



Matthias Lilienthal
Artistic director of Hebbel am Ufer (HAU)

Hebbel am Ufer (HAU)
<http://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/>



Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to “Create friction in the world?”

2009.6.24

パフォーマンスの震源地HAU
“世界に摩擦を起こす”その企みとは？

Matthias Lilienthal is a vibrant “warrior” of the German performing arts world who re-established the former East Berlin’s Volksbuehne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz as an experimental theater after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in 2003 took the post of artistic director of Hebbel am Ufer (HAU), an organization with three performance spaces in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, which is home to a large immigrant population today. Working with performance groups like Rimini Protokoll in the pursuit of reality and documentary theater, Lilienthal has given birth to chain of performing arts projects unapologetically aimed at creating “friction” in the world. These activities have made him one of the most talked about figures in his profession. With 2009 marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the city is now in the midst of a rush of commemorative events and festivals. Lilienthal is also involved in the planning of a “Japan Festival” scheduled to take place in Berlin this October. In this interview we talked with Lilienthal about his stance of always presenting projects that look at contemporary society with a sharp and insightful eye, HAU’s activities and his outlook on culture generated by cities like Berlin or Tokyo.

(Interview: Makiko Yamaguchi)

Early in the 1990s you worked with director Frank Castorf in founding and leading the re-established Volksbuehne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. This theater is considered one of the theaters in Berlin that presents more experimental and more political productions. Could you tell us about some of the important re-orientation and changes that went on during that time?

That was just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and one of our important themes was how this theater in the former East Berlin be re-positioned amidst the dramatic social changes of the day. At the time, the people of the former East Germany were trying desperately to get closer to the standards of West German society, while on the other hand, within the process of re-unification, there was a tendency to ignore the former East’s own unique issues. In light of that situation, what we tried to do was to say that the people of the former East Germany had problems that shouldn’t be ignored and pose the question of whether the re-unification of Germany wasn’t actually a colonization of the East by the West instead of liberalization based on democratic principles as one nation. For that purpose we employed metaphors to induce debate concerning the issues of East Germans. One of those was to use the retro-design style that was used in East Germany in the past. Using visuals of that type we tried to promote interest in the problems of former East Germans who were suddenly unemployed and the other social conditions they were subjected to.

Can you tell us about some of the specific theater works that dealt with the problems of the people of East Germany?

The most successful work in that sense was *Murx den Europaer* (“Bump Off the

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

European!"). It was written and directed by Christoph Marthaler and developed around songs that were often sung in Germany's Nazi era. The surrealistic stage art was designed by Anna Viebrock, creating a strange sort of waiting room, like a Salvation Army waiting room, or it also had the appearance of something in a home for the aged. On stage there were ten actors, each sitting at their own desk and each in their own world, not speaking to each other. And the concept was that their only consolation came when they sang together. The perception was that within this surrealistic setting Utopia could only be attained through coral singing, as a kind of negative consequence that could only be born in the context of German reunification. Marthaler achieved his first big success with this work and it has been performed regularly in the 14 years since its premiere. This is an exceptionally long run that surely can be considered a record in the German theater world. Also, Castorf brought *King Lear* to the stage during that period. As a story about power struggle and holding power, he used it to explore his thoughts about the East German regime.

You served as director for the 2002 Theater der Welt festival. It's an international theater festival organized by the German center of ITI (International Theater Institute) since 1981 and, as the name suggests, every holding invites theater works from around the world. It is held once every three years in different German cities, and in 2002 it was held in the four cities of Cologne, Duisburg, Bonn and Dusseldorf. We would like to hear about that festival. In particular, we hear that you had an "X-Wohnungen" (X-Residences) project where artists did installations at private homes and unused buildings and audience members went in twos to visit different residences.

This festival is basically one that invites foreign works that meet certain international standards, and in 2002 we invited productions like theater company ZT Hollandia's *Euripides' Bacchae* directed by Johan Simons. At the same time we wanted to make it a festival with local orientation, and we did a numerous of projects with that aim. One of the projects that we started at that festival is the "X-Wohnungen" project, which is still continued today. We did this in Duisburg, which used to be an area where poorer Ruhr valley coal miners lived and today has a large immigrant population.

We made private homes in this area the sites for installation works, and when members of the audience visit these homes they are confronted with realities that are very different from the preconceptions they brought to it. What I like most in this projects was the installation by the Polish artist Krzysztof Warlikowski. He used an abandoned building that had been a grocery store for coal miners in the 1950s and '60s and later housed a Mosque for Turkish laborer in the 1970s and '80s and did an installation based on Sarah Kane's play *Phaedra's Love*. In this installation a naked man lay on a bed and a woman walked around the room, which had a Polish Catholic shrine, reminiscent of the large numbers of Polish immigrants who came to this region in the era of the industrial revolution. At the same time it revealed potential interest in homosexuality and sex in the subconscious due to the presence of around twenty Turkish children who were always gathered outside trying to get a look at the naked man.

We asked not only directors but also painters and video artists to do installations, which not only inspired their imagination but also asked whether or not the audience would be encountering unexpected realities in the works.

The audience departed in twos at 10-minute intervals and spent three to four hours visiting eight different houses. There were also measures taken to provide encounters on the streets in between, and there were surprises prepared, too. It

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

also provided a good opportunity for encounters between German directors and foreign directors. As the directors worked on their installations in neighboring houses, there were opportunities for exchanges to develop. Unlike a 100% protected theater space, the houses created situations where a performer would be alone in the same room with one or two audience members, which led to a situation where you could not anticipate what was going to happen. In some cases erotic situations developed as well. After that Theater der Welt the same project was conducted three times in Berlin, and once in Caracas and in Switzerland. We also have plans to do it in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Waiting in 2010 are Johannesburg and Warsaw.

Do you think you could do it in Japan, too?

Aren't people in Japan reluctant to let other people enter their houses? Also the houses are small, so it might be difficult to get adequate conditions. However, Tokyo has very modern areas and other areas that are small village-like neighborhoods. I think it would be very interesting to do the project in a place with such marked inconsistencies. My impression of Japan is that of a rather closed society with a strange sort of insular mindset common to islands. In other words it seems distant. And it is strange, because it is just a 10-hour flight from Berlin to Tokyo and the only country you have to cross is Russia. These kinds of discrepancies it fitting for the project and I think a truly Tokyo-specific project could be held that doesn't lose Tokyo's uniqueness.

Since 2003 you have been serving as both the artistic director and administrative manager of HAU (Hebbel am Ufer). HAU is a consortium of three theaters (Hebbel-Theater [HAU 1], Theater am Halleschen Ufer [HAU 2] and the small Theater am Ufer [HAU 3]) located in the downtown Kreuzberg district of Berlin where many Turkish immigrants live. How did you come to this position?

At the time I was recommended as the next artistic director of Hebbel Theater and I was given the job after the usual application and interview. The 500-seat HAU 1 theater is not really suited for inviting international productions, either from the standpoint of building facility or its size. The addition of the 200-seat HAU 2, which is well suited for invited international productions, and the 100-seat HAU 3 made it possible to conduct a wide range of programs.

Can you give us a rough outline of HAU's budget?

Each year we receive a budget of 4.5 million euro from Berlin State. There is a separate 400,000 euro budget for programs. Together that comes to just under 5 million euro. We also make efforts to supplement this by obtaining outside funding, and the 1 to 2 million euro we gather from these efforts is added to the program budget.

We have a staff of 24 people. We have separate curators for the dance and theater divisions. Despite our limited staffing, we do 120 projects a year, and this means that each staff member has to perform a wide range of duties. For example, the publicity specialist may also be involved in festival curating. Our annual theater attendance is about 70,000, and on average we fill about 70% of the seating capacity.

Could you tell us about programming at HAU?

Our aim with the HAU program is to try to constantly create friction. For example, in the work *Hell on earth* by Argentine-born, Berlin-based choreographer Constanza Macras, half of the cast was dancers and the other half children of Palestinian, Arab

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

and Turkish immigrants. We deliberately chose to stage this work at HAU 1 because of its traditional building.

There are two main focuses of the HAU program, and one of those is issues relating to immigrants. Fifty percent of the population in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin where HAU is located is of immigrant origin, and half of those are Turkish. So, at HAU we have projects involving young Turkish directors, curators, stage artists and actors and we have been successful in our attempts to treat the immigrant situation in our program through these projects. Opening our doors to this community through our programs dealing with the issues and meaning of the immigrant situation at our theater is still in itself quite a sensational thing.

Do members of the immigrant come to HAU as audience? Do you see many immigrant residents or foreigners at German theaters?

In Germany's Turkish immigrant communities the ties of the family unit are very strong, so when the curator or director of a production or the actors are from the Turkish community, their families, relatives and friends come to the performances as audience. The determining factor as to whether they come to HAU or not is not the contents of the program but whether their community friends are involved or not. This fact is very clear. Although they tend to be reserved in terms of response, they are very interested in these programs.

What is the second of the HAU's focuses that you just mentioned?

It is a joint effort we have been involved in for the last six years with the Rimini Protokoll. They are a group of artists from the performance movement who have continued to create works that present questions directly concerning their reality as a realm of the unknown. The Rimini Protokoll group is involved in the same type of process as Bruce Chatwin and Claude Lévi-Strauss undertook when they traveled around Australia encountering unknown people as a form of research into cultural phenomena.

Just recently Rimini Protokoll performed *Das Kapital* in Tokyo as a joint production of the Dusseldorf's Schauspielhaus and HAU. It is a fact that Karl Marx was a central figure in the history of German humanities. On the other hand, he is very strongly connected to all socialist thought. Despite this fact, very few people have actually read the book *Das Kapital*. The Rimini Protokoll production investigates the flow of capital and its movements in today's society are explored through the life experience of ten people and shows how money is spent and invested. For example, Thomas Kuczynski, the son of an East German editor who published the works of Marx and Engels, makes an appearance in the play to lecture the audience about the work of editing those manuscripts. Another appearance is made by an investment consultant from Hamburg who tried to make money through a pyramid scheme by collecting money from rich members of tennis clubs. The system collapsed and all the money was lost, and you can see this as a kind of precursor to the present economic crisis.

The Rimini Protokoll production of *Cargo Sophia – Berlin* was also a great work. The audience get in a freight truck outfitted with audience seats and it takes them to a number of places like a parking area for long-distance trucks on the Autobahn, a wholesale market for fresh produce and warehouses. During the trip the audience looks at unknown parts of Berlin with new eyes through the full-wall window of the modified truck's cargo compartment. At the same time they listen to long-distance truckers talking about their work and lives in a two-hour experience. It is a fresh theater experience full of discoveries that show the audience another face of the city

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

of Berlin.

This is a work that was born originally in Sofia Bulgaria. A German long-distance trucking company acquired a Bulgarian nationally-run company. That company employed 8,000 long-distance truck drivers. They ended up doing long-distance trucking at dumping-level rates for European corporations. Rimini Protokoll's Stefan Kaegi got a long-distance freight truck and modified it. He put high-tech equipment in and outfitted it with passenger seats. He also installed a one-way glass window across one side wall of the truck's freight compartment that allowed the passengers to see out without being visible from the outside.

In effect, for the audience, the city they drive through becomes the stage set. The audience sits in parallel with the road and experiences the world of the long-distance truck driver. They are shown the kitchen-fitted driver compartments built into some of these trucks stopped at gasoline stands, learn about the drivers' low salaries of just 500 or 600 euro a month and other facts about how this previously unknown world functions. The truck also takes the audience to warehouses and a port with shipping docks where the cargoes are unloaded and thus experience the city as one large theater set. Furthermore, the two drivers in the drivers' compartment tell the audience about their lives. This work has been performed at Avignon and other cities around Europe. We want to find some Asian truckers and do this work in Asia, too. Presently, Singapore and Yokohama are two candidate cities for this.

I heard that Rimini Protokoll's newest work has premiered at HAU.

Yes. It is Kaegi's *Radio Muezzin*. When he was in Amman for a performance of *Cargo Sophia*, he learned about the plan to integrate the "muezzin." The muezzin is a chosen person who calls the faithful to prayer in Islam. The muezzin traditionally makes this call over large areas with loud speakers from the top of the minarets of mosques in cities. Since there is difference in the voices of the muezzin, a total of 36 muezzins were selected to make the call from one mosque, which would then be broadcast by radio to all the other mosques. The decision to integrate the muezzin was also made in Cairo, Egypt.

Kaegi created this work about the muezzin for a joint production by the Goethe-Institut Cairo and HAU. He had four muezzins and one radio technician tell their thoughts about this muezzin integration plan. It begins with the chanting of the "Adhan" (call to prayer). Then they tell about their daily routine, how rising at 4:30 am to open the mosque, and about their faith, about the fact that Mohammed said that only men should be muezzins, and about the strict separation of men and women. They also talk about being selected as one of the 36 central muezzins, and about not being selected.

The four muezzins talk about their lives and their daily routines, about the blind muezzin of Egypt, about a muezzin who used to work as a construction site technician, and about the fact that it is hard to get by in Cairo on the low muezzin salary equivalent to just 50 euro a month. Although it is not an often-noticed job, for those who get it, it is a job that assures their passage to paradise after death. For those who lose their jobs because of it, this integration of the muezzin is a very grave matter.

Are there other artists besides Rimini Protokoll that you have been working with on a long-term basis or in close collaboration with?

There are always about 10 to 15 such artists and groups. The Argentine-born choreographer Constanza Macras does works with dancers and children. The

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

young group Andcompany & Co. emerged with a work titled *little red (play): 'eherstory'* that used the Little Red Riding Hood fable as a framework to present anew interpretation of the history of the communist party. Starting with that work, a trilogy of works about communism has now been completed. Other artists we work with are Gob Squad and She She Pop. We also work with Hans-Werner Kroesinger. He is a veteran in the genre of documentary theater with a very deep sense of issues and a strong political commitment. He recently wrote a work about the genocide in Rwanda and made a play out of it.

In your Volksbuehne years you did themed weekend projects. You set themes and invited the unemployed or 3rd-generation Turkish immigrant young people and held discussions and workshops with philosophers and you did concerts as well. Do you do projects like this at HAU?

We do projects that take a journalistic approach to various phenomena. Recently we did one on the music industry. Because of the growth of the internet, people can now download music, so CDs are not selling anymore. This has been forcing the music industry to reconsider their business model. We explored this issue with concerts and discussions.

Lately, electronic music is very popular in Berlin, and every weekend from Friday till Monday morning the clubs in Berlin are packed. Young people fly in by the hundreds on cheap flights of carriers like "easyJet" from cities like Barcelona, London, Paris and Moscow. Berlin is a sort of capital for them, although very few of the artists performing at the clubs are actually from Berlin. EasyJet now connects the major cities across Europe. It's like taking the train from Tokyo to Yokohama. We did a project based on this phenomenon. The idea was my own actually and the curation was done jointly with the former chief editor of the music magazine *Spex*, the critic Christoph Gurk. We organized a concert with artists including Matthew Herbert Big Band and Young Marble Giants.

In a 2004 survey by the German theater magazine *Theater Heute* polling theater critics, HAU was voted the best theater in the German-speaking world. Is this because you have a different system from existing public theaters?

I wonder. One thing I can say is that, a specialized theater like ours that doesn't employ the traditional theater system and doesn't have its own company or stage staff is naturally better suited to creating works with groups using non-professional casts like Rimini Protokoll or "professionals of daily life." Our new system offers us greater freedom. The traditional German theater system requires large budgets. In Berlin each theater gets an annual budget of between 12 and 15 million euro. But in our new system as well, creating works requires a lot of money.

What effect has the re-unification of Germany and the integration of the EU had on HAU?

We are strengthening our relationship with the important theater world of our neighbor, Poland. Also, it has become very important for theaters to establish their presence within Europe. The idea that after unification under the EU its member countries would still retain distinct policies is a complete myth. So much is being controlled from [EU headquarters in] Brussels. Europe has become in effect a single country like North America. All that is left in terms of separate governments in the individual countries amounts to little more than provincial puppet governments.

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

Nonetheless, the German theater world does have its own unique cultural sphere even after the integration of the European Union, don't you think?

With regard to dance, Europe definitely does form one cultural sphere. In terms of theater, the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Austria and Germany do form a distinct German-language cultural sphere. However, Johan Simons (Note: Dutch director, incoming intendant for the Munich Kammerspiele) and the British artist group Forced Entertainment are becoming more influential in the German cultural sphere, as they are in the rest of Europe. And in Berlin there are now many artists from other countries performing in English, and in fact it is now possible to live in Berlin using English. There are movie theaters that show only English-language movies and there are a growing number of English-language newspapers. Berlin has perhaps become a more international city than Tokyo. And when you look at the various international projects going on in Berlin, you will see immediately that it is no longer just a German cultural sphere.

What is the underlying concept running through the HAU programming as a whole? I have heard the words "a hysterical longing for reality." Is that the theme?

I think it is boring if you believe that theater has to be based on a particular kind of performance or has to always involve internalized artistic process. For me it is important that theater attempt to make some kind of statement about reality or connect to reality, or put forth a debate about it.

The expression "a hysterical longing for reality" is one that was born when I began working on the X-Wohnungen project. What this project attempted to do was to create a conflict between the people who lived in a building or the condition of the rooms in an apartment and the director's artistic approach. At the same time, there was the aim of freeing the works from the theater environment. And, with regard to the term "a hysterical longing for reality," can say that it is indeed a concept that runs through all the HAU programming.

Also, there are the terms reality theater and documentary theater. Since 20 years ago, Hans-Werner Kroesinger had been writing quite dry documentary theater. Then there is Rimini Protokoll, who create works that explore realities that are unknown to us by putting real people on stage. When we add X-Wohnungen to these two, we see that documentary theater certainly has an important place in HAU's activities. But that is not all we do.

What do you try to communicate to your audience through these types of works?

I don't really know. At the very least, what we are trying to do is to make things that can be differentiated when seen from the outside. Especially, in many cases, I want to see us put things out there that are unknown, or that involve issues that still incomprehensible. I am interested in bringing focus on problems that the society has not expected. I am not interested in taking issues that I already know about and making a statement on them.

Why do you wish to see reality in theater works so strongly? What is it about documentary theater that interests you so much?

For someone born and raised in Germany, theater has always been deeply involved in ideology or the collapse of ideology. When thinking about ideology, the important thing is to have a grasp of reality and researching the nature of the realities we are confronted with. The important thing is to grasp realities and put them in forms that can be seen.

The project "*Foreigners out! Schlingensiefs Container*" created by director Christoph Schlingensief was one where he put actually foreign exiles seeking

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

political asylum in a shipping container set up in the square next to the Vienna National Opera House and allowed spectators to peek in at the process of selecting those among the exiles who were to be deported. This was done as an extreme version of the popular reality TV program *Big Brother* that broadcasts footage of people living on closed quarters 24 hours a day. I abhor works that present reality just as it is, or naturalism. I believe that we rediscover reality when it is put into mechanisms or film, for example the video images in games.

Could you tell us about what projects HAU will be undertaking in the near future?

We will continue our projects on the theme of immigrants. We are thinking about projects with the Vietnamese and Arab communities. In September, we are having general elections in German, so we are taking this occasion to run performances of a work on post-democracy and hold discussions. The theme is the hollowing out of democracy with the behind-the-scenes activities of lobbyists. It may be the same in Japan, but in Germany the people are losing interest in politics and elections and in fact it is mostly the media that is playing out the campaigns by remote control. The work to be performed is Rimini Protokoll's *Wallenstein*. This is a work in which politicians who have actually run for office in regional elections will appear. We will also invite the British political scientist Colin Crouch who promotes post-democratic thought for lectures and an installation project.

You also have a festival that programs cross-over works, video and dance works.

Can you tell us something about the contents?

As a cross-over project involving multiple genre, we did a project with a group of unemployed architects called *Traumlabor* (dream lab). This project involved flooding part of the former East German "Palace of the Republic" (Diet building) and having visitors paddle through the building in inflatable boats. It was a joint project between Sophiensaele and HAU and it ran for six months. Could we do it in Japan's Diet Building too? (Laughs)

For the festivals we usually have a theme. In the festival held in June the theme is family structure and immigrants and child education. It tells stories about the system in which poor immigrants are used for educating children and stories of some families. The title is "Your nanny hates you." It deals with the situation where wealthy North American families hire poor South American women as nannies to care for their children and the way these women work hard far from home and send as much as they can back to their families. In this way, we set a different theme for each festival. But we avoid the common pattern of inviting a selection of the best works from a given region or country and instead do research into subcultures in search of leads.

You also have regularly held festivals.

For dance we have our Tanz im August festival and our Brazil Festival. We also have one involving Poland. We would also like to have a yearly Japan festival as well. (Laughs)

I understand that HAU is the center of an independent art scene, but are there other similar centers in Berlin?

We sometimes do collaborations with public theaters, such as works by Johan Simons with Munich Kammerspiele, but that is the exception rather than the rule. HAU is indeed the center of an independent art scene. As for other such centers, there is the Sophiensaele for theater, DOCK 11 for dance and RADIALSYSTEM V for early music and contemporary music performance.

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

Do you have a network or particularly strong ties with other European theaters?

We have ties with the **KunstenFestivaldesArts** and the Kaai Theater in Brussels, Theater Frascati in Amsterdam, the Theater Rozmaitosci in Warsaw, the Nowi Theater in Moscow, and in New York, we have Performance Space 122 in New York and in Tokyo, **Festival/Tokyo** and others.

In October, you will have a Japan feature scheduled and this is your third visit to Japan for that.

We have gotten funding from Berlin State for a Japan Festival within the framework of the Asia Pacific Week 2009. I am here in Japan to do research for that. Seeing **Festival/Tokyo** and the Tokyo Performing Arts Market, I realized that young theater people here seem to be experimenting with new things. I suspect that in the last few years they have come in contact with theater scenes outside of Japan and have been stimulated in ways that have broadened their perspective and sense of theater. The young theater people's works deal with street culture and sex almost to an extreme. One of these is a pop work by the young performer group **Fai Fai**. It asks questions like can't a price be set on the body and the value of sex in this globalized world. While recognizing the treat of having a price set on the body, it also wants to show the naked body. It portrays Shibuya, techno culture, sex robots and the commercialization of sexuality.

The work *Love's Whirlpool* by the **Potudo-ru company** is a play telling a story about group of men and women at a secret club and giving the audience a peek at a world of orgiastic behavior. It portrays society's obsession with sex as a form of terror against sexuality. While on the one hand it shows a hard reality in which there is a clear division of sex and love, on the other hand it brings to mind images of Bruegel paintings, like a scene from the Middle Ages with bodies piled on top of each other. Furthermore, it deals with individual action regarding the approach to love and sex. What was intended to be purely sex ends up evoking feelings close to love, and jealousy. It was very interesting to watch, like a section cut straight out of the Shinjuku nightlife.

Like last year, we will be inviting **Toshiki Okada** and his Chelfitsch company again this year. I think he is one of the most important directors in Japan today. His work *Air Conditioner* is a story about two people working in an office where the air-conditioning is always on too strong and the two gradually draw close to each other with dance-like movement. If this can be seen as another form of sexuality, then I think the suggestion I made half jokingly before the start of this interview that one title possibility for our Japan feature might be "Sex and the City" isn't actually too far off.

Also, amidst the background of the realities of Japanese society and the issue of the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor, I got the impression that a small but significant movement of social commitment is occurring. For example, there is the "Amateur Rebellion" of Hajime Matsumoto. He runs a shop that repairs and sells second-hand household appliances in Koenji and I had the opportunity to meet him and hear about his anti-consumerism "Amateur Revolution" movement. He is someone who is trying not simply to keep rising prices down but to search for new values outside the framework of consumerism and liberal economics. I am thinking of inviting him to our feature and having him participate in a dialogue with the German philosopher Guillaume Paoli. Paoli is promoting the concept of "happy unemployment" and criticizing the idea of constant development of labor. I also want to have the music and literary critic Atsushi Sasaki come and talk about his vision of cultural development from the 1990s to the present. He

Presenter Interview

Berlin's HAU as an epicenter of the performing arts — What's the ideas behind its aim to "Create friction in the world?"

パフォーマンスアーツの震源地HAU
"世界に摩擦を起こす"その企みとは？

speaks of the '90s as a decade trapped between the death of the Showa era and Nostradamus prophecies. This is a view that you won't find often in the West.

I also saw the video *Super Rat* by the artist group Chim-Pom. It is about catching the rats that feed on the garbage of Shibuya and stuff them to make dolls the animation character Pikachu. All of this, the pop culture, the Shinjuku-Shibuya-Koenji settings and the sexual obsessions are things born of the unique metropolis that is Tokyo.

Does this mean that your Japan feature will be an attempt to bring the expressions of the images and phenomena of Tokyo to the stage?

We put them all on the stage. And then we think about what we do when we have no more money for consumption. Wouldn't it be a fine party of desperation? We have no money but still we dance. And I am also thinking that maybe we can connect Berlin and Tokyo through a bond of electronic music.

It may be a question out of the blue, but can I ask you why you are doing theater?

I don't know. I don't know the answer myself. It just happened this way.

What do you think you have gained and achieved by doing theater?

I haven't gained anything. If there were anything, it would only be that to some small degree I have opened the theater to the immigrant population and got them to come to the theater a few times. I can say with certainty that they have been given the opportunity to encounter art in a broad sense. Or, by showing the near-sighted German audience something of the things that are happening outside their world, we may have succeeded in opening the possibilities for internationalization. That's about all. I don't think that art can change society or the cities anymore. Thinking that it can is nothing but a dream.

But you will still keep doing it, won't you?

Of course.

For the sake of world revolution?

It is true that I have sought to resist the realities of society in the past and it is still an important thing for me. But for me world revolution sometimes means doing an art project.