



Artist Interview アーティスト・インタビュー

Creating performances in a live mode like a DJ, the world of Junnosuke Tada



Junnosuke Tada

Tokyo Deathlock
<http://deathlock.specters.net>

Karumeki
(Oct. 1 - 26, 2013 at Doosan Art Center
Space111)
(C) Doosan Art Center



DJのようなライブ演出で創り出す
多田淳之介ワールド

Junnosuke Tada first drew attention with a work titled “*Saisei*” (rebirth/replay, 2006), a performance depicting scenes of final wild carousing by a group that intends to commit mass suicide, all staged with loud, hard-driving music. As the leader of the theater/performance unit Tokyo Deathlock, Tada has presented a wide array of works based on the beliefs that “the greatest appeal of theater is that there are actors right in front of you,” that there is a need to “rethink the conventional methods of theater to expand its possibilities,” and that there is value in “pursuing the possibilities of plays using contemporary colloquial language.” Representative Tada production have included *Waltz Macbeth* (2008), which employed ‘musical chairs’ as a dramatic device; *Romeo and Juliet* (2009), in which various couples dressed in formal mourning attire run around shouting their lines; the eight-hour performance *Moratorium* (2012), in which the invisible barrier between the stage and the audience is removed to enable direct communication with the audience, and other productions. A consistent operational method that Tada employs in his stages is to direct the action like a DJ, playing music and using real-time camera images on stage to create performances that communicate through the dynamic physicality of the actors.

Tada also has an experience as a resident director of Seinendan, a theater company from which many young directors have emerged, and from 2010 he was appointed artistic director of the Fujimi City Municipal Culture Hall “Kirari Fujimi” in Fujimi City. This experience led to his developing and directing “citizen theater” productions around the country in which people in the local communities contribute to the writing of their own plays. In recent years Tada has focused also on exchange and collaboration with the [South] Korean theater world. In 2013, he collaborated with Korean playwright Sung Ki-Woong (leader of the 12th Tongue Theatre Studio in Seoul, Korea) on a production *Karumeki* that won the Award for Best Play, Award for Best Direction and Award for Best Scenography/Technical Direction in the Dong-A Theatre Awards. In this interview we look for the things he has sought in live performance that have led to creation of what can be called the “Tada world,” and the wide range of activities he has engaged in until recently in his collaborations with artists in Korea and other areas.

Interviewer: Masashi Nomura [producer / dramaturg]

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Leading up to the encounter with Seinendan

Is it true that you didn't begin activities in theater until after you entered college?

I played in bands in middle school and high school and wasn't interested in theater in those years. However, my high school was one in which drama productions were always an important part of our annual school culture festivals, and I did something like a participation type theater experience in my senior year of high school. It involved borrowing the spaces of five classrooms and stages fictional classes each based on a different concept such as "a revolting class" or an "embarrassing class." It was intended to give the visitors in the audience an experience of the feelings of the students, and looking back on it now, there seems to be a definite connection to the theater work I am doing now (laughs).

I had the vague idea that I wanted to be an actor, but not in theater, which seemed outdated and un-cool to me (laughs), so when I applied for college I chose the film acting course of the Department of Arts at Nihon University. After entering college I auditioned for things like [playwright] Shoji Kokami's workshop and performance project, but I turned out to be such a poor actor that I was replaced two weeks before the performance (laughs). When I quit the university in my third year I began doing theater with a number of amateur companies in the Waseda neighborhood with a friend of mine from high school. At the time theater people like Asagaya Spiders' Keishi Nagatsuka, Tokyo Orange's Masato Sakai and potudo-ru's Daisuke Miura were active as students at Waseda University, so it was a lively scene. Then, in 1999, by some twist of fate I joined the Dobutsu Denki company where Takuji Takahashi, the actor who had filled in for my role when I was taken off the cast in Kokami-san's workshop production, happened to be a member. I acted with that company for seven years.

You formed Tokyo Deathlock in 2001. Will you tell us how that came about?

At that time I got to know another actor who was acting with several companies in the Waseda neighborhood, Shinya Natsume. Forming Tokyo Deathlock was kind of a whimsical effort by myself, another friend and Natsume to give him a play to act in. Somewhere in my mind, I also had been thinking that I wanted to try directing anyway.

In 2003, while continuing Tokyo Deathlock activities you also joined the directing department of the Seinendan company.

The first time I heard the name of Seinendan's leader, Oriza Hirata, was when Kokami-san was making some negative statements in the workshop I attended about the "quiet theater" that Oriza Hirata-san was doing at the time. After that, seeing plays like *Neko no Hotel*, *Guringu* and *The Shampoo Hat*, my image of "quiet theater" began to change. So, I thought that I simply had to go and see Seinendan, and when I saw *Ueno Dobutsuen Sai, Sai, Sai Shugeki* (based on the original script by Tadao Kanasugi, translatable as "Return attacks on Ueno Zoo") I found it incredibly interesting.

When we did our first Tokyo Deathlock performances, however, we used lights-out to darken the stage [at the end of scenes, etc.] and we played music, but I also wanted to employ the kind of real dialogue like in [Oriza's] "quiet theater," turning the actors'

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Saisei

(Oct. 26 - 31 ,2006 at Atelier Shunpusha)
(C) Tokyo Deathlock



backs on the audience and the like as in contemporary/colloquial type plays. But, when I looked at the video of our first performance, it didn't work at all, because I had just been trying to copy by imitating what I had seen [in quiet theater plays] (laughs). Part of it is the fact that the script wasn't well written, but it was clearly done on a level that was completely unsuccessful.

Was it that experience that led you to immediately decide to join Seinendan?

At that time, Seinendan only took applications for new members once every two years, so it was in January of 2003 that I joined Seinendan. Natsume-san and I both auditioned [took the test] as actors and failed, but I was able to get in the directing department. At that time they had taken in so many people in the directing department that they started the "Seinendan Link" system (in which directors remained active in their own theater units other than Seinendan).

At the time you joined Seinendan, you were really just starting out as a director, so what kinds of things did you learn from [Oriza] Hirata-san?

In terms of the things I learned after joining Seinendan, I get pointers about what I was doing wrong from Oriza san, but the most valuable experience for me was that of working with actors he had trained and brought up, such as Hideki Nagai and Kenji Yamauchi. It was also thanks to them that my creative style changed. Seinendan actors can bring reality to regular dialogue, but they are also able, for example, to do things like delivering their lines of a dialogue realistically without looking at the other person. With that ability, they can be told to do things such as acting out a situation in which one actor in the dialogue is, for example, in Brazil and the other actor in the dialogue standing next to him/her is in the U.S. and still bring the same realism to it. This made me want to try using these actors to do new things, while of course being sure to preserve their forms of communication and reactions as contemporary/colloquial type theater actors. And that is what I have done.

What were the subjects or themes you dealt with in your Tokyo Deathlock productions?

At the time, I had a concept of doing stories that involved death. In effect, that is where the company name Tokyo Deathlock comes from. Rather than stories of people being killed, I believe I was consistently dealing with the theme of how people go on living after someone close to them has died. It happened that at the time I was thinking about going into directing, there was a death in my family, so I believe the fact that I was pondering the irrationality of death and of being left behind when someone dies had a lot to do with it. I guess I was interested in feelings like having terrible things happen to you but still wanting to find a way to go on living positively, or wanting to live with an attitude of bright optimism even if it is actually based on nothing more than false courage or self-styled stoicism.

I feel that your 2006 play *Saisei* (rebirth/replay) was your first representative work with Tokyo Deathlock. It was a work performed at Atelier Shunpusha, the rehearsal studio and performance space provided by Seinendan for young theater makers, and it depicts a group of young people who have gathered to commit group suicide and

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LOVE – Tottori ver.

(Feb. 20 - 21, 2010 at Bird Theatre Tottori)

Photo: Miyuki Yonei



begin wild carousing to loud, hard-driving music, and all their actions are repeated three times. Even though the directing remains the same, the actors gradually get tired. It is a work that the audience reads different messages from.

At the time, I was finding it very interesting trying a variety of new ways to use the contemporary/colloquial theater method and see what results I could get, and before *Saisei* I had done a work titled *Sannin Iru!* (They Were Three!) (2006). This piece *Sannin Iru!* was based on the idea that the same actor didn't have to keep playing the same role, and in it the actors keep exchanging roles, regardless of the progress of the story. In the case of *Saisei*, I had the idea that a performance didn't have to end after the story had been played out once from beginning to end, and I decided to see what could happen if a performance involved repetitions of the same story. At the beginning of the rehearsal stage, we had begun with three of us doing repetitions of the same simple conversational play, but as we tried new things the amount of physical activity gradually increased. And, what I found was that when the same play with lots of action was repeated three times, it comes to look like something different from at first, and if you repeat a story of death, it comes to take on the appearance of rebirth, doesn't it?

In your next work, *Love* (2007), in which there is music playing and a number of young women are dancing and expressing emotions without words. With the appearance of a man on stage, their atmosphere among the women changes, and as the man (with his back facing the audience) is asked a series of questions by the young women, their emotions change.

Actors trained in contemporary/colloquial theater deliver their lines while reacting to the other actors words and motions, but on the other hand they move in very technical ways, so that when placed in the same scenery with the same sounds being heard, they will move with the same timing and the same motions. If that is the case, then they should be able to act with motions alone, without the use of words. So, I got the idea of trying to use just this physical [motion] communication aspect. In addition, I added to this the discovery from *Saisei* that the body gradually becomes tired over time as physical movement is continued. So, *Love* was the result of my desire to try using this realization that, although you are simply repeating the same actions, in reality fatigue will be setting in and the body will be unable to continue repeating the motions in the same way, and this becomes a true measure of the passage of time.

Refining a unique directing style

Your creative method involves repeated experimentation with a variety of contents in the studio with trial and error in uncertain directions right down to the limit of the preparation period. I think you must have been able to arrive at this working style because you had the studio space of Atelier Shunpusha that you could use freely.

Atelier Shunpusha opened in 2003 and from the following year, 2004, I was using it all the time as a director. Under the young Seinendan director independent project program, I would use it twice a year, and when you added our Tokyo Deathlock productions, I was using that space for performances four or five times a year. I was able

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to do a month of studio work and rehearsals at Shunpusha and then do the performance there. We were able to gradually create each production's stage art there and put in the lighting equipment little by little while experimenting with it. At the time, I was also put in charge of managing Shunpusha, so I was there virtually all year 'round. In fact, now as well, even though I am often lacking in time, there are times when I don't finish and can't finish a work until it is time to take it into the theater.

What is your working method like in the studio?

It is a process of discussion, I would say (laughs). I put a particular theme out on the table and I ask everyone to talk together about it, and then I just watch their discussion. In most cases, that is the way we create a work each time. It is the same when we are working on a production of a play with an existing stage script. The themes I choose come out of the fact that I am [we are] alive, living our daily lives and thinking about things. For example, this year is the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 50th anniversary of the normalization of political relations between Japan and the Korea Republic, so I thinking that I want to do a work on the theme of "peace."

But, it would seem to me that just having discussions like that would lead only to a bunch of unrelated talk that will never become a play.

It is exactly that kind of unrelated things people talk about that I am interested in hearing (laughs). I want to know what brains other than mine are thinking. Particularly for works where we are not working with an existing play, or for citizen plays, I first of all want to use brains other than mine and then look at the various things that come out from them, and then I ask myself what I think of it all. I have everyone talk together for an hour, then we take a break, and if something interesting has come out of the discussion, then I will say, "Let's try doing something with this." Then we set to work. I say, "OK, let's all try saying 'No more war!' once as loud as we can." Then, "Now let's say 'We support war'." And, "Now let's say we're against something else." We try them all to see how it looks.

In fact I had the opportunity to see you at work in the studio, and I thought that free-for-all 'winning without fighting' style was really something. Normally, most people would be looking for common ground at some point.

I don't at all (laughs). I write down notes about the things we try while listening to everyone's unrelated talk, and then I just keep trying things. Then, in most cases, things finally take shape just before the scheduled performance. There are times when things come together gradually step by step, and when I find that what has been built up doesn't work, I rework the scenes, and substitute and change the order, right down to the last days.

If that is the case, then one of the determining factors becomes the actors that you choose, doesn't it?

Yes. The subjects that each one of them brings out are different, and they all appear different as people. For that reason, casting is very difficult. In my work *Symposium* that I did in 2003, the theme was 'Japan,' so I gathered actors from all around Japan

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Romeo and Juliet – JAPAN ver.

(Oct. 24 - 28, 2009 at Fujimi City Municipal
Culture Hall "Kirari Fujimi")

(C) Tokyo Deathlock



Waltz Macbeth

(Feb. 25 - 27, 2011 at Fujimi City Municipal
Culture Hall "Kirari Fujimi")

Photo: Yuko Ishikawa



and from Korea as well in order to create the work with people from different backgrounds.

In 2008, you directed a portion of *Romeo and Juliet* as a project of the Fujimi City Municipal Culture Hall "Kirari Fujimi." It seems that from this point you began directing existing plays more often. I have heard that your directing of existing plays like that has been influenced by Minoru Seki, the leader of the Sanjoukai company. Is that true?

I had performed in Sanjoukai plays in the past as an actor and, indeed, I have been influenced by Seki-san a lot. He got me thinking about a lot of things, like what you need to do to make a successful work when you are starting from an existing play, what you should have the actors do, how to choose a play, how to take a classic play and make it contemporary, as well as about the role of the director as the person who connects the audience to a play.

In Seki-san's case, while he also approaches a work from the creative and artistic aspects like the stage art, etc., but in my case, I don't like giving the actors a lot of freedom, but rather my approach is to place burdens on the actors in hopes that that pressure will result in revealing or showing something new. Also, I had a strong aversion to the scripts when doing classic plays. Still, I wanted the actors to look good by delivering their lines in a big voice. In that situation, placing some kind of physical burden or stress on the actors allows them to use a big voice without looking embarrassing, doesn't it?

Unlike Oriza [Hirata], in your direction you do things like using mirror balls to light the stage and audience areas and you make extreme use of music, lighting and video images, etc. In this sense, I feel that your directing method is different in direction from [Oriza's] contemporary/colloquial theater.

Personally, I don't feel that my methods are a departure from those of contemporary/colloquial theater. For example, in the case of *Seinendan* the lines of the script and the actors are the most important element, but there is also similar importance placed on the value of elements like the props and the time when there are no actors on stage. In other words, a prop like a cup can have equal value with that of an actor, and as an extension of that way of thinking, you can say that since the actors and the soundtrack and lighting effects and the audience are all equal in value, it leads me to feel that you can consider it valid to use anything that is present there in the performance space. Because I want people to experience that, I do things to arouse the audience, like turning the volume of the music way up. The reason I want to use mirror balls is because I have a very strong sense that theater is not a space where there is an audience viewing a play but a time and place where everything happening in the space is theater, and I want everyone present to feel that.

The way you control various aspects of the action taking place on stage, your position as a director reminds me of that of a DJ.

Perhaps, yes. I am operating the sound and the video images during the performance. I do believe that to some degree the sound and video should change depend-

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ing on elements like the number of people in the audience, the weather that day and the condition of the actors. To begin with, theater is a medium that draws its validity from the fact that it is happening live, here and now in front of the audience. But, lately I also feel that at the same time, it would be interesting if we could create a bit more connection to the audience, anticipate more response from the audience and make these elements more visible in the performances.

Is it your desire to build a state where the same 100% intensity exists on the stage and in the audience, much like a pro wrestling match where people in the audience will be standing and shouting jeers at the wrestlers in the ring?

That might be the case. I think it is great when you could go to a live performance [of music, etc.] and feel that everyone, the audience and the players are sharing the same experience in the same space. It is true that I do have the desire to use devices to create that kind of atmosphere where the people in the audience can be more aware of each other.

The quest in citizen theater

In 2010, you were appointed artistic director of the Fujimi City Municipal Culture Hall “Kirari Fujimi” in Fujimi City. That led you to begin holding workshops for local citizens at similar public halls around the country and directing citizen plays.

Of course there is the possibility of simply giving people who have never done theater before a play to perform, but I believe there are also things that people of the general public can do on stage exactly because they have never done theater before. When I work with general citizens from a community, I prefer to have them write their own play rather than giving them an existing play to perform. I am there to do the directing and to adapt the script [that they write] into a workable composition, but I tell them that there won't be a play [worth doing] unless they work hard to create it. It can't be helped if a citizen play is a downgraded version compared to what pros would do, but I think it is meaningless if the only thing the citizens take away from the experience is having been directed by me, so for me it is important that they write their own play.

Would you explain to us in a bit more detail how you actually go about creating a citizen play?

The work *Fuyu no Bon* (A Bon festival in winter) that we did at the Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center in 2012 was done a three-year project. It was a project based on a tie-up between the Edamitsu-kita Community Center in Kitakyushu City, the Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center and a group of artists and it involved doing a series of workshops during the first and second years and then creating [and performing] an original citizen play in the third year. The Edamitsu-kita Community Center is located in a hilly part of the city where residential homes were build on the slopes of the hills during the era when the population was growing due to the presence of the Yawata Steel Works company, but now with the aging of the local community [and depopulation] there are more and more vacated houses in the area. The people in their 60s and 70s are very healthy and energetic, but the community also faces a lot of issues.

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Moratorium

(May. 19 - 20, 2012 at ST Spot Yokohama)

Photo: Shun Sasa



I went around to a lot of communities like that and talked to a lot of people who live in them.

Most of the summer Bon (O-Bon) festivals that used to be held in each community have disappeared, but there was one place that still held their annual Bon festival at that is the one time when the children [the younger generation] that have left the area come back to their hometown and family. When I heard people there say, “The Bon festival is a festival when the dead [ancestors] return home, but it is also [now] a day that brings the living home as well and that is why we continue to hold the Bon festival,” I was deeply moved by this story, so I decided to make the Bon festival the theme of the citizen play [community play]. Once that was decided, we divided the participants into three teams and had them each make short plays involving a variety of situations that took the *Bon Odori* (Bon festival circle dance) scaffolding (central scaffolding and raised platform for the drum and flute players around which the people dance) as the background setting. Once we had these short play stories and wrote them down as a stage script and handed them out to the participants [citizen actor], everyone started focusing on trying to memorize and recite their lines and things grew tedious and boring, so we gathered up all the scripts again and got rid of them.

Since we had had the participants think up their own episodes to act out themselves, they all knew the structure of the story, so if someone forgot their lines the others could step in to help each other with follow-up to keep the story moving, and they also maintained communication with the audience in ways that made the entire scene more enjoyable for everyone. It is that beautiful dynamic that I want to show, and that is why in my citizen/community plays I want to create an atmosphere, a place where that can happen. My ultimate aim is to make the people see their lives in a wonderful light, to show our lives and the image of ourselves living our lives in a way that looks beautiful. Since the whole aim of the project was to use, to involve the members of the community themselves, I made it a point not to bring in or choose anyone with previous theater experience. My hope is that when people see this kind of community theater, they will come away feeling that the community they are living in is really an OK place to live, and I hope it will inspire the audience to think about their community.

In the case of the eight-hour performance *Moratorium* (2012), you arranged a space where events happened occasionally and made it so that visitors could enter at will anytime during the eight hours and spend time there as they wished, and the visitors could also become involved in the work. It seems to me that this work was born largely out of your experience of having the participants in your citizen theater [community plays] take responsibility for the time involved. How do you feel about that?

It is indeed true that that may be a factor. My experience with citizen theater while I was at “Kirari Fujimi” was very important for me, and I believe that my way of connecting to the audience became much more direct. With *Moratorium* I created a space where people could enter freely and there were actors there to start something happening when they did. I believe I wanted to directly try creating time with the work and the audience—using the work and the audience to create shared time. If, for example, the audience [visitors] got up and left in the middle of it, the atmosphere would suddenly go cold, and there would be no way you could pretend that it didn’t happen. Since having audience leave in the middle has a major effect on the theater

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experience of those who remain, so I don't want to make that a bad thing. If there are people who leave in the middle of a performance, I want to accept that fact properly as one of the things that happened during the performance.

So, it is an attitude not of pretending that something [undesirable] didn't happen because of a performance but one of accepting everything that happens as a result of the performance?

Yes. Probably, I was thinking of putting a [calculated] burden on the actors by telling them to use things that were actually happening on the stage to make a performance, but in the process, I believe that approach rapidly developed to the point where I was thinking that I couldn't ignore anything that was happening in the audience as well.

From the start of activities in Korea to the present

Since 2008, when you were invited to the Korea Asia Directors Exhibition and did a production of *Romeo and Juliet* using Korean actors, you have taken Tokyo Death-lock performances to [South] Korea and done collaborative works with Korean Actors. How did your work and exchanges with Korea begin?

It began with a proposal I wrote in response to an invitation that Oriza [Hirata] received from a theater festival in South Korea, for which he solicited application from the Seinendan directors. At that time my interest was not in Korea specifically but in working abroad somewhere. Oriza-san had always said that it was good for directors to get experience creating works abroad as early as possible in their careers, so I had wanted to work abroad if the occasion arose. At the time, I knew nothing about Korea, and as things turned out. I believe that was probably for the better.

How did you create your first work during a residence in Korea?

The day after I arrived there was the audition for the Korean actors (laughs). At that time the leader of the 12th Tongue Theatre Studio, the playwright and director Sung Ki-Woong, was on hand to help me on the scene. He told me about important background information about Korean theater and actors and gave me advice. After the production of *Romeo and Juliet* was over, the two of us talked together and he told me that no one was making theater like mine in the Seoul small theater scene, so he wanted more audiences to see my work. And we agreed that many exchanges like this ended after one project and that is no good, so we should show that young theater groups in their thirties can do exchanges on a continuing basis. We agreed that we would definitely try to make it happen.

One of the important factors that enabled us to continue working together was that after *Romeo and Juliet* some of the Korean actors that had acted in it then joined Ki-Woong's theater company and began taking part in Ki-Woong's productions. They formed a kind of loose network and came to be referred to as something like "Tada's friends."

Around 2008, your activities seemed to become very aggressive. You would go on

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performance tour trips before you even got funding, and you declared a suspension of your Tokyo Deathlock activities in Tokyo and proceeded to expand your range of activities.

I knew that we would never get much funding anyway, and watching the way Seinen-dan operated, I got the understanding that if you didn't take the initiative to go to the place you want to go and start making friends there, nothing is going to happen. I knew we had to write project plans and send them out and then decide how we would proceed with the places that answered us, and if we couldn't get funding we had to be prepared to raise the money ourselves and just go there. There is no way you can do performances around the country if we just stayed in Tokyo and sent out requests, saying please invite us to perform at your hall, so you just have to go and do it. So, we worked that way on the assumption that once we acted, one thing would lead to another. In the case of Korea as well, I thought it would be very stimulating to be able to be active abroad, and I found that it was important to continue showing my work to people who knew nothing about me.

After that Sung Ki-Woong continued to act as producer bringing you to Korea to work with Korean actors, and that eventually led to the *Karumeki* production in 2013. This work was created as a production of Seoul's Doosan Art Center with you directing a play written by Sung Ki-Woong for the first time. The play is written as an adaptation of Chekov's *The Seagull* set in Korea in the period of Japanese rule and it took the form of a controversial play that had both Korean and Japanese in roles where they each spoke their own native language. It was a project that was five years in the making.

From about 2010, Ki-Woong and I began talking about the possibility of me directing one of his plays. But, the plays I had been directing in Korean had either been classic plays or ones with few spoken lines, and since I hadn't yet done a play in contemporary Korean, so I thought it would be best to do one first, and for that reason I did *They Were Three!* with Korean actors (2012). The year before that, I had done *Saisei* in Seoul, and since it was a time when there were demonstrations going on in Korea protesting the Free Trade Agreement, so I tried interjecting some social relevance. With *They Were Three!* as well, when I added a taped speech about Takeshima at the end the response was amazing, and that made me realize how difficult it is to deal with historical issues between Korea and Japan.

So, you had been moving forward one step at a time before trying to direct one of Sung Ki-Woong's plays.

That's right. Ki-Woong is interested in the historical issues between Korea and Japan and has continued to write plays about the issues, so it is very important for him to do create works based on these issues together with Japanese theater makers. And, you can say that he has been working to create a situation where he could do that.

Were there any conflicts involved in the creation of *Karumeki*?

This is something that I'm sure would be hard for Japanese audiences to understand, but in this play the Korean actors had to speak in a particular dialect of Korean.

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What's more, it is a dialect of a region that is now in North Korea, so the actors don't understand it either. For example, if eastern and western Japan were divided into two separate countries and actors from the west who speak western Japan's Kansai dialect had to play a role using the Tsugaru dialect of northeastern Japan, that would be the kind of situation it is. The difficulty of that situation is something that it is not possible for me to understand, and all I know is that it is a big problem for the Korean actors. But, again it is a problem related to historical awareness, and that made it the biggest hurdle of all.

When we did the premiere in Seoul, it hadn't been decided yet whether there would be a Japan performance, so we decided to create it targeting the Korean audience, and we began by watching together with the [Korean] actors a video of the *Seoul Shimin* (Citizens of Seoul, by Oriza Hirata) trilogy with Korean subtitles, and watching the old film footage Ki-Woong had of Korea in the 1930s and a film made in Japanese by Koreans during the period of Japanese rule, and then spent a lot of time holding discussions about what everyone felt about what we had seen. I also spent a lot of time talking with Lee Hongyi who served as our interpreter and dramaturge. As we were working on it I was impressed by how very difficult it was, and we found ourselves admitting to each other that we never wanted to deal with on a historical piece again. And I was unable to anticipate how the Seoul audience might react to our play.

There were also a variety of opinions voiced by the actors. Some said that the play itself had problems, and there was the opinion that it was problematic that there were no bad Japanese depicted in it. There were differences on a number of levels about the issues involved. And, when that is the case, it is a problem deciding where the focus should be in terms of values. In one part meant to demonstrate the violent nature of the Japanese, there was a scene where a Korean was being pulled around by the hair, but we Japanese had an emotional reaction to that, because we felt sorry for the actor and couldn't stand to see that kind of treatment. But they [the Koreans] in contrast are used to seeing that kind of scene, so it didn't bother them at all. We really struggled to make that Korean premiere, and it was all we could do just to get it on stage and performed.

Considering the differences in interpretation, how did the Korean actors proceed in their roles?

In terms of interpretation of the historical facts, there wasn't really much of a problem, but there were some cases where an actor would say that they couldn't speak particular lines because the interpretation wasn't decided. In such a case, I would listen to what they had to say but, because my way of directing doesn't ask that kind of interpretation by the actors, I would tell them since we don't know the interpretation at this point, please just speak the lines as they are. But, in the process of trial and error there would come a point where suddenly an understanding would come, and when it did the Korean actors would always come through with very good performances. It was that kind of give-and-take that brought that play together, and I learned a lot from that process.

I saw the Japan performance of *Karumeki* and rather than it appearing to be the result of the interpretations you arrived at, it appeared to me like a rope wound of the two

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parallel threads of time, one being the time of “Sung Ki-Woong’s story” and the other the time Junnosuke Tada’s directing with its colorful music and lighting, and just as it seemed as if the it were coming to a bind of historical interpretation, the emotional thrust would return to the realm of human relationships, and in that sense I felt it was a very meaningful work from the perspective of it being a collaboration.

In terms of the directing, there were some places that I changed between the Seoul premiere and the Japan restaging. The premiere had a bit more of an orientation toward the role of the Japanese as cruel oppressors and Koreans as the victims of oppression. With the restaging in Japan, the producer said we had solved most of the issues that they had felt problematic in the original. So, my honest feeling is that I would really like to take that revised version back and perform it once again in Seoul. From around the time we were rehearsing for the restaging in Japan, the feeling had changed to a surprising degree and I found the play [script] itself even more interesting than ever.

What kind of further developments do you see ahead with your work in Korea?

Of course, I want to continue my activities in Korea. This year I will be directing a play by Ki-Woong based on a Shakespeare play. In December of last year I did field work on the Sewol ferry disaster with artists from Korea and Japan as a [Agency for Cultural Affairs] East Asia Cultural Ambassador. Through connections related to that, I will be participating in a work at the Ansan Street Arts Festival by Yoon Hansol, who appeared at F/T (Festival/Tokyo) in 2012. Since my long-term goal is to do the type of work I do in Japan in other countries of East Asia, I also want to do community theater in Korea, and I would like to do workshops at schools too. Since continuing to do collaborative work through residences will lead to more shared benefits, I want to continue to work diligently in that area as well.

Meanwhile, I have the feeling that, in part because of your activities in Korea, your work has taken on more of a political aspect. In light of this, do you feel that the concept you talked about earlier of “accepting everything that happens as a result of a performance” in theater is headed toward an attitude of “accepting everything that happens in Japanese society” as something to be dealt with?

Definitely, that is so. That is what I am interested in now, so I think this trend will continue for a while. It is not really that I want to address political themes specifically, but I am interested in the people who are living in this increasing state of confusion, so it seems certain that I will probably be working in that direction.

Finally, I would like to ask you what your thoughts are about what the ideal form of collaborative work with artists in Asian nations should be.

From the experience of what I have done until now, I would say that working on a continuing basis is very important, and I also think that it is necessary for artists from different countries to spend a lot of time together finding the things that they are interested in pursuing together. What I am trying to do in Korea is to find out how we see the current state of the relationship between Korea and Japan and how we can use theater to give expression to it. Depicting today’s society is a difficult thing for Japa-

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nese artists to do alone, so I believe that there is value in using international projects as an opportunity to bring our respective perspectives to the process of looking at our shared issues and finding ways to express them in artistically skillful and meaningful ways. As the end result of cultural exchange, I think it will be good if we can change our perspective from one of ‘it’s because we live in different countries’ to one of ‘we may live in different countries but we all live in the same region of the world.’ That is what I have learned from working in Seoul, and it is a task that I feel I am capable working toward.