



Profile

Kenichi Tani

Playwright, director and translator. Born in Fukushima Prefecture in 1982 and raised in Kashiwa City, Chiba Pref. Tani is the leader of the theater unit DULL-COLORED POP and the representative of the unit Theatre des Annales.

Tani majored in Theater arts at Meiji University and took courses in Theatre and Drama Study at University of Kent at Canterbury in the UK before starting his own theater company in Japan. His theater style has been described as “a fortunate mix of innovative methods and a knowledge of classical theater” (Ai Nagai) and his creative style as a playwright and director has been widely praised as pop and rock and literary.

In 2013, his Japanese translation and staging of *Freud's last Session* with the Japanese title *Saigo no Seishin Bunseki – Freud vs Lewis* (*The Last Psychoanalysis: Freud vs. Lewis*) won him the 6th Yushi Odajima Drama in Translation Award and the Agency for Cultural Affairs' Arts Festival's Excellence Award. In recent years he has also collaborated on numerous works with renowned foreign directors, including Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's production of *PLUTO* (Theatre Cocoon), Andrew Goldberg's production of *Macbeth* (PARCO Theatre) and David Leveaux's production of *Eternal Chikamatsu* (Umeda Arts Theater/Theatre Cocoon), serving as translator, script writer and directing assistant on each production.

Tani's representative works in recent years include *Eternal Chikamatsu* at Umeda Arts Theater/Theatre Cocoon (Tani writing the stage script), *Orphans* (translation), *TUSK TUSK* at Owl Spot (director), *Peer Gynt* at KAAT (translation/stage script), *Macbeth* at PARCO Theatre (assistant director), the DULL-COLORED POP productions of *Natsume Soseki to Neko* (Za Koenji), *Kappa* (Kichijoji Theatre), the Theatre des Annales productions of *Tokyo Slum Angels* (Aoyama Round Theatre), the Tokyo Globe-za production of *Strange Fruits* and *Molly Sweeney* (Theatre Tram).

DULL-COLORED POP
<http://www.dcpop.org>

Artist Interview

アーティスト・インタビュー

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Orthodox but radical, The theatrical power of Kenichi Tani

オーソドックスでラディカル
 谷賢一の演劇力

The playwright, director, translator and dramaturge Kenichi Tani (born: 1982) founded the theater company DULL-COLORED POP while still a student at Meiji University in 2005. Employing the theater knowledge acquired while studying in the United Kingdom, he made his debut as a translator in 2007 with a Japanese version of a masterpiece of American contemporary theater, *Proof* by David Auburn, (titled *Proof / Shomei* in Japanese, it is a love story about a mathematical genius and the proof of a formula he left behind). In 2011, Tani won him acclaim by translating, producing and directing a full-scale stage production of the play *Molly Sweeney* by one of Ireland's representative contemporary playwrights, Brian Friel. Since then, his impressive activities have continued to win attention with a series of quality plays he has translated and directed, including *The Last Psychoanalysis: Freud vs. Lewis* (based on Freud's Last Session and winner of the 6th Yushi Odajima Drama in Translation Award) and *TUSK TUSK*, while also providing stage scripts for such internationally renowned directors as Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and David Leveaux. Furthermore, in 2012 Tani established the theater unit Théâtre des Annales, for which he writes and stages well-crafted dialogue plays on serious subjects, thus further expanding his realm of activities. In this interview we explore Tani's theatrical background that “takes standard ideas and stages them with nothing taboo,” and hear about the many aspects of his multi-faceted career.

Interviewer: Masashi Nomura [producer / dramaturg]

High school years overflowing with vitality

Today, you are looked on with high expectations in the theater world. Can you begin by telling us how you became involved in theater?

When I was in middle school, you could say that I was a student with “top grades but a rebellious attitude,” as I was always finding things to object to the teachers on. I simply didn't like school and I was determined to become a teacher so I could make the lessons more interesting for the students. So, I started reading all the books in the library about education, and in one of them I read that in school teachers in Britain have to take courses on theater. And, with the idea in my head that I had to study theater in order to become a [good] teacher, I joined our school's drama club in high school.

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My mother was a housewife and my father was a in mechanics and industrial business, so ours wasn't a home where my parents would take me to see theater. So, the situation was that I was motivated to do theater because I believed it was necessary to becoming a teacher.

Being motivated to do theater in order to become a school teacher is certainly interesting and unusual (laughs). What was your encounter with theater like in high school? And, what kind of plays did your drama club do in high school?

When I started high school, the play that was put on for the new students was *Pilgrim* (based on a story by Shoji Kokami), and unlike the plays in our textbooks or ones that my teachers had recommended for me to read, there were things in that play that defied any sort of conclusive interpretation. And, conversely, that got me interested in theater. I think that turned out to be a good first introduction to theater.

In our high school drama club, like with many clubs at the time we did plays by such companies as Daisan Butai and Caramel Box. I was reading the theater magazine *Serifu no Jidai* at the time and it made me think I had better read plays like *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*, but when I did I found them to be boring. I was so disappointed when I read *Hamlet* that I actually got mad and threw the book against the library wall! At the time I never believed it would be possible that someday I would become absorbed in Shakespeare's plays (laughs). Until I was about 19 I was only thinking of becoming an actor, and I never thought that I would be writing scripts myself someday and I didn't do any directing either.

Where there any other things besides theater that you were stimulated by or got involved in during high school?

In all, I became involved in six extracurricular activities in high school. They were the Drama Club, the school "light music" club, the *Rakugo* (stand-up comedy) study group, JRC (donation collecting volunteers), Social Studies Club (a club for discussing political or social issues and publishing a pamphlet about study results), and the Student Council. Gradually most of my attention began to focus on theater, but looking back, I think that all those things I did were connected in some way.

In the light music club, my knowledge and interest in music broadened very quickly. Basically I liked rock music and among Japanese bands I especially liked Blankey Jet City. I also liked SOPHIA and Number Girl. In foreign music, I started with The Beatles, and at the time Radiohead was very popular, so I listened to it and others like it too.

I wasn't very good at *rakugo* comedy but I started it because I thought it would connect to theater. Also, through middle school I wasn't at all interested in literature, but when I got to high school I began reading all the works of the famous authors. I liked Herman Hesse, Franz Kafka, Maupassan, Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Ryu Murakami.

In JRC, which is a sort of subsidiary of the Japan Red Cross, we did things like standing outside stations with a donations box asking people for donations. At the time I had a strong interest in contributing to society and social issues. In the Social Studies Club we literally studied social issues, debating on subjects like the issues being dealt

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with by the National Diet at the time, discrimination against the people of certain resident blocks and against women, and we published pamphlets about our study results and distributed them.

Also, there was the Student Council. At my high school there was a big emphasis on independent study projects, and a lot of things, ranging from the budget to school rules, were decided by the Student Council. Ours was a school that had no school uniforms and no raising of the flag and chorus reading of the National Anthem. Just at that time, a law was passed requiring use of the flag and the National Anthem at schools, we became seriously involved in writing our opinions as students opposing the Ministry of Education's directive. We borrowed books and read interviews of law professors and educators on the subject and held discussions about it.

Hearing about your desire to become a school teacher and your social activities, it seems that you had a strong sense of justice.

Well, yes. I still have the belief that justice is the most important thing. My high school was like a university where we could skip classes and spend our time doing what we wanted in the club rooms.

Starting with a strong sense of justice and a desire to become a teacher so that you could change the school, you gradually went into theater. Weren't there any doubts for you along the way?

I think it was because of the strong impressions that the various forms of culture I encountered in those three years of high school. I hated school tests because all you had to do was to use logic to get the right answers. Encountering literature and art that dealt with things that couldn't be solved by mathematical equations or formulas made me feel like I had found a mountain of treasures, and that was far more interesting.

Learning about the history of theater and doing foolish things

You went to Meiji University and majored in theater arts. I believe that at the time you were entering college there were other colleges where front-line theater directors were teaching and students could get experience in actual theater productions, so how did you choose where to go?

The truth is that for a year after graduating from high school I spent a year just working part-time. I had an odd belief that an actor didn't need a college degree, so I was running to stay in shape and doing my voice training every night and in the day I worked at a part-time job and saved money to go see plays in the Tokyo area. But, after about half a year I began to feel how cold the world can be and it was beginning to affect me. I started to realize that life would be tough with just a high school education. The pay was poor in the jobs I could get, and most of the better jobs required a college degree or better. When I said I wanted to do theater, that alone was enough to make people look down at me. So, I decided that I needed to go college, so I went to my parents with my head bowed.

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At the time, I was still hoping to become an actor and wanted to learn the actor's craft in the theater, so I decided to go to a university where I could study theater in the classroom, so I chose to major in the theater arts course at Meiji University.

How were your studies at university?

I truly learned a lot at university. For example, in the study of Western theater history we began with a course where the professor would say things like read Aristotle's *Poetics* by next week, and we would learn about the structure of the plays in Greek tragedies and the definition of the arts and their role at the time. I also learned things like what changes in the course of theater were brought on by Shakespeare and Ibsen. The professors taught us with real passion for the subject. I was hungry for knowledge and asked them for all kinds of details and they kindly taught me all I wanted to know.

Are there things that you learned at that time that are being applied in your activities in theater now?

I think almost everything I learned has been useful. What I learned about the history of theater is very useful to me even now when I think about the relationship between theater and society and between theater and the audience, and the store of knowledge I have in the back of my head about the structure of a play and the forms and conventions of staging a play serve as reference in the things I am doing and want to do in theater today.

A knowledge of the work of great theater-makers of the past has been a good source of reference for directing. I could say, for instance, that a particular script I am staging might be good to use the Stanislavski method on, or that another script might be good to stage with Brecht-like elements, or perhaps it would be better to use a Meyerhold style.

Since I was studying what is taught at a Japanese university, I know that it might be quite rudimentary and basic knowledge, but it did provide a foundation for someone wishing to progress in the arts, I believe it was good that I got that foundation before I started writing and directing plays and before I launched my theater company.

By the way, it was about four or five years after that time when I threw a book of Shakespeare at the library wall that I finally became absorbed in Shakespeare's works and read them all with great interest (laughs).

Were you active as an actor at university?

I joined the Soudousya theater circle at our university and throughout those years I continued doing ero-grotesque plays, nonsense play and just generally plays where we were constantly taking off our clothes (laughs). It all had nothing to do with the theater studies I was doing in class, but it was completely silly and fun. Probably, at the time, what we were doing was close to the things that the popular small-theater plays and companies were doing. It was a time when companies started by my seniors from Soudousya had started, like Highleg Jesus, Doubutsu-denki and Jovi Jova, were the focus of a lot of attention.

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I may have been a serious student always carrying around a book of the full works of Shakespeare, but intuitively I guess I found that kind of theater to be fun, and so, along with my studies, for about two years I did those crazy plays, always silly, always drinking, always taking off our clothes on stage.

After studies in England, launching a theater company

While you were at Meiji University you took a year of study abroad at University of Kent. How did that come about?

I had done a lot of study of English for the university entrance exams [in Japan] and I was beginning to feel that I wanted to do some more in-depth study to make it worthwhile, so in my third year at university I decided to study abroad for a year. The reason I decided to go to the U.K. was because I knew that is where Hideki Noda and Shoji Kokami had gone for study abroad, so I thought it would be good. Kent is among the top five universities in the UK in theater arts studies and the curriculum there looked like it would suit me well.

Did you earn the money by yourself to go there?

I worked at a part-time job seven days a week and saved up two million yen! During that period I was going to all my classes at university and doing all the wild plays with Soudousya as well as working part-time every day, so life was really crazy then (laughs).

How was your study abroad?

It was very interesting. I had studied hard in my university in Japan, so I went to England I intended to show off what I knew, but I soon found out that what I knew was no more than common knowledge over there. So, I started from the bottom rung. I wasn't very good at English yet, and there was such a [knowledge] gap between myself and the student's there, so I really had to study hard. And, I feel that year of study has given me my present foundation.

For example, when I wanted to study about a certain playwright, I would go to the library and do a search for materials and find so much in the way of books, essays, archived research reports, video, and just so much available that I could really do a thorough study. That difference in the depth of the theater culture compared to study in Japan really impressed me. By the way, the main course I was studying in was one for aspiring directors, critics and producers, and at the end of my year there I submitted research reports on modern productions of *Macbeth* and the directing theory of Antonine Artaud.

Are there any plays that you saw in England that left a strong impression on you?

Every weekend I would take a cheap bus into London and see two or three plays. The one that left the strongest impression on me was a production of *Measure for Measure* directed by Simon McBurney at the National Theatre. It was by far the best. And there was also a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* that I saw at the Globe theater. I

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DULL-COLORED POP

Kuro Neko-chan, Beige Neko-chan (Black Little Cat, Beige Little Cat)

The mother of the family who has been a full-time housewife until the death of her tax accountant husband suffers from a breakdown of her identity, leaves the housework to a maid and begins raising an invisible cat. When the son and daughter return for the funeral, the discord within the family that had remained hidden until then begins to come to the surface.



Courtesy of DULL-COLORED POP

don't remember who the director was, but Juliet was played by a black actress and the production drew a lot of attention. And I was really impressed by the fact that the audience consisted of everyone from young people in jeans to white-haired elderly and everyone was drinking beer and enjoying themselves as they watched. It wasn't just the contents of the play that left an impression on me but also, the relationship to the audience.

More than anything, it was a year during which I was continually impressed by how different the relationship between the stage and the audience is in the UK compared to Japan. Academically. The things I learned at University of Kent have been useful, but I also learned a lot from experiencing the relationship between the theater and the audience and the role of the theater in the community.

Your returning to Japan after that marked the start of your activities as a director and playwright.

Before going to the UK I had directed one or two short plays, but my real start as a director was with a production of *Macbeth* at Meiji University. At the time, the theater makers I respected like Shoji Kokami, Kerarino Sandorovich, Suzuki Matsuo, Ai Nagai and Keishi Nagatsuka were all playwrights and directors, so I thought that eventually I wanted to write plays too.

Then, in 2005, I got together people from Soudousya and friends who had participated in my *Macbeth* productions and launched the theater company DULL-COLORED POP. And after that, I contacted people I knew and continued its activities with no connection to the university. I had no knowledge about how to establish a theater company and what to show to audiences, so I just felt things out as best I could.

The motto phrase of DULL-COLORED POP is, "We want to show the darkest and most grotesque side of human beings, but always with a pop touch," but could you tell us if you have anything that you are particularly concerned with or focus on as a playwright?

I didn't have any clearly defined concept of how I wanted to write, and I think you could say I was writing rather impulsively. The play *Nihon no Onna* (written and directed by Keishi Nagatsuka) that I saw in the 2001 performance at Asagaya Spiders (Tokyo) struck me as tremendously interesting, and from that time I went to see almost all of Nagatsuka's plays and became very strongly influenced by his work. There is something wicked about his plays, but they also have comedy, and although there is violence they are entertaining contemporary theater. That is what attracted me to them.

Now that you mention this, I would say that I think your plays are certainly built around serious dialogue, but there is also an element of fantasy to them. For example, the first play you premiered with your newly launched company DULL-COLORED POP in 2012, *Kuro Neko-chan to Beige Neko-chan* (Little Black Cat and Little Beige Cat), is a story about a family whose deception is disclosed when the father dies in a traffic accident and we find the mother is keeping an invisible cat as a pet and there are characters that come out wearing cat ears. Also, in your play *Aquarium* about young

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DULL-COLORED POP
Aquarium

Tani, who was born in the same year 1982 as two famous murderers, Seito Sakakibara and the Akihabara street slasher wrote this play about the unique atmosphere of the young people of his generation. A group of young people living in the same shared house are living quietly with pets that include a talking alligator and birds, but when two detectives come looking for a murder suspect, suspicion begins to grow between the boarders.



Courtesy of DULL-COLORED POP

people living together in a shared house there are a talking pet alligator and bird(s) played by actors in animal suits. Both involve characters with very symbolic presence, and at the same time, their presence is very enjoyable for the audience.

This is something that is very important to me. Stage works created by people who are interested in theater arts and have studied the subject are usually rather boring and there is nothing cool about it. It's not enough just to say, "This part inherits the such-and-such spirit of Brecht," and even if the title is great, it isn't interesting. It is in response to the failure of that kind of theater that I have placed importance—intuitively you might say—on the pursuit of ways to connect with the audience.

When I am asked to participate in productions outside of those with my own company as a writer, translator or director, there are the original intents of that project's producer and I have to think about how best to meet those objectives, but when it is a work for performance by my own company, I can do the kind of theatrical experiments that I want to do. Even if it may be a somewhat audacious challenge I am experimenting with, the members say, "If Tani wants to do it, let's give it a try." I believe that my foundation in theater now comes from the things I have tried, experimenting with this and that, in works for my company's performances.

In fact, in order to strengthen my capabilities for projects with outside production, I plan to suspend my own company activities for a while after the "Theater" we will be performing in May. Then I will be looking for a new path on which to resume my company activities in the future.

For about two years from 2007 you worked as an assistant at the privately owned small theater Tiny Alice (closed 2015), and in 2010 you also joined Seinendan theater company and worked as artistic director at its Atelier Shunpusha studio. Did you gain anything from those experiences?

I believe that a director should know not only how to stage his own plays but also how to look at things from the perspective of a producer. I believe it was a good experience for me working at Tiny Alice and Shunpusha because I had to look at things from that perspective in my work there. Also, I was grateful to be getting a salary, though it wasn't large, for working in those jobs involving theater.

In the case of Tiny Alice, when my company did a performance there the owner, Hiroko Nishimura, said she wanted us to perform more at her theater, and asked me if I wanted to work there. What's more, on days when the theater wasn't being used, she let my company do rehearsals there. That showed me clearly how important it is for creators to have a space that can serve as their home ground. Under the responsibility of the owner, I was able to build a free space at Tiny Alice, but at the same time I was able to see another aspect of the stage-theater-community relationship at work at Atelier Shunpusha and the Komaba Agora theater that Oriza Hirata had established, which gave me the opportunity to think about the community and public roles of theater. Experiencing both of these formats, I believe I was able to think about the connections I wanted to make guide my own activities.

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Molly Sweeney

This is a work of one of Ireland's representative contemporary playwrights, Brian Friel. It tells the story of a blind woman named Molly who gains sight through the work of a genius ophthalmologist and the many things she then begins to lose as a result of her new-found sight. Translated and directed by Tani, this play was the first to be performed under the "Reading Japanese – Performances in the drama reading format" program of the Setagaya Public Theatre (Tokyo) begun in 2008 for the purpose of discovering and supporting young directors by giving them the opportunity to stage outstanding foreign plays.

The approach to translation work

What was it that got you into translating plays?

When Seri Kurosawa of the Jikando Theatre Company did a production of *Proof/Shomei* (2007), he said to me, "Tani, you have studied abroad. So, you can translate, can't you?" So, I did the translation for him, and that is how I got started. The response was good, and I myself found the process interesting, so I started translating regularly after that.

In fact, until then I had questioned the style of many plays in translation up to that time. In the UK, I had read a lot of plays in English and I had felt that even with older plays they could still be performed in very lively productions. With playwrights like Harold Pinter, I was surprised to find how natural and interesting the plays were. But, in Japanese translation they came through as very old-fashioned plays and the wording needlessly exaggerated. It made me feel that the negative image Japanese audiences got was the fault of that heavy, obviously theater-in-translation literary style.

For that reason, when I translate, my approach is to translate the intent and the emotions, not the wording used, and to make it translation that includes the directorial intent. It is also part of my translation policy to allow for adjustments once the actual rehearsing begins.

How many plays have you translated so far? And, how do you find the plays you want to translate?

I translate one or two plays a year, and so far the total is about ten plays. It would be nice if I could search out and find plays that I want to translate, but I don't have time for that, so in most cases I have translated plays that producers bring to me for translation. For example, Chieko Hosaka of the Setagaya Public Theatre (Tokyo) has found a number of plays for me to translate after we worked together on the play *Molly Sweeney* that I translated and directed in 2011.

Molly Sweeney is a weighty story of a woman who lived in a world without sight for 40 years. This stage represented a turning point in your career in that you were working for the first time with professional actors and staff.

Since it was my first experience working with professional theater makers, it was full of discoveries for me and I learned a lot. In my directing until then I had always given the actors detailed instructions, but this time I was able to let the actors do it for me and then we talked together about how to develop it. There I got an understanding of how a professional team of specialized artists functions.

The work which made a name for you as a play translator was your DULL-COLORED POP company's 2013 production of *Saigo no Seishinbunseki – Freud vs. Lewis* (The Last Psychoanalysis: Freud vs. Lewis, based on the original *Freud's Last Session* by Mark St. Germain). It is indeed a dialogue play that involves a true battle of words as two men of very different orientations—the atheist Freud and the author and devout Christian C.S. Lewis—exchange opinions. With this play you won the Bureau of Cultural Affairs Arts Festival's Excellence Award, and your translation won the 6th Yushi

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Odajima Drama in Translation Award.

I have a strong belief in the need to be able to change the translation in order to fit the directorial intentions. The setting for this play is the first part of the 20th century. I wanted to stage the play without changing the atmosphere of that era, so for the script I used expressions that were somewhat closer to written language than conversational language, and because it was dialogue between a psychoanalyst and an author, I deliberately made the translation sound rather stiff and intellectual.

In theater recently, I have done translations for the production of *Peer Gynt* directed by Akira Shirai and the production of *Orphans* directed by Keiko Miyata, and with these translations I have first of all talked extensively with the directors about their intentions and things like whether they want a daily conversational tone or one with and older, more classical flavor, how long they want the text to be. Then I begin translating based on their requests.

So, it is a process of creating a stage script that includes the intentions of the director rather than trying to do a definitive translation?

A definitive translation is something that a scholar can publish, with all the necessary explanatory notes and leaving it open to all the possible interpretations. But, if you believe that part of directing is having the freedom to choose the orientation of the characters and the type of language they will use, as well as what translation the director will choose, I can make various suggestions as a translator for ways to help achieve the image the director has in mind. Just like the lighting designer suggests a variety of different types of lighting, as a translator I believe that I can make suggestions regarding how stiff or soft the language could be.

With regard to translation [into Japanese], it has been said that there are two fundamental stances, that of Haruki Murakami and that of Yukio Mishima. Murakami says that you have to produce a translation that is faithful to the original as much as possible, while Mishima said that translation should be a re-creation that passes through the filter of the translator's artistic sensibilities. My approach is the latter of these two, and I believe that one's own color will always come through. When you think about it, when theater makers are working together to create a work, about the only ones who aren't taking into account the realities and atmosphere of the stage and its people and setting are the translators, aren't they? It is best to have the team thinking about what the stage art plan should be, what the costumes should be like, etc., based on consideration of what it is you want to create overall and what direction you want to take it in. So, I believe it is actually best for the translator to be there in the rehearsal studio as the play is being put together and to be thinking along with the rest of the team about the issues and concerns that emerge in each scene.

Does the process of translating a play bring about deeper understanding to the original work?

Last year, when I translated Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* from the English one word at a time, there were really a lot of new discoveries for me, and of course it deepened my understanding of the original and brought me a lot of new inspiration and stimulation. All authors have their own distinctive tendencies that come out when they write, and in

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Eternal Chikamatsu – Chikamatsu Monzaemon from “Love Suicides at Amijima”

A housewife named Haru who turns to prostitution out of her need for money to pay off her late husband's debts, falls in love with one of her frequent customers, a married man name Jiro with a wife and two children. However, when Haru realizes that their love can never be requite, she pretends to be no longer interested in Jiro and parts with him and wanders the streets. Following the Shijimi River, which legend says overflowed with the tears of prostitutes of old, Haru finds that her fate is similar to that of the heroine of the Kabuki play *Love Suicides at Amijima*, the prostitute Koharu, and is drawn into the world of the old story of Koharu's suicide.

translation, where you are working at length with the writing of someone with different tendencies from your own always teaches you a lot. Then, when you start putting it into Japanese, it feels as if you are in a one-on-one discussion with Ibsen himself. There are really so many discoveries involved that I want to continue doing at least one translation a year.

Expanding activities including work with foreign directors

In the last few years, besides plays in translation you have also been working on the productions of foreign directors as assistant director or by writing stage scripts. In 2015 you wrote the script for a production of *PLUTO* (based on the manga *PLUTO* by Naoki Urasawa, which was a remake of the Osamu Tezuka manga “Tetsuwan Atom – Largest Robot on Earth”) directed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Also, you wrote the script for a production directed by David Leveaux titled *Eternal Chikamatsu – Chikamatsu Monzaemon from “Love Suicides at Amijima* starring the Kabuki actor Shichinosuke Nakamura and contemporary theater actors.

For *PLUTO*, I first met with Larbi and went through the eight volumes of the original manga and marked the scenes that he definitely wanted to use. After that, talking with him by Skype and marking more scenes that he wanted to use, before long there were stickers on all of the scenes (laughs). From there, I wrote a script of about two hours in length and showed it to him, but it turned out that there were more scenes he wanted to add. After playing catch ball like that for a while, the final script gradually came together. We talked about whether this is a story about human beings and robots, or about relationships of trust, or about technology, or is it a criticism of modern society or criticism of civilization. Gradually we came to conclusions that, “this is a story of hate breeding hate!” and “this is a story about the unresolved emotions of three fathers and three sons!” and we ended up picking out episodes about three people.

Larbi is a wonderful person and the amount of love he has for his works is truly amazing, and he is also a good listener. He makes it very clear about the parts that he trusts you to handle and the parts where he has his own vision that he insists on presenting, and I feel that it was a very good collaboration in the sense that everyone was able to bring all their knowledge and intelligence to the production under the direction of the director. Since it was that kind of creation, in the credits I asked that I be listed as contributing the “stage script” rather than writer of the play’s “script” or as the “writer” of the play.

Another theater unit that you are a leader of is the unit Théâtre des Annales that you started in 2012. I also work as a dramaturge and I would say from my experience that this is a unit through which you present theater dealing with very serious subjects. Théâtre des Annales resulted from an offer from the representative of the GORCH BROTHERS company, Tatsuya Ito from around the summer of 2011 asking if Tatsuya Ito, Kenichi Tani and Masashi Nomura could get together to collaborate on something. At first, Ito-san was wondering if a play like *Copenhagen* (a human drama by Michael Frayn about the happenings of a mysterious a one-day visit to physicist

Artist Interview

Orthodox but radical,
The theatrical power of Kenichi Tani

オーソドックスでラディカル
谷賢一の演劇力

Théâtre des Annales

Jugun-chu no Ludwig Wittgenstein ga (Ludwig Wittgenstein in Military Service)



Courtesy of Théâtre des Annales

Niels Bohr and his wife in Copenhagen by the German theoretical physicist Heisenburg, who was working on the German atomic bomb project in WWII). Because, there has long been a theater style that searches out Western plays with intellectual subjects as a means of achieving a high level of theatrical quality.

From there we each suggested plays that could be of interest to all of us, and the first performance resulting from this collaboration was *Nude Mouse* that I wrote based on the theme of brain science that I had suggested. From there we decided on the unit's direction of making theater based on the latest, and now intellectually stimulating subjects. Our second performance was of *Jugun-chu no Ludwig Wittgenstein ga* [long title abbreviated] (Ludwig Wittgenstein in Military Service) on the subject of philosophy and our third was *Tokyo Slum Angels* based on the theme of capitalism. Each time we have been making plays in an effort to find ways to share with the audience serious subjects that would not normally be considered suitable for theater.

Your plays are consistently ones that employ logical dialogue put together into a play with dynamic scripts that communicate very directly to the audience in a straightforward way.

It is my hope that my plays become something like a “battle (martial art) of words,” and if it doesn't succeed in reaching that level, then it isn't exciting for me. That is why in my directing I keep working over it to get that verbal martial arts quality.

Even as we sit here talking now, I can think things like, “at just this moment a definitive statement was interjected,” or “since I have now begun to talk, I will watch the situation for a minute,” so in these ways isn't what we are doing as we listen to each other's words actually a very active and actual thing? I look at conversation as that kind of [active] action.

Of course, in Western dialog plays and the like, since the structure is often one in which people of different stances are jousting with each other with words in a battle of wills, the number of scenes where people are putting their lives or existence into words as they converse increases and it thus becomes like a slugfest with words instead of fists. On the other hand, there are plays where conversation is conducted in a more delicate and quiet tone but the opposing positions of the characters is still clear, and although the tone is quieter, the development is still often one in which the characters are thinking how to talk the other into a corner. When you write with this process in mind, I guess it can't help but lead to an increasing number of scenes that become more dynamic, or you might say rougher, with active confrontation between the characters. I guess I like dialogs where you can feel the sparks flying.

Finally, would you tell us what you see or are planning for the future?

One of my mid-term goals is to acquire the strength and skills to direct mid- and large-scale class theater productions. My work with foreign directors has been done with a consciousness of the work as sort of simulations in that direction. To work on that scale, of course, I have to think about the entertainment element, and I also want to get to know about the balance between using famous actors and still getting the results I want. I want to keep digging in that direction.