

JAPAN IN DRAMATURGY

FEB 18, 2.30PM - 4.00PM

Ken Hagiwara opened this panel by outlining his role as a “translator” in three of his works with the collective Rimini Protokoll. Rimini Protokoll is a trio of German and Swiss directors. The collective does not use established scripts or plays and does not have trained actors. The text was developed after “casting” masquerading as interviews. Hagiwara was primarily involved in the curation of the Japanese adaptations of Karl Marx’s *The Capital Volume 1* (presented as *The Capital*), *Cargo Sofia-X* (presented as *Cargo Tokyo Yokohama*), and *100% Berlin* (presented as *100% Tokyo*). Hagiwara's role was an interpreter of context. In these pieces, he translated the interviews, prepared German subtitles to accompany the performance, operated the subtitles onstage, and translated improvisational speeches by the performers. For the second piece, it was also important that the piece was adapted to suit the borderless nature of Japan (unlike European borders that truck drivers travel through). Hence the choice of a virtual truck ride from Niigata to Yokohama (via the long tunnel journey linking Tokyo to Yokohama) is important.

Kaku Nagashima admitted that with his translations of European works to Japanese in the early 2000s, he was always conscious that his interpretation of the European text would affect the work of the Japanese directors and actors. Embracing his influence on the creative process, he began actively participating in rehearsals and sharing his interpretation of the text and any other relevant information with the artists. He realised that he was going beyond the role of a translator. In 2004, Nagashima met with academic Eiichiro Hirata, who had studied dramaturgy in Germany. Hirata informed him that he was actually performing the role of a dramaturg.

As a dramaturg, Nagashima was found his role in (1) creating and developing a concept collectively with the artists, even before rehearsals began, and (2) steering the creative process. Dramaturgy, to him, is not something that is fixed and rigid, but one that is malleable. It is important to dialogue with the team to nurture the concepts. Being cautious about not making the final decisions, dramaturgy is like a zone/place where people can work collectively and collaboratively with others. For his 2007 work *Atomic Survivor*, about nuclear power plants, he also researched into an appropriate parallel — Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*. Being sensitive to the social climate surrounding the 2011 accident, he is aware on the difficulty of restaging such a show again.

With *Arrows*, a community-based Art Festival, a social dramaturgy could be seen in the way the local residents were able to create arrows of different kinds in the neighbourhood. As a dramaturg Nagashima nurtured and fostered a social dramaturgical thinking that was owned by everyone and the work itself.

Peter Eckersall's presentation offered a socio-historical analysis of the role of *dramaturgy* (not *dramaturg*) within the Japanese theatre context. Given that the term 'dramaturgy' is complicated in all fields (notions of time, space, narrative structure, politics), there still is an internalised dramaturgical thinking when talking about Japanese theatre. Drawing on theories from Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977) and his *Essays on Proletarian Theatre*, the relationship of Japanese theatre and modern drama and dramaturgy appears implicit. With practitioners like Hijikata Matsumi, who actively think about public spaces, embodied practices, crossovers between performance and protest cultures (Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*), the social dramaturgy of bodies (constructed through a dramaturgical thinking) allows one to observe the ruptures that are present. Referencing Yoshimi Shun'ya's *Toshi no doramaturugii* (1987) where dramaturgy in the city is focused on city as performance, Eckersall suggests that there is a social dramaturgical practice. He also addressed civic performances and ritual through the example of a man using the kyogen monkey mask who marched through an abandoned town in Fukushima area with his cows (refuses to slaughter his cows that are not productive), as a way to resist the government's falsehood about the place and its safety.

He further comments that one of the most sustained programme in dramaturgy (with a research programme and series of workshops) is led by Professor Fujii Shintaro at Waseda University. He then concludes by analysing Okada Toshiki's *God Bless Baseball* and the dramaturgy of ambience. With the rise in neo-liberal culture, sometimes one tends to lose out critical distance. With the nations of Japan, Korea and USA, there is also a risk of cultural imperialism where alongside flows of culture and language there is also the risk of miscommunication. Therefore while dramaturgical intervention that takes us into the Japanese culture, like Noh, it is still a post-dramatic perspective of dramaturgy — the play stages the dramaturgy for us (a material dramaturgy).

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