

E I A R A K A W A M I T A N D E R E N  
E I A R A K A W A W I T H O T H E R S

Die im Westen wenig bekannte japanische Performancegruppe Jikken Kobo («experimenteller Workshop») begann 1951 mit ihren Aktionen, also noch drei Jahre vor der Gutai Art Association, die im Westen als Begründerin der japanischen Performancekunst gilt. Von Beginn weg ging es ihr um eine medienübergreifende Kunstpraxis jenseits aller künstlerischen und gesellschaftlichen Klassifizierungen, um eine Kunst, die über die Kunst hinausging, die ausserhalb des Museumsraumes stattfand, sozial relevant war und sich in enger Berührung mit dem Alltagsleben entwickelte. Das Kollektiv, das sich aus vier Komponisten, drei Malern, einem Druckgrafiker, einem Pianisten, einem Fotografen, einem Dichter und Kritiker, einem Lichtdesigner und einem Ingenieur zusammensetzte, realisierte bis 1957 eine Reihe von ephemeren Aktionen und Aufführungen, die nur spärlich dokumentiert sind. Die Gruppe mit ihrem Mentor, dem Poeten Takiguchi Shuzo (1903-1979), verzichtete beziehungsweise verweigerte die Konstruktion einer klaren Identität, weil eine solche letztlich wieder nur zurück in die Ideologie und Exklusivität führen musste. Da sie kein Manifest verfasste, an keinem Ort verankert war, keine Werke hinterliess und im Gegensatz zu Gutai nicht von einem führenden Kopf vermittelt und vernetzt wurde, geriet Jikken Kobo unweigerlich in Vergessenheit.

Gemeinsam war beiden Gruppen jedoch die klare Ablehnung von «gadan», dem fest etablierten japanischen Kunstsystem westlicher Prägung. Diese Haltung verband sie wiederum mit den japanischen avantgardistischen Künstlergruppen des New Art Movement (shinko geijutsu undo), die zwischen 1910 und 1930 aktiv waren und von denen MAVO die bekannteste ist. Aktiv zwischen 1923 und 1925, entwickelte MAVO unter der Führung von Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977) den sogenannten Conscious Constructivism mit dem Ziel, ein Bild des modernen Lebens zu entwerfen, das sich jenseits von Abbild und Repräsentation entwickelte, dafür aber in grosser Nähe zu alltäglichen Realitäten. Murayama Tomoyoshi stammte aus gebildeter christlicher Familie und war Autodidakt (was ihm den Blick des Aussenseiters verschaffte), er war Illustrator für populäre Kinderzeitschriften und begab sich 1921 für elf Monate nach Europa und insbesondere nach Berlin, wo er mit der internationalen Avantgarde, mit dem Expressionismus und Konstruktivismus in Kontakt kam, aber auch mit Niddys Impekovens Ausdruckstanz und marxistischen und sozialistischen Gesellschaftstheorien. Ende 1922 kehrte Murayama nach Japan zurück und gab im Juli 1923 die Gründung von MAVO bekannt, begleitet von einem Manifest, in dem u.a. steht: «In short, in terms of

organization our group is a negative entity. Kurz gesagt ist unsere Gruppe bezüglich ihrer Organisation ein negatives Wesen» Im Gegensatz zu den europäischen avantgardistischen Gruppierungen existierte MAVO jenseits ideologischer Überzeugungen und Solidaritäten. Während zwei Jahren zelebrierten die Mavoisten eine umfassende anarchistische Aesthetik mit Bühnenbildern, Aufführungen, akrobatischen Performances, Architekturmodellen, Ausstellungen, Tanz, Büchern, Zeitschriften, Wanddekorationen, Skulpturen und Strukturen. 1925 löste sich MAVO auf. Murayama radikalisierte sich weiter, wurde 1931 Mitglied der Japanischen Kommunistischen Partei, kämpfte für intellektuelle Freiheit und gegen Zensur und japanischen Militarismus und geriet dafür wiederholt in Haft. Dabei verfolgte er seine Ideen eines anderen Theaters weiter und entwarf u.a. die Umschläge für *La Teatro*, einer japanischen Theaterzeitschrift, die 1934 gegründet wurde und bis heute erscheint. *La Teatro* bzw. Murayamas Umschlagsentwürfe bzw. die Geschichte von MAVO und Jikken Kobo bilden die Ausgangspunkte von Ei Arakawas «M.A.V.O.E.», präsentiert in *New Jersey* in Basel am 3. September 2009.

2009

- *Künstlerhaus Stuttgart*, Stuttgart, Germany, curated by Axel Wieder
- Pro Choice, Vienna, Austria, with the Pernice's students graduating in 2009
- UNNAMABLE BOOKS, NY, as Ouroboros (with Sergei Tcherepnin and Lisa Clair)
- JOHN CLAIR NIGHT, *Roulette*, NY, as Ouroboros
- SHINKOYO CIRCUS: IMPROV/COMP, *Roulette*, NY, as Ouroboros
- OUROBOROS CONCERT, *The Tank*, NY, as Ouroboros

2008

- THE COLOR BALL, *The Power Plant*, Toronto, Canada, with Chris Currei, Luis Jacob, Jon Davies, and others, with the installation of Scott Lyall
- AS IF SCALE, *Reena Spaulings Fine Art*, NY, with Nora Schultz, David Zuckerman, and others
- 8864 3362 2250 Z1 CDGRT, *BaliceHertling*, Paris, France, with Nikolas Gambaroff, and others
- THE ALTOIDS AWARD 2008, *New Museum*, New York, with Chase Granoff, Sakura Shimada, Andrew Smith, Sergei Tcherepnin, Nikolas Gambaroff, Georgia Sagri, Jenn Joy, Eleanor

- Erdman, Alix Pearlstein, Nancy Garcia, Ronnie Bass, Young Prada, and others
- YOKOHAMA TRIENNALE 2008, *Kanagawa*, Japan, with Mari Mukai, Naho Honma, Fumiko Oka, Fukiko Kishimoto, Reiko Nagae, Tetsuro Ochiai, Masato Ogami, Yoshitake Tomoko, Ito Haruka, Mori, Waka, Izumi, Hara, Aso, Davi, Amir, Shizuko
  - BUMBERSHOOT 08, organized by The Henry Art Gallery, *Seattle Center*, Seattle, USA as Grand Openings (with Jutta Koether, Jay Sanders, Emily Sundblad, Stefan Tcherepnin)
  - FRONT ROOM at *Contemporary Art Museum*, curated by Anthony Huberman, St. Louis, USA, with Richard Aldrich, Fia Backström, and others
  - FINISHING SCHOOL at *Edinburgh College of Art*, organized by Clémentine Deliss and The Embassy, Edinburgh, UK, with Stefan Tcherepnin, Gela Patashuri and students / alumni from Edinburgh College of Art
  - *Museum Moderner Kunst (MUMOK)*, Vienna, Austria, as Grand Openings with Josef Strau and students of Josephine Pride, and others
  - NON-SOLO SHOW, NON-GROUP SHOW, *Franco Soffiantino Arte Contemporanea*, Turin, Italy, with Nora Schultz and Henning Bohl
- EA For NON-SOLO SHOW, NON-GROUP SHOW we were three artists working together, Nora Schulz, Henning Bohl and myself, discussing ideas and doing installations and performances based on the dialogues we had. I had invited them because I didn't want to do a solo-show. But there was this hierarchy of me inviting them which we openly discussed. We made a kind of metal basket, a container without really thinking what we would put inside. It became the main object of the show and the opening's performance which was very much about deconstructing the idea of the solo-show within the gallery system. Next time I would like to have it deconstructing, but at the same time constructing even more.
- DB Did you always collaborative work?
- EA I did my first performance at the School of Visual Arts alone, I didn't like the solo performer expressing (or exposing) himself, I got too much attention, I found it solipsistic and found it hard to deal with it.
- DB What do you answer if somebody asks you what you are doing?
- EA During the preparation of my work, there is always a thing or a certain subject that I want to sort of look into, but in the end maybe I am making this movement or continuous, sort of, constellation of different projects. Somehow I am making a territory that is always somewhat unfixed.
- DB How do you proceed when you discover some material like the Jikken Kobo or the *La Teatro* magazines designed by Murayama?
- EA The material triggers my identification. In the case of Murayama it's the fact that he is working with a group and makes objects that are not only art objects. And he visited Berlin for eleven months, as I am currently in Germany for 9 months, this was a starting point too.
- DB An anecdote connects his and your history, then you do research and buy some issues of *La Teatra*. But what are you doing with this material, how do you proceed then?
- EA In this case I try to make the historical material more present, to handle it differently, to bring it closer to our bodies and the movement, and to give the magazines physicality.
- EGYPTED, curated by Will Benedict, *Kunst-halle Exnergasse*, Vienna, Austria, with Nora Schultz and Henning Bohl
- 2007
- PERFORMA07, *Japan Society*, NY, with Richard Aldrich, Alisha Kerlin, Daniel Lepkoff, Charles Mayton, Patrick Palermo, Patrick Price, Woody Sullender, Sakura Shimada, Jean-Marc Superville Sovak, Sergei Tcherepnin, Patricia Treib, with Amy Sillman's paintings
- EA But it's not that I am always working on Japanese artists. For instance, at the Japan Society, I did a performance about the paintings by Amy Sillman, who was my teacher at Bard. It was about how to deal with the culture of painting, about the ideas surrounding painting, while using her real paintings in the performance.
- INTERNATIONAL PRIZE FOR PERFORMANCE—THIRD EDITION, *Galleria Civica in collaboration with centrale FIES*, Trento, Italy, with students in Trento
  - SYNTROPIA, *NGBK Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst*, Berlin, Germany, with Bill Dietz, Sebastian, Andrew Smith, Nick Mauss, Ken Okiishi, Nora Schultz, Josef Strau, and many others
- EA In Berlin, I did RIOT THE BAR project for a second time, the Berlin version. Again different people would contribute and it ran again for eight days. For the first version at Bard College in 2005, we destroyed the bar at the end, in Berlin we destroyed it every night. The bar was made out of a lot of material and pedestals around to be used. The next day, we moved the bar to the next room and installed it again, or even outside, when the Kreuzberg gay parade was happening. We didn't have the portraits like at Bard College, but again, I informed the people about the profit I was making, as well as the interview of the participant of Stonewall Riot.
- ONE SEASON IN HELL, organized by Nick Mauss and Ken Okiishi, *Gavin Brown's enterprise*, NY
  - DEAD ALREADY, organized by Kim Gordon and Jutta Koether, *Reena Spaulings Fine Art*, NY, with Eleanor Eardman, Jessie Stead, Patrick

Price, Miki Ikeda, Shinsuke Aso, Sam Pulitzer, and others

- VARIOUS SMALL FIRES, *Royal College of Art*, London, UK, with Mari Mukai, and students of MA curating
- FOR THE PEOPLE OF PARIS, *Sutton Lane*, Paris, France, as Togawa Fan Club, with Fulvia and James, Yayoi, and others

## 2006

- MEERRETTICH ON ICE, *Volksbühne Sternfoyer am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz*, Berlin, Germany, as Togawa Fan Club (with Sakura Shimada and Eric Angles)
- MOVEMENT RESEARCH AT THE JUDSON CHURCH "ABOUT TOWN", *The Judson Church*, NY, as Togawa Fan Club (with Jay Sanders and Sakura Shimada)
- THE METAL MAGAZINE, *Galerie Meerrettich*, Berlin, Germany, with Nora Schultz and others
- KEEP PASSING THE OPEN WINDOWS, OR HAPPINESS, *Galerie Gisela Capitain*, Cologne, Germany, with Mari Mukai and others (catering person)
- ECHIGO-TSUMARI ART TRIENNIAL 2006, directed by Fram Kitagawa, *Tsunan High School*, Nigata, Japan, as Grand Openings with some high school students and their teachers
- *magicalART ROOM*, Tokyo, Japan, as Grand Openings with Haruka Ito
- THE DIMES OF MARCH, *Reena Spaulings Fine Art*, NY, with Mari Mukai, Sachiko Hirose, Jessica Arndt, Sakura Shimada, Adam, Aisha, Benjamin, and many others

EA This performance at Reena Spaulings went for four days, it took place inside of a group show and it was like renovation of a gallery-performance. We moved around artworks.

DB There was no difference between moving artworks let's say at the end of a show and your actual show.

EA Probably there is the difference. We documented it and made a magazine. I often make a magazine during the performance and distribute it.

## 2005

- EMPTY SPACE WITH EXCITING EVENTS, curated by Christian Rattemeyer, *Artists Space*, NY, with Sam Lewitt
  - PERFORMA05, organized by Jay Sanders, *Anthology Film Archives*, NY as Grand Openings
- EA The first Grand Openings took place in Tbilisi on October 31 and was based on a scenario developed by Jutta Koether, Jay

Sanders, Emily Sundblad and myself for PERFORMA05 scheduled for November 20. Then there was the re-enactment at Bard College made by other students as my diploma in Summer 2006 followed by Grand Openings at Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in the Tsunan High School, Nigata in Japan. The one at Bard College was hated by quite some people, they found it confusing and it was a failure but I liked it. It ran for one hour and if you were not participating, yes, it was long.

DB When we presented Grand Openings in Tbilisi in 2005 we didn't understand anything, we were lost in a good way. So, we insisted on a fast rhythm, it was all about moving from one scene to the other within a clear structure without any narrative. So it was all about juxtaposing and dealing with what each person wanted to contribute within the proposed frame. We used the scenario as a structure but soon found out that it was not a performance in the sense of expressing personal feelings or experiences, but quite the opposite. This came as a surprise, I had never thought about performance as being something else than historic and part of the culture of self-exposure. This was a discovery, the possibility of lining up moments

EA Jay Sanders had invited Jutta Koether, Emily Sundblad and myself individually to present a performance at PERFORMA05. We all met and decided to develop together one performance, one event. For this we wrote the scenario which we sent you to Tbilisi for a re-enactment that actually was the very first presentation. In a certain way, Grand Openings is an exception, also because it is a fixed crew. For all other projects, different people join and I have to be conscious about the position I am taking as the one who invites them.

- LTR 22ND STREET BLOCK EXPLOSION, *Printed Matter, Inc.*, NY, with Patrick Palermo
- RIOT THE BAR, *Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson*, NY, with Jessica Arndt and many others

EA It was an eight day performance of my running a business, a bar. The starting point of this was that when I came to New York, I went to Stonewall, the gay bar where the Christopher Street Riot happened in 1969. Today it is a touristic place for the official gay scene and they opened a new space, Stonewall Bistro. So I produced a little book documenting this which actually was the program for the performance. At the end, we sold the bar at an auction to one of the customers for very cheap, like \$150 or \$200, then moved it into another place. When we were moving it, it totally broke and in the end, I think I gave him the money back. We would sell drinks and I would document how much money we made and informed the public about the profit. On the outside, I had installed banners with the portraits of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz and Ana Mendieta who were the three 'canonical' Identity Politics artists to me for this project. So each time when I made more profit from the bar, I would add new banners. After eight days and because I made a lot of profit it became a field of banners.

Each night, different people would do different things, but it was loosely curated about gay politics and feminism. The first night, the artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt who participated at the riots in 1969 came to talk about what actually happened. I was the serving person and almost served too much, I was too nice with the prices and in the end, the profit was equal to the expenses. So I didn't make any money, which conceptually speaking is sort of perfect. Because of this serving too much, for the third year of Bard College I decided to do Grand Openings re-enactment executed by others which was somewhat very unfriendly. People were upset because they expected me to do another nice thing, but it was very abstract.

- GREATER NEW YORK 2005, *P.S.1 Center for Contemporary Art*, Long Island City, NY, with international dance students from Peri Dance Center

2004

- SUCCEEDING WHERE THE HIPPIES FAILED, *LeRoy Neiman Gallery*, Columbia University, New York, with Mari Mukai, Reiko Nagae, Sachiko Hirose, and others
- THE TIME AT THE END OF THIS WRITING, *The Poetry Project at St. Marks Church*, NY, with Paolo Javier
- DON'T THINK ABOUT ME, I'M ALRIGHT, *Greene Naftali Gallery*, New York, with Patricia Cazorla, Kimiko Fukuoka, Michiko Hoshi, Miki Ikeda, Mari Mukai, Etsuko Noda, Hisayasu Takashio, and Maki Waza

EA I did another project researching On Kawara and his use of Esperanto. I was fascinated to know where he comes from and his knowledge of Esperanto, and then I tried to make a performance out of it without illustrating it but making it physically present. I saw On Kawara as a product of Japanese postwar education, which changed very fast from extreme nationalism to liberalism. On Kawara participated in an Esperanto group too. I wrote an essay about it and made a 13 minute video piece out of. It was for a conference of art historians and played during the break. I think some people really liked it. My essay would run as English subtitles and you could hear a voice in Chinese pronounced by an American. The video itself is mostly a slideshow documenting various performances but it also shows pictures of me painting a fake On Kawara painting while sitting in an airplane. The painting says Duty Free in Esperanto (although I misspelled it) and you hear the noise of the airplane and the flight attendant saying 'Duty Free, Duty Free'. Because he is a Duty Free artist to me.

DB And the actual performance at Greene Naftali?

EA I was going to this 19th Century style art school in New York to get a visa to stay in the US. We did academic drawings etc.

For the performance at Greene Naftali, I then worked with eight students from that same school, mostly Japanese except one girl from South America. It was a nine hour performance and we made fake On Kawara paintings, assembled them, destroyed them and drilled them together into a kind of mini-Constructivist structure. Inside the space there was also a copy machine which was copying interviews of my interviewing with these eight people and then the stack of sheets was stapled and distributed. We also showed an earlier version of the video on On Kawara and Esperanto.

- MID-YUMING AS RECONSTRUCTION MOOD, *Reena Spaulings Fine Art*, New York, with Mari Mukai, Reiko Nagae, Sachiko Hirose, Yuri Yasuda, Alisa Baremboym, Ikuko Ikari
- DB Do you always use historical material as point of departure for your performances?
- EA No, for instance not for the first performance at Reena Spaulings nor the one at Yokohama Triennale in 2008 about Yuming, the singer for whom I was in a fanclub for ten years.
- DB Performance has the privilege of disappearing, and while a text or a picture is fixed, a performance can add up, bring unplanned or unexpected moments ...
- EA ... and you can experience it, and there is the immediacy of doing it, the speed of doing it that makes sense to me.

2003

- THE CLUB IN THE SHADOW, curated by Jutta Koether and Kim Gordon, *Kenny Schachter CONTEMPorary*, New York, with Nick Alexander

*Daniel Baumann*

Siehe dazu die ausführliche Studie von Miwako Tezuka, *Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s*, Doktorarbeit, Columbia University, 2005.

Miwako Tezuka, op. cit. p. 117

Miwako Tezuka, op. cit. p. 14, 16

siehe dazu Jennifer Weisenfeld, *Mavo. Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde*, University of California Press, Berkeley et al., 2002, p. 2

Miwako Tezuka, op. cit. p. 50

Jennifer Weisenfeld, op.cit. p. 29ff.

zit. in Jennifer Weisenfeld, op.cit. p. 66

<http://www2.odn.ne.jp/teatro-chamomile/>