

SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga) and Restu I. Kusumaningrum (Indonesia)

“Electra” Fourth Report: Reflection

Author: UCHINO Tadashi

Up to the third report, I mostly completed my reports as an observer. In this final report, I would like to analyze the historical significance of this international co-production, taking into account academic views.

International coproduction is a relatively neutral term, but the word “international” nevertheless implies the assumption of a nation-state, meaning that different nations work together to produce a work of art. In the case of *Electra*, this means Japan and Indonesia.

On the other hand, academically, the term *interculturalism* refers to a trend in performing arts that has emerged as a new phenomenon since people’s interaction with each other has increased globally. It is important to note that the term “culture” is used rather than “nation,” and also that “inter,” meaning between or among, is used here. The Japanese translation has not been settled, and while some researchers call it *ibun-ka-sesshoku-shugi* (literally, different culture contact-ism), I have consistently used the term *kanbunka-shugi* (interculturalism).

The fact that different cultures come into contact and are influenced by each other due to various factors is the very history of humankind. As such, it is possible to say that this is not a phenomenon unique to the age of globalization. However, considering the characteristics of the limited category of the history of contemporary theater, I believe that it is possible to segment/discuss the various practices that have come into the limelight with the keywords “inter” and “culture,” so I have adopted this translation and will use it uniformly in this report.

Interculturalism first came to attention in the 1980s. More than 40 years have passed since then, and it is safe to say that a common understanding of what interculturalism means in the context of theater has emerged among practitioners and researchers alike. With some reservations that this shared understanding may be limited to the English-speaking world, with which I am deeply involved, I would like to point out that the publication in 2020 of *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Interculturalism and Performance*, co-edited by Daphne P. LEI and Charlotte McIVOR, demonstrates the growing understanding and expansion of interculturalism in theater.¹

The final chapter of the book is an annotated bibliography by McIvor with Justine NAKASE, in which the historical view of interculturalism on which the book relies, and which is generally shared by the academic community, is presented, along with explanations of key terms and key references. According to the description, the *winds* of intercultural theater began to blow at the end of the 19th century, forming Wave One (“emergence and backlash”) from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. Then, Wave Two (“consolidation”) lasted from the early 2000s to 2010. And the present (2011 onward) is the era of Wave Three (“other” interculturalism(s)).

The *winds* were blown by the giants of theater history with whom we are familiar, such as Bertolt BRECHT, Gordon CRAIG, Vsevolod MEYERHOLD, Antonin ARTAUD, and Jerzy GROTOWSKI, who are considered to have been influenced mainly by the Asian theatrical tradition despite being in Europe. They are referred to here as the “modernist genealogies of experimentation,” and key texts are introduced. They are all must-reads for theater researchers, such as Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938).

Wave One, which is considered the “emergence and backlash,” is where many familiar names from my generation and others appear, and

authors such as Peter BROOK, Richard SCHECHNER, and Erika FISCHER-LICHTE are mentioned. The word “backlash” is used because, just at this time, postcolonial criticism was a major force in critical theory in the English-speaking world, and the structure of artists from the former colonial powers exploiting the culture of their former colonies was, *in and of itself*, severely criticized. Perhaps the most famous controversy is the criticism by Indian critic and director Rustom BHARUCHA of the British, white, Brook’s production of *The Mahabharata* (1985).

The subsequent Wave Two of consolidation was a period when intercultural works had great influence within the festival culture circuit, mainly in continental Europe, against the backdrop of an era of globalization. Partly because of this, intercultural theater practices had become so commonplace that even scholars had begun to point out the need to separate the categories within them. In this book, categories such as *transcultural*, *intracultural*, and *extracultural* are introduced. Moreover, articles that say things such as the following have also come to be written.²

While [noting] that intercultural theatre as a whole has tended to be dominated and over-determined by Western practitioners and theorists, [it is argued] that intercultural theatre is better positioned to “explore and critique alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries, although the subjectivities they produce are not wholly free of state mediation.” (p. 237).

In other words, as intercultural theater productions matured with the period of consolidation, the discourse surrounding them also shifted toward more subtle analysis and evaluation that could not be reduced to simple dualism.

As for the current Wave Three, as it is one of the “other” interculturalism(s), it is noted that the attention of researchers is increasingly focused on a very diffuse and diverse range of intercultural theater practices, especially small practices in non-mainstream and non-Western-centered places. Of course, since we are talking about discourse in the English-speaking world:

Wave Three is characterized by... the study of intercultural performance with an emphasis on minority-led and/or Asian and/or non-Western artists, projects, events, and experiences, and an even more pronounced focus on intercultural processes including but not limited to actor-training and rehearsal processes... Wave Three might be seen as centered on practices that repurpose, replace, redirect, or ignore these [traces of Wave One and Wave Two] entirely. (pp. 239-240)

Within this stream of the “other,” coeditor Lei argues, for example, that a genre of “hegemonic intercultural theatre” (HIT) has come into existence. First, here is the definition of HIT as a keyword in this book:

Daphne P. Lei’s succinct term which describes elite practices of intercultural theatremaking that are unbalanced in their power dynamics between collaborators, typically lead by auteur directors, spectacular in scale, and driven by the West or Western sources of influence and funding. (p. 240)

Brook’s *The Mahabharata* is a typical example, but it is worth noting that in the 2010s, Lei ventured to call it hegemonic. This is noteworthy be-

cause Lei deliberately calls it HIT, as she wants to say that there are limits to critical evaluation of such dualistic power structures.

For example, Lei considers Robert Wilson's (1941–) international collaborations in Taiwan, considered to be part of Wave One, to be typical HIT. There were two collaborations between Wilson and local artists in Taiwan. The first, *Orlando* (2009), was an intercultural performance that could not withstand the postcolonial criticism. However, *1433—The Grand Voyage* (2010), which was produced in response to the first collaboration, is said to have been able to present tremendous complexity that was a complete change from the previous production. Although the details are beyond the scope of this report, Lei attributes this success more than anything to the positive lessons learned by the participants from their experience with *Orlando*.³ To summarize briefly, opportunities that ought to have been positive—the “Interruption, Intervention” mentioned in the title of the essay—were brought to Taiwanese theatrical culture through two collaborations with the “other” in the form of Wilson. The cultural flow, which had been in a natural state, was artificially interrupted, so to speak, by the introduction of aesthetics and ideas (in this case, Wilson's views on theater) from the “other,” which normally should not have entered the flow, and an unexpected chemical reaction occurred. She also says that even researchers who are critical of HIT should recognize this significance of HIT. From a larger perspective, Lei believes that the stance of criticism that criticized institutions from the outside and pressed for their dismantlement, which was the mainstream in the 20th century, has become invalid via the postmodern, and that it is only from within institutions that institutions can be changed, a stance that is becoming the mainstream in the 21st century.

If we bring in this theoretical or genre framework of intercultural theater, how does the Japan–Indonesia co-production of *Electra* (co-produced by SCOT and Purnati Indonesia) look?

In Lei's paper mentioned above, SUZUKI Tadashi's name actually appears as one of the practitioners of HIT for some reason. Although I cannot find a very assertive reason other than the fact that Japan belongs to the first world economically, it may have something to do with the fact that Suzuki's appearance in the period classification already mentioned falls in the time of Wave One. In other words, is it because he has continued to be active since the “backlash era,” when being a “great director” itself was simplified to such analyses as “unbalanced power dynamics”?

In any case, I am not going to personally quibble with this assessment made in 2011. Rather, in looking at the chronology given in the book edited by the same Lei almost a decade later, I believe that it is important to note that from the very beginning of his activities, Suzuki's work so far has realized a performative practice of subjectivity within the problematic sphere of *identity politics*, which as I have already cited as a characteristic of the consolidation of Wave Two, “explore[s] and critique[s] alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries, although the subjectivities they produce are not wholly free of state mediation.”

This applies not only to the works with actors from the former Waseda Little Theater and SCOT, but also to all of the various international co-productions that Suzuki has created so far. The performances and presence on the stage of the Indonesian actors who participated in this production of *Electra*, as I have written about in previous reports, were certainly a heterogeneous or intercultural physicality “explor[ing] and critique[ing] alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries.”

It is important to emphasize that such “physicality” is not acquired overnight, but is made possible first of all by the persistence and soundness of the organizations (in this case, SCOT and Purnati Indonesia) on

which the international co-production is based. It is thought that the success of the co-production comes down to the fact that it took five years. Of course, it is not always better to spend a long time doing things. Even though the collaborations between Wilson and Taiwan only took place on two occasions, they are said to have brought about significant changes (“interruption, intervention”) in the Taiwanese theater scene. What about the case of *Electra* this time?

The key to this is the existence of the Suzuki Training Method as a shared asset. By sharing this training method with Indonesian actors as an introspective system to consciously cultivate not only their skills and physical abilities as actors, but also their entire being for speaking dialogue, *Electra* was able to achieve the same level of theatrical per-



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formance as Suzuki's many previous international co-productions. In other words, not only did the actors give physical and concrete shape to "alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries" before the eyes of the audience, but through their bodies and the words they uttered, they allowed the audience to become aware of, or rather to comprehend, an ancient Greek story that should be a great reference for considering the crises of our own time.

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- 1 It should be noted here that the term "theater" in this report refers to performing arts that are not limited to theater in the narrow sense of the term, as well as to all so-called performative works in general that do not necessarily take place on a stage.
 - 2 The quotation in parentheses is from the following paper.
Lo, Jacqueline and Helen Gilbert. "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis." *Drama Review* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 31-53.
 - 3 Daphne P. Lei, "Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson's HIT Productions in Taiwan," *Theatre Journal*, Volume 63, Number 4, December 2011, 571-586.