

A notice by Uchino Tadashi (Theater Critic, Professor of Tokyo University)
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Performing Art in the 2010s

From the second half of 2009 to the summer of 2010, there were some symptomatic incidents that make us consider about Japanese performing art. I will illustrate them in this essay.

Gekidan Kaitaisha, which has become most well know in abroad among Japanese contemporary theater groups since the second half of the 1990s, is presenting their trilogy performance, '*Finality Living*', as their annual event. The title of the work performed in August, '*With Eternal Revolution*' (directed by Shinjin Shimizu), carries obvious reference to Nietzsche's famous concept, Eternal Recurrence.

This performance was not presented in an ordinary style. Its opening scene begins in a small reception room, which is located in upstairs of the main studio. In the scene, quotations from the trial record of *the Tuchiura Murder Case* are used. At the trial, the defendant Kanagawa Masadai, who was convicted of killing 8 people at the Tuchiura station (suburb of Tokyo) in 2008, logically analyzes his actions and insists on his want to be executed. Especially, a line in which he says, 'the justice you have made is totally different from mine', stuck in my mind. There are two ways the quotations from the trial record are performed. In some parts, Chizuko Sugiura, who performs this scene, uses two cellular phones in such a way that voices from the cellular phones respond to one another so that the trial interrogation are presented between the two cellular phones. In other parts, Chizuko Sugiura directly questions and talks back to the cellular phone from which Kanagawa's voice is heard. (The theme, Law and Justice, underlies the performance as a whole. At some points, lines from the Greek Tragedy, '*Antigone*' are quoted.) After the first scene, audiences are guided to the main studio and find themselves in the next scene. This scene can be called 'the exhibition theater of human body'. Kaitaisya's young performers and Kaitaisha's regular members such as Kenjiro Kumamoto, Hiruko Hino, and Reiko Aota perform this scene. In addition to them, there are guests from abroad, Jonathan Giles Garner and Rebecca Woodford-Smith from Whales, U.K. The notable characteristics of Shimizu's direction in the recent years are that he tends to construct each scene (drama) with loose composition and structure. Because of these characteristics, each scene (drama) succeeds in avoiding becoming clichéd human body drama, which often emphasizes the

sense of crisis. The scene depicts (modern) humans who have already lost their subjectivity and are not agents of their own anymore, and, despite this fact, have no choice but keep living. Sudden utterances and autonomous/singular gestures produced by human bodies without subjectivity and agency are repeatedly and obstinately inscribed on the theater space.

During this process (performance), contemporary (T)hemes related to 'Law and Justice' such as 'Gender', 'Japanese Emperor System', 'Violence', and 'Impossibility of Communication' are taken up and exposed to audiences' critical look. And, from there, various questions, both conceptual and actual, come and go in audiences' minds. Also, audiences' bodies react to performers' bodies and receive from them a sense or feeling that could be called 'synchronized sways'.

This performance not only is thought through at actual working process, but also has theoretical background and analytical insight toward the contemporary world. In this sense, this performance can be regarded as 'straight' performance. However, this 'straight' performance was performed for small numbers of audiences in an obscure corner of postmodern city Tokyo. This literally intercultural 'straight' performance is a daring response to 'exceptional condition/condition of being exception' in globalization. For contemporary Japanese theater world, it is set in advance that this 'straight' performance will be not even 'exceptional' but 'absent'.

A performance called '*via Intolerance II*' directed by German director Christoph Schlingensiefel was presented at a festival in Brussels in May this year. The title is taken from an Italian composer Luigi Nono's opera '*Intolerance*' composed for Venice Biennale in the 1960s. Schlingensiefel uses this opera as a material source and interrelate it with the activities at Utopian Art Village (also called Opera Village) in Brukinafaso in Africa, at which he took a lead for its establishment. The performance raises questions about ideas of 'tolerance/intolerance', 'discrimination/equality' in North-South/post-colonial problem between Europe and Africa. Tolerance from European standpoint may still be an actual subject matter, but can it have the same actuality for African reality? How can Art of each genre such as opera and African dance/music treat this kind of actual themes?

What is particular about Schlingensiefel's performance is that Schlingensiefel himself comes up on stage and explains to audiences how the performance came about. He also performed dance on the stage. In contrast to these mischievous aspects, professional opera singers perform opera songs. And then opera songs are juxtaposed with dances and songs of Brukinafaso in the same theater space. Moreover, stereotypical

documentary video image of Schlingensief's crews' trip in Africa is projected on screen. These elements make this performance both classy and noisy, and intellectual and physical/mischievous/excessive. This is the reason why this performance is exactly 'via' *'Intolerance'*. It can be said that this epoch-making performance is appropriate to be regarded as the sequel to (the contemporary version of) *'Intolerance'*. And audiences take pleasures from directly facing artist Schlingensief's hypertrophied ego.

As I have illustrated above, both Shimizu and Schlingensief conceive their plans for performance in globally philosophical and art-theoretical framework. And they try to present various themes abstracted from their locality, which reflect today's end of contemporary/global situation. It should be noted that while Schlingensief's ego is hypertrophied to the limit, Shimizu's ego is open for sharing and commonness. Despite this difference, it is notable that the two directors who represent contemporary world bears some parallels in their ways to work out their presentations.

The fact that Chelfitsch's *'Hot pepper, Cooler, Cheers of good-by'*, which was premiered in Berlin last fall, was presented at the festival in Brussels (at which Schlingensief's work was also presented) as a Japanese performance work is symptomatic. I am not saying that it should have been Kaitaisha instead of Chelfitsch. What I am trying to point out here is that festival culture in Europe, in the end, seeks for 'presentation of Difference'. It is natural that festival organizers are attracted by Chelfitsch's Toshiki Okada's distinguished 'Difference'. He, with keen critical consciousness and the awareness of contemporary issues, brings 'Daradara-kan (the sense of laziness/looseness/release)', which cannot be found in Europe, into aesthetic realization. In short, wherever his performance is presented, Kaitaisha's Shimizu, on the one hand, has already crosses the border, so that festivals in Europe do not feel for need to invite them. On the other hand, Okada's methodology has been developed through experiments and contemplations in the closed culture place (the place of J (Japan)), and it cannot cross the border without the system of European festival culture.