



Weekly Opinion

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The "Kanikosen" Boom Reflecting Present Day Suffocation

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Home > Features > DY Weekend

Weather

DY Weekend

Top

'Text to Speech' poses important questions

Mieko Sasaki / Special to The Daily Yomiuri

Four men and two women stare at their own computer screens while passages on fictitious wars, conflicts and terrorist activities are broadcast in a variety of languages through their computers.

This was the opening scene of Text to Speech, a provocative 50-minute work choreographed by Gilles Jobin, a Swiss contemporary dancer and choreographer. This introduction instantly transported the viewers into his world of virtual realities. Text to Speech, which was premiered in Paris in March, was performed last week at the Spiral Hall in Tokyo by the Compagnie Gilles Jobin.

Jobin, who was born in 1964 in Geneva, is noted for his gamelike approach to subjects, including relationships between the self and others, differences between the sexes and the correlation between man and material. Text to Speech, meanwhile, is his first work to employ text.

Broadcast from the stage were imaginary news announcements in synthesized voices telling of wars, terrorist activities, violence and disregard for human rights. Some incidents felt quite real, while some seemed unrealistic. However, one might consider anything could happen in view of the current state of the world. Jobin urges the audience to take those incidents as familiar and urgent subjects, despite being fictitious or taking place in some far off country.

The six dancers, including Jobin, began to move suddenly while listening to the news broadcast. The synchronization of news and physical reactions was diverse. At times, they moved as if to visualize the contents of the news. At times, their movements did not seem to be related to the announcements. In one instance, a woman began to dance a solo featuring straight-line movements, without revealing any emotion, as if to enclose herself in her own territory. In another scene, a couple performed a tangled duet, like a cat's cradle, with their hands constantly remaining entwined.

The woman also performed a quiet solo with lots of long sticks piercing her

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bikini, but she didn't appear as if she was being tortured because she showed no sign of pain. Changed into a uniformlike costume, she kicked a naked man on the floor as she held a video camera in her hand. This unmistakably reminds the viewers of the ill treatment of prisoners of war. Later, contrasting this imagery, she became submissive and was carried along the floor by a man and a woman acting as human rollers.

Also impressive was a scene in which a man violently kicked a car tire again and again. What was he really trying to kick?

One noteworthy stage setting was the use of ropes, which were stretched at random across the stage. They did not seem to portray borders used to separate the performers or the circumstances they were expressing. Did they indicate the multipolarization of our world?

The use of projections also was symbolic. A steadily burning flame--possibly placed upon a mantelpiece--was displayed on computer screens. Projected simultaneously on a large screen was a picturesque view of an aquarium with colorful aquatic plants and tiny fishes. What did this contrast represent?

Jobin's representation left the audience with a lot of questions, in part because Text to Speech comprised many short sequences that seemed unrelated to each other. He might simply be presenting a composite image of the modern world as seen from his point of view. Only after the stage has been darkened and the computer screens turned off might it be the viewers' turn to activate their own innovative channels focusing on the world.

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