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# Memory of Nanjing: Kamome Machine's Experiments in Sharing Thoughts

By Beri Juraic in collaboration with Hagiwara Yuta

## Abstract

The controversial topic of the 'Nanjing Incident' (1937) and its memorialization is very rarely depicted in theatre. Equally important, the memory of the Second World War in Asia-Pacific has been heavily politicized both in Japan, China and other Asian countries. In summer 2022, the Japanese performance company Kamome Machine embarked on research for their new project re-addressing the Nanjing Incident. In general, Kamome Machine's works explore public and private space that centre on the human body. They are known for their site-specific performances such as *Waiting for Godot in Fukushima* (2011), performed just outside Fukushima's exclusion zone or more recently the telephone theatre series *Moshi Moshi* (2020-2023). For the initial research phase on the *Nanjing* project, Kamome Machine interviewed Chinese students, invited a historian to provide material and insight and a Chinese dancer/choreographer in a process they termed 'experiments in sharing thoughts through body'. Since this early phase, I became involved in the process on several occasions as embedded researcher. (Haydon, 2012) (McGinty and Salokangas, 2014). We actively exchanged ideas and shared thoughts both physically and via email, video calls and messages. This paper not only traces their work-in-progress, but also how my theorising of their work has shifted, based on the experience as a witness and participant in process. I explore the notions of aporia (Barthes), tourist as the Other (Azuma, 2017) and liberation from myths about Japanese identity (Oguma, 1995) to show how creative process is an important tool for repositioning the memorialisation away from political controversies.

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# Memory of Nanjing: Kamome Machine's Experiments in Sharing Thoughts

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## KAMOME MACHINE'S BACKGROUND

In the recent history of theatre, there are only a handful of projects that deal with the 'Nanjing Incident', and the majority of these were produced outside of Asia.<sup>1</sup> This highly controversial moment in Sino-Japanese relations refers to the mass killing of Chinese citizens by Japanese soldiers when they captured Nanjing on 13 December 1937. David Askew (2002) remarks that this episode is "emerging as a fundamental keystone in the construction of the modern Chinese national identity." (Askew 1) He further comments that in the Japanese context any such interest in the subject can be either considered as "Japan bashing" or "self-flagellation" depending on the perspective of foreign or Japanese researchers.

Most recently, the topic was dealt with in *Nanjing* (2019), directed and performed by a British director of Chinese heritage, Jude Christian. It is a theatrical meditation that mixes autobiographical and historical elements based on her discovery of what is sometimes referred to as the *Rape of Nanjing* in her early twenties. Having seen Christian's production, Hagiwara Yuta, the leader of the Japanese theatre company Kamome Machine, started contemplating his own ignorance of the history and his desire to deal with the 'Nanjing Incident' in a performance as a Japanese director.<sup>2</sup> In August 2022, Kamome Machine ran an initial workshop to create a new performance based on this historical event.

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<sup>1</sup> For further explanation of the terms adopted here, see below in the article.

<sup>2</sup> I am using the Japanese order of names with family name first throughout.

Kamome Machine was founded by the theatre director Hagiwara Yuta and Shimizu Honami in 2007 and they were later joined by stage manager and performer Ito Shin. Their 'Nanjing Incident' project follows their other works that explore the public and private space focusing on the human body, such as the site-specific performance *Waiting for Godot in Fukushima* (2011), performed just outside the exclusion zone shortly after the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster; *Oregayo* (2015~) that uses the text of the Japanese constitution<sup>3</sup>; and the Telephone Theatre Series *Moshi Moshi* (2020~) in which the actors deliver one-to-one performances for a single spectator via telephone. All these works were developed over long periods of time and have evolved with each new public showing.<sup>4</sup>

## THE EXCHANGE

I participated in Kamome Machine's work-in-progress sessions on three occasions. The first was at the invitation of the company in August 2022. This invitation came on the back of my presentation on their *Telephone Theatre Series* project at the 14<sup>th</sup> Colloquium of the Asian Theatre Working Group (ATWG) of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR), held remotely in March 2022.<sup>5</sup> The second time, I invited them to submit a proposal for the 15<sup>th</sup> Colloquium of ATWG in Chiayi, Taiwan, in

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<sup>3</sup> The title of the production is a Japanese wordplay based on the national anthem.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.kamomemachine.com/> for more information about the company.

<sup>5</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> colloquium entitled 'Towards a Post-Covid-19 Asian Theatres' was organised by the University of Philippines-Diliman and held remotely from 2 to 4 March 2022. I presented a paper entitled *Seeing through listening: Japanese immersive audio performances and engaging audiences in pandemic and post-pandemic context*.

February 2023.<sup>6</sup> Hagiwara and I proposed a hybrid presentation that consisted of an academic paper and a workshop. This seemed a radical proposal for a traditional academic conference, and we were therefore delighted when it was accepted. Before the colloquium in Taiwan, I spent three days with the company while they prepared for the workshop. The third occasion was a two-week residency that the company undertook in Okinawa, Japan, in May 2023. This paper highlights my experiences of being an *embedded researcher* in a form of thick description, along with my reflections of the process. It also presents translations of Hagiwara's accounts of their work-in-progress and practice.

The principal aim is to demonstrate the importance of process both in artistic creation and in academic research. I trace how my own theorising of Kamome Machine's work has been enhanced by our 'sharing of thoughts.' For example, in the initial encounter I used Roland Barthes' notion of *living together* (1976-7) to illustrate how theatre can not only overcome societal struggles with politically contentious issues such as the 'Nanjing Incident,' but also reposition the memorialisation away from political controversy. During the second session, my contributions oscillated between Eiji Oguma's ideas about the myth of homogeneity of the Japanese nation (1995) and Hiroki Azuma's notion of the *tourist as the other* (2017), which I will explain below.

It is important to clarify some of the key terms I employ in this paper. Firstly, I use the term the 'Nanjing Incident' instead of the 'Nanjing Massacre,' the 'Rape of Nanjing,' or the 'Nanjing Atrocities' because the company itself uses this term in accordance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Hagiwara nevertheless explains in a blog post that 'there is

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<sup>6</sup> It was jointly organised by National Chung Cheng University and Taiwan Association for Theatre and Performance Industry Studies. It took place in Chiayi, Taiwan 18 – 19 February 2023 under the title 'War, Memory, and Theatre in Asia'.

no question that there was a massacre in Nanjing.’ (Hagiwara, 2022). Secondly, I borrow the term *embedded researcher* from the theatre critic Andrew Haydon who coined the term *embedded critic* in 2012 after traveling through Iraqi Kurdistan with a theatre company, in response to an outdated model of criticism where a writer shows up to a show, reviews the piece and then publishes a day or two later and calls it done (Haydon, 2012). McGinity and Salokangas (2014) also defined embedded research as a “mutually beneficial relationship between academics and their host organisations...” (McGinity and Salokangas 3).

In theatre studies, especially in the emergent field of rehearsal studies, these relationships are far more intertwined, and mutual influence is inevitable. Kamome Machine and I began and continued our collaboration on this basis. This type of respectful and honest approach can serve to reduce any potential antagonisms between the artist and researchers. I should point out that some might consider my role as being that of a dramaturg, but it was far from that. It was more liminal, situated between theory and practice, but without significant interventions. From a methodological perspective, it would also be acceptable to think of my role as a participant observer. From this position, I hope to illuminate in this paper the ways in which academics and researchers can also be a part of the theatre process from the very beginning, rather than post festum, which can help us gain a deeper understanding of the work we are researching. What follows are the notes and recollections of Kamome Machine’s process.

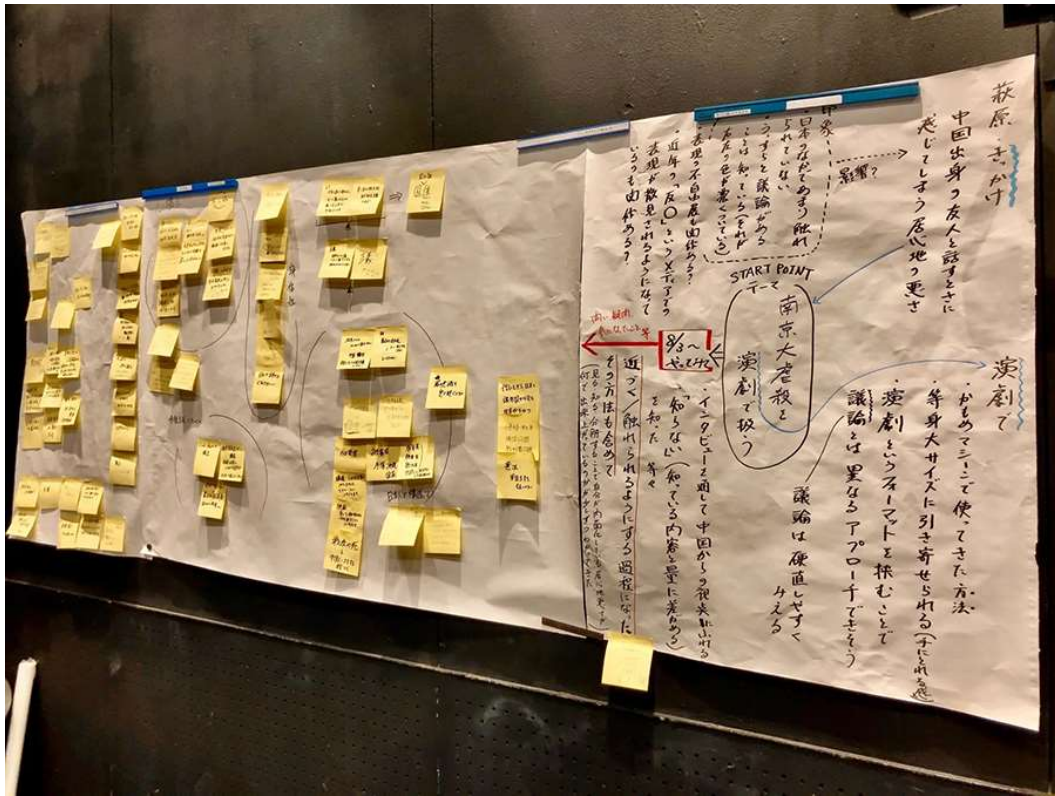
**RETHINKING STAGE WRITING THROUGH THE BODY (AUGUST 2022)**

During my field research in Japan last August, I was invited to a workshop rehearsal by Kamome Machine at the Waseda Shōgekijō Dramakan, an important venue in Japan that was founded by angura director Suzuki Tadashi. Since I had been following the company for over a year, I was keen to see their work in practice rather than on video or audio.

I arrive in front of the grey-black box building with a façade resembling a dropped stage curtain. I stop for a moment to study the contours of the building and how it is squeezed in between two buildings. There is a snack shop selling koppépan to the right and stairs leading to the black box theatre to the left.<sup>7</sup> I climb up to the second floor where the small rehearsal room is located. I find Hagiwara, the director, and the performers Shimizu Honami and Ito Shin in the middle of a conversation. We greet each other and I sit among them at the table. The table is filled with post-it notes and the rehearsal space is surrounded by written-up flipcharts. (see Fig. 1). The company is in the initial research phase for their new production on the 'Nanjing Incident'. Over the past two weeks or so, they have been interviewing Chinese exchange students in Japanese, creating a historical timeline, comparing Chinese and Japanese textbooks on the topic, discussing the 'Nanjing Incident' with an historian/political scientist and doing some physical devising. They have also invited other artists and researchers.

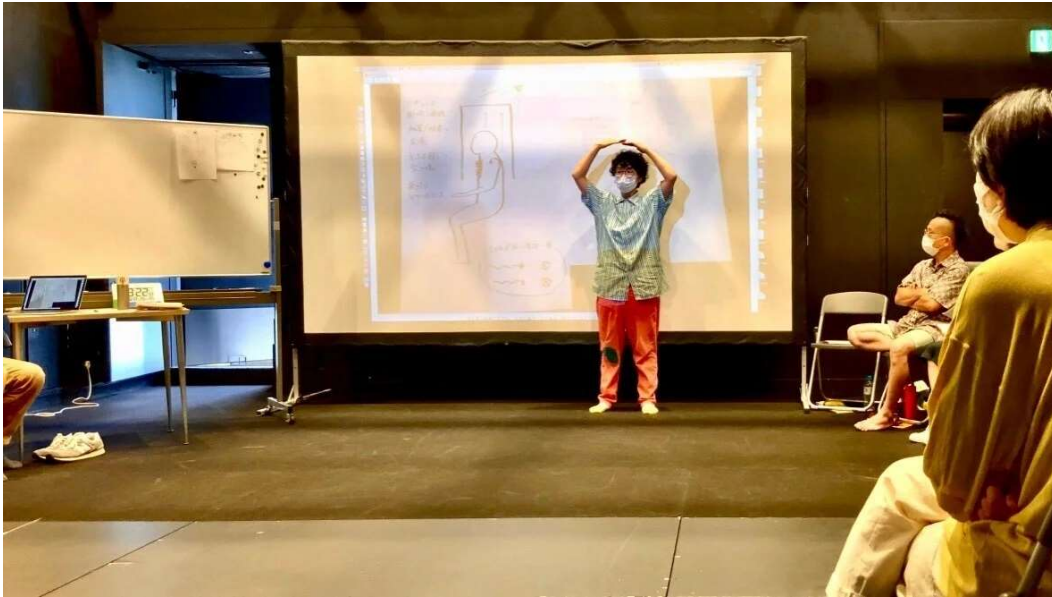
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<sup>7</sup> Koppépan is a Japanese milk bread roll with cream and jam in the middle.



Post-its and memos on the whiteboard. © Kayu Tomita, photo courtesy of Kamome Machine

The greeting formalities complete, they continue their discussion about how to think theatrically about the ‘Nanjing Incident,’ I am drawn to a torn-up page from Shimizu’s notebook which shows the body of a performer in three different postures. (see Fig.2). Their aesthetic seems to embody both textuality and physicality. Hagiwara confirms this to me later and I get to see it for myself over the course of the three-hour session. At one point they include me in the discussion by asking how the ‘Nanjing Incident’ is perceived in Europe.



Body postures drawn by Honami Shimizu. © Kayu Tomita, photo courtesy of Kamome Machine

In Croatia, my home country, at least during my school days, this event was not really taught in history classes although we did learn about Japan's militaristic and imperialistic aspirations during the first half of twentieth century. It was not until I started my undergraduate degree in the UK that I learned about it in more detail in the first year of my Japanese Studies module aptly named *Rethinking Japan*. Reflecting on it, it could be viewed as a paradoxical moment of history in the years leading up to the Second World War. John Rabe, a member of the Nazi Party, tried to prevent war crimes and protect Chinese citizens in Nanjing during the Japanese massacre.

Their conversation about whether what occurred in Nanjing was a massacre or genocide continues for a while. Then, Hagiwara suggests they get to their feet and do a bit of physical work. Ito starts with the idea of *matsuri* (festival). In many Japanese festivals, men carry floats (*mikoshi*)



and stamp their feet. Ito also notes that to a casual onlooker, a foreigner for example, this can feel quite intimidating, almost militaristic. The trio – Hagiwara, Shimizu, and Ito – try a few movements based on this idea. (see Fig. 3). Once finished, they ask what I think about it. Although I have never thought of *matsuri* as war-like, I find myself suddenly questioning this idea of *matsuri* as something peaceful and joyous.



Re-enacting movements during matsuri (festival). ©Kayu Tomita, photo courtesy of Kamome Machine

I am reminded of the Nobel-Prize winning author Elfriede Jelinek when she said that “sport is war in peacetime” (Jelinek 14). Could we then conceive *matsuri* as a form of sport? I share this idea with them. Jelinek did later qualify her statement stating that sport can be a political tool leading

to both war and peace. We also discuss the idea of the stamping of feet as a metaphor for bomb explosions. I am reminded of the war in Croatia during my childhood in the 1990s. I left for the UK in the late 2000s, but this remains a topic of conversation every now and then. Bombs falling around me was a part of everyday life at a certain period, but I only realised the weight of it as an adult. They experiment with some more movements.

As they finish, we gather around the table. Hagiwara hands out two poems by one of the most important young Japanese poets, Ōsaki Sayaka. They are from her 2018 collection entitled *Atarashii Sumika (New Habitat)*. Shimizu reads out *Mokutō (Silent Prayer)*. Having heard her voice in Kamome Machine's *denwa engeki* (telephone theatre) series and watched her powerful, yet harrowing, performance in *Oregayo*, I can sense how well she controls her voice. The poem reminds me of the former Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo's silent tribute to the victims of Nanjing.<sup>8</sup>

Later in the week, I read an article by Awazu Kenta on the rituals of silence. He writes: "Silence is well-suited to pluralistic societies and multicultural policies if for no other reason than that it glosses over diversity" and further concludes: "The benefit of new forms of rituals like silent prayers is that there is no attempt to control the way people imagine their country, but instead they give themselves over to the ambiguities of quietly bowing their heads" (Awazu 63). I don't necessarily agree with the second point as it somewhat re-mystifies the ritual of a silent prayer. However, what I find most interesting is that the idea of silent prayer is a modern (Western) invention. The Japanese imperial family copied this form of non-religious prayer from the British and used it for militaristic purposes.

Ito then reads the second Ōsaki's poem, *Suihanki (Rice Cooker)*. He brings a different voice quality, slightly shaky but also compelling. I am not

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<sup>8</sup> In 2018, ten years after he left office.

sure if they have read these poems before, but the sound of Japanese poetry is pleasing. In the discussion following the reading, one can tell Ito has been processing many thoughts about it. It seems that the use and non-use of vocal cords, as part of the performers' bodies, can be a potent tool for reconciliation and memorialisation on stage.

The company makes plans for a public sharing of their workshop research that it is due to take place over the following weekend, and we go for a meal together at a local restaurant. There we discuss theatre in Japan and the difficulties of working on the margins. I am, however, most curious about their way of working, their re-thinking of *écriture du plateau* (*writing for stage*) and how they navigate from history to the performer's body and then to poetry and literature. Privately, I also reflect on how the company plays with *listening* in theatre. In other words, how sounds and voices shape our experience of theatre. Although aurality in theatre is not new per se, they introduce a fresh and innovative approach: thinking about how words are written onto the performer's body while being uttered in the theatre space.

I received an email from Hagiwara later in which he noted that the company always invites other people to the rehearsal rooms to exchange. On the train back to the hotel, I remembered that I had come across Ōsaki Sayaki's poems before while studying her collaboration with another Japanese director and playwright Yudai Kamisato in the early 2010s.<sup>9</sup> I recalled that she was still relatively unknown then. A few days later, I replied to Hagiwara asking to meet again to delve more deeply into the core themes. Over the course of the next two or three months, we continued to exchange ideas both in person and online, each time discovering new aspects that led to further reflections.

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<sup>9</sup> I am currently writing a PhD thesis on the work of Japanese playwright and director Yudai Kamisato who was born in Peru.

## THEORISING THE WORK-IN-PROGRESS (SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2022)

A month after my visit to Drama-kan, Hagiwara posted a blog about the whole workshop experience. From the very beginning Hagiwara honestly described his own and the other members' struggles with the topic and whether the company should tackle it theatrically:

This 'lack of desire' may have the same root cause as my own 'incomprehensible desire.' In any case, when the Nanjing Incident is brought up, it seems that we are inevitably compelled to react in an excessive manner compared to other events, which is very intriguing. (Hagiwara 2022)

Hagiwara added, referring to the Japanese, that:

Our bodies do not embody history as 'perpetrators'. Being a victim of war and being a perpetrator are not contradictory things, but a coexistence. Differences in history give the Japanese and the Chinese not only different perceptions, but also different body images. (Hagiwara 2022)<sup>10</sup>

After reading this, I immediately thought of a series of lectures by Roland Barthes entitled *Comment Vivre Ensemble* (1977), translated as *Living Together* or *How to Live Together*. In these lectures Barthes employed the notion of *idiorrhythmy* as a utopian model for social coexistence which respects the idiosyncratic behaviours of its members. In Barthes' words, "Neither dual nor plural. Something like solitude with regular interruptions: the paradox, the contradiction, the aporia of bringing distances together – the utopia of a socialism of distance" (*How to Live Together* 6). Barthes took

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<sup>10</sup> My emphasis

these ideas from idiorhythmic orders who were purged from the early Christian church so that monks could be controlled centrally. I would draw a parallel here with the way that the silent prayer mentioned earlier has been taken away from spiritual practices, often for political purposes, such as honouring the war dead. Barthes further explained the origins of the Greek word *rhythmos* which is also a synonym for *rule*, thus paving way for modern forms of political organisation. Similarly, in considering the 'Nanjing Incident,' David Askew (2004) observed the difficulty of overcoming semantics in such debates; the lack of consensus about the numbers of killed in Nanjing; and the very idea of what constitutes a massacre among Chinese, Japanese, and English historians and activists. In short, it is evident there are irresolvable contradictions in how the 'Nanjing Incident' has been memorialised. When talking about the problem from a Japanese perspective, Hagiwara stated:

It is only the 'victim' aspect that remains firmly in our bodies while that of the 'perpetrator' fades away quickly. Therefore, when faced with responsibility for harm, it is not possible to see it as our thing, but rather it can backlash. Isn't this more of a question of the body than an historical explanation or of establishing the facts? This is where I see room for theatre, a medium that uses the body. How can our bodies as perpetrators deal with the memories? (Hagiwara 2022)

Again, I feel that the notion of *idiorrhythmy* is useful to better understand Hagiwara's perspective. This is evident in Barthes's description of its function which is not to protect the purity of identity, but rather its spatial arrangement – its dispersion, not concentration. (*How to Live Together* 58). Thus, the process of creating theatre works could be formulated through the opening of Barthesian aporia in four distinct steps

that are described in *How to Live Together* 1) finding other people's bodies unsettling or disconcerting, 2) experiencing confusion and fantasising about calmness, 3) setting out the rules that would achieve calmness 4) extinguishing the desire of others which also extinguishes the desire to live. In this way, aporia is resolved. (*How to Live Together* 72-73). Our contemporary world stops at the third step and shifts to desire through rules. However, in theatre we can deal precisely with Barthes' last step through the dispersion of the performers' and spectators' bodies in a form of co-existence at a distance that does not extinguish the desire to live.

### **GOING BACK: NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM (FEBRUARY 2023)**

It has been some time since our paper was accepted for the ATWG colloquium. Since then, the company has performed the latest version of *Oregayo* as part of the YPAM Fringe Festival in Yokohama (Japan) in December 2022, where they included some of the material about Nanjing. The interconnectedness between the company's various performance pieces is arguably a sign of their desire to create a recognisable dramaturgy.

I arrive in Tokyo a week before the ATWG meeting in Taiwan. The following day, the preparations for our presentation begin. Over that week, I attend three rehearsals. The company has made a firm decision to start preparing the new piece. Compared to last summer's work-in-progress, there is very little body work. It seems that there is a desire to step back, to discuss and re-think, rather than move forward with the actual staging. Despite this, it is a full-on process with its inevitable ups and downs. The questions, the answers, the silences, the boredom, and the feeling of impasse are replaced by sublime, unrepeatable moments.

When breakthroughs occur in the rehearsal room, I too draw on my knowledge of theoretical frameworks and of my intrinsic knowledge of

performance histories and share them with the company. For example, when Shimizu describes how at some point in her life she thought the flag of Bangladesh had similarities with the flag of Japan, I offer Hiroki Azuma's *Philosophy of the Tourist* (2017) in which Azuma described the tourist principle as the issue of the Other. For Azuma, the tourist is someone who misdelivers precisely because they find the familiar in the unfamiliar, creating a potential to coexist with the Other.

Our late-night conversations lead to a discussion about Azuma in relation to a TV documentary, *Hinomaru*, by the Japanese angura theatre and film director Terayama Shūji. In this documentary, Terayama asked Japanese people on the streets: "What is the meaning of red in the Japanese flag?" and "Do you have foreign friends, and if a war were to start would you fight against them?" What I observe, however, is a marked difference between Terayama's confrontational attitude and the company's desire to shift this inquiry to include non-Japanese people in such conversations, even if they are still coming to it from a Japanese perspective.

I am particularly struck by the exchanges that sometimes result in an important corrective to my own thinking. For example, we discuss myths and mythologising in theatre. At that point, I think of Eiji Oguma's work *A Genealogy of Japanese Self-Images* (1995) in which he called for the liberation from all myths. However, Hagiwara notes that recycling myths in theatre is necessary for the purpose of critical engagement.

The most fascinating moment occurs during the second day of preparations. All four of us start to draw images and write words based on questions such as "what is the meaning of Japan to you?" and "how do you perceive Japanese people?" For the first question, Hagiwara and Shimizu draw various things that most people would associate with Japan – from Mount Fuji to food. Ito draws a very detailed image of a tree with all its roots. I split a piece of paper in two – one half which I leave blank and on

the other where I draw some waves. It is interesting to see the kind of public images, or rather, the memorialising of Japan that emerge from these drawings and we spend considerable time discussing them (see Fig. 4). Why are certain images stronger and more persistent than the others? I refer again to Eiji Oguma's work which discusses how the Japanese self-image, at least at the macro and socio-political level, has always changed depending on Japan's relationship with other countries and the wider world. (Oguma 299). How is my image and perception of Japan and the Japanese different to the members of the company, and what are the reasons for this?



Discussing the drawings. © photo courtesy of Kamome Machine

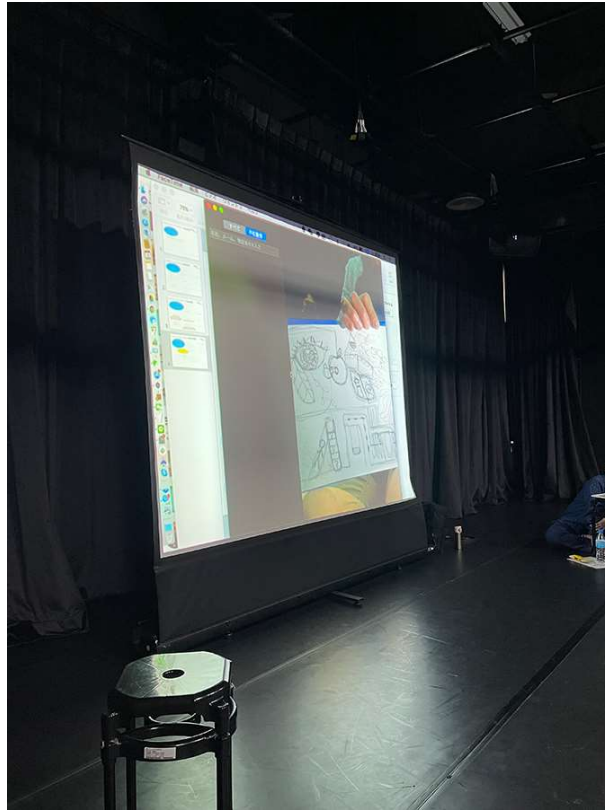


Barthes discussed the total meaning of an image, and especially the works of mass communication (such as the image of a nation) that “all combine, through diverse and diversely successful dialectics, the fascination of a nature, that of story, diegesis, syntagm, and the intelligibility of a culture, withdrawn into a few discontinuous symbols which men 'decline' in the shelter of their living speech” (*Image, Music, Text* 51). This certainly resonates with the above-mentioned exercise. Our scattered drawings of various Japanese symbols emerge from our desire to tell our own personal story about Japan. Our combined drawings equally confirm that the differences (our intelligibility of culture as unified) play a part in the creation of the total meaning of an image.

For the question about how Japanese people are perceived, I struggle to draw a single image. In the end, I resort to writing numbers and letters connected as an image. (see Fig. 5). I discuss this with the company members. I conclude, and the company members agree, that this is perhaps because my memory of living in Japan in my youth, the image of Japan presented in the media and the image I have now as an adult are in conflict. We then contemplate the idea of public and private images and memories, a theme that is a constant preoccupation of the company.



I gave a ten-minute introduction of the company's work combined with a short work-in-progress report. The company then conducted a workshop-style presentation with the attendees. This included an exercise where they invited participants to draw an image employing a similar process to the ones mentioned above. However, this time Shimizu, Ito, and Hagiwara told a personal story about the war that they had heard from someone else and asked the participants to illustrate it. Hagiwara talked about his grandmother and the bombing raids on Tokyo during the Second World War. Shimizu told a story about her having to do homework about 'her family and the war' and of her grandmother's reaction when she asked her for help. Ito spoke about a person from Nanjing he had listened to during last year's research. The results were fascinating and diverse. Some participants literally reproduced what they had heard, others drew images of varying degrees of abstraction. (see Fig.6). This exercise exposed how theatre-making enlivens the imagination of each spectator.



Sharing of drawings at Asian Theatre Working Group Colloquium. (c) Beri Juraic

What emerged though were further questions as noted by Hagiwara on social media: “how is memory transmitted? what is human memory? what is the relationship between the memory and the body?” (Hagiwara, 2023). This links with the work done prior to this colloquium about public images that are presented to us and affect our bodies in the moment, and that impact our memories, which then linger in our bodies for longer (also feeding into Barthes’ notion of total meaning of image). In the following months, the work continued now and then, without my presence.

**A LETTER FROM OKINAWA (8-21 MAY 2023)**

*Dear reader,*

*I am sending you this letter from Okinawa in anticipation of the next stage in the creation of Kamome Machine's work on Nanjing. I also share notes from Hagiwara's diary and final report that I have translated exclusively for you. The company is moving towards creating an actual performance, and they have decided to do a two-week residency in Naha, Okinawa at the Theatre in My Town (Wagamachi Shōgekijō). Okinawa is an island where the memory of the war is ever-present due to the high concentration of American military bases, so it seems like an ideal place to continue the process.*

*Prior to my arrival towards the end of the residency, the company conducted several site visits and connected with Okinawan residents and academics. Ozawa Ibuki, a child psychiatrist, specialising in trauma care, also joined for part of the residency. One day, whilst still in the UK, I woke up to a message from Hagiwara about an interesting breakthrough moment. They tried reading a speech by the Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War. (see enclosed photo) Hagiwara wrote in his diary: 'Facing each other, reading this speech... we changed 'our country' to not only 'I' and 'us', but also, importantly, to 'you'.' (Hagiwara, 2023). Later in the final report, he pointed out that 'changing the subject and altering the meaning of the text in the process is one of my common techniques.' (Hagiwara, 2023.)*

*Most importantly, as part of the residency, the company reflected on the performance structure and on the different dynamics between the company*

*members. Before coming to Naha, Hagiwara also created a performance blueprint in the form of a text. For this reason, the questions 'what is theatre?' and 'how do we tell someone else's story?' frequently arise, and our exchanges mainly revolved around this line of questioning. In one of the exchanges in Naha, Hagiwara tells me that they are creating more than ever as a collective.*

*Hagiwara later wrote in his report on the difficulties of this new process for the company:*

*'Within the text I made, there were testimonies of the victims of the Nanjing Incident. As someone in the position of 'using' the text and of the performer who 'uses' it, it felt natural for me to 'use' this text. However, for the performer who takes on the role of bringing these words to life, it felt ethically problematic to handle them freely, just as they cannot freely manipulate their own performing bodies. This made the interpretation of these testimonies difficult. Is it permissible to 'use' words? If they are to be used, for whom are these words being used? Who determines the 'true meaning' of these words? Because these are sensitive words, we had to discuss the ethics of handling them... So, what is permissible and what is not in art? The criteria are heavily influenced by how each of us perceives art, in other words, our individual artistic perspectives. However, issues revolving around such fundamental attitudes are inherently unsolvable precisely because they are fundamental...' (Hagiwara, 2023)*

*and on the opportunities encountered:*

*'Through many stays in Okinawa, we have connected with various local artists but now also many other people. For example, we encountered Zainichi Koreans, former Self-Defence Force members, and individuals battling life-threatening illnesses. Friends who have stepped into a local theatre seemed to feel comfortable there, unlike in enclosed rehearsal spaces. We spent time with them in conversation and in such a pleasant environment, and they observed our interactions. Through these experiences, something may or may not happen.'* (Hagiwara, 2023)

*These challenges and opportunities can be seen in the showing of the work-in-progress on the final day. It is creation by trial and error; the product of hard work and not magic as audiences (and researchers) are often led to believe. Failures are also part of the process. On the one hand, there are some very poignant moments in the final work-in-progress presentation such as Shimizu's imaginary description of a painting of the 'Nanjing Incident', or Ito's recollection of stories heard last summer from Chinese students. On the other hand, there are also parts still in the incubation period, but the company is now better placed to reflect on these in the coming months and years.*



Reading former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's speech. (c) photo courtesy of Kamome Machine

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### **(NOT) CONCLUSION**

In Kamome Machine's work, I see their methods as a process of opening, or rather, potentially opening, the afore-mentioned aporia. They achieve this by enabling the audience to *listen through seeing* the text or speech being written onto a performer's body and through an exchange of thoughts. As a researcher in the rehearsal room, I was able to witness these processes and methods of creation, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding. Equally, I felt that it was useful for the company to carefully consider a range of perspectives from an outsider. My role was also to document, for international audiences, their unique artistic practice and to highlight how their repertoire of works change with each new iteration. In that sense, this paper can also be viewed as unfinished, and the conclusion can only be considered as a moment in time. The internal and external



inputs, outlined in Hagiwara's writing, significantly contributed to the thinking and re-thinking about how to approach the 'Nanjing Incident' in theatre. Above all, I think the experiment within the Asian Theatre Working Group offered some other paths of conducting research in Asian theatre scholarship. While this might not always be possible, such encounters and exchanges, or, as Kamome Machine called them, *experiments in sharing thoughts through body* - and, as I would add, *through the ear* - could also serve as one of the templates for collaborative research with theatre-makers. Future exchanges with the company will no doubt reveal some other new and completely different perspectives on how such research could be achieved.

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