

Document Paper



01

Q: I was impressed by the performance of the two male dancers in Alessandro Sciarroni's *Save the Last Dance for Me*. This piece, based on the now-defunct ballroom dance polka chinata, made me think about how culture is passed on to coming generations.

Artuso: In Sciarroni's piece, the focus was on how to rediscover or restore Italian dances that are being lost. The work by Shinichi Anasako x Pijin Neji with Ten-tenko, *Stand by Me*, explores the Japanese Noh play through a modern, contemporary approach. Many Japanese people are not necessarily familiar with living historical performing arts such as Noh, so I think it is both important and fascinating to highlight them within a contemporary festival. I was particularly intrigued to see that this year, Kyoto Experiment (hereinafter called "KEX") experimented with innovative ways of interplaying local and historical performing arts, curating them within contemporary performances.

Todoru: I think it is important to look at the past, but at the same time, we should be critical of tradition. The polka chinata was part of a deeply patriarchal and repressive culture that did not allow unmarried men and women to dance together and disapproved of same-sex relationships. I thought it was interesting that Sciarroni reinterpreted this homophobic tradition through a gay filter.



05

Q: How (if at all) does your writing make and break careers? How do you archive objectivity in a subjective field?

Jászay: At least in my country, Hungary, critics do not have the power to influence an artist's career by writing, and I do not want to have such power. As for an objective approach to the work, writing criticism is an extremely subjective genre, and not only in the performing arts. Objectivity is almost impossible, and the only "objective" task you may need to do is to write the names of the performers correctly. I like smart, thought-provoking pieces, but I also like to be emotionally touched. When I go to see a work, I just want to love, cry, be touched and surprised—briefly: simple pleasures.

Cappelle: As for making someone's career through criticism, that could have happened before the appearance of social media, but I think it rarely happens anymore. On the other hand, I believe that writing reviews at certain appropriate times can boost the careers of previously unknown artists. Of course, although artists' career development is not solely due to critics, when I am able to write something at the right moment, I feel that I have at least some role to fulfill.



09

Q: What is your stance on the profession and identity of a critic? How do you think about calling yourself a critic?

Todoru: I am not the best person to answer this question because I am not a professional critic. My salary does not come from the newspapers and magazines where I publish reviews, but from the university that employs me. So I am officially more a scholar and a teacher than a critic. But I really love reviewing performances. I think critics have such an important role to play in maintaining the quality of public discourse. So I try to contribute to that as much as possible. Given that my money comes from somewhere else, for me doing criticism is a passion. But the fact that so many who write criticism today cannot live off it, and have to do it on the side of their actual jobs, shows the deep crisis of the profession. And ultimately, I believe, of public discourse. I also carry quite a lot of guilt, knowing that by writing criticism often for free, I contribute to the exploitation of my colleagues who do try to make a living as critics, and to the degradation of the profession overall. The pay for a review is so low partly because there are people like me who do it for free.

Fiala: While the role of the critic has been vital to the socio-political legitimization of theater (and the performing arts more broadly) in European history, I wonder what the transfer of this role across cultural contexts actually means. There is also a judgmental aspect to this role, which applies a form of single-minded subjectivity, but in a way that is seen as important for historical research into performance as an ephemeral art form. Given these aspects, I personally do not see myself as a critic—rather, I propose to observe, perhaps in a somewhat Buddhist sense, to acknowledge and mediate what my senses witness. It is more interesting for me to document than to judge and, in an intercultural sense, to try to find access points that allow people a deeper understanding of a work of art or performance. This is not to say that our digitally driven contemporary "affirmative societies" do not need this function at all, but I would rather frame this practice as that of a mediator. That would be my suggestion.

About the program of Kyoto Experiment 2024

Q: When I was watching Mathilde Monnier & Dominique Figarella's *Soapéra*, an installation, the person in front of me took a picture with flashlight during the performance. This made me feel very uncomfortable. How do you deal with unpleasant happenings during performances?

Remere: It can be unpleasant for the audience, but it also has a very serious effect on the people making the work. Light designers have important roles in the production, and they create magic by adjusting the lighting so delicately. In a work I was previously involved in, there was a problem with the lighting at the very climax of the work, and all the creators were hurt and crying. I think the flash of a camera might cause a similar effect.

Fiala: Since the question is about subjective matters, I will try to answer it subjectively as well. It might sound a bit funny but if I can choose my seat freely, I would try to sit next to a woman as much as possible. There was a man next to me at this festival and he sat with his legs spread apart, which was a very distracting experience for me. If you can choose your own seat, please choose it wisely.

02

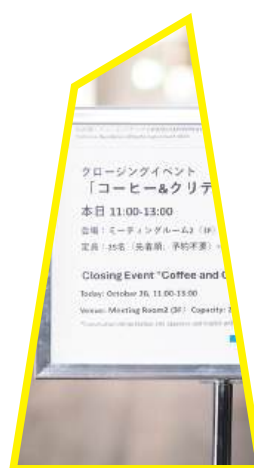


About the job/work of a critic/criticism

06

Q: Amidst the decline of critique/criticism in our current societies, what motivates you to continue working in this field? Do you have any prospects for the future?

Šivytė: I used to go insane over this question a few years ago: "Why do I write?" "What is the point of writing on a very simple answer that might sound a bit egotistic: "I write, because I love doing it." For now, it is the strongest reason and motivation for me to keep writing. I try not to think what the future holds and try to do (and enjoy) all I can today. I just hope that I will not see the extinction of criticism in my life.



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Q: I sometimes feel that the art criticism in Japan is not mature enough. What are your thoughts on this matter?

Yamazaki: I think there are certainly aspects that have not matured. But when it comes to performing arts not matured. But when it comes to performing arts criticism, the reality is that in some ways we are too "mature" and the age range of critics is too high. I was shocked to hear from a Taiwanese critic that the board members of Taiwan's IATC (International Association of Theatre Critics) are currently all under forty years of age, and even so, they said they wanted to pass the pole, and on to the next generation as soon as possible. I think the state of Japanese performing arts criticism is parallel to the state of Japanese society.

Remere: At an art festival I am involved in, we held a workshop for teenage participants to write critiques, and the participants of the workshop are now adults. I think there is a huge potential in involving children and young adults. We do this at our festivals, not only with our critics' programs, but also in terms of curation, where we work with the younger generation.



03

Q: I heard there was an audience member who was crying at the end of the performance of *Room with a View* by (LA)HORDE x Roan with the Ballet national de Marseille. I wonder why the person was crying.

Itō: I am wondering how you got to know about the crying audience member. If you heard about it from a friend or someone else, that is fine. But if you saw it on social media, I think we need to be careful. Emotional comments can easily spread far and wide, and the influence of such comments are getting stronger these days. I try to distance myself a bit from comments like "I cried so much" or "someone was very angry, which is common on social media. These comments may be buzzing just because of their power to move people and not say anything about the work."

Artuso: I am Italian, so I get emotional easily (laughs). For example, I was emotional while watching Jaha Koo's *Haribo Kimchi* yesterday in the festival. But I try to have a critical distance especially when I write something about the work, and I try to be careful to analyze by myself as to why my emotions were stirred so much.



07

Q: I would like to ask about how you take notes on a performance. When do you take notes and what kind of notes? Or do you write reviews without any notes?

Šivytė: During my time on the "Critics in Residence" program, I noticed that I am one of the very few who barely takes notes during the performance or does not take them at all. I rarely take notes, because if I do my mind strays away from the performance and I feel that my judgement becomes flawed because I did not immerse myself in it fully. However, I do have my notes ready most of the time in case I feel like I must write down an idea or a piece of the performance. I tend to take notes of my general thoughts after the show.

Lanigan: My note taking is quite rapid and are largely carried out during the performance. It tends to be a messy process as I am observing the performance and not my handwriting. As such, in the hours or days after the show, I need to revisit these notes - often very factual descriptions of events, scenes, details, but also rough illustrations of actions or the stage set-up. During this later revision stage, I attempt to decipher my observations and write out an outline in more detail, akin to a treatment for a script.



08

Q: I myself sometimes take on different roles depending on the job or project, sometimes as a critic and sometimes as a dramaturg. What are your thoughts on how to position yourself in each case?

Todoru: My first impulse is to say that I would prefer not to position myself anywhere, nor to be limited to a well-defined role in the first place. In the contemporary performing arts scene, roles such as performer and director have become more fluid. I would like to see this fluidity in critical ways of engagement with a work of art as well. My involvement and positioning change too depending on the project, and I try to respond as much as possible to the demands of each job.

Cappelle: I am trained as a sociologist, when I look at a work as a sociologist, I focus on the creation process rather than the finished work. In this case, giving my opinion about the work is not important. It is difficult to find a balance. If you go into the process of creation and learn too much about what is behind the works, it becomes difficult to maintain a critical perspective. If I write critically, the creator may feel betrayed although I myself do not stand on anyone's side, and if I am standing on any side, it is the side of art.

About the residency experience in Kyoto

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Q: I find it very interesting that in the self-introduction of Tamás Jászay on YouTube, he talks about "embedded criticism." I understand this is a new writing style that has been gaining attention lately, but I would like to hear a little more about it.

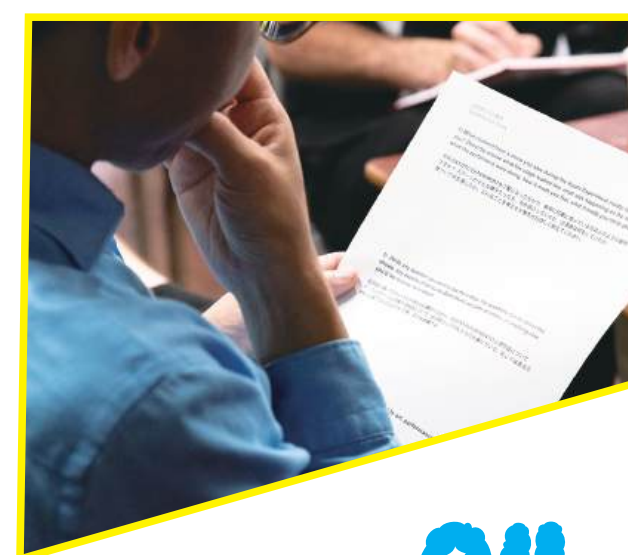
Jászay: There are various ways to interact with a work of art, whether you look at it as a critic from the outside or from inside the work. I myself am running a critical portal and have been experimenting with the form. There, sometimes you can not only read the critics' texts, but also write responses to the texts, including the creators. In the course of one of these dialogues, a critic has been asked to be involved as an embedded critic for the creators' next project. However, for me personally, I would rather look at the work from the outside rather than get involved in the difficult aspects of the creation process.



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Q: Listening to the panel talk, it seems to me that there are two types of critics. The academics and the writers/reporters. Do you feel that there is any difference in approach to criticism between these two types?

Lanigan: I would feel there is a considerable difference in the approach of the writer/reporter to the academic in that we are communicating to very different audiences, using entirely different language sets (academic English and everyday English). My own approach stems from my day job as a reporter, and as such, this itself, while also delving into the ideas behind a performance. Academic language has a plethora of merits in how it can dissect these ideas through the use of very precise terms. But that approach is also prone to alienating readers outside academia. A writer/reporter as the percentage of its readership who are students of a specific subject is likely lower. Our audience could be anyone, and as such a lucid, more grounded approach is necessary.



04

Q: It is interesting to me that this year's KEX has many programs reflecting on contemporary society and related lectures and talks. Are works based on such contemporary political and social situations becoming popular?

Itō: I believe that works dealing with contemporary social issues have been presented not only in KEX but in many other international theater festivals held to date. The prominence of events related to the programs suggests that there is a growing need for audiences to learn more about the background of the productions. I think that the influence of #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and other online activism, as well as the experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic, has increased the number of people who feel and think about the problems faced by others as if they were their own.

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Q: Given that many art festivals are now being held all over the world, what did you feel was the unique aspect of KEX as an art festival in Kyoto?

Remere: I do not think it is possible to create a festival that is not unique—even with the same performances, there is always a different time, a different crowd, and a different context. However, the most special aspect of KEX, which will make me miss it and want to return, is its playfulness and its communication with its home—Kyoto and the Kansai region. This reflects a desire to discover the role of one's place in the present time and its relationship to other regions and the rest of the world. Kyoto is an ancient, culturally multilayered city, and uncovering its contemporary aspects is both astonishing and eye-opening. I greatly appreciate the work conducted in the "Kansai Studies" program by researchers and artists Takuya Ishikawa, Yuka Uchida, and Kohei Maeda. I believe this underlying research adds depth and character to the entire festival.

Yamazaki: Since this year's program included a collaboration with "Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels Festival", it was a little different from previous editions of KEX. But I think this festival is characterized first and foremost by its experimental spirit. I am always excited that I can see something I have never seen before. Another great thing about KEX is its respect for local context and critique, and its attempt to build long-term relationships with artists and audiences.

Cappelle: While I only experienced the 2024 edition, KEX struck me as a particularly open-minded festival. In a context where travel costs are increasingly high and more events and institutions are forced to cut back on international invitations, KEX's trio of directors still managed to bring together artists from very different aesthetic backgrounds in Europe and East Asia. That included creations—always a risky endeavor. The festival is also clearly committed to presenting work on a range of big and small stages around Kyoto, and had a core audience that not only seemed ready for anything, but fostered an atmosphere of respectful curiosity throughout.