

## 東京芸術祭ワールドコンペティションに寄せて

### On the Tokyo Festival World Competition

#### Criteria for evaluation

With the idea of a time-span of a decade in mind, I decided to think about what I felt as one viewer of these six works that came to us from many different places and then think about the future.

Two things occurred to me. First, the way things are collapsing, breaking apart and what that looks like. Maybe not the forms, just the image or how it feels. The living, surviving, continuing to live for a long time that goes on anyway. And the work as a vessel that holds this.

The second is theatre, old and new, and the ongoing relationship between the work and the viewer. ‘Viewer’ has come to mean ‘collaborator,’ the one left with sensations or emotions after seeing the work, or even during or at the beginning of it. Human emotions are constantly changing: which feelings will remain and which ones will fade away in the person who is there, and how is the work attempting to spark such relations?

『可能性は風景の前で姿を消す』

“Possibilities that disappear before a landscape”

The sense of a kind “teasing.” Along with a cool, but unique feeling of distance, this piece left me with a visceral sense of something raw, inevitable, unavoidable. My skin and unconscious were fused in an instant; the polished performance of almost playful gestures caused a subtle shift deep inside.

Something like a proto-sound, a metallic vibration, reverberated from the steel instrument at the front of the stage, pounding the body. It went in through the ears and sank deep into the gut, a sound more intense than any cluster of words could be.

Images leapt out as a certain sense of distance was transformed into something concrete. Many of the works experimented with sound that strained our nerves as a way to bring us back to consciousness. In this piece, with its many twists and turns in the

narratives of violence embedded in history, a kind of tragedy was conveyed along with a strong sense of the cumulative power of theatre arts.

『たびたび罪を犯しました』  
“Mea Culpa”

Sounds like the voices of ghosts, buried in the graves—fragments of sounds that were not quite yet voices reverberated in the hall. Tales of the violence embedded in history came back to life from the graves as the gravedigger was possessed by the ghosts and became their medium, performing the role of telling stories that must be told. There was a strange sense of humor in this piece. The piece was structured so that we might return to self-awareness through humor in daily life.

The moment he was transformed by putting on the undeniably beautiful mask created a physical sense of aggression or violence that came closer. The energetic and beautiful dance of the actor led us to question violence in society, even as it offered intimacy. “Who are you?” “It’s me!” “I am the one who committed the crime,” he cried. The recorded sounds from the city in Burkina Faso gave the work a strong sense of reality. The inventive use of ordinary, discarded objects and the universal theme of listening to the voices of the dead, brought back to life the unique tradition of theatre that can be performed at any time, in any place.

『ハウリング・ガールズ』  
“The Howling Girls”

Using the culture of the voice with its long traditions, and rebelling against the strict discipline of that culture, this piece expressed an outcry on behalf of those who are oppressed.

The voice in ceremonial rituals for the dead has a long tradition, but this was a new experiment that used concrete composition in a way that penetrated and almost split open the body. Undulating breath and rhythm; something different from natural breathing, a rhythm that swelled with “nature” and sought to create a new voice that completely dismantled existing language.

As if the limits of bodily perception to which we are accustomed had been carefully

considered, a faint light slowly began to fill the hall, a painstaking reminder of the relation between life and death; and we heard voices that were not quite human, perhaps unfamiliar, superhuman creatures with voices of women and children.

At one point, a kind of ritual-like prayer led us toward the finale, and along with this, a subtle change in the light brought a glimmer of hope as the piece came to an end. This was a carefully constructed, beautiful piece.

『汝、愛せよ』

“You Shall Love”

Even now I recall the sense of sadness that stayed with me after the piece ended. I think all the pieces showed us how we all, without even noticing, unconsciously participate in everyday violence. The way we end up in all sorts of places creating “others” to protect ourselves. There is a long history of protesting unavoidable “traditions”—including colonialism—through the power of recreating narratives. There is also a long history of those who have always been excluded and made into “the enemy” sharing ideas and finding ways to survive. Here we can learn ways to address all kinds of violence that afflict today’s world from the cultures of indigenous peoples.

I also remembered Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, that Sethe had to kill because she loved. Wounding a body, and through a ritual of internalizing that pain, pointing to the possibility of being able to grasp the pain of the other. We are also faced with harboring ‘a sense of shame,’ or a feeling of responsibility. This was a piece with the power to bundle together many related things and show us the unconscious violence that comes with creating the “other.”

『紫気東来——ビッグ・ナッシング』

”Big Nothing”

Little bits and pieces of ordinary daily life, things discarded and broken, came alive on the stage with a presence of their own, creating their own sense of time.

I hadn’t experienced the strange pleasures of shadow puppets in a long time. Even while enjoying the piece, I glimpsed moments of sharp critique of modernity that made me shudder, and was drawn into the world of shadow puppet theater where the ups and

downs, comings and goings of emotions unfold noiselessly. Then, the actor created one sound after another—sounds unexpected and unknown outside the world of shadows—and at the moment he became a shadow on the screen, cut through linear time and history, to become “now,” and we were enveloped in a kind of pleasurable play.

The piece gave a sense of the world of dreams and imagination that exists even without language and recreated the greater “tradition” of theatre arts.

『ソコナイ図』

“Sokonaizu-Bottomless”

This quiet but eloquent work asked new questions about possibilities for theater. It was also a response to those questions.

An image of deaths that occur daily in places we don’t know, or aren’t aware of. This piece was able to push the limits of expressing the deaths that remain invisible and can’t be arbitrated, deaths that occur where no specific evil or villain exist.

The process of dying. What it looks like, and the body that must endure choices made. After death, time flows on. Death lasts a long time. What remains, what is left behind? Watching this work was an almost unbearably difficult experience, but in a sense it pointed to a sense of time that cannot be calculated or imagined, the time before something is discovered.

A time not here, a dimension where there is no mourning, where being mourned is not allowed, but where if we listen to the barely audible sound, we quietly turn with it.

I can’t really find words for this yet, so please wait a bit longer.

This is an abridged version of comments I made to the audience at the review session. There are still many other things I wanted to say. By coincidence I had just been asked to comment on something I wrote twenty-three years ago, and was thinking about how I might have imagined the world twenty-three years later at the moment I was asked to write this. So it was a rather difficult task for me to look at these works and imagine the world ten years from now. Nevertheless, it was truly wonderful to see them and meet the other critics and judges, and I am deeply grateful to Yokoyama Yoshiji for this opportunity.

Thank you so much!

Lee Chonghwa

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