



Ce este dansul contemporan? What is contemporary dance? コンテンポラリーダンスって何ですか?

Eastern Connection contemporary dance Romania—Japan | 2013—2015

BY
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Eastern Connection

Eastern Connection (EC) is a cultural exchange programme between Romania and Japan. Schemes like this usually tend to be limited to artists – you travel back and forth the hotel and studio, create your artwork, and you’re done. You really have no time to fully understand that country’s culture. Once you return home, you forget all about it.

EC is different. Participants include not just artists, but also producers and critics. EC believes, “It’s important for those who connect artists and societies to also understand about each other’s cultures.” Indeed, this is very unique.

EC is a three-year plan.

Choreographer and curator Cosmin Manolescu and I met in Bucharest back in 2011, talked about a future collaboration programme, and agreed to work together. The following year, Saison Foundation awarded him a fellowship in Japan where he stayed for 6 weeks. During that time, he met different Japanese artists and got inspired to later invite Zan Yamashita and Mikiko Kawamura as participants in the future exchange programme to be called Eastern Connection. Shinji Ono, producer of Aoyama Theatre (now Dance New Air International Festival), and myself were also invited to join the platform.

In autumn 2013, the Japan team visited Bucharest, Romania. The two Japanese artists stayed for one month, Mr. Ono and I for almost weeks, to meet the participants from Romania. Between the two countries, we had lectures on the history of dance and discussions on the different environments for dance, as well as workshops and gatherings.

Our timing coincided with the protests in Bucharest against Roşia Montana, making this a very valuable experience. Many EC participants talked about dance during the day, and went to demonstrations at night. Romanian protests, which have a history of defeating the Ceauşescu government, were clearly different from those in Japan, both in terms of scale and momentum. I was surprised most by the fast pace with which the group of protesters marched the streets.

The Roşia Montana issue reminded me of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The two incidents are about polluting beautiful water and land.

Both the earthquake and nuclear disaster were big tragedies. However, there was some anticipation that the incidents would pose an opportunity to question how Japan stands as a country. It was hoped that people would now think twice about lives that continued to revolve around valuing efficiency. We were meant to realise and escape a system of citizens being cleverly exploited by both government and corporations alike. Unfortunately, we find Japan proceeding to resume operations of nuclear facilities.

It was interesting then how the Romanian side continued on the discussion hearing this. “We defeated the Ceauşescu government, but now that we think about it, perhaps it’s still the same kind of people who are running the country.”

Japan and Romania are completely different countries. Yet by thinking about each other’s problems, we found ourselves thinking of our own country’s problems in a new light.

In 2014, the second year of the EC, choreographer and dancers Cosmin Manolescu, Zan Yamashita, Mihalea Dancs, and myself participated in the exchange programme in Japan.

First, there was the residency creation activity (8/16–8/21) at the Kinosaki International Art Center. The facility was situated in Kinosaki Onsen, Hyogo Prefecture, where old Japanese street-scapes still remain to this day.

During our gathering, we looked back at the exchange in Romania during the previous year, and raised some key words from the experience. We found ‘water’, ‘air’, and ‘travel (transport)’ were particularly important:

- Water (hot spring, sea, flood, alcohol, pollution: Roşia Montana and Fukushima nuclear disaster)
- Air (kite, breathing, Dance New Air)
- Travel (crossing various borders, transporting the body)

In Kinosaki, in addition to visiting the hot springs, we also hiked along a mountain path that felt like more like an animal trail, saw fireworks, and flew kites at Kihihama bathing resort. We then returned to the studio and discussed about the shared experiences, trying out various different movements. We found that at times, shared physical experience would be reflected directly in the movement we came up with, whilst at other times, they would be hidden more in the under layers of the work.

Following Cosmin’s suggestion, we talked about “What contemporary dance means for me” through flying kites in the studio, and experimenting with “Japanese selfies

(violently shaking your face or hiding the face in the moment the picture was taken, creating selfies that didn’t properly show your face).”

There are numerous movements and gestures fostered over a long history in each culture. However, this is something you don’t usually realise. One way of understanding this residency programme would be as a buildup of self-discovery through the other.

During 8/22–8/24, Zan, Cosmin, and Mihaela continued working at Zan’s studio in Kyoto. They seemed to have gone and visited places like a ninja restaurant.

During 8/25–9/17, we moved to Morishita Studio in Tokyo, and began to engage in serious creation. Ştefania Ferchedău also joined the team. Morishita Studio was a venue offered by the Saison Foundation, the main financial supporter of Eastern Connection. Zan and Mihaela created a simple duet “Don’t Let Me Down”, where they mutually read each other’s body movements as they traveled across the stage.

Cosmin created “The Kite” where all the four of us (Cosmin, Zan, Mihaela, and myself) participated. It encapsulated our experiences over the two years, including visits to the karaoke booth, the kite museum, as well as the various dance performances we viewed together.

“What is contemporary dance to you?” was a theme that ran throughout.

Contemporary dance is not something that points to a particular dance style such as ballet or hip hop. “Anything goes” is its base understanding – you can just sing incessantly or lie on the floor and still call it “contemporary dance”. This widened the possibilities of dance, but at the same time, diminished some of the passion that went into dance. True enough, there are many performances where set design gets more attention than the dancer’s physicality. However, this is exactly why questioning what contemporary dance means to each individual poses a fresh new approach.

These two works were performed as works in progress at Morishita Studio in Japan on the 16th and 17th September 2014 as part of producer Shinji Ono’s Dance New Air International Festival.

2015 marked the third year for EC.

The artists continued to pursue the realities of their own bodies. At the same time however, I feel, “Contemporary dance will continue to play an important role for our countries to better understand each other’s culture.” Dance can instantaneously draw out reality embraced by society before it’s even verbalised. What’s important is for both parties, in the real sense of the word, to really understand each other’s cultures. The creation of work can come after that. EC is an important step towards this. ●



Found in Translation.

In Conversation with Mikiko Kawamura and Zan Yamashita

INTERVIEW BY
ȘTEFANIA FERCHEDĂU



Japanese choreographers Mikiko Kawamura and Zan Yamashita have been in Bucharest on the occasion of Eastern Connection project, between August 26–September 23, 2013. The first phase of the programme included a workshop held by Zan Yamashita, open to Romanian dance professionals, presentations by the Japanese artists, lectures by dance critics Mihaela Michailov and Takao Norikoshi, the presentation of the “(anti) aging” performance, as well as the process sharing of the Eastern Connection artistic residency. The project also included a reflection platform aimed at exploring the possibilities of artistic collaboration between Romania and Japan, which brought together the above named artists and dance writers, as well as producers and festival curators from Japan and Romania.

The conversation with Mikiko and Zan took place at the end of their Bucharest residency, in a warm September evening, in the relaxed atmosphere of a Bucharest café, enjoying a late beer, a tea and a coffee.

ȘTEFANIA FERCHEDĂU:

I would start our conversation with something I liked very much, which was brought into the conversation by Mr. Shinji Ono (at the time producer of Aoyama Theatre and Tokyo Dance Triennale – currently Dance New Air festival, present in Bucharest on the occasion of Easten Connection). At the last edition of the Tokyo Dance Triennale, participating artists were invited to propose a book or an author that they like to the audience, and then the respective books became part of a book stand from where the audience could acquire them. So, what do Japanese artists read? Do you have time and feel like reading between shows and working trips?*

MIKIKO KAWAMURA:

I like to read, I even worked in a library for four years. But I only read Japanese authors.

ȘF: *As you mentioned the Japanese authors, is Murakami among your reads, how is he perceived in Japan?*

ZAN YAMASHITA:

He is very popular, a bestselling author.

ȘF: *Do you like him?*

ZY: Yes, I do, but most critics don’t like him because he is considered commercial and because his novels are influenced by the American post-modern novel, and he is not original, he is copying. But I like him, I don’t know the American novel. I believe it’s important to have writers with access to many people.

ȘF: *What about you, Mikiko?*

MK: I read philosophy, Buddhism. What is beautiful, good or bad, true or false. I am more interested in philosophy than in fiction. However I read Japanese science fiction, my father has many science fiction books in our house. I used to read these when I was a child.

ȘF: *Which were your children books, the ones you grew up with and that still follow you somehow?*

ZY: There are many stories in Japan. Anime stories have influenced us. The kind that say, “you do good things, you will be fortunate”. Now it is not clear any more if these are about the difference between good or bad.

ȘF: *Mikiko, you said, and I saw your presentation video, that you like to do many things, to sing, to knit, how come that you chose to dance?*

MK: Maybe the people around me always told me that I have to be on the stage. Actually at this point I lack motivation, I am not so excited any more about what I do. But before I had a lot of motivation, I don’t know why this happens now, maybe because I am too busy, I don’t know. All the time I am thinking I want to do something, but I don’t know what exactly, there is always something I want to do. I believe that young people of today, myself included, don’t know to think enough and we are lacking a higher motivation.

ȘF: *So when you want make a new piece, you start from an obsession that you need to fulfil?*

MK: When I start a new piece, it’s because of a lot of unhappiness. Being unhappy makes me very creative.

ȘF: *So what will you do when you will be very happy? And what kind of influence does your personal life have in your piece, if their source is your personal unhappiness? Mikiko is drawing the level of unhappiness between present and future. She explains in the drawing that she will be even unhappier in the future.*

MK: I am only happy when people give applause at the end of my pieces. Audience is my motivation. It is a connection with my personal life in my pieces, but not directly, there is an influence in the piece. Personal experience is deeper.

ȘF: *You said you keep a diary. Do you go back to it, you read it again at some point?*

MK: No. But I use this diary for a newspaper I give to the audience when I present my pieces.

ȘF: *Mikiko is very unhappy at 23. What about you Zan, how were you at 23?*

ZY: I was very happy. I was moving my body. And I had a girlfriend that went to India and she got another boyfriend there and she sent me a letter from there explaining the situation. Sad story, but I understood. India is very dangerous for lonely women. My first creation was at 24. There were a lot of issues at that time. Ah, it’s already 20 years ago. I was living in Kyoto and I was often changing the apartments. The first performance at 24 was called Music and I tried to make music while I made dance. I offered dancers to make sound from objects. 20 min. performance, I was happy with the piece.

ȘF: *Mikiko, I read this interview of yours in which I liked this idea you had saying that our bodies are made of water. How did you get to be interested in this idea?*

MK: I always played with water and I realised I cannot catch water and started to ask why. I am fascinated with water. I want to live my life like water, not to be ever caught. I think water is clear and has a clear movement that inspires me.

ȘF: *Did you use this idea anywhere?*

MK: I don’t have a water piece yet, this is maybe the first time I say this. I think water is clear and has a clear movement that inspires me. She starts to draw. Scientist research says beautiful language gets into the water and then the water’s particles become beautiful. But ugly language poisons the water and I am affected by this experiment.





My body in the water becomes clearer, I think. The clearer the water is in my body, the clearer is my movement. Sometimes living with ugly is also beautiful.

ŞF: *And for you Zan, what is beautiful for you?*

ZY: Human concentrating on something is beautiful, reading a book or a person doing something... I do not think how audience will think about what I do. For me the process is important and I focus on this. I want the audience to feel my process, I think this is beautiful.

MK: Sometimes I try to show ugly things during the performance and this is also beautiful for me, even if the audience does not like it and cannot look. I challenge to show ugly things, because I think this is beautiful as well.

ŞF: *Do you have an idea on something new to work on, something that you would like to do?*

MK: A new work is coming up. It is natural to have new ideas, but when I close my eyes to try to sleep many things appear. I choose from these, mix and build on them. This is a natural way of working for me. Now I want to create a piece, somebody says – I want you to make a piece, this is the performance date, performance date. I can't think at anything else right now.

ZY: I have a lot of ideas. But it depends on the opportunities to make these happen and of the context. Performing art is difficult to make without support. The most important thing for me is the process, I don't have a special message, I don't want to change the world. I would only concentrate on my process, and then I hope to come up with some message and motivation.

ŞF: *Why do you think the process is important?*

ZY: When I look at an art exhibition or at a movie – and I like both kinds of arts – I want to know the way these were made. How is this art made. If I was impressed with this, at first my feeling is how did the artist make it. I'm interested in how the work is made. And also I cannot predict the audience response, all the time this is different. One time it's very good work, but the audience response is bad. Or the other way around. A work doesn't look good for me, but the audience likes it. I have to focus on my process.

MK: The audience sees the result and labels as good or bad.

ZY: Norikoshi-san (* dance writer Takao Norikoshi, participating to Eastern Connection) told me I am not able to take part in competition because I don't have confidence to take part in. I live in Kyoto, I made my work very independent and therefore I can concentrate on my process. I don't care about the result.

MK: In what I am concerned, I don't like people to look at me when I work, to watch the process of my work. I'm not a very sharing person. If people are not looking at me, I can make something. Sometimes this is good, but it makes me feel empty.

ŞF: *Have you already started to think about the next project, now that you reached the end of this residency?*

ZY: Yes. This weekend I am reading poems of a Polish writer. It's a festival made by the Embassy of Poland in Tokyo, but it's not difficult work. This residency was very good, very open. Cosmin (Manolescu) said to me many things, even bad things. Japanese people are very closed,

but he can say everything. Other people don't say anything, maybe they keep for themselves. This is was very good for me.

ŞF: *How did you feel during the presentation, all of you together?*

ZY: It was good atmosphere, and there was a good relationship with the audience. Basically I don't like when the audience looks very critically at my work, and the audience at ZonaD was critical, but I felt it was very warm as well.

ŞF: *Why do think audience is very critical?*

ZY: Sometimes I feel a distance from the audience. Maybe it's just a feeling. When I am on the stage I feel lonely. But I didn't feel lonely at ZonaD. Basically I don't like improvisation, I hope to make a clear work.

ŞF: *What about the presentation in Cluj?*

ZY: I was only reading my text. Usually I do that with dancers, who are dancing my text. But in Cluj I let only text and I said to the audience please use your imagination. Cluj is a nice place, I wanted to walk by myself. I hope to stay longer next time. Cluj is similar to Kyoto.

ŞF: *With what sort of feeling are you leaving, after so many changes?*

ZY: I like changes. I have to know about world issues more. When I came here I thought this was short time. But now it seems a long time. Maybe I have to spend two years for this project. I want to tell much more about my opinions here on Rosia Montana, the National Dance Centre. I want to say my opinion, but I'm very confused I need much better English skills.

ŞF: *But you wrote on your blog.*

ZY: The blog is only like a diary in pictures.

ŞF: *Going back to the presentation, for me it was about translation, being lost in words, words that don't get through. I like the idea to find something in this mistranslation, it's very performative and it can go very far. Maybe we name the piece Found in translation, because it's about something that comes out, very positively. It's something you find, it's not lost. Do you have questions for me?*

MK: Why do you work at ZonaD (* ZonaD studio – ongoing space between 2012–2014, transformed in a mobile platform in 2015)?

ŞF: *It's like when you make a piece. ZonaD is my playground, my piece. Like you keep alive your pieces, we keep alive ZonaD. What about you Zan, do you have any questions for me? I put you in a vulnerable situation, so you can do the same. Zan takes a lot of time to think.*

MK: Japanese people think a lot, but they speak less. ●

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The Children Workshop
in Bucharest

[OCTOBER 24, 2015]

I have never run a kite. I always gaze and look lustfully to those that strive to run a kite high by running on the beach or fighting a wind sometimes much too whimsical. I have never imagined that the place of a kite may be anywhere else than on the sky, flying in the wind. Likewise I have never imagined a kite but in the hand of a child. All these images have been turned upside down. This summer, on the beach, there were only men (full grown so to say) with professional kites, so strong that they even lifted their runners from the ground (professional and probably at astronomical prices). And recently I've seen how a kite can find its way on a dance floor.

I am writing about kites in a performance space now because I stayed for three hours in a venue (Replika) with eight kids, a choreographer (Cosmin Manolescu) and different kites, bigger or smaller, made of paper or of plastic sheet, tied on a thread or on a bamboo stick, and I observed how something starts like a game, chaotic and despotic from the one outside, like any game, and then can finish at the same time with a general pommeling, but also with thoughts about dance, about art. And these thoughts are coming from some 5–7–8 year old kids.

The kites were brought from Japan together with the idea to link contemporary dance to kite running. In Asia kite running is very popular; probably from here also their great variety comes as well.

For the beginning, Cosmin Manolescu proposed the children to befriend the kites, after they designed together a set of rules. More precisely: take care of the kite and take care of yourself; don't break the kite, but also, don't hurt yourself. The children, four girls and four boys (the youngest, a 5 year something old one) each ran a kite, without knowing that, a little bit later, they will be asked to remember exactly the movements made while they were playing.

"Close your eyes and imagine you are a kite", Cosmin tells kids. That's a piece of cake, right? Not really, because the kites are plenty, none identical to the other, and the kids have of course preference and it's not easy for them to decide. Or more precisely all of them want to become friends with the same kite (especially the boys, with the biggest one, of course). "Try to find the kite in your body. I want to see how your body becomes a kite".

"In dance workshops, there is nothing like good or bad, it's important to discover something" – the space, the movement, the relationship of your own body with the space, Cosmin tries to explain the children. I would venture to say that this should not be seen at children of this age, but unfortunately this is one of the outcomes of the (Romanian) education system, this need for confirmation coming with the fear not to make a mistake. And these kids have it as well, even if they are uninhibited and cheerful.

Sometimes the kites are stubborn. They don't go up, their threads twist, they even break.

- I'm tired, Eva says.
- I know, it's hard, Cosmin answers. Mr. Cosmin.
- What is dance? What do you think dance is? Think a little bit, what is dance for you?

- Something beautiful.
- Something free.
- A game.
- An art.



From the Rehearsals

[OCTOBER 30, 2015]

- Why are you doing this?
- I don't know. Contemporary dance is always...
- Do you like to dance?
- Yes, I like to dance.
- Do you like to sing?
- Yes, I like to sing.
- Do you like to make love?
- Yes, I like to make love.
- Do you like to read Murakami?
- Yes, I like to read Haruki Murakami.
- What is contemporary dance?
- It's better than working in a tofu factory.
- Do you dance like an octopus?
- (Zan answers in Japanese). Cosmin, in Romanian:
- Can you do the same thing, but imagine that you are a kite?
- Yes, you can be a kite. You do understand me, right?
- In general (Japanese people), are you sincere or only polite?
- **ZAN:** What do you think, this is contemporary dance?
- **COSMIN:** I don't think so, contemporary dance should give me an emotion. To provoke something in me and this... doesn't.
- It's very technical; I think this movement suits you very well. But I need more, if you turn, more softly, but you are too quick, if you imagine the chopsticks attached to your body, only then it starts to become contemporary dance.

This is a corner from the construction site of a performance. Cosmin Manolescu (Romania) and Zan Yamashita (Japan) work together on a *show* that questions the nature of contemporary dance. "What is contemporary dance" the two choreographers ask each other, and I don't think the future audience should wait for an answer, but only follow a journey. A route between several questions on art, society and life, between doubts and unknown things, between cultural differences and affinities, a route that many times passes on the thin edge between personal and art. For the moment, when I write this text, the two artists don't know yet how the performance will look like, this is only a construction site, as I said, there is still a great deal of improvisation and the future elements of the show only now start to connect and coagulate. A conglomerate of ideas and objects, movements and dialogues, of sounds and silent moments, together with the energy and fragility of every beginning. Above this, a recording of dance critic Takao Norikoshi in Japanese, talking about contemporary dance. "What is he saying?" Cosmin asks. "Contemporary dance is a white field. Anything can happen", Zan answers.

I was with them on the second day of rehearsals in Bucharest. I made notes for everything I saw, from objects – a fuchsia pink director's chair, a small children chair *made in China*, tens of Japanese chopsticks, two tatamis, a selfie stick, a book, three kites, a masage stick, two similar anoraks, a blue one, for Zan, a neon green, for Cosmin – to movements, exchanges of words between Cosmin and Zan, a sequence of sounds. If I look at my notes, they also look like a construction site. It's difficult to choose and I know that anything I would write here may very well have nothing to do with what we will see at the National Dance Centre Bucharest on November 12 and 13.

- Do you think dance should be political?
- I don't think so? Do you? Should art be political?
- Should dance be political?
- No, I don't think so. What do you think?
- Yes, I believe dance should be political.
- Do you prefer Japanese or European dance?
- I don't know exactly what you mean when you say Japanese dance. If we talk about traditional dance, then I prefer the European one. If it's about contemporary, then I prefer the Japanese one.
- Do you prefer Zan Yamashita or Cosmin Manolescu?
- Zan Yamashita. What choreographer do you prefer?
- I have recently discovered Kazuo Ohno. I also like Zan Yamashita. I think I'm his fan. If you were a choreographer, I would love to work with you as a dancer. ●



Interview with Cosmin Manolescu

[OCTOBER 31, 2015]

EV: *You find yourself now at a stage in your career when you are working on a piece called “What is dance?”. How would you characterize this period in your career?*

CM: What is contemporary dance? I am at a great age and I believe the experience of my journeys in Japan and of the projects I made there and in Bucharest led me somehow to this question. I started to ask myself what is dance?, what is contemporary dance?, and in fact, what am I doing?, what I propose to the audience?, is there one spectator or more?, has dance to deliver anything?, is dance political?, that is a bunch of questions that came up, connected to the experience of relating to the Japanese culture, with the context there, completely different from what is happening here in Europe.

EV: *Why do you feel this need, to define and define your dance? Is this a stage that comes up in any artist’s career at some point?*

CM: I don’t see this as an attempt to define, because I don’t believe one can clearly define dance. Everybody perceives dance differently, depending on their experience, state, and data that form a moment, a certain context. I believe there are more questions about what is happening to me, concerning the situation of dance in Romania, questions about the status of the cultural sector, about things that are worrying me. I’m more pessimistic at this point, I feel that in our country, the situation of culture and, in general, of the performing arts field is deteriorating instead of improving. It’s a moment of inhibition, if you want, the audience numbers are low, and there are several problems that, after 15 years of intense activity in this field, make me ask myself serious questions.

EV: *This experience of the Japanese culture and society seems to have been very important for you. When did you travel for the first time there and what happened that changed so much your perspective on art?*

CM: My wish to go to Japan appeared in 2005–2006. Even in the Visa Game piece I was talking about how nice it would be to travel to Asia and experience Japan. Somehow this experience was mediated through a workshop of a renowned Japanese choreographer, Ko Murobushi, that I attended in Vienna in 1999, and he opened for me the appetite for this philosophy completely different from the European space. It took 10 years for me to actually go to Japan.

The first time I went there on the occasion of a fellowship offered by The Saison Foundation, Tokyo, an extremely interesting and strong organisation, which supports contemporary dance and theatre in Japan, with an excellent infrastructure – three rehearsal studios, a performance space, artist residency space for accommodation, all at the artists’ disposal for 365 days a year. I travelled a lot there for six weeks and I met around 50 artists, producers, critics from the dance field. This is how I connected to the Japanese dance scene and, among these many people, I also met Zan Yamashita in Kyoto. At that point he was a fellow of Saison Foundation, who can support an artist for 6 years. For this period an artist may receive an annual fellowship of 10–15–20.000 USD, which allows him to develop his activity. It’s a long term support, first it goes for three years, and then, they can reapply and if they produced some performances and have some results, and may receive it for another 3 years. Zan was in the last year at that point.

We had very interesting discussions then. Normally, the official meetings in Japan last exactly how they were scheduled, if you scheduled a 30-minute meeting, this is how long it lasts. The meeting with Zan was one of the few which broke this typical Japanese format, because after the scheduled part, he asked me if I wanted to go somewhere else for a beer. We went out of this very rigid and disciplined structure of the Japanese society and stayed in a café where we had for two more hours a very interesting conversation about our artistic process, how we conceive our performances, about life and death. This is how the dialogue started and I tried to understand more about his creation, about Kyoto and the local context, while he was trying to learn more about Romania.

This meeting was essential for the kick-off of the Eastern Connection project.

I met also other people in 2013 when I launched the project together with Ștefania (Ferchedău). We invited five dance professionals: one very young artist, she was only 23 then, but she was very talented and she’s now one of the stars of Japanese contemporary dance, Zan, who is from another generation of artists, a producer, a festival director and a dance critic. We brought them to Bucharest, where Zan gave a workshop and selected Mihaela Dancs, who later joined our research group, formed also of Mihaela Michailov, Miki Braniște from Temps d’Images, and together we had a period of discussions about what happens in Romania and Japan. The Japanese artists came here determined to produce something, because in Japanese society you need to produce something all the time. For them it was mandatory that, along the few weeks they were staying in Romania, they make something, a piece, a performance, and I tried to explain them that we needed more time for that, and that not the product was important then, but the experience of working together and of our meeting, in the studio or outside. Somehow Eastern Connection is more a platform of dialogue and experiences, materialized also in 2014, when together with Mihaela Dancs, Zan Yamashita and dance critic Takao Norikoshi we regrouped in Japan. At this point, in Bucharest, myself and Zan we continue this process, a final phase, which concludes with a public presentation, we name this performance, but we don’t know if it’s show, a film or simply a dialogue...

EV: *A laboratory.*

CM: It’s in fact a laboratory that we open for the audience, in which we recall memories from our experience together and we ask questions about dance and life in our countries.

EV: *What do you like from what Zan Yamashita is doing?*

CM: We are very different in what concerns our artistic language, but he has humor and he works very well with text, with words, he is an exploratory artist, who, just like me, is in search for something, and questions himself. I believe our personalities met at this crossing point, in this search for an identity. He also has a political message in his pieces, in regards to what is happening now in Japan, he asks himself some questions. I am also asking myself questions at this point. Now we are working for only two weeks, but I think the result will still be very interesting for what is happening now in our country: a cocktail of different moments – dance, questions, film, or kite

running. Already from last year, the kite got an important role and it made me rediscover something from far back in my childhood – kite running. This game made look at dance and movement with new eyes, to get a new perspective, more Zen, I would say, on things.

- EV:** *Quite so, what is with this kite? You also gave a dance workshop for kids, where you combined the playing with the kite with dance movements.*
- CM:** All things are linked and the experience I had this year in September, when I literally ran the kite in Tokyo, in different public spaces, around governmental buildings, in public gardens or in the streets, made me continue and develop this kite workshop. I gave a kite workshop in Kinosaki. It was open to adults, but many kids also came and eventually it was a mix of children and adults, which functioned extraordinary. In Bucharest it was only for kids, because I was curious to see how they react, but looking at the parents waiting for their children, I saw they were also willing to grab a kite. I think I could also develop a version for different ages. Anyway, it seemed an interesting approach for children. As you also saw, the boys were asking themselves why boys can't dance. I believe that in this way they discovered they can move differently, they can dance and enjoy it, and this is beautiful. This year in Bucharest Eastern Connection started with this workshop at Replika Centre for Educational Theatre and it was a good start, we felt that something special happened. I will certainly continue this kind of kite workshop, I believe it's very beautiful.

- EV:** *Earlier you told me what brings you together with Zan Yamashita. What about what is sets you apart?*
- CM:** There are many things that are different. For instance, at this time in my career, I work a lot with audience interaction, and for him this is very complicated and difficult. He prefers to take distance, to be stay in a sort of expectation, and this is transparent in our dialogues, in the way we relate and we answer each other. I am much more focused on a certain type of movement and energy, on a certain emotion, while he is much colder, more calculated, rational, clearer. He needs things to be very clear and precise, what questions to ask; while I let questions come depending on the moment, on what he says. These are cultural differences, influencing the way in which relate – see the questions in regards to touch (is it ok to touch?), to sincerity (is it ok to be sincere?). I think these are normal differences among people with different lives and ways of seeing things. I was drawn exactly by these differences that can be positively integrated in our project.

- EV:** *What will happen with this show after November 12, 13?*
- CM:** My intention is to also develop a solo version, I mean I will collect a relevant content and the show will have a solo version to be presented next year as well. My reunion with Zan is obviously a costly one, so I have to think of this other version as well. I'd like that this experience does not disappear. I hope the piece will be performed many times next year. This is something I wish for every piece, but this remains a utopic wish, because in Romania there are not many possibilities to perform, and I lost my capacity to promote and present my pieces. I will perform the piece as much as I can in this context in 2016. Even if at this point Eastern Connection comes to the end of a three year period, I hope to find further support in Romania and abroad to continue this exchange project with Japan. I think there are many things to be done in both contexts, and I believe the experience of Japanese artists in Romania is extremely important. Zan Yamashita and Kim Itoh told me that the way the audience reacted at their performance was very good for them, it was much more intense than in Germany or Switzerland. Romania is not an important country for the Japanese, most probably they don't even know where we are on the map. They always work with Germany, France, etc...

- EV:** *There are more funds there.*
- CM:** Yes, but also the context and the relation at economic and political level are much more important. Japan has no connection with Romania, but I think that the 6–7 artists and dance professionals who came to Romania observed that something is happening here, that there are some issues. In 2013 when they were here, we had the Roşia Montană protests. This was for them something extraordinary, they even went with us on the streets, and these moments are recalled in the performance. So I believe this is an important experience I wish it can continue, even if in Bucharest and Romania, in general, international projects are not favored. I hope other artists will connect to the Asian scene and use the door that I open through this project, I was a trailblazer since 1996 and opened many roads for the Romanian dance scene.

- EV:** *Do you know what contemporary dance is?*
- CM:** Ah, I have a personal definition that I really like. It's an art that can structurally change you conception about body, people, and life. Contemporary dance is an emotion, something very alive, an art of the present which asks questions and transforms us. ●

BY
ELENA VLĂDĂREANU

NAMAEGANAI – There is no name

6



From the Performance

[OCTOBER 28, 2015]

Namaegana*i* or *There is no name*. Even before seeing the piece created by Zan Yamashita and performed by Kim Itoh I thought I would start from the title. Because this is the kind of title that says more once you see the performance than at first sight, and not because I was necessarily waiting for something precise. Anyway, as a regular Romanian audience member that does not have too often the occasion to see performances made in other places, the less so shows from Asia, once can expect anything, it doesn't matter. This *Namaegana*i** performance does not come only with a different stage version and other references – cultural, social, artistic ones –, but it also impose to *itself* to *you* a certain rhythm of development of things on stage that generate a strong feeling of strangeness.

So, I start from the title, because, in a dialogue with a ladder – yes, a metal ladder used for painting – the performer (Kim Itoh) is asked: “Who are you?” and “What do you do?”, and he answers: “I dance” and “Namaegana*i*”, there is no name (for this dance). This last part seems to address especially this European audience, who, captured by this feeling of “strangeness” mentioned above, would need to be told at a certain point: “*keep calm*, even if it doesn't seem so, what you see is a dance performance”.

A ladder, two wooden panels, several paint containers. Without marking in any way the moment, the piece starts when the performer arrives on stage, in sneakers and in a red overall. He speaks very softly, like for himself, in Japanese, of course, while the translation is projected on a screen. A sort of flow of consciousness, a flow of words and ideas without any connector than the memory of the one who speaks. All the references are to a real everyday life, unknown to us and hardly legible, but one of nowadays Japanese society. For instance, the job in a tofu factory, about which the performer talks, is real, Zan Yamashita really worked in a tofu factory at the beginning of 1990s. No doubt, we also have here a *cultural clash* between Asian and European societies, and the way in which Zan Yamashita chooses to represent this gap is equally amusing and irreverent. Kim Itoh touches his genitals talking about geopolitics (a potential war China–Japan), saying: “I made this sign in Romania and they didn't care”, referring to the identification of the genital zone through a triangle. Then he draws the map of Japan and he transforms it into a bike.

For Zan Yamashita text is very important. He started his artistic career with a performance called *Poetry reading*, in 1994, and a first inspiration source for him and his pieces were precisely the people who read, that he considers being very beautiful. In another performance, *It is written there*, before the show, the spectators received a 100-page text, each page being performed on stage afterwards. His pieces explore the relation between body and language and the tensions that appear when the body has to represent/ translate the verbal language in movement. This is how Zan Yamashita explains his interest in text, in an interview from 2011: concerned by oblivion and memory, more precisely by the fact that he cannot remember the choreographic pieces he created along the years, he asked himself if he would better remember his creations if he used words. “That is when I became conscious of words as a methodology for dance”.

As for Kim Itoh with whom Zan Yamashita chose to work for *Namaegana*i**, he played an important role in redefining Japanese dance in 1990s. Kim Itoh's roots in butoh dance can be seen in *Namaegana*i**: spasmodic movements, irony and sarcasm, minimalism, grotesque, taboo, the natural beauty of the body vs. the convention of beauty, the natural expressivity of the body.

Interview with Zan Yamashita

[OCTOBER 30, 2015]

- EV:** *You started to dance when you were 19. How is this age for dance in Japan? Is it late or early to start dancing at 19?*
- ZY:** For a dancer, it is very late. Usually, most dancers start much earlier, so that at 19 years old it was a little bit late. I wanted to become a musician, so I made a rock band, in which I was playing the guitar. But soon I realized that I had no talent for music, instead I was much more interest in body movements. But no in making music, but in the way I was moving my body. And then it happened that I saw some dance performances, at the time there was no contemporary dance. Nobody name

it “contemporary dance”. Instead, there was butoh dance and I attended many butoh performances in the 1980s. And this is how I started to want a career in dance. Butoh dance was very popular, but there were no butoh dance classes, so I started to take modern dance and classical ballet classes. I had to build my own style, to run and become a dancer.

EV: *But before dance and the rock band, what was your job?*

ZY: My father was the editor of a *go* magazine. And he suggested that I became a professional *go* player. So I learned *go* from my father and I used to play it every day. I was in elementary school, then in high school, and all that time I was also preparing to become a professional *go* player. But when I was 15 or 16 years old, I became interested in talking about myself, it is very important for a teenager to present himself to the world. So I had a conflict with my father, I told him that I didn’t want to play *go* anymore and I decided to play the guitar.

EV: *So the guitar was your first interest in the artistic field.*

ZY: Yes.

EV: *Do you remember how you were when you started to dance?*

ZY: I was very furious. I think now the society in Japan is free and very open, but at the time it was very rigid, everybody had to do the same things, to follow the same education. Japan is a very small island and I experienced a big frustration as a teenager.

EV: *Was this feeling of frustration typical for your colleagues?*

ZY: Yes.

EV: *So was it linked to your generation?*

YES. The society was also very competitive at the time, now the population is decreasing, but when I was a teenager it was increasing. There were very many competitive people in our society.

EV: *Was this competition also in dance?*

ZY: No, on the contrary. Nobody was making dance. The dance world was not a competitive one, I felt freer in it than in our Japanese society.

EV: *And was this valid for the entire artistic field or only for dance?*

ZY: Maybe only for dance. I remember that music was very popular when I was a teenager, heavy-metal, pop music, techno music these were all popular in Japan, which means that many young people were making music, were singing in a band, but very few started to dance. I wanted to dance because it was a less competitive field.

EV: *And you started by dancing in the street.*

ZY: Yes, it was very short moment. It was at the same time when I was playing in the band. I was making music from 16 to 18, and then I started to dance at 18–19, and for a very short while I was both musician and dancer, and I was dancing in the street with my musician friend.

EV: *How were these performances in the street?*

ZY: These were improvisations, centred on body. My body was striking the paving. And there was music as well. I didn’t use language or dance techniques; I was just throwing myself to the ground.

EV: *When did you start to use language in your performances?*

ZY: Around 1995. At the beginning I was only a dancer, but in 1995 I started to work on my own creations. I wrote the choreography in a text when I worked at my first performance in 1995.

EV: *Why did you begin to use verbal language in a choreographic work?*

ZY: Initially, I wanted to use video, because it’s very effective in capturing movement. But in 1990s, in Japan, new media were very popular, we had the Pahomas group that was active around the world, and the field became very competitive. I found difficult to be original in using video technology, so I chose to use to be *low tech* in my performances, by using a pencil and a paper, that was all.

EV: *Earlier you’ve said that you were not necessarily a talented musician. While reading your interviews, I observed that you also insist in saying you are not a good dancer. Why do you think so?*

ZY: I am much too tall for a dancer and too thin as well. For instance, in classical ballet and in modern dance, the male is strong, full of muscles, while my body is thin. It’s ok for a musician, but not for a dancer.

EV: *But in some pieces you work with your own body, in other ones you choose to work with other performers. When do you work alone and when do you work with other performers?*

ZY: It’s just a question of budget. If I have money, then I work with other dancers, if not, then I have to work with my own body.

EV: *So it’s not easy to be a contemporary dancer or artist in Japan.*

ZY: No, absolutely not.

EV: *How do you fund your work?*

ZY: It is very difficult to apply as independent artist; most funds are available only to theatres and to the producers of performances, so I work with different theatres and festivals. There are also several foundations to which I can apply even as independent artist and sometimes a win a grant, but it’s very small.

EV: *Do you have another job?*

ZY: No, only dance. Fifteen years ago I worked in a tofu factory.

EV: *And how was it?*

ZY: Very hard. Tofu is a traditional Japanese food and I was working in this tofu factory from very early in the morning – as tofu is made very early, it has to be very fresh, it should be consumed the day it’s made – and we had to finish before afternoon, it’s a very hard work in a tofu factory. At the same time, it’s a job which proves to be very generous time-wise for the work of an artist.

EV: *Why is it so important for you to link your pieces to a historical and social context?*

ZY: For me, contemporary dance is a personal movement. Usually, dance creates a community, likewise hip-hop for instance. But contemporary means personal, independent. I started to present myself in the pieces I was making, but at a certain point I got tired, mostly after I passed the 40-year threshold. No I am 45 years old and in all my pieces before 40 I was talking about myself, but recently I became interested to look at society and connect to it.

EV: *Because you work with Cosmin Manolescu in a performance which questions the nature of dance, what can you say, what is contemporary dance?*

ZY: It’s very hard to answer to this question. For me, dance is better than working in a tofu factory. It’s my job. I know there are many styles of dance in the world, I like dance, but it’s hard to say what is contemporary dance.

EV: *How popular is contemporary dance in Japan?*

ZY: Not that popular, even if in schools and high-schools they do teach dance. At this point, each student learns dance in school, but hip hop or the history of dance, not contemporary dance. Everybody asks themselves what is contemporary dance, but nobody has an answer.

EV: *What about butoh? I read somewhere that butoh is more popular in Europe than in Asia. Is it true?*

ZY: Butoh was very popular in the 1960s and 1970s, and at the beginning of 1980s, but now is considered out-dated. For Japanese, it became a traditional dance, but probably in Europe and around the world, butoh is seen as very contemporary, in Japan it is however a traditional and avant-garde style.

EV: *Is it still an avant-garde style?*

ZY: Yes. For instance last week I travelled to Germany. *Krautrock* made in Germany was very popular in Japan in 1970s. Now when I asked Germans how popular now *krautrock* is, they told me it isn’t anymore, it’s obsolete.

The same thing happens in Japan as well with people who come and ask about butoh, and we tell them that it’s not popular anymore. But if you want to see butoh, you must go somewhere else, not in Japan.

EV: *In your work, you use many real references to your own life or the performers’ life. Why is that?*

ZY: I am trying to determine the spectators to see more points of view; this is the reason why I am using real facts from other peoples’ lives.

EV: *How did you work with Kim Itoh for Namaeganai?*

ZY: Kim Itoh commissioned me to make a solo piece for him, so I made an interview with him about his life, about personal things, I transcribed the interview and then I edited it with my own stories and various issues from Japanese society. So it resulted in a mix of Kim’s and my personal things and of recent events in Japan. We rehearsed together two months in a studio, we discussed every day and we made a text and body based work.

EV: *Kim Itoh is very close to butoh dance.*

ZY: Not really. His master was a famous butoh dancer, he passed away. Kim was influenced by butoh dance, but in Japan he is famous as a contemporary dancer.

EV: *How did you feel when the performance was presented at the National Dance Centre in Bucharest?*

ZY: I was very happy. The audience is very nice, I like the vibe in Bucharest.

EV: *What does it mean for you a nice audience?*

ZY: Ah, it’s hard to say, but the atmosphere was very open. I wouldn’t like that they laugh too much, I mean I want that serious moments are also observed, and that there is a balance between humor and serious moments.

EV: *Are you always present when one of your performances is presented?*

ZY: Yes, because I want to see how the audience is. Some days we have good audience, sometimes not.

EV: *What can you say about the performance you are working on now with Cosmin? You only have two weeks to finish it.*

ZY: It is directed by Cosmin, he makes the choreography. I’m very curious how it will be in the end.

EV: *Will you dance?*

ZY: Yes. ●

Timeline

Eastern Connection

2012	Cosmin Manolescu goes to Japan for The Saison Foundation fellowship (6 weeks, March–April)
2013	Eastern Connection round #1 in Romania Events in Bucharest at ZonaD studio, National Dance Centre, in Cluj at the Paintbrush Factory. PARTICIPANTS JAPAN: Zan Yamashita (choreographer), Mikiko Kawamura (choreographer), Shinji Ono (producer of Dance Triennale in Tokyo, currently transformed in Dance New Air Festival & programme director of Aoyama Theatre, Tokyo), Norikoshi Takao (dance critic & writer), Ayako Miyake (manager) PARTICIPANTS ROMANIA: Cosmin Manolescu (choreographer & manager, project initiator), Mihaela Dancs (choreographer/ performer), Mihaela Michailov (dance critic, dramaturge), Ștefania Ferchedău (art manager), Miki Braniște (director of Temps d’Images festival in Cluj) 27–29.08 Zan Yamashita workshop for professionals (selects Mihaela Dancs to join the project) 30.08–05.09 Reflection and brainstorming platform gathering Japanese and Romanian participants 31.08 Artists and producers presentation of projects – Mikiko Kawamura, Zan Yamashita, Ayako Miyake, Miki Braniște, Ștefania Ferchedău 02.09 jam session at ZonaD studio conducted by Cosmin Manolescu, with musician Vlaicu Golcea and video artist Cinty Ionescu 03.09 lecture about Japanese dance by Takao Norikoshi 04.09 lecture about Romanian dance scene by Mihaela Michailov 05.09 (anti) aging performance by Mădălina Dan & Mihaela Dancs 06.09–23.09 choreographic residency Mikiko Kawamura, Zan Yamashita, Cosmin Manolescu, Mihaela Dancs 17.09 artists sharing process at ZonaD studio 20.09 artist talk with Zan Yamshita and Cosmin Manolescu at Paintbrush factory in Cluj
2014	Eastern Connection round #2 in Japan 02–16.02 Cosmin Manolescu and Ștefania Ferchedău attend Yokohama Dance Collection EX and TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama 16.08–23.09 Artistic residency at Kinosaki International Arts Centre, Kyoto and Morishita studio in Tokyo with Cosmin Manolescu, Mihaela Dancs, Zan Yamashita, Takao Norikoshi 17.08 Artist talk at Kinosaki International Centre 13.09 Artist talk at Dance New Air Festival in Tokyo 16–17.09 works in progress presented at Morishita studio in the frame of Dance New Air Festival: Don’t let me down , by/with Zan Yamashita & Mihaela Dancs; the kite , directed by Cosmin Manolescu, with Zan Yamashita, Takao Norikoshi, Mihaela Dancs, Cosmin Manolescu 18–22.09 Performing the air – workshop for professionals with Cosmin Manolescu at Aoyama Theatre, in the frame of Dance New Air Festival.
2015	Eastern Connection round #3 in Japan and Romania 10–28.09 Artistic residency in Tokyo and Kinosaki International Arts Centre with Cosmin Manolescu, Zan Yamashita, Tania Cucoreanu. Shooting on location for What is contemporary dance artistic documentary of Eastern Connection and the kite project. 19–23.09 Performing the air – workshop for amateurs with Cosmin Manolescu at Kinosaki International Arts Centre Eastern Connection showcase in Bucharest Events at National Dance Centre Bucharest, Replika Centre for Educational Theatre and J’ai Bistrot. 24–25.10 the kite – dance workshop for children 28.10 NAMAEKANAI (There is no name) , performance by Zan Yamashita, with Kim Itoh 29.10–11.11 final production residency for the kite project with Cosmin Manolescu and Zan Yamashita 02.11 Kazuo Ohno – the body and the soul are one – evening of films 10.11 Introducing Dance New Air Festival in Tokyo with Maki Miyakubo 12–13.11 the kite or what is contemporary dance – performance by Cosmin Manolescu, performed together with Zan Yamashita. Includes the artistic documentary by Tania Cucoreanu and Cosmin Manolescu, and artist talk on 13.11.



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