movements close to the floor and highlight smaller objects more clearly, so she sought a format where the audience would not be too high or distant from the stage, resulting in this surrounding arrangement.

This idea seems to have resulted in effects beyond merely enhancing the visibility of movements close to the floor and small objects. When people think of puppet theater, many might imagine a proscenium stage framed like a picture relative to the audience, with only the puppets in view. Of course, there are cases like *Bunraku* where the puppeteers are visible, and in their presentation last year, although the audience and stage were oriented in one direction, the performers operating the objects were still visible.

However, with a circular stage, the audience can see how performers interact with and relate to the objects from all directions. Each scene revealed discoveries—moments when the relationship between objects and people shifted or when objects were intently observed from different angles. The dynamics of humans dominating objects or being dominated by them, playing with objects, or being played with. Finding various meanings in the relationships between humans and objects, and instances when objects appear different depending on angle and shape.

After the performance, when I asked several audience members for their impressions, I heard comments such as, "The performers' movements were interesting as physical expression," and "I could see other audience members' faces across the stage, which added to my enjoyment of the space."

Scene Development

Returning to the ten scenes, each was created from ideas generated by the performers and directors in the rehearsal space, arranged like an omnibus. The opening and closing scenes, in which all objects used in the creation appear with a certain degree of sheer volume, seem to provide the entire work with a unified worldview.

One audience member told me, "Having a scene at the beginning where they bring objects onto the stage made it easier to understand that these objects would be used later." By showing all the objects in their "not yet moving" state at the beginning, it served as an introduction to the world of objects that would soon be brought to life.

Afterward, the scenes unfold one after another, each presenting its own worldview. The transitions between scenes, performers, and objects are seamless, enhanced by music and lighting. While there is no consistent narrative throughout, as audience comments like "It was like an art exhibition" or "I enjoyed how scenes were created and then dispersed" suggest, viewers likely freely interpreted the movements of objects, the relationships between objects and people, or the spaces in between, creating their own stories and meanings.

And with all objects placed back on stage at the end, I personally felt as if I had witnessed "a certain lifetime" of objects that lived on stage. Made of bamboo, paper, plastic, and iron—normally inanimate—these objects were, for a time, brought to life by their handlers and had a period of living on this stage. The ending direction conveyed precisely that conclusion.

What It Means for Objects to Live

The main theme of this coproduction was how to handle objects. It was striking that performer Enomoto mentioned

Members confirming movement methods with each other until the very end

Members conversing in front of the set for the ending scene

Shiraga adding detailed direction to each scene

Before the performance, objects are set up in several places in the wings

AI (artificial intelligence) several times during our conversation. Enomoto's words—"AI-powered robots can learn various movements through learning, but puppets and objects don't move unless people move them"—seem to offer one answer to why they do puppet theater or why they are passionate about object theater.

When I spoke with the Japanese performers after the creation, Enomoto said he would contemplate questions like "What does it mean for an object to 'live'? Is this object hard or soft? What are its color and shape?" while carefully observing and moving objects. Adachi mentioned that Toh, on site, emphasized "objects breathing" just as much as "putting life into objects." Tsuruta, participating this year for the first time, said she was conscious of the distance between her emotions and the object's emotions—whether to align them or put them in antagonism. As Yanase described the creation time as "an exploration of people and objects," it is certain that this period of continuous dialogue, though challenging, was meaningful for all performers. The process itself of each person using their own body to pursue and gain their own expression of "what it means to move objects/for objects to live" and "how handlers should behave at that time" seems to be the significance of the creation.

Inanimate objects that are normally just present begin to speak vividly and lively. There were many moments when I was moved by the fact that it is humans who create the moments when objects and puppets move with a certain persuasiveness—just as it is natural for Laotian "*Phi* (spirits)" to dwell in and actually exist in objects—and that this is a technique or craftsmanship generated from their bodies.

Various meetings among directors, members, and production staff continued even after theater move-in

The Meaning of International Coproduction

This project, needless to say, is premised on international coproduction. What does it mean for people from different national backgrounds to collaborate in creating a work? I

would like to share some thoughts based on what I felt on site.

While this project is presented under the banner of Japan and Laos as national units, the participants are private artistic groups and individual artists. This project exists after years of ongoing exchange among them. Their interest in each other's different cultures and their desire to learn more have connected them. Throughout this process, they have continually been tested on how to acquire "physicality" through engaging with puppets and objects, and I feel that this space of exchange through living bodies is unique to the performing arts.

In the second year of this project, trial and error continued after acknowledging that they "don't fully understand each other." In their practice, non-verbal exchanges seem to have been just as important as their efforts to converse through words. According to Chizuko Asanuma, who has been involved in this series of projects as a Lao interpreter, Toh and other Laotian members "understand from places beyond words" and "are trying to do something that transcends language." In fact, beyond those who visited Japan this time, Khao Niew includes many members who may have difficulty with the Lao language, including deaf people, ethnic minorities, and foreign nationals. Toh himself says that when he first conducted a workshop with deaf people, he felt the potential for expression in being able to connect without words. It is also interesting that Toh mentioned, despite the differences in Japanese and Laotian approaches to objects, "I felt that Enomoto bridged the gap between the two approaches," and "Perhaps it was because Enomoto is deaf that he had the freedom to connect without relying on words."

Individuals with their own cultures exchanging wisdom and techniques through their physical presence in the same era—I believe there is much information exchanged here that cannot be supplemented by digital information. I don't have the space or capacity to compare digital and physical bodies; however, as I observe them exploring how people breathe life into objects and puppets, I can't help but feel the great significance of it.

Also, while this report has focused on the creation process leading up to the live performance, in coproductions within the performing arts, members spend considerable time together outside of the creative work. They share meals, engage in casual conversation, occasionally discuss personal matters, and check on how each other is feeling. It is important to remember that such shared time, rather than just the work itself, is integral to the collaboration.

As an observer who could not attend all the creation sessions and participated only partially, my notes were still extensive. Setting aside whether I have adequately summarized them, I would like to note that there is great value to be found in what could not be written here, what was not expressed in the work, and what was left out.

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