

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOSHIKI OKADA/chelfitsch

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1. Your company's name "chelfitsch." I know it's a childish version of the English word "selfish," but I'm curious where it came from, and what it means to you, if anything?

It meant myself when I named it. Because I thought myself childish and selfish. I was twenty three years old. But it changed its meaning after the company's name got to be known. When a critic said "chelfitsch" describes the social situation of our time in Japan, especially Tokyo, I was somehow convinced of it. Then I got to like using this explanation.

2. What were the ideas you set out to explore in HOT PEPPER and what influenced the script? I understand it's a triptych—is it three separate plays or are they interconnected somehow?

非正規雇用労働者の問題が日本でも深刻になってきていた時期に作った作品です。つまり現実の状況に影響を受けて作りました。同時に、これは日本のみならず世界的な問題でもあるので、ローカルな状況を描くことをとおして日本の外の観客とも共有する問題を提示したい、という考えもありました。三つのパートは、実際的には独立して見てもそれなりに楽しめると思います。でも僕としては、この三つは今や緊密に関係しているので、三つは続けて見られるべきものと考えています。

I created this piece when the "non-full-time employees" issue (from Japan Society: the growing rate of temporary employees, part-time staff, or project-basis staff - aka all employees without benefits such as insurance, pension plans, promotion opportunities, etc.) became a serious problem in Japan. That is, my play was influenced by this ongoing issue. At the same time, I wanted to address the universal issue of unemployment through the portrayal of Japan's local situation, which I believed that non-Japanese audiences could sympathize with. I think that audiences can enjoy each of the three parts of this triptych even if each one is presented independently. However, because the three parts have become so closely connected to one another (from Japan Society: "Air Conditioner" was written originally as a stand-alone play and the two other parts were added three years later), I now believe that the three parts should be presented in sequence as one evening-length piece.

3. What is the creative process like working with your actors? Do you bring in a finished script or does the text change through collaboration? Do you provide them parts of the movement, like a choreographer, or do the actors generate the movement through improvisation?

テキストはリハーサルを通して絶えず、毎日のように変わります。特にこの作品の一部では、音楽の演奏時間とパフォーマンスを揃えるということをしているので、いつも以上に微調整をしました。動きを作る方法はいろいろありますが、僕は振付家ではないので、ゼロから動きを作ることはできません。俳優達が、与えられたテキストを元に、なかば自然に動きを作り出し

ていきます。それを僕が選んだり、加工（もっと大きく動いてほしい、とか、その動きを繰り返してほしいと言う）したり、その動きを見て思いついた新しい動きを提案したりします。基本的には即興を通して動きを作り出していますが、本番の上演でも即興的な動きは行われています。

My text changes constantly – it even changes daily throughout the rehearsal period. Especially for this piece, subtle changes took place often, because I tried to sync up the music with the performance. There are various ways of creating movement. Since I am not a choreographer, I am not capable of creating movement from scratch. Instead, I ask my actors to extract natural movements from each of their lines and I simply pick up these moves, or manipulate them. For example, I instruct the actors to “exaggerate their movements” or “repeat the same movement over again.” Sometimes their particular movement inspires me to come up with another and I suggest that the actors try out these new movements. Basically, improvisation is the starting point of setting my choreography, but improvisation takes places even during the performance.

4. You've said in other interviews that since the success of FIVE DAYS IN MARCH that you've been thinking more about how you want to affect your audience, citing Bertolt Brecht. What are you trying to accomplish in HOT PEPPER? What do you hope to convey?

「三月の5日間」などの実践を通して僕たちが獲得した言葉と身体との関係性についてのある種の方法論を、それとは別の形で出力できないかということを考えはじめました。両者のあいだの見た目上のズレをもっと誇張させてダンスのようにしてしまう、というアイデアが、そのひとつです。いくつかの小作品でそれを試しつつ、この作品ではじめて、そのアイデアに基づくフルレングス作品を作ってみたというわけです。

There was a time when I began to think about a method of linking text and body movement, different from the method that my company developed during “Five Days in March.” One of the ideas was to widen the apparent lag or gap between the text and body movement and to exaggerate the performance into something like dance. I tried to materialize this idea in a few shorter pieces. “Hot Pepper” was the first full length piece based on this idea.

5. Your writing is hyper-colloquial, but now you're creating work with the expectation that non-Japanese speakers will see it. Does this affect writing in any way? What has been your experience touring and performing for non-speakers? I saw both your version of FIVE DAYS IN MARCH, as well as Witness Relocation’s English version, and the experience of the text was very different.

I believe spoken language in theatre is important, but at the same time it is only part of theatre. And I think also language must affect the body that speaks it. Language affects not only speech but also the whole performance.

6. With all the touring, you've been exposed to many other artists and their practices. Has this affected how you create work? Have you responded or been inspired by others?

さまざまな地域で上演すると、舞台芸術がどのような仕方でそこに住む人々に対して機能しているか、ということが、劇場の中や併設されたカフェなどにいると、肌で感じられるように思います。その経験は、明らかに僕に影響を与えています。それを端的に言えば、公的な演劇を作りたいという思い、日本の社会で演劇が今以上に公的な機能を果たす存在になってほしいという思いが芽生えたということです。

When I sit in a café of a theater where my work is being performed, I really feel what type of function the performing arts play in the lives of the local people living in the city. I have experienced this feeling in each of the different cities where my work has been performed. These experiences have influenced me greatly and I have begun to hope that theater will have more of a “public function” in Japan’s society.

7. Since your work seems to deal with the experiences you or your friends or your collaborators have in their daily lives, I’m curious what’s happening for you now, and where you may be going in your new work. I know it’s been a tumultuous time in Japan, with political shifts and economic issues and of course the Fukushima incident. Are these things you’ll be responding to in future works?

僕は今、フィクションを作るということに強い関心があります。これまで自分が作ってきたものが結果的にはフィクションであったとしても、それについて強く意識して作ったわけではないものでした。震災以降、僕は、フィクションの必要性を強く感じるようになりました。フィクションを、作り物の絵空事、としてとらえるのではなく、現実のオルタナティブと考えるようになったのです。そして今の日本社会の現実は、オルタナティブに対置されなければいけない、だからフィクションが必要だ、と考えるようになったのです。そういう問題意識のもとで、次の新作を作ろうと思っています。

Currently, I have a strong interest in writing fictional works. You might say that everything that I’ve written/created has been fiction, however, when I was creating my past works, I wasn’t consciously creating ‘fictional’ plays. Since the earthquake hit Japan, I’ve strongly felt the need to write fictional stories. I have started to consider “fiction” as not an “unreal fabrication” but rather an “alternative” to reality. I think the current society in Japan should change to this alternative reality. That is why I have started to think that “fictional stories are needed.” I will make my next new work with this idea in mind.