

Tokyo Festival World Competition 2019

Artists' Jury meeting

Date: 4 November, 10:00-

Venue: Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, Theatre West

Chairperson of the Jury

Juliette Binoche (Actress | Paris, France)

Vice-Chairperson of the Jury

Mari Natsuki (Mari Natsuki Terroir director | Tokyo, Japan)

Jurors

- Asia

Yang Jung-ung (Artistic Director, Yohangza Theatre Company | Seoul, South Korea)

- Oceania

Lemi Ponifasio (Theatre Director / Choreographer / Stage Designer / Founder and director of MAU | Auckland, New Zealand)

- Europe

Thomas Ostermeier (Theatre Director / Schaubühne Berlin, Artistic Director | Berlin, Germany)

- Africa

Brett Bailey (Playwright / Theatre Director / Stage Designer, Third World Bunfight | Cape Town, South Africa)

- Americas

Emily Johnson (Choreographer, Emily Johnson / Catalyst | Manhahtaan / Mannahatta (Manhattan, NYC), Lenapehoking (U.S.A))

Editing, writing, translating Kyoko Iwaki

Binoche: Hello, everyone. My name is Juliette Binoche and I am the moderator of today's discussion. Before starting, I would like to remind you that we will not be deciding the best production here in front of you. We think that doing so will be too brutal for the artists. Satoshi Miyagi, General Director of Tokyo Festival and Yoshiji Yokoyama, Director of Tokyo Festival World Competition have posed two criteria for judging the productions; first, 'whether the piece presents a new set of values for the performing arts of the 2030s'; and second, 'whether the piece presents those values through skills of exceptional quality'. We will try to respond

to these questions. However, as Thomas [Ostermeier] said the other day, we can only start with what we already know. So, what we are doing today is to start from the known, respond to the productions, and endeavour to talk about some kind of a vision of the future of theatre. First of all, I would like to ask all jurors to introduce themselves and also talk about their expectations of the festival before arriving in Tokyo.

Yang: Hello, my name is Yang Jung-ung. I am a theatre director in South Korea creating theatres, operas, and musicals. Recently, I was appointed as the director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the PyeongChang Olympics. Even before coming to Tokyo, I was somewhat interested in inquiring the two questions that Juliette has just mentioned. You can say that as an artist, I am trying to search an answer for these questions. Personally, I think that theatres in the 2030s will be more direct and more political. I think they would be challenging the theatrical grammar of the previous generations. And, with these thoughts in mind, I have attended the productions this week.

Johnson: Hello everyone, and also hello to your ancestors and cultural bearers. I come from the Yupik Nation in Alaska, and currently live and work in New York City making performances, social gatherings and dance pieces. This is my first visit to Japan. It is quite exciting to think about how theatre could create new pathways for shifting social consciousness in the future. We are now in point of crisis, and are demanded to think how the languages and the technologies could be part of an action that aims towards the good. I think that the conversations we had this week were formulated around these topics and in relation to what we have seen this week.

Bailey: Hello, I am from South Africa, and I always wanted to visit Japan since when I was a little boy. I come from a very complex country. For generations, my country has suffered from the issue of the white supremacists; and so, in response to this issue, I have questioned through my artworks how we could create spaces for so many voices that were forced to feel inferior. At first, my reaction to the invitation was sceptical. I am always suspicious of the notion of the 'best'. Deciding which production is the 'best' by comparing different artworks from different nations is extremely difficult. For me, the more important question is to find a new scale within the new order beyond the colonial.

Natsuki: I feel extremely responsible to be here as a Japanese. And, I think that it is significantly meaningful that these kinds of new projects are initiated from Tokyo. As a person who has been involved in theatre, when I was asked to think about a 'global standard', I could not help but only think about the Western standards. However, this week, I was given a chance to see various productions from multiple continents, and I must say that I have learned a lot. I think that in Japan, it is common to make theatres from personal feelings, but, in this competition, I was surprised to see so many pieces that expressed social anger. In the 2030s, technologies will inevitably develop, but precisely because of this, I think that human bodies will be valued more. I hope that I could be a member of those people who shares a global language in the theatres of the future.

Ostermeier: I must admit that Tokyo Festival World Competition is tackling quite a difficult task. Yes, it is a good thing to gather different companies from around the world, but then, we are discussing artworks that cannot necessarily be judged. Also, no theatre maker can be a prophet for what is going to happen in ten years of time. For these reasons, I was very sceptical about this competition. However, I did like what Yoshiji wrote in his text about the competition. He said that although theatres in the past century has been dominated by the west, the cultural-economic grid is now shifting toward Asia and so we should reconsider the western aesthetics. I like this brave and courageous view responding to the changing world, and it made me curious to participate in the competition.

Ponifasio: I come from New Zealand. When I was invited to the competition, I tried to imagine the outcome, I tried to think about the discussions on the 'collective future', and I tried to envision our readiness to welcome the new generations of creators, visionaries and peace makers. These were the thoughts I had prior to arriving in Tokyo. For me, this competition is an opportunity for imagining the values that we make as artists. For me, art is something that always gives us a second chance. For instance, a useless empty bottle could be a rubbish for many, but an artist could remake it into an artwork and create a new life of beauty. So, art is to look for how we could open up possibilities for regeneration.

Emotions of Anger and Anxiety

Binoche: Lastly, to introduce myself. I am an artist, actor, and searcher. When I was asked to come participate in the competition, I was very excited to go into a different world and share visions with other artists. To go back to the two questions that I have said at the beginning, what I sense is that these questions come from a very deep sense of pain. There is a sense of pain of not knowing how to reach the other. Within the productions I saw this week, there were some pieces that did not reach us as much as others, and there were some that were even difficult to see and feel. And, so, at the end, the big question for me this week was to think how we can reach others.

Ostermeier: When you were talking, I was thinking of something that we did not discuss so far because now you are talking about emotions. I would say that the six shows we saw could be generally divided into two emotions: one is anger or rage, which was the case in the African production (Charles Nomwendé Tiendrebéogo, *Mea Culpa*); and the other is the feeling of anxiety of living in a world of uncertainty and only being able to grasp an incomplete vision of the world. These feelings were posited by the Spanish (El Conde de Torrefiel, *La posibilidad que desaparece frente al paisaje*) and the Japanese productions (dracom, *Sokonaizu-Bottomless*). In contrast to the African one, the latter two were refusing to show any intense emotions. Especially, the Japanese production was like, as if they were already dead in their performance. What I think from seeing these performances is that, perhaps, one of the major values of theatres in the 2030s will *not* include the truthful incarnation of emotions.

Bailey: We must remind ourselves that, in theatres, emotions can be expressed not only through actors but also through the entire production. And, at least for me, there was an extraordinarily emotion coming out from the African, Chilean (Bonobo, *Tú Amarás*) and the Australian pieces (Sydney Chamber Opera, *The Howling Girls*). The Australian piece was especially commendable in terms of the expression of emotion, because, at first, they gushed out emotions through the gasping breaths, and then it slowly transformed into this primal animal-like screaming trying to seek some kind of a harmony, and then, at last, there was a glimpse of light coming out from between the curtains. Also, it was the only piece that showed us some resolution from the viewpoint of young women. And, as represented by people like Greta Thunberg, the voices of young women have recently gained power across the global stage.

Johnson: Anger and apathy were what I wrote in my notes. But, then, as Thomas says, if emotions have no place in the future of theatre, even the thought of that creates some fear in me.

Binoche: For me, it's not only fear but a catastrophe. What happens when people do not address their emotions but hide them inside? If we do not voice the emotions, we are not humans. Emotion is a way of knowledge. It helps us become saner and more intelligent. Of course, as Bret says, emotions could come from the scenery and the ensemble, but what is more important is that the actors on stage are connected to their emotions. If you are not connected to your emotions, you are dead. That is why I became frustrated when I saw shows which I felt like there were no links to the emotions. I am not saying that you cannot represent the sense of disconnection, which was the case in the Spanish production. And, yes, people could be provoked by it. But, frankly speaking, it makes me more frustrated, it makes me angry.

Ponifasio: Thank you for expressing your emotion. I must say that theatre is not just a mirror, a reflection of reality. We have to intervene and shatter that mirror. The point is, as an artist, we have to seek new vocabularies that allow us to adequately express who and where we are at our time.

It is easy to make a show, but it is hard to make art. So, when I am watching any production, I question how the artist is widening the artistic range of vocabulary. This process is not emotional, but rather more intellectual as well as spiritual. I think that emotions erupt, when you fail to find the right tool for expression.

Natsuki: I think you are saying that you have to have various vocabularies when expressing emotions, right? What reminds me from that statement is, how European contemporary dance suddenly became very popular in Japan in the 1990s. In hindsight, when you think why so many people went to see contemporary dance was because the bodies on stage were expressing anger. They were expressing anger through not words but bodies. And, it taught me how performers should obtain various vocabularies for expressing feelings.

Yang: Until now, I thought that I was a person who was completely against sentimental feelings. In South Korea, when sentimental emotions are openly expressed, it becomes a very tacky play in the vein of *Shinpa*

melodramas. However, I know that in general Asian people are fond of these sorts of plays. In the competition, the Chinese play (Dai Chenlian, *Big Nothing*) was expressing concepts such as the 'past' and 'memory' through traditional *Shinpa*-like aesthetics reminiscent of an old Chinese philosopher. In the Japanese production, although on the surface they were trying to refrain from expressing any emotions, I think that they were in fact expressing a feeling of tremendous sadness. Through these productions, I have come to know that sentimental emotion is one of the key Asian identities. Emotional expressions in the west is very different: it is cooler and more sophisticated. It's not a matter of which is right or wrong, but I am just mentioning that the difference between eastern and western emotional expressions became quite apparent in the course of the week.

Ostermeier: I don't know whether the western aesthetics is more sophisticated, but one thing I know is that, currently in the German-speaking theatres, there is a certain movement which I am not part of. The movement is created by theatre scientists and pseudo-philosophers and they are transforming theatres into a very dry academic discourse. All these people come from very dry backgrounds, and at any given moment, they are trying to prove how clever they are. This is what is completely destroying the vibrant and urgent interactions that should be happening between the audience and the stage.

Bailey: Thomas, I understand what you are saying, but I think that you are talking from a particular cultural condition. That is, you are talking of theatres only in specific time and space. For instance, the post-dramatic theatre by the Spanish creators presented in front of us emotions of a *joie de vivre*. That was the case, also with the Chilean production. As for the Japanese piece, I was able to feel emotionally connected as well. When the Japanese actor told a painstaking monologue, she was expressing a very deep sense of emotion. So, I disagree to what you have said. We are so different; our forms of emotions are so different. If it is somehow difficult to access the emotions, that is because we cannot decipher their cultural codes.

Ponifasio: We are paying too much attention to the actors when talking about the Japanese performance. Theatre is space. And, when I looked at the show through this perspective, it was almost like a melancholic book that the mother reads to her child in bed. There is not much excitement, but there is kindness; there is not a loss of emotion but rather humanness. The aim is to transition from one state to another. Theatre is not universal, and I think we should not see the western format as default.

Ostermeier: Yes, that is true. And, it may not mean much to differentiate dramatic theatre from post-dramatic theatre, but I must remind you all that most of the productions I saw this week was the latter. Also, I would like to defend my idea of theatre. When we are here at the table, we can behave in a very nice way. We can keep our masks of being civilized humans. However, as soon as a dramatic situation occurs, say, like a nuclear war erupts outside, we know that there is limited amount of resource and sooner or later there will be a fight for food. We will see what is hidden behind the masks of nice, educated, and clever-enough people. This is why I defend the idea of dramatic theatre: it reveals the deeper nature of human beings.

Three Values of Art

Binoche: Let's change the topic. Before today's discussion, I have asked several questions to the jurors and I would like to share the answers with you. The first question was: 'What are the three values of art?' Lemi, can you read out the answers for us?

Ponifasio: Mari, 'physical movement, emotion, consciousness'. Yang, 'humour, emotion, originality'. Emily, 'present and timeness, clear intention, transformation.' Brett, 'beauty, depth, political'. Thomas, 'rhythmical, relevant, new freeness'. Juliette, 'truth, freedom, connected'. And, Lemi, 'truth, new form, accessible'.

Binoche: The second question was, 'Theatre for me is...'. Thomas, can you read the answers this time.

Ostermeier: Mari, 'maturity, development, sexy'. Lemi, 'report on life, a common genealogy, communion'. Yang, 'beauty, evil, ritual'. Emily, 'everything, responsibility, possibility'. Brett, 'transcendent, sharing, ritual'. Juliette, 'fear, need, exploration'. Thomas, 'shithole, place of the dead, place of fear'. And, let me just give a quick comment. We must admit that most of us are already past middle-age and that we are looking at works of a new generation that is ten to fifteen years younger than us. Maybe, there is a generational shift in the desire for theatre. Maybe the younger generation of creators wants to be soberer and more distanced from the world. Perhaps, they are more apathetic rather than seeking hope for the future.

Natsuki: I felt like that when I was watching the Japanese production. I don't mind that they present those kinds of distanced perspectives, but for me, I rather prefer seeing something more dramatic on stage. I want to see development and maturity in theatres.

Yang: I thought that the Chinese production projected an aesthetic of the next generation. It is said that the younger generation of people do not read texts as much as we do. They even use the YouTube to seek for not a textual but visual information. His performance was on the same track; he did not use texts but rather rendered all information visually. I was astonished by it.

Bailey: Frankly speaking, I think that the onus of the discussion should not be our values but what kind of values the participating artists have suggested. What is the Chilean work putting forward? Are they saying that the world should not be divided into clear binaries? Other values that could be observed through their production is, collaboration and political urgency, which was represented by the banner that they brought on stage at the curtain call. Let's listen to the young people more. Young people across the Globe are already becoming slaves of the elderlies.

Ponifasio: Was that banner they brought on stage a part of the work? The point of theatre is making us

question what is rotten or what is the wound in our lives from another dimension. The cast brought the banner protesting the situation in Chile on stage after the show, as some kind of an addendum. Are they admitting that this question was not adequately presented through their artwork? It seemed to me that they lost faith in their artwork.

Ostermeier: When it comes to political battles, we should create alliances between the oppressed, the discriminated, and the people of first nations. It is a coalition for a mutual fight. The violence of Chilean police is deteriorating day by day. And, I think that the Chilean creators felt an urgent need to take an immediate action against the violence. I do not necessarily think that it expressed a loss of faith in art.

Towards the Future of the 2030s

Binoche: Lastly, I would like to go back to the topic of ‘new set of values for the performing arts of the 2030s’. As I have said at the beginning, we would not be giving you the final result, but rather I would like you all to think again about the criterion that was set by the competition committee.

Yang: I would like to say a word about the concept of ‘newness’ from an Asian perspective. Differing from my country South Korea, in China and in Japan, there still exist lineages of theatre traditions that continue from the past. In Asian context, tradition is like a strong father. And, newness derives from the desire to liberate yourself from this paternalistic figure. In traditional theatre, actors and bodies are emphasized. However, in the future, whether you like it or not, new media will gain power and we have to focus on those technologies in theatres. In this sense, maybe theatres in the 2030s will be focusing less on artists, and more on the digital audiences. I sense that new possibilities of theatre could flourish from here.

Natsuki: Whenever I go to a theatre, I look for something that shocks me like ‘what the hell is this!’ I seek for the unknown and the surprising. And, also as I have already said, I want to mature and develop through theatres. Another thing is that, in the future, I don’t want to struggle from inferiority complex. You were talking about theatre traditions in Asia, and there certainly are things like Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku in Japan. However, when you are born a woman, we can never be a part of these traditions. And, so unless you don’t make your own artworks, you will automatically be doing translated plays from the west. That is why I always had an inferiority complex towards the west. In the future, I wish that there will be a space that is devoid of these kinds of complexes.

Johnson: In the future, I wish for a space where we could mutually respect each other, and also one another’s artworks. In order to do so, we have to transform all kinds of existing theatre formats. As Yang said, I think it is important to talk about the technology in the future, but I also think that we should talk about the rights of the indigenous artists. Yet, above all, I think the most important thing is seeking for a way to not only fight together but also a way to transform together. That is the vision I have now for the future.

Ponifasio: Ninety-nine percent of the people whom I work with have never been to a theatre or a dance school. Most of them do not know or even care to consider what art is. They simply do things together with me. And, in the process, I just need to be there. Not as an artist in the modern western tradition who is at the centre of the creation, but just being there as one member of the creation process. The theatre is a new thing. Theatre for us is a product of colonisation. Colonisation comes from the mentality that the other is not human enough. I make art in order to prove our existence, that we are humans. So I seek a theatre form not colonized by history or literature of Europe. I want theatre that is true. That is my hope for the future.

Ostermeier: Thank you, Lemi. If I were to respond to what you have just said, I hope that, in the future, the battle and the anger of the colonized people, will also be the anger of the Western colonizers. And, I also hope that your battle for post-colonialism could form an alliance with a battle against the capitalist system. Because, as you know, there are so many oppressed and exploited people in Europe struggling from the class division. I want to give voices to these oppressed people. And, I hope that my battle will not be more important than yours. I hope that theatre becomes a vehicle for joy, pleasure, hope, resistance and enlightenment by entertainment. Recently, theatre has been so marginalized. And, I sometimes despair why I belong to the world of theatre instead of rock music. I sincerely hope that in the future, theatre will again become something that is erotic.

Bailey: I want to move on from Thomas and Lemi's words. I hope that theatre could create a wider platform, and also a space for cross-pollinations. The more we accept each other, the more enriched the outcome of the cross-pollinations. This is precisely why musicians are so ahead of us. Extraordinary fusion music is being created as an outcome of mutual appreciation. I hope that in the near future, an intriguing fusion theatre will bear fruit in the similar vein.

Binoche: We are already made from different influences, and it inevitably restricts our perspectives. Perhaps in the future, we might be able to form a global solidarity for solving our common issue of global warming, but, then, it might equally destroy us. Your festival asks us to talk about the future, but none of us can come up with a panacea. Even though there is a sudden rise of the rightists in global scale, we can only see the event through our own visions. Nevertheless, we have to open our eyes to the threat. We have to see that something new has to be created in our world. And, it might be very painful, but, if we succeed, what an evolution, what a bliss! But we should not be frightened, and not look back. And, with a full heart, full awareness of our emotions, and full visions that see that a bigger force is helping us, we have to uphold a big hope. Transformation is within our power, if we allow that place in our heart. Thank you all for attending today's discussion.