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A theater of evocation that holds the universe in your heart - Review of Nahum's ``Another Life'' and ``Poetics of Orbit''

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"Now, close your eyes and breathe slowly." The performance began with such a voice. The room was lit with a faint red light, and everyone in the audience closed their eyes. Breathe in and exhale slowly. As you concentrate on the way your breath moves through your body, your strength gradually eases, and as you feel the sensation of the chair you're sitting on, your body becomes more and more relaxed. Just as I was about to fall asleep, I heard the guide's voice.

"Now let's go down the stairs one step at a time." Following that voice, the stairs I imagined in my head began to grow downwards. "1, 2, 3..." I went down the stairs every time I counted, and finally stood in front of a large door. ``From now on, our respective journeys begin."

When I opened the door, I was greeted by a hazy, light-colored landscape.

“Intangible art” that resides within each person

This is a memory from the beginning of ``Another Life," an experiential performance using hypnosis methods by Berlin-based artist Nahum. Nahum's themes are space technology and meditative methods. Some people may be skeptical about that combination, but his philosophy remains consistent. ``Imagining the universe that exists within everyone" is the essence of the theatrical experience created by Nahum. At Theater Commons '20, a two-part lecture performance was held: ``Another Life," which lulled the audience into a meditative state, and ``Poetics of Orbit," which spoke poetically about the politics and cultural policies surrounding space.

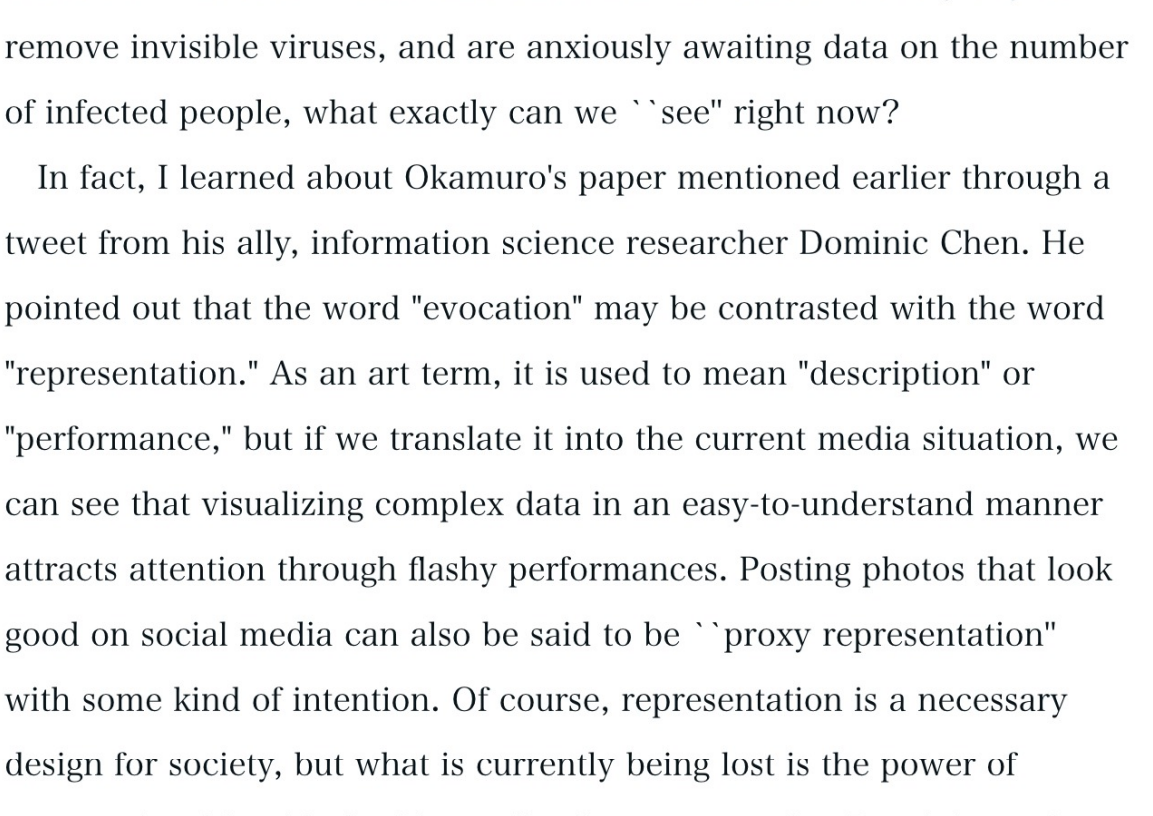
In ``Another Life," the story progresses in each audience member's mind as guided by Nahum (or more accurately, guided by an interpreter who reads Nahum's script). At first, it was a scene from my own memory, a scene from a movie somewhere, a glimpse of the universe, a view of the future hundreds or thousands of years from now...this is what "daydreams" were like. A series of scenes that come to mind. The countless images evoked there are unique to each audience member. Nahum says that this image is the ``intangible art" that resides in each person's heart.

Nahoum, who learned hypnotherapy while attending art school in London, uses hypnosis in his work as a method to tap into people's deep psyches. However, it is different from the common ``hypnosis" that causes your body to stop moving or say things you never thought it would. In reality, hypnosis is a type of therapy that works on a person's internal consciousness, and the meaning lies in the process in which the individual spontaneously creates an image, rather than an arbitrary suggestion made by a guide. What Nahum places emphasis on is ``evoking people's images."

A theater of evocation where deep images open up

What does it mean to evoke an image? Minako Okamuro, known for her Beckett studies, discusses Samuel Beckett's essay ``BECKETT, YEATS, AND NOH: ...but the clouds... as Theater of Evocation" [1]. Taking the theme of ``...Like a Cloud...", I will discuss the relationship between Irish playwright William B. Yeats and Japanese Nohgaku under the title ``Theatre of Evocation." The term was originally coined by theater researcher Katherine Worth. Yeats, who was also keen on researching necromancy, is said to have been deeply influenced by Japanese dream Noh, but according to Okamuro, Beckett's ``As a Cloud..." is a combination of Noh and Yeats. The influence of both can be seen. The first thing that stands out is the stage set. As you remember from the Noh stage, the movement and props on stage are kept to a minimum in Noh. Whether a demon appears in the play or a female ghost starts talking, ``the audience's imagination creates the background and set." The story of ``...Like a Cloud..." also unfolds around invisible tables and chairs.

Okamuro points out that ``Noh was of fundamental interest to Yeats in that it uniquely dramatizes the evocation of spirits," but this was not limited to an occult interest; It may have been his desire for an elaborate image that appears between reality and illusion, as if he were "half asleep." Noh depicts many Itako-like situations in which the main character, shite, is possessed by a spirit and begins to speak in the spirit's place. The presence of an invisible spirit is engraved in the minds of the audience as they imagine the moments of uncertainty in the shite, where the boundaries between self and others become blurred. Even if it's not visible right in front of you, you should be able to feel its presence. It's as if Beckett created a ``Gotho" in ``Waiting for Gotho" that never appears on stage. Okamuro concludes the aforementioned paper as follows. ``Noh must have attracted him [Beckett] because it is the art of waiting in a dream-like state for someone to arrive."



Imagination for the invisible

Nahum's ``Another Life" also evokes a dream-like state in which ``something comes into view." The title ``Another Life" does not mean starting over or being reborn anew, but rather the traces of a life that can be imagined infinitely in images. Imagination for things that are not here and cannot be seen reveals the possibility of a new life. This seems like a very suggestive message at a time when the world is changing due to the new virus. As we sterilize our hands with alcohol every day to remove invisible viruses, and are anxiously awaiting data on the number of infected people, what exactly can we ``see" right now?

In fact, I learned about Okamuro's paper mentioned earlier through a tweet from his ally, information science researcher Dominic Chen. He pointed out that the word "evocation" may be contrasted with the word "representation." As an art term, it is used to mean "description" or "performance," but if we translate it into the current media situation, we can see that visualizing complex data in an easy-to-understand manner attracts attention through flashy performances. Posting photos that look good on social media can also be said to be ``proxy representation" with some kind of intention. Of course, representation is a necessary design for society, but what is currently being lost is the power of ``evocation." Intuitively, I immediately commented to Dominic, and whenever we had the opportunity to speak on stage together, we often talked about this ``Evoation."

I got so excited that I started a group called ``School of Evocation" for one day and talked with some of my closest friends. It was a project similar to ``Buratamori," in which we strolled around Ebisu, the venue, looking for something that aroused us (we called it ``evo-mi"), but it brought back memories of a strangely fulfilling afternoon. We just smile and say things like, ``I'm curious about the angle of that telephone pole," or ``I like the texture of that wall," but as we look for something more evolutionary, the scenery of Ebisu changes. I often describe Evomi as ``a local small restaurant that makes you want to enter just by the appearance of the entrance," but no matter how many Tabelog ratings it gets or whether there's a signboard, the atmosphere it creates is... You could also say that it's like a sense of smell that detects strange things.

Who does the universe belong to?

I'm off topic, but I think that remembering the depths of things and sensing the presence of things that cannot be seen is one of the abilities that everyone has. Nahum extends this evocation to the universe and humanity. The second half of the lecture performance, ``Poetics of Orbit," began with questions about the history of humanity surrounding the universe. In addition to his artistic activities, Nahoum also presides over a space and art platform called KOSMICA, and is also the chairperson of the Cultural Applications Technical Committee at the IAF (International Astronautical Federation) in Paris . He continues to practice cultivating the seeds of "culture" in the soil.

In 1969, humans landed on the moon for the first time in history. This is a historical event that everyone knows about, but Nahoum adds: "In 1969, 32 white male astronauts became the first men in history to set foot on the moon." At this time, there was a woman who volunteered to fly to the moon. Nahum reads a letter sent to the woman by NASA. "Unfortunately, women are not allowed to participate in this mission." It was written that women were excluded because of the unprecedented situation and their physical abilities.

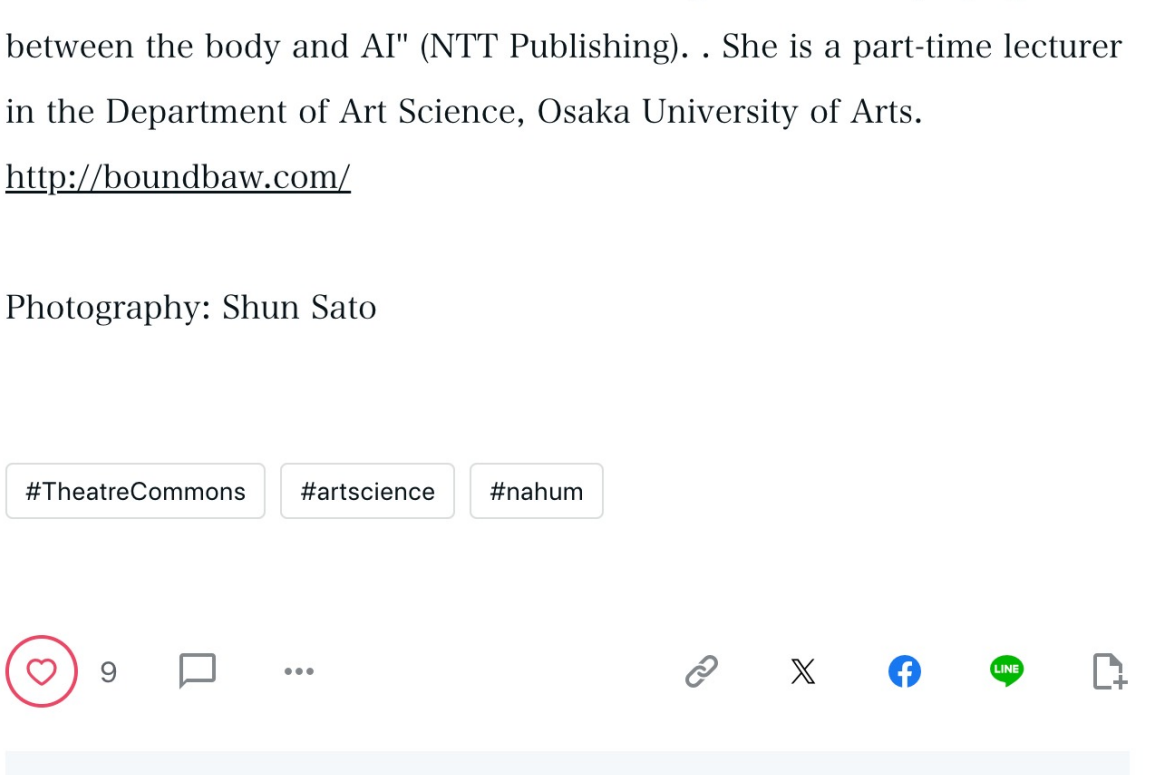
Why? Considering the social situation in America at the time, it is easy to imagine that the concept of diversity did not even exist. Even if it is now possible for female astronauts to participate, Nahoum complains that space exploration is still rife with ``colonialism," dominated by economically wealthy nations with advanced technology. . Is it possible to spark a discussion that will create cultural diversity in space exploration, which has a major impact on society? He believes that nurturing the imagination that leads to such discussions is important in solving the current social problems on earth.

So Nahum asks: "Who does the universe belong to?" Then he started talking about a Syrian refugee girl he met in Berlin. As part of his activities at KOSMICA, he visits shelters and camps where refugees and immigrants live in various countries, and holds workshops with children to think about the mission of ``leaving Earth and going to space." ``By adding the perspective of space to people who feel like they don't belong anywhere on this earth, it's an opportunity to get them to feel and think about the vastness of the space they live in," says Nahoum. They cannot return to their home countries or freely travel to other countries, let alone go to space. However, you can still travel around the world and even fly into space in your mind. In response to the call of Nahum and others, a girl from Syria compared herself to the moon and created a story that looks at the Earth.

I would like to think about the beautiful story she has written in light of the way we have now entered the world of ``with corona". The virus is not something we can defeat; it has been around for a long time. Now that we know that humans cannot control the world alone, what is true richness to live with? Rather than trying desperately to control something, I pay attention to the smells and sounds of the wind and listen intently, as if waiting for someone to come. Open your senses to every corner of the world, gently close your eyes, and play with the images that are evoked from deep within your body. Environmental philosopher Timothy Morton called such practices "ambient poetics" [2]. Nahum's poetry evokes the power to perceive such a world.

[1] Okamuro, M. (2010). Beckett, Yeats, and noh:...but the clouds... as theater of evocation. Samuel Beckett Today - Aujourd'hui, 21, 165-177

[2] Timothy Morton, “Ecology without Nature: Toward a Future Environmental Philosophy” (Translator: Masatake Shinohara/Ibunsha)



人類が、地球を出て、宇宙の星々に
住んでいるのを想像してください。
そこにいるのは、どのような人類
でしょうか?

______________________________Arina Tsukada

Editor and curator. She is the editor-in-chief of Bound Baw, a media outlet that conveys art science from around the world. She is the representative director of Whole Universe, a general incorporated association. In 2010, she started ``SYNAPSE", a project that connects science and different fields, together with young researchers. Since 2016, she has been in charge of media strategy for JST/RISTEX "People and Information Ecosystem". Her recent books include ``ART SCIENCE is. Transformation of the world guided by art science" (BN Shinsha) and co-authored ``Information environment - A guidebook for playing between the body and AI" (NTT Publishing). . She is a part-time lecturer in the Department of Art Science, Osaka University of Arts.

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