

Abstracts and Profiles

ラジカル ! (Rajikaru!) Experimentations in Japanese Art 1950–1975
Day 3: Graduate Workshop

Gallery 6, UCLA Armand Hammer Museum
Sunday, April 29, 2007, 10 am – 3 pm

Sponsored by the UCLA Paul I. and Hisako Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies

Panel 1
Out in the World: Manga, Architecture, Photography

Nansensu: The Practice of a Word Circa 1970 Japan (Meow!)

Ryan Holmberg (Yale University)

This paper considers the relationship between the comic and the political within the Japanese counterculture through an analysis of the various practices organized around the term *nansensu*, the transliteration of the English “nonsense.”

A key term within the lexicon of the Japanese counterculture, *nansensu* belonged to two different discourses. Best known was its use within the context of the campus struggles of the late 1960s. There it functioned as an invective slung at the empty promises and circumlocutions of the university administration, and was closest in sense to our word “bullshit.” Though symbolizing the frustration felt amongst radicalized youth, one can also read in the enunciation of *nansensu* certain hopes for the revitalization of social efficacy in language. *Nansensu*, in this context, tread a fine line between asymbolia, melancholia, and utopia.

Nansensu was also the subject of Japanese art discourse in the late 1960s. Critics saw in the practice of *nansensu* the achievement of critical distance through the negation of everyday life. In this, the precedent of the historical avant-garde was evoked: Dada and Bretonian black humor foremost amongst them. In contemporary art practice, positive examples were found mainly in manga, and most interestingly in *The Screw Ceremony* (Neji shiki) of Tsuge Yoshiharu.

The paper will close with a consideration of the work of Akatsuka Fujio. Though rejected by the proponents of critical *nansensu*, Akatsuka manga nonetheless functions as a cipher for the commonalities shared by these two divergent discourses of *nansensu*.

Two Futures: Metabolism and Japan World Exposition '70, Osaka

Hyunjung Cho (USC)

Along with the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, the Japan World Exposition '70 in Osaka (Expo '70) showcased Japan's economic growth and technological innovation to the public both at home

and abroad. To represent an optimistic vision of the future and technology, the fair officials mobilized Japan's leading artists from various fields. Among others, young experimental architects of the Metabolism group, who had published its manifesto entitled *Metabolism: The Proposals for New Urbanism* in 1960, played a crucial role in constructing a vision of the future city at Expo '70. What is intriguing in Metabolism's participation at Expo '70 is not only the complicated relationship between avant-garde artists and state sponsorship but also the fact that Metabolist members, who were commissioned to build a future city at Expo '70 had already been developing their distinct future vision since the late 1950s.

What kind of future was imagined by the Metabolists and how was their idea of the future city different from the official narrative of a techno-utopian future promoted by Expo '70? How did these two future visions respond differently to changing memories of the past, especially memories of war and ruins? In this paper, I will discuss the futuristic fair architecture designed by the Metabolists as a site where different future visions of avant-garde architects and fair officials compete and collaborate with each other.

Megalopolis and Wasteland: Peripheral Geographies of Tokyo (1960-1971)

Ignacio A. Adriasola Muñoz, (Duke University)

This paper will revisit Tokyo's spatial politics in the wake of the student movements of the late 1960s, through the examination of two photographic works: Tōmatsu Shōmei's *Oh! Shinjuku* (1969) and Hosoe Eikoh's unfinished *Simone: A Private Landscape* (1971-). I contend that the two photographic works constitute virtual bracketing points that help us to formulate alternative geographies of the periphery, either through a reflection on the production of the counterspace of protest, or through the performance of a spatial poetics of melancholy, leading us to a rethinking of Tokyo's boundaries. To this effect I draw on Henri Lefebvre's idea of representations of space as intimately related to space lived and perceived. Lefebvre thus forces a reconsideration of the status of representation within the dynamics of social transformation.

I will first examine Tange Kenzō's master plan *Tokyo Megalopolis* of 1960. I will argue that Tange's plan for a capitalist utopia re-produced the basic faith of Japanese directed capitalism in the concentration of economic and human resources in the Greater Kantō area. By advocating a metastasized version of Tokyo, *Tokyo Megalopolis* frames the ideological underpinnings of a national geography of the center.

Contrasting to *Tokyo Megalopolis* and its omnipotent subject of enunciation—the architect/bureaucrat—Tōmatsu and Hosoe document alternative articulations of progressively erased spatialities, forcing an ambiguous gaze that underlines the periphery's proximity to death, engaging the modality of subjective documentary in mourning the barren “fruits” of directed capitalism.

Panel 2
Art as Engagement: Reportage Painting, Photography,
and Performance Art

The Tales of *The Tale of Akebono Village*

Justin Jesty (University of Chicago)

A few months after the massive “Bloody Mayday” protest of 1952, Yamashita Kikuji was deep in the mountains west of Tokyo searching for a related story. What he found became *The Tale of Akebono Village* (1953). Included in most surveys as an icon of the reportage movement in the 1950s, its images are recognizable to many. Few, however, know what the “tale” of the title refers to. Was it, then, a failed piece of reportage, if reportage is intended to impart information about the world? I will argue that reportage was a form of activism, and that “realism” it deployed was less about representation than participation. The litmus test for this realism was not verisimilitude, but the instantaneous *impression* of reality. Reality included poverty, colonization, and war, and painting as a form of physical impulsion functioned to create a community of shock and movement. The warped space, caricature, gore, and primitivism of *Akebono Village* conspire towards this.

Reportage was also activism outside of painting. Artists participated in long-running protests; they visited factories to teach drawing and learn about working conditions. Many works, including *Akebono Village*, sprung from these short-lived exchanges. Artists were also tireless exhibition organizers and publishers. Yamashita was one of the founders of the *Nippon-ten*, a small independent exhibition where *Akebono Village* debuted. Though the reality this painting tried so hard to be part of has gradually fallen away, leaving us only the painting, traces of the aesthetic and ethic also survive, albeit in altered forms.

Body and Counterculture: Yayoi Kusama’s Photographic Experiments, 1958-1969

Midori Yamamura (CUNY Graduate Center)

During her residency in the United States (1957-1973), Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) produced numerous photographs that centered on her body and those of others. Excluding her photo-collages, however, Kusama did not consider photography as an autonomous medium of expression. Rather, she used her photographs as publicity stills; served as a model for other photographers; and used her photographs as an “experimental tool” to develop her ideas for her artistic production.

This paper will examine Kusama’s experimental photography between 1958, when the first of such photographs were taken, and 1969, the year prior to President Nixon’s political assaults on the counterculture movement, which gravely affected Kusama’s activities in New York. By incorporating objective social analysis and critical biography, this paper will scrutinize the genesis of Kusama’s photographic practice.

Many of Kusama’s photographic experiments focus on gender difference and portray human bodies as organic and irrational. In her photographs, her isolated body stands out within a threatening environment. The psychological effect is disturbing, as though suggesting a disruption of seemingly mechanical and strangely homogeneous urban spaces produced by what Herbert Marcuse called “technocracy.” Her intent was clearly to revolt against the system of late industrial society. This sentiment would push her to affirm counterculture after 1966. As she shifted the target of her art from an “elite” to a “mass” audience, her work acquired a stronger social dimension, wherein she attempted to question the state of power that legitimized the Vietnam War.

The Spectator as Artist: The Case of Akasegawa Genpei and Hélio Oiticica

Pedro Erber (Cornell University)

The notion of spectator participation has been among the most widely debated in avant-garde art in the 1960s. My paper explores the aesthetic and philosophical implications of this notion through examining the works and texts by the Japanese artist Akasegawa Genpei and the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica.

Akasegawa's notion of "secret art" (*himitsu geijutsu*), as elaborated in his narratives of the High Red Center events, challenges the traditional position of the spectator (*kankyaku*) as the holder of a contemplative attitude toward art. Such performances as High Red Center's famous *Cleaning Event* (1964)—of which Akasegawa documented the wary reactions of passers-by to the group's cleaning of the sidewalk on a busy street in downtown Tokyo in detail—sharply illustrate the significance of such "secrecy."

Using a strikingly similar conceptual framework, Oiticica puts forward his central proposition of "new objectivity" to challenge "pure transcendental contemplation." Within Oiticica's artistic and theoretical production, the concern with spectator participation prompts a critique of the primacy of vision, which leads to the development of what he calls "relational objects" requiring bodily interaction from the spectator-participant.

The problem of spectator participation advances a discussion about the potentialities of art as a mode of social and political intervention, by touching upon the essence of art as a relationship between creator, work, and spectator. The paper examines the theoretical convergence of the deeply diverse paths of Akasegawa and Oiticica, and discusses the significance of their propositions within the field of aesthetic theory and the context of avant-garde art in the 1960s.

Expanded Fields: Suga Kishio and *Kirokutai*

Mika Yoshitake (UCLA)

This paper examines the critical intersection between the groups, Mono-ha (Things School) and Bikyōtō (Artists Joint-Struggle Council) through the rare feature of the work of Mono-ha artist Suga Kishio in the journal, *Kirokutai* (literally "Document Zone"; English title originally given as *Art and Document*) in 1972. Published by core members of Bikyōtō, the journal featured conceptual and process-based practices of the period, including photography, performance, drawings, films, and sound experiments with peer commentaries. *Kirokutai* was published in conjunction with the journal, *Bijutsu shihyō* (History and Criticism of Art), a critical arena for post-1970 Bikyōtō's theories on the subject's psychic relation to the political collapse of the second wave of anti-Anpo (U.S.-Japan Security Treaty) protests and the New Left.

By taking up Suga Kishio's critical feature in *Kirokutai* as a case study, this paper begins to problematize the historical tendency to place Mono-ha and Bikyōtō as counter-practices. Suga's works are often determined by the limits of the artist-viewer's sense perception, where material objects are realized as an "existing condition." Instead of locating the two groups at opposing ends, this paper explores Suga's work through the lens of texts by three artists, Hori Kōsai, Kashiwara Etsutomu, and Hikosaka Naoyoshi. Their texts engage with Suga's attitudes toward the materiality and relationality of objects, revealing a crucial tendency towards a radical

rupture rather than production of form, and articulate a breakdown in the ideological systems of language prominent in both practices.

Profiles of Moderators

William Marotti (Ph.D. University of Chicago, 2001) teaches modern Japanese history, with an emphasis on everyday life and cultural-historical issues. He joined UCLA's Department of History in the fall of 2006. He has published articles on 1960s-era avant-garde Japanese art and politics in *Postcolonial Studies* and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. His article on Yasunao Tone and the Music group (Group Ongaku) appears in *Yasunao Tone: Noise Media Language*, ed. Brandon LaBelle (2007). He is currently working on *Money, Trains, and Guillotines: Art and Revolution in 1960s Japan*, an investigation of the politics of culture and the everyday via avant-garde artistic production and performance.

Bert Winther-Tamaki is Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and the Visual Studies Ph.D. program at the University of California, Irvine. He is author of *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2000) and co-author with Louise Cort of *Isamu Noguchi: A Close Embrace of the Earth* (University of California Press, 2003). His current book project, titled *Maximum Embodiment*, is a study of images of bodies in the *yōga* movement of modern Japanese painting.

Profiles of Graduate Students

Hyunjung Cho is in the fourth year of the PhD program at the art history department of University of Southern California, where she is studying postwar Japanese art and architecture. She is currently working on her dissertation on the Japan World Exposition '70.

Pedro Erber, born in Rio de Janeiro in 1975, studied philosophy, aesthetics, and political thought in Brazil, Germany, France, and Japan. Since 2000, he conducts research on contemporary Japanese thought and art history. Doctoral candidate at Cornell University and Japan Foundation fellow, he researches on 1960s avant-garde art in Japan and Brazil. He is currently organizing a panoramic exhibition of postwar Japanese avant-garde art to take place in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 2010.

Ryan Holmberg is a graduate student in the History of Art Department at Yale University. His dissertation, treating the monthly manga journal *Garo* during the 1960s and early 70s, was submitted in March. He has recently contributed to *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Dot dot dot*.

Justin Jesty is a graduate student at the University of Chicago, currently researching for his dissertation titled "Art and Activism in Postwar Japan." The project has three main foci: the reportage movement, Kyūshū-ha, and independent art education movements. In all, he proposes to think through ways to articulate artistic creativity and creative political participation.

Ignacio A. Adriasola Muñoz studies at the Ph.D. program in Art History at Duke University, where he is also affiliated to the Department of Women's Studies. He moved to North Carolina

from Japan, where he completed his undergraduate studies at Chiba University. His research focuses on postwar Japanese visual culture, encompassing art, sex, and radical politics in the 1960s. His research interests include performance art, photography, feminism, queer theory, death, porn studies, and museums.

Midori Yamamura is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, writing a dissertation entitled “Yayoi Kusama: Biography and Cultural Confrontation, 1945-1969.” She is a lecturer at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and a recipient of 2006-07 Terra Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship and Ford Foundation Travel Grant. Before graduate school, Yamamura curated exhibitions featuring contemporary artists from developing countries and written about them in Japanese and English.

Mika Yoshitake is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History at UCLA specializing in post-1945 Japanese art. Her dissertation examines Mono-ha and Bikyōtō as a form of destructive aesthetics in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. She has published on the work of Mono-ha, Bikyōtō, and contemporary artist Yanagi Miwa. She is contributor to a catalogue accompanying a major retrospective of Takashi Murakami at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2007.