CONTENTS

Preface 7
Forewords 9
Acknowledgments 11
Notes to the Reader 15

PART I
INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1
Scream Against the Sky

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 19

Essay
As Witness to Postwar Japanese Art

ISOZAKI ARATA 27
Translated by Sabu Kohso

Chapter 2
Japan As Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa

KARATANI KÔJÔ 33
Translated by Sabu Kohso

Chapter 3
Artistic Subjectivity in the Taishô and Early Showa Avant-Garde

JOHN CLARK 41

Chapter 4
Japanese Thematics in Postwar American Art: From Soi-Dissant Zen to the Assertion of Asian-American Identity

BERT WINTHNER 55

Chapter 5
Some Issues of Circumstance: Focusing on the 1990s

AMANO TARÔ 69
Translated by Robert Reed

PART II
JAPANESE ART AFTER 1945

Essay
To Catch Up or Not to Catch Up with the West: Hijikata and Hi Red Center

NAM JUNE PAIK 77

Chapter 6
To Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun: The Gotoi Group

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 83

Chapter 7
Circle: Modernism and Tradition

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 125

Chapter 8
Morphology of Revenge: The Yomiuri Indépendent Artists and Social Protest Tendencies in the 1960s

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 149

Chapter 9
Revolt of the Flesh: Anzôku Butô and Obsessional Art

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 189

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The Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Kobe
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Chapter 10
A Bore of Smile: Tokyo Fluxus, Conceptual Art, and the School of Metaphysics

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 215

Chapter 11
The Laws of Situation: Mono-ha and Beyond the Sculptural Paradigm

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 257

Chapter 12
X: Experimental Film and Video

BARRABA LONDON 265

Chapter 13
Infinity Nets: Aspects of Contemporary Japanese Painting

REIKO TOMII 307

Chapter 14
Hinomaru Illumination: Japanese Art of the 1990s

ALEXANDRA MUNROE 339

PART III
CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY

Chapter 15
Readings in Japanese Art After 1945

Compiled by NAKAJIMA MASATOSHI and REIKO TOMII 369

Translated by Reiko Tomii

Glossary 393

Compiled by REIKO TOMII

Bibliography 399

Compiled by KASHIWAGI TOMIO

Edited and expanded by Reiko Tomii

with the cooperation of Nakajima Masatoshi

Index 412

Chapter 10

The exhibition, "Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky," is an interpretive survey of the last fifty years of Japanese avant-garde art. It is a great pleasure for the Japan Foundation to be co-organizer of the American tour, which travels to the Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens.

The Japan Foundation has worked for many years with leading American art institutions to introduce representative works of Japanese culture to the United States. We have focused on both classical Japanese and emerging contemporary art. An example of the former was an exhibition of traditional Japanese art organized by the Japan Foundation and held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. in 1988, entitled "The Shaping of the Damyo Ny Culture 1185-1868." A successful example of the latter was "Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties," which opened in 1989 and toured for two years to seven major U.S. cities, including San Francisco and New York. These exhibitions enjoyed critical acclaim and performed a significant role in encouraging a deeper understanding of Japanese culture among Americans today.

"Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky" is the first exhibition devoted to the history of postwar Japanese avant-garde culture ever presented in the United States. Although the artists are of different generations and their works represent diverse styles of expression, a common element can be detected. While clearly demonstrating a departure from European and American modernism on one hand, these artists have sought innovative methods of expression that surpass the boundaries of established art forms and which are contemporaneous with some of the most experimental and radical international art movements of the postwar period.
CHAPTER 12

X.

EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO

BARBARA LONDON

During the second half of the nineteenth century, in its desire to strengthen itself and conquer new frontiers, Japan swiftly absorbed industrial and artistic practices from the West. When photography was introduced in the 1850s, the Japanese adapted a new, foreign technology to local conventions. A popular saying of 1872 included photographs in the "standard paraphernalia of civilization and enlightenment," along with newspapers, the postal system, gaslights, steam engines, exhibitions, and dirigible balloons. Photography arose in the early 1900s when it became possible to print photographs and type on the same page.

Western cinema reached Japan in the form of the Kinetoscope in 1896 and the Vitagraph in 1897. Audiences interested in the new technology and up-to-date Western film styles flocked to Tokyo's special film theaters which opened in 1903. The first Japanese films resembled, and used familiar stories taken from Kabuki. Other themes were drawn from Shinpa (new, Western-style theater), with its contemporary plots, and Shingeki (modern dramas), which also borrowed its texts and techniques from the West.

Similar to Bunraku puppet theater, early Japanese film was accompanied by a live narrator who told the story and commented on the images. Standing in the theater beside the screen, the benkiki (narrator) identified temporal and character shifts and frequently introduced a narrative parallel to the one that was shown. Subtitles were irrelevant. The benkiki sheltered the Japanese cinema from the realism of Western film.

In 1923, Japan's strong, regional film industry was demolished by the Kantō earthquake. New sound technology was introduced during its reconstruction, and cinema changed dramatically. Directors like Murata Minoru, Mizoguchi Kenji, and Ozu Yasujirō developed detailed styles that faithfully illuminated the reality of daily life. As equipment proliferated, the versatile camera arts gradually came to seem part of the fabric of Japanese life. Filmmaking reached a remarkable level of artistry, employing long takes, serene moments, and non-logical, intuitive editing. Atmosphere was more important than character, and linearity was not a concern.

The period that began with the American Occupation (1945–1952) after World War II saw the progress of science and technology, rapid economic growth, and the modernization of culture. Setting the tone for democracy in Japan, Occupation commandants prohibited the creation and viewing of period Japanese dramas that sanctioned feudal ways. They encouraged "enlightened" foreign films, and viewers began to follow and emulate American and European styles and fashions.

In the late fifties, eight millimeter (8-mm) home-movie technology was perfected, and film became a desirable and affordable form of expression for the general population. Artists experimented with the medium in this new form, developing strategies that often were derived from traditional contemplative methods of experiencing the arts. Film time was perfect since it slows down and makes the moment become all-absorbing.

SURREALIST/ABSTRACT AESTHETIC MOOD OF THE FIFTIES

The decade of the fifties was a transitional period: everyone was catching up, struggling to survive. The American Occupation ended in 1952 and left the Japanese people to sort through the many changes and new challenges to tradition. Experimental film gained a foothold among painters, poets, composers, photographers, and playwrights. Con-
cury to Western filmmakers, who tended to probe psychological depths, Japanese artists adopted the style more than the content of Surrealism.

The critic-to-be Takagi Shōshi (1902–1979), who had studied with the poet Nishiwaki Jun'adora and the Marx-

ist theoretician Tozaka Jun, was chiefly responsible for the wide dissemination of information about Surrealism in Japan. He was instrumental in the founding in 1951 of the Experimental Workshop (Jikken Kōdaib), which explored new media and staged interdisciplinary events using photography and film in a kind of Bauhaus revival. Participants included composers Takemitsu Tōru and Suzuki Shin’ichi, kinetic artists such as Yamaguchi Katsumi, the music critic Akiyama Kunihito, the performer Somoda Takahiro, and the photographer Osugi Kiyoshi. The group promoted equality among members and dispensed with the traditional hierarchical teacher-student relationship, which required that the student perpetuate the teacher’s style.

Other experimental organizations emerged, including the Democratic Artists Association (Demokūtō Bijutsu-ka Kyōkai) which was composed of creative young artists and critics. Searching for values and subject matter that corresponded to their rules in a new Japan, the Democratic artists were drawn to the generosity and experience of the contemplative artist-photographer Ei Kyō (1911–1966). Their 1957 exhibition, “Eyes of 10,” challenged traditional photography and heralded a new, postwar era. Akonku Butto (Dance of Utter Darkness), a new kind of dance created by Hijikata Tatsunori, was influential in the stylistic and methodological development of Japanese photography and film (Performance Pages 106 to 109). In May 1959 Hijikata held his first solo performance in Tokyo. Based on Mishima Yukio’s novel, Forbidden Colors (Kinjiki) that depicts sexual relations between men, the dance—more ambitious than the book—featured a male dancer, a young boy and a live chicken. As the piece reached its climax, Hijikata broke the bird’s neck and splattered blood over the stage. This innovative new dance form arose from a search for something authentic to be made out of Japanese rather than Western culture.

Buttoch touched the expressive part of life Hijikata felt had been lost in contemporary society since the sanitizing of Japanese popular culture began with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Hijikata and emerging alternative theater groups like Kura Jūrō’s Theater of Situations (Jukyō Gekijō), Sasaki Tadashi’s Waseda Little Theater (Wasedo Shi Gekijō), and Satō Shin’s Black Tent (Kuro Tentei), looked back to primitive Japanese roots. Exploring the dark, obsessive, and banal, Buttoch created images of a wasteland peopled by white-faced spastic beings who existed somewhere between reality and illusion. Hijikata and others also studied the rancorous atmosphere of popular entertainment which they saw as the legitimate heir to Kabuki. They looked at Asian “opera,” a kind of musical theater that incorporated both traditional and Western influences; Mismone, a form of theater that included acts comparable to ones in a circus sideshow; and Hose theater, that centered on comic monologue, similar to a vaudeville review.

The photographer House Ikōki saw Hijikata’s Forbidden Colors, and was inspired by the stark, filthy figures. House took Hijikata and his group off the stage and with them constructed otherworldly dramas in film and photography. House also worked with Mishima Yukio the writer was in Hijikata’s studio so often he kept his own chair there—who posed for House in an erotic series, Ordered by Roses (1963). Both Hijikata and House were born in the northern area of Tōhoku, where the harsh winters are long and bleak. Tōhoku contains such frightening, volcanic landscapes as Osore Mountain, where people annually to commune with the dead through the blind mysteries that live there. In keeping with the Japanese people’s reverence for the area where their ancestors lived, this remote environment permeated both House and Hijikata’s work.

Commercial cinema was experiencing a ferment as well. Ōshima Nagisa was a novice when the commercial film studio, Shiseikaku, asked him to direct Town of Love and Hope (1959). This and Ōshima’s subsequent narratives dealt with such gritty subjects as young people’s nihilistic questioning of the ways of their parents, and the plight of Koreans living in the slums of Japan. Ōshima was active in urging his colleagues to overthrow the conventions of traditional cinema in order to create a new, independent art form.

THE NEO-DADAIST PERIOD

Photographers and filmmakers were the visible figures in the Japanese neo-Dadaist movement. Like the original European movement of the 1920s from which it was derived, neo-Dadaism freed art from tradition by challenging old structures. Although it came at a time when leftist activity was disintegrating through political oppression, the movement was sustained by students who had been encouraged after the war by unconventional and progressive teachers. Artists used everyday, industri al objects and materials and such techniques as collage and assemblage, unliking Japanese traditional arts and orthodox modern painting and sculpture, did not require years of training with a master.

It was a fertile time for Anti-Art. There existed a strong, anarchist underground fueled by lively interdiscipl inary exchange, and unusually forthright artistic dialogue. Rules were up for grabs. In October 1960, Hijikata, the poet-director Terayama Shūji, and the photographers Hosoe and Tomatsu Shōni created the Jazz Film Laboratory (Jazzan Eiga Jikken-shiha), which embraced music, dance, film, and light ing. Anti-tradition, anti-authority, and opposed to Social Realism, they and their peers deliberately rejected common sense, as well as the conventions of a rigid society. Proceeding without established formulas, every means was possible—from the ludicrous to the political, from the derisive to the violent—and they produced artistic work that was exuberantly expressive.

Navel and A-Bomb (1960, figure 12.2), Hosoe’s short black-and-white film, reflects the anguish of the period. The film mocks tradition with its nude male performers who stand in ritualistic poses on an empty beach beside a placid cow. The performers light a fire over an apple, and then a flapping chicken with its head cut off dies (reminiscent of the chicken in Forbidden Colors). The film concludes with an aerial shot of ten naked little boys swimming and crawling over the beach. They run in a circle, fall down, and pile up in a heap, their penises covered. A man comes out of the ocean and draws a long rope from one boy’s navel, which was marked by a large X. The concluding image is of an atomic bomb majestically exploding over the scene; this horrific shape is the subliminal leitmotif of the film.

Another well-known neo-Dadaist film, X (Battus) (1960, figure 12.1), follows the progress of an everyman through an urban wasteland. It was made by the celebrated poet Tanikawa Shuntarō, who is a master of common language and wrote many film scripts and texts for photography books, with a soundtrack (subsequently lost) by the composer Takemitsu Tōru. This every

man marks everythings he encounters with an X, from telephone poles to fruit and books he fondles in markets to a woman he pursues who lies on the ground, first clothed, then unclothed. As he caresses her back, he puts X's along her spine. Later, when he draws an X on a storefront, he is beaten and dragged off by businessmen. The allegorical Xs can be either consent or rejection, or the mark of individualism, putting an identifi cation (or accepting) mark on the world.

Terayama Shūji (1935–1983) was a central figure in Tokyo’s underground, was widely published even during his teens, and revered as one of Japan’s finest poets. Out of his own Tōhoku childhood and his close rapport with Hijikata, Terayama joined innocence with the erotic and the grotesque. He looked to the Japanese popular culture of rural folk festivals and street theater for inspiration. He worked on the ambiguous edge between reality and fiction.

In 1967, Terayama founded the Tokyo Tenjyū Sajiki Theater with designer Yokose Tadanori and theater director Higashi Yukata. He worked there with young performers, creating theater pieces for them and eating them in a variety of his films. Tenjyū Sajiki attracted many artists from different disciplines and the group frequently toured America and Europe. Terayama’s eccentric vision, reflected in his books, street performances, and films, had a strong impact on young artists, as did his encouragement and generosity of spirit.

In The Cage (1962, figure 12.3), Terayama transformed an ordinary pastoral scene into an enchanted garden. This magnum opus depicts a collection of solitary characters who come and go about their obscure business. It opens...
12.4. TESHIGAHARA Hiroshi. Woman of the Dunes. 1964. Film

with a naked figure who runs up and peers through an ornate door, trying to get in (or out). Two men exercise and flex their muscles, then a woman holding a goat runs past. An elderly woman in a flowered print dress appears with a large pendulum clock, which is later cast aside, as if murdered.

Despite the existence of places like Tenjo Sajiki and the intense creativity of this period, the field of experimental film was threatened by various outside forces. The influence of television expanded exponentially after many households bought television sets to watch the live broadcast of the Crown Prince Akhito's wedding in 1959. Film audiences were dropping in number, so many film companies invested in television stations. Filmmakers, reduced by broadcasters' need to fill up air time, began to make television movies, documentaries, and commercials.

Struggling to portray their own vision, avant-garde filmmakers turned to the example of the West. They presented their work in basement cafes and such unlikely places as Naipu Gallery, which was housed in a former medical clinic in the Shinbashicho section of Tokyo and presented the experimental film of Takahiko Iimura and Ōsawaya Nobuhiko in 1963. The most active alternative site was the Sōgetsu Art Center, established by the celebrated sculptor and iconoclast master Teshigahara sofa, and run by Nara Yoshimi and Igawa Kotō, with sofa's son, Teshigahara Hiroshi as director. Sōgetsu subsidized local performance artists and filmmakers by donating production funds and exhibition space. The center quickly became the focal point for avant-garde activities, from interdisciplinary events staged around Higikata's dance to screenings of the films of D.W. Griffith and Sergei Eisenstein, as well as American underground and French New Wave cinema. The inauguration of the Cine Club Research Group gave artists direct access to foreign films. A wide range of artists were active at the Sōgetsu Art Center, including the musician-composer Takemitsu Tōru (who, like Ichiyō Nagai and Takahashi Yūji, was trying every imaginable way of making new music), the architect Isozaki Arata, and the sculptor Miki Tomio. Teshigahara Hiroshi is considered an authentic "anteur"-director, representative of the New Wave in Japan. His accomplishment was fueled by the international stimulus provided by the Sōgetsu Art Center. Initially a painter, Teshigahara shifted to film and made his first documentary in 1953 on the late-eighteenth-century artist Katsushika Hokusai. In the late-fifties he worked as an assistant to Kamei Fumio, the leftist documentary filmmaker who had graduated from the Leningrad Motion Picture Institute and brought Russian Socialist-Realist filmmaking techniques to Japan. After making several anti-war films during the war (financed by the army), Kamei was persecuted by the Japanese police. He directed the provocative (and eventually censored) documentary The Japanese Tragedy in 1946. Teshigahara was impressed by the older director's techniques as well as by the humanistic message of Japan's Communist Party. Yet he was more interested in psychology and atmosphere than in politics. In his dramatic films, he turned to the novelist Abe Kōtō, fascinated by the writer's baroque, psychological symbolism. He set his probing camera to reveal microscopic detail and to make emotions feel tangible. Westerners found Woman in the Dunes (1964, figure 12.4) wildly sensual and mysteriously beautiful. The Japanese felt the artistry was too obvious.

Also active at the Sōgetsu Art Center was the American expatriate writer and filmmaker Donald Richie, who had a catalytic effect on experimental filmmaking in Japan. After receiving a degree in film from Columbia University on the GI Bill, he returned to Tokyo where he had been stationed. His 8-mm films from the mid-fifties inspired many artists with his personal approach to cinema, broad experience, and direct response to other artists' experiments. He shot Human Sacrifice (1959) in an abandoned factory in Tokyo's Shinagawa area with Higikata and his dancers, and recorded one scene of A Couple (1963) at the Sōgetsu Art Center. Richie's films were included with the Japanese entries at the "3rd Experimental Film Festival" in Brussels in 1964.

The role of documentary and art films was discussed in the many film journals that appeared at this time, as well as in the art magazine Bijutsu techō. The Sōgetsu Art Center's FILM quarterly, among other publications, devoted pages to the meaning of "independent production," "independent" exhibition, and the "Old Left" notion of "independence." It encouraged film artists to move away from the restriction of making public-relations films, which for many years had been their source of livelihood.

Takahiko Iimura's low-budget films followed extemporaneous methods. For one project he took found footage of an American sex education film, scratched the emulsion and reedited the film, calling it On Eye Raft (1962, figure 12.5). Another work, Onon (1963), which is accompanied by a music score by Yoanno Tone, turned film into an interactive medium: he played the projector like a musical instrument, going backward and forward, stopping and freezing frames. The result was a lively kind of junk art, the everyday given another context.

More iconoclastic young filmmakers banded together in groups. Adachi Masao, then studying film at Nihon University (said to have later joined the
Palestine Liberation Organization) founded the Nichida Group with Wakamatsu Kōji, Hiroko Kambara, and Jinnouchi Motoharu. The name is an abbreviation of Nihon Daigaku (Nihon University). Adachi's expressionist film Closed Vagina (Snia, 1962) was his metaphor for the political situation in Japan. Jinnouchi made "abstract" documents by using a fish-eye lens to film student protests. His impressionist film, Hi Red Center's Shelter Plan (1964, Plate 73), scans the photographs from this Hi Red Center absurdist performance at Tokyo's Imperial Hotel. Often, Nichida audiences would be taken to a dark room expecting to see a film, but the room would remain pitch black—the cinematic equivalent of John Cage's concerts.1

After graduating, Adachi and his group founded the Van Film Institute and worked out of a small studio in Shinjuku. They combined fact and fiction in Document June 16, a documentary about the student movement and the death of martyr Kambu Michiko. Yasuhiro Tane, Yoko Ono, and Ichirayagi Toshi provided a semi-improvised sound track.

The Korean artist-musician Nam June Paik is closely connected to the multifarious cultures in which he has lived. During the sixties, he completed a degree in aesthetics at the University of Tokyo, then studied music in Germany, where he joined Fluxus, the international movement that sought to erase the distinction between art and everyday life. He returned to Tokyo in 1963 to develop a robot with engineer Abe Shiyu. His performance of the music of John Cage at the Sijutsu Art Center was one of the first Fluxus events in Japan. He left Tokyo for New York, where he and the robot could frequently be seen together walking down Canal Street and at Fluxus events. In 1984, he was the first video artist to be given a retrospective in Japan.

Fluxus included many Japanese artists, including Shiono Mieko and Yoko Ono. In the early sixties, Ono became an active participant in and instigator of proto-Fluxus events, performing her distinctive style of Happenings in Tokyo, New York, and London. She made a series of formalist films which have been shown in experimental circles in the West more often than in Japan. Interested in the representation of the body, Ono emphasized stylistic and abstract concerns. Bottoms (1966) is a whimsical series of close-ups of naked posterior, recorded as they walked in place in front of the camera.

MINIMAL ABSTRACTION

By the late sixties, neo-Dadaism in Japan had played itself out. At this time Minimalism was starting to take hold in America, inspired in part by a rediscovery of Zen Buddhism and Asian art. Many North American filmmakers were interested in the structural possibilities of the camera and the recording process. Japanese artists embraced Minimalism as a return to aesthetic issues. Despite the fact that Minimalism came from America, many of its tenets were familiar to Japanese artists since appreciation of the traditional Japanese arts had trained them to look at the abstract qualities of materials. Exposed form was a goal.

For Minimal filmmakers, formal considerations counted for everything. They dealt with art's processes—the film emulsion as material to be drawn on or scratched, the frame as information to be broken down and separated into colors, the projected image as a landscape-like field of color. Film was considered a progression of stills. Works emphasized a state of being rather than an action, each moment separate from the next.

Hag iwara Sakumi's Mint (1971) was recorded from one stationary camera position. It shows a black-and-white landscape in which, over a span of eight minutes, the misty clouds obscuring nearby trees gradually lift to reveal distant mountains. Viewers become contemplative as their own time slows down, in the same way they would look at an ink drawing of a similar landscape.

Andô Kôhei sculpted with time. He based a series of short films on the suburban train that rattles past his house. In Like a Train Passing #2 (1979), the camera set on a tripod records family members standing in front of the train that rumbles through cherry blossoms, autumn leaves, and snow. Gradually the scene fades to dark red, and the camera moves closer to the family members. By this time, the train's unbroken motion and sounds have become mechanized lullaby.

In Yamazaki Hiroshi's work, time and space belong to the same continuum. In Heliography (1975), he recorded the motion of the winter sun over a thirty-day period. As a projected image, the rays of the starlight glimmer, twinkle, and disappear.

A more technically-based Minimal work is Matsumoto Toshio's I'm an Atom (1975, Plate 16). The title comes from the Sanskrit word meaning self, which the artist contrasts with Brahma, the concept of the cosmos as described in the Upanishad texts. Matsumoto wrote that he "tried to focus on some kind of paradoxical struggle between Atman and Brahma." He dressed his actor in traditional No costume with a devil mask, and used No music as the film's score. The film is a structural masterpiece. Matsumoto shot the film frame by frame, recording from 480 camera positions around his subject. He alternates between close-up views and a lateral

motion created by a zoom lens. As he cuts between the two points of view, he simultaneously modifies the landscape, building in increasingly faster momentum to the film's crescendo.

In addition to his important contributions to experimental film, Matsumoto has produced numerous feature films, starting with Funeral of Roses (1969). The film is an Oedipal story that deals with transvestism. A television-style host poses rhetorical questions to the viewer. An avowed disciple of Bertolt Brecht, Matsumoto clarified the confrontation between Japanese culture and Western materialist theories of representation.

THE ELECTRONIC ARTS

When the Sony Corporation introduced the first portable video equipment in Japan in the mid-sixties, some artists immediately began to experiment with it. Japanese video art was launched with a 1968 event called "Say Something Now, I'm Looking for Something to Say," organized by the critic Tôrô Yoshiaki and former Experimental Workshop member Yamaguchi Katshiro. Since the early sixties, when he covered his paintings with lenses whose refracted images shifted as the viewer moved, Yamaguchi has been involved with kinetic art and electronic media. In his video work, he has concentrated on multi-monitor installations. His elegant constructions are the embodiment of good Japanese design. For many years he was an influential professor at Tokku University, and he continues to be an effective advisor to corporate and government leaders.

In 1969, the "Cross Talk: Intermedia Festival" took place at Tokyo's Yoyogi Stadium, attracting an audience of 11,000 people over three days. American electronic composers David Tudor and Robert Ashley performed along with filmmakers Stan Vanderbeek and Matsumoto Toshio. In the same year, Miyai Rikoré experimented with multiple television sets.
in an intermedia presentation, and
imura made Man and Women, in which the
front and back of a naked couple were shown through two video monitors.
Shigeki Kubota moved to New York in 1964. She was led to her exploration of
video by her association with Fluxus and her marriage to Nam June Paik, and she
later organized several "video exhibition" exhibitions between New York and
Tokyo. In 1970, she created a Video Self-Portrait and in 1975 was making sardon-
nic video sculptures. (From 1974 to 1982, she was Curator of Video at Anthology
Film Archives, New York.) Interested in
video, she combined man-made and nat-
ural materials and the stationary object with temporal video images. Her earliest
pieces cry with feminist anger, her "sacred
video" is an attempt to pay homage to Marcel Duchamp, whose work is revered in Japan. Kubota's later sculptures reach back to her Japanese
roots. In River (1979-1981, Plate 165),
rushing water and video reflections shorten
like the seasons.
Identimle Mako is an artist out of
step with convention. Born into a cul-
tured and traditional family, she studied
film at Columbia University and lived for
a while in California. She experimented with film and video, and returned to
Japan to become a founding member of
Video Hiroba at a time when the women's liberation movement was active in
Japan. "Identimle's early video sketches reflect an effort to address her country's
patriarchal society. In Another 100
Years (1976), she recorded her daily routine in the kitchen, all the while
watched by an eye on the television set on
the counter. Her Great Mother series (1983-1989, Plate 164) scrutinizes the emotional interactions of mother-child
relationships, revealing the underlying
volatility of seemingly placid households. This series took advantage of the "live"
feeling of video and the apparent candid-
ness of people talking to each other. Ide-
imule's complicated scripts and use of
plot are distinctive in the context of
Japanese video. She also addresses the
constraints of social conventions and the
conflicts caused by living in a hybrid
Japanoese-Western culture.

Shigeki Kubota moved to New York in 1964. She was led to her exploration of
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Years (1976), she recorded her daily routine in the kitchen, all the while
watched by an eye on the television set on
the counter. Her Great Mother series (1983-1989, Plate 164) scrutinizes the emotional interactions of mother-child
relationships, revealing the underlying
volatility of seemingly placid households. This series took advantage of the "live"
feeling of video and the apparent candid-
ness of people talking to each other. Ide-
imule's complicated scripts and use of
plot are distinctive in the context of
Japanese video. She also addresses the
constraints of social conventions and the
conflicts caused by living in a hybrid
Japanoese-Western culture.

Traditional Japanese homes contain a consecrated place where photographs of ancestors are respectfully set. Today, in
most Japanese households, the tele-
vision fills this place. Identimle's videotapes often depict the claustrophobic reality of modern homes, and each interior con-
tains a television set. Her silent close-up shots of various members of a family are a counterpart to the tense dramas of the
room. The television screen is a window into the darker, often more destructive aspects of their characters' minds. Her
sound tracks are based exclusively on
dialogue and ambient noise; her videotap-
es seem particularly like documentaries
than dramas.

Inexpensive video cameras made way for a literary video genre—and one of the most lauded Japanese videotapes, the 1982 collaboration between the well-
known poets Tanikawa Shuntaro and Terayama Shunji. These long-time friends had worked extensively with film and
other artistic media before they tried video. In their Video Letter (figure 12.11), made with the aid of Image
Forum, they updated a venerated liter-
ary form, the collaborative renga (linked
verse). They exchanged electronic "let-
ters"—extrapleomorphic monologues recorded on camera with a theatrical
time of meaning and a poetic command
of language. Each rambling "letter"
wove a particular moment, yet each was
connected to the preceding one.
Video Letter has a particular poignancy
because of Terayama's fatal illness, which brought the project to an end.
His death is acknowledged in the last
letter." Completed and edited by
Tanikawa, the work became a powerful
dog to Terayama.

In addition to Video Hiroba, other
artists collected survivors the early and
difficult experimental days. Video Earth, founded toward the end of 1971 by film
animator Nakajima Kiti (Plate 165), unit-
ized cable programmers in rural Japan
who were interested in alternative, public-access television. The Video Infor-
mation Center was another grass-roots
organization that was founded in 1972 by Teruko Ichirô and used video as a cultur-
al tool to embrace home viewers. The
group also taped Butch performances
(figure 12.12) and Mono-ha's site-specific installations for archival purposes. A
similar media center was founded in Sapporo by Yataro Katsumi.

At this time American subculture was being introduced by the "flower
child" experimental filmmaker Kanesaka
Kenji. He wrote the Japanese subtitles for the film Easy Rider and introduced the
notion of an experimental film co-op. The
tea was realized in 1971 by experimental
filmmakers Kawasaki Nobushiri (figure
12.13) and Nakajima Takashi, with
organizer Tomiyama Katumi, who founded a screening organization called the
Underground Center. Renamed the
Underground Cinematheque, it presents
of experimental films and then video on
a regular basis, bringing the work of such American artists as Stan Brakhage and
Michaid Snow to Japan. Renamed Image
Forum in 1977, it offered production
classes as well as screenings, and in 1980
founded a monthly film and art magazine
of the same name. It holds an annual experimental film-video festival and con-
tinues to be a focal point and prime mover in spreading information internationally.

In 1980, Nakaya founded Video
Gallery Scan in Tokyo to be a distribu-
tion service, archive, and screening stu-
dio for video. Run by a young and
energetic staff, this informal space has
promoted the medium through its
newsletter, competitions, and interna-
tional festivals, held most recently in

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
M. The most notable and innovative
theme of the last decade through
teach of the world is perhaps appropria-
tion. Artists extract visuals and ideas
from many different sources, often
to make a critical statement about the mate-
rial they have borrowed. This type
of work evolved as a reaction to the daily
surfeit of mass-media images in which
data and time are fragmented.

In Japan, where appropriation in
has a long tradition, younger artists
tend to use this "international" trend to
make stylistic rather than political work.
(Most are even unaware that multimedia
artists Hijikata and Terayama paved the
to way during the sixties with their
methods of pastiche, freely borrowing
from modern and premodern dance and
teacher techniques and elite and popular
art forms.) The use of electronic media
has perpetuated such techniques as col-
lege and unconventional juxtapositions.
The current generation in Japan is com-
puter-literate and often works with
desktop video. Perhaps the best represen-
tative of their time, Dumb Type is an
interdisciplinary arts collective based in
Kyoto, formed in 1981 while members
were students at Kyoto City University of
the Arts (Kyoto Shiritsu Geijutsu
292 EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO
EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO 293
Daigaku. The group takes an irreverent look at popular culture and society's rigid stratification.

Dumb Type’s performance/installation ‘Pleasure Life’ (1987–1988) is an ironic, hypothetical view of the near future. It depicts a mélange of new and old Japan that resembles an integrated circuit suffering from urban sprawl. The English title conjures up both the dispersive routines of daily life and the refined culture of Kyoto’s geisha houses. The capital of Japan for a thousand years, Kyoto is still governed by time-honored ways and a strong sense of the past. Dumb Type’s performances evoke its antiquated pleasure world, where music, poetry, conversation, and cuisine were relished as sophisticated conventions, and the electronic environment of karaoke bars, fast-food restaurants, and celebrity talk shows that have diluted and transformed it.

With pH (1990–1991, Plate 160, figure 14.2), Dumb Type depicted the impersonal and repressive aspects of metropolitan city life, exposing the way electronic tools are used as status symbols. The title is meant to imply measurement—a litmus test as it were—for modern life. The performance presents robotized actions and winful comments enclosed in a mechanized environment on which are projected weather maps, corporate logos, and monetary symbols, as well as a film that seems to flow out of the characters’ minds.

Their next work, S/N (1992–1994, Plates 199.1 to 199.2), addressed what it means in Japan to function outside the norm, specifically examining gender issues: the sexual identities of a gay man and a divorced woman—not particularly unusual people by Western standards, but pariahs in Japan. Although the title conjures up such phrases as serial number, sex/reuter, somewhere/nowhere, and signal/noise, the work concentrates on life’s ambiguities. It implies that by rigidly classifying information in categories, the elusive areas where creativity and magic exist are lost.

Tsukamoto Shin’ya also addresses the sexual realm where reality and fantasy merge. While a student at Nihon University, Tsukamoto founded Kajū Theater (Sea Creature Theatre) with a group of friends. His film, Tetuso: The Iron Man (1989, figure 12.14), is a black-and-white home movie that he made practically single-handedly: as writer, actor, director, and cameraman. He worked with a very small team of young artists from other areas of experimental theater. The film is a parody of the horrific manga comic books, which convey cathartic violence and frank sexuality and are extremely popular in Japan today. Tetuso is a caricature of a businessman whose life goes awry. After deserting a young man he hits with his car (a fetishist who inserts scrap metal into a gash on his leg, and who later becomes the businessman’s nemesis), he finds a metal thorn sticking out of his own cheek. His world suddenly becomes a violent mine field of metal. While making love to his girlfriend, his phallus mutates into a drill, and although he tries to run away, eventually they reach a dismembered climax after which she stabs him in the neck. Tsukamoto ends his film with the businessman and the fetishist merging into a wild, two-headed monster that stalks Tokyo’s streets. The film has become a cult movie and still plays in art theaters.

Fukuhara Shoji is a television producer and director who is reaching a new generation of Nintendo-playing viewers by pushing the limits of broadcast television. He belongs to the first generation who grew up with computers, and with Sakurai Takao directs Up Ugo Lhag (Plate 166), Fuji Television’s early-morning children’s program that blends live computer animation with live action. The program, whose title is gibberish, is a parody of the ribald adult shows that nightly Japanese television thrives on. In the show, two children engage in shenanigans with a cast of outlandish animated characters which include a talking, motherly television set and a rakish, Parisian-style artiste. Many adults watch the show, attracted to its youthful innocence.

Technology is changing faster than most artist-users can keep up with, and the situation is as confused in Japan as in North America and Europe. With the media arts still in their infancy, artists who use the new technology are often incapable of taking a critical stance to the equipment and software packages. The problem is compounded when corporations hire artists to show off new products. Art becomes consumed by the technological advances.

In 1990, Canon Inc. established a creative laboratory called Art Lab, that made available computers and photographic, print, and copier machines to artists interested in exploring new technologies. The company produces several artists’ projects each year and organizes special exhibitions. Mission Invisible is a collaborative team from Osaka that created an elegant installation in 1991 at Art Lab (Plate 167), in which the artists appropriated technology to probe the philosophical differences between the Japanese and English languages. Their project centered around a pair of large, tastefully designed panels that hung on opposite walls. Each panel had separate but overlapping texts written in the two languages. A video camera in a metal...
frame skated across the smoothed printed surface. Viewers could control the cam-
era's vertical and horizontal motion and "zoom" by using a "track ball," the sim-
plest computer control device. Unfortunately, most only scanned the typog-
raphy and stayed on the periphery of the work rather than participating in it.

Okazaki Kenjiro uses the computer as a useful editing device. He collaborat-
ed with Tsuda Toshinori, and as the group Ballroux they made Rend-

dam Accident Memory (1993, Plates 201 and 202). The installation combined video-
tapes, photographs, and diaries taken from the artists' families. Usually

concealed from outsiders, these confidential, ancestral stories reflect the sadness

of a less than perfect world. Viewers roam freely through this private, digit-
ized archive and create their own montages, unleashing their own sagas.

Today, Japanese intellectuals are pondering characteristically Asian appli-
cations of computers and the camera arts, again looking to such iconic forms as

ink painting for local strategies and viewpoints. Such a proposal is not a sim-
ple one, given the fact that people worldwide use similar computers and EDI-

on and fiber-optic telephone lines, and are moving globally toward new kinds of

commercial, consumer, and artistic inter-
changes. This new global project will be the focus of Nippon Telephone and Tele-
graph (NTT)'s art and technology museum scheduled to open in Tokyo in 1995.

In Japan new technologies—espe-
cially video—have pervaded daily life.

Not only are taxis, trains, elevators, and
doctor's waiting rooms equipped with

flat-screen televisions showing the news and visual Muzak, but billboard-size
video projections of soft drink and fash-

ion commercials that seductively sell a

"life-style" light up thoroughfares in

major urban shopping and nightlife dis-

tricts. Video has become as common and disposposable as wooden chopsticks.

Although Japanese artists have been experimenting with film and video for
ever over four decades, like their foreign col-
leagues, they have been constrained by the expense of making innovative art with
these new tools, and the difficulty of find-
ing an audience. There is little corporate

tax incentive in Japan to encourage com-
panies to support other artists or non-

profit art organizations, and when they
do purchase art, they tend to buy an

expensive Van Gogh or a Rubik's cube. Until recently, Japanese government

agencies have also been conservative, directing their monies toward "national
living treasures" who practice traditional crafts or established forms of theater.
The corporate giants, such as Sony, Matsu-

hiba, and Sharp give only occasional free access to hardware for younger, experi-

mental artists.

Exhibition opportunities in Japan are far more limited than in North Amer-
ica or Europe, where experimental film and video have a support network of

museums and alternative galleries. Com-
pared with their Western colleagues,

Japanese film and video makers receive

little support from the Japanese culture

establishment. They operate in a twilight zone between the fine arts and the com-

mercial world, and their work lacks the

prestige afforded conventional art

objects and mass-entertainment prod-

ucts. Still, the field is fertile with ideas,
because film and video artists have

autonomously found their way.

SOTES:

1. Partly raised by a great uncle who owned a film theater, Terayama grew up watching often six

movies a day, even sleeping behind the screen or in the projection booth. Wanting literary graces as a

teenager, he attended Waseda University before being hospitalized for three years with a chronic kidney ailment. He then lived on

the streets and worked in Shinjuku, Tokyo's closest equivalent to New York's Greenwich Village. When he died in 1983, he was buried by friends on

every continent.

2. The Sights Art Center sponsored a wide range of programs, including Wada Ryo's "Images of New TV" in 1961, a performance by Merce Cun-

ningham, John Cage's concert with David Tudor, and Nam June Paik's Cage concert in 1964 (see

Chapter 10, "Twenty Years of American Short Films" in 1969 was jointly held in Tokyo by Siga-
to with The National Museum of Modern Art and the Asian Auditorium. Films by Stan Vanderberd, Bruce Baule, Brian Comber, Lee Lye, Paul Shar-
in, Clifford Harrington, Ed Snowdell, Robert

Brue, Maye Deen, and Kenneth Anger were shown for the first time. The Tokyo Film Art Festi-
val's 1968 included Jean-Luc Godard's Le Chro-

nuo, Michael Snow's Wavelength, Tony Conrad's

Flower, Paul Sharits's Raise Blade, Takahiko

Imura's Three Colors, and Joel Valthier's Beetle

Electronics. Subsequently, the Festival was closed down by the radical student movement in the late sixties.

6. These included Etsu Fujita (Image Arts), the journal of the Image Arts Society (Etsu Fujita na Ka

Kai). Members were kuriko Kurimoto, Tatsuhiko

Noritsuka, Noda Shinnichi, and Osawa Shinsuke. The group disbanded around 1968 over theoretical differences

with those who sought more avant-

garde expression. Matsumoto Toshi edited anoth-
er film magazine, Kiriko nips (Documentary Film). The short-lived Film Independant group was

founded with members Takahiko Imura;

Ohayuki Nabahiko; Takabayashi Yutaka;

Kuwake Kenji; Akihiko Moris; and Ishibiki

Kiyoshi, who translated P. Adams Sitney's Film

Culture Reader. The group broke up in 1965.

7. In his own distinctive way, the Tokyo artist Gut-

(literary) Shinbashii was making abstract films

and videotapes about light and the formal qualities of the media. In the late sixties, he showed these at such Tokyo disoeuboros as L.S.D. and Killer

Joe's, at Niki Hall, and on Nihon Television.

8. Members included Nakaya, Tsumo, and

Yamaguchi, as well as Idemoto Masa, Kawa-

Makubayashi, Kobayashi, and Yanamto-

Koiso.

9. After the student movement in the sixties, most

men dropped out of society and married their

female colleagues, who had played lesser roles.
The more outspoken women felt they needed to do

something positive against the tendency to repress

individuality. Inspired by the writings of Kato Hid-

let and Betty Friedan, such magazines as Otsu

Ero were started. Instead of wanting to change all

of society, women wanted to change their own

lives. They believed that if they began living by

their own principles, society would be changed.

They occasionally confronted the system directly, opposing an abortion law in 1972. By 1973, the movement had lost its momentum.
Plate 164
MATSUMOTO Toshio
Amac
1975
Film

Plate 162
IDA Shintei
Conception
1970-85
Multimedia installation
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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   A. Books
   B. Exhibition Catalogues
   C. Magazine Articles and Special Issues

COMPILED BY KASHIWAGI TOMOII
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This bibliography is organized as follows:

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Entries are arranged chronologically, unless otherwise noted. Bibliographic citations may also be found in the Notes to each chapter and in Critica di Giografia in Chapter 15.

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(R.T.)

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Alfred S. Frueh is the Henry G. and Lila L. Frueh Professor of Japanese Art and Curator of Japanese Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. He is a specialist in Japanese 19th-century and contemporary art. He has organized numerous exhibitions and catalogues, and his research has been widely published in various academic journals and books. His recent catalogues include "Keisuke Sato: Paintings 1958-2004," "Takahashi Tatsuo: The Art of the 20th Century," and "Nakahara Masami: The Art of the 20th Century." His current research focuses on contemporary Japanese art, particularly the work of contemporary artists such as Takahashi Tatsuo and Nakahara Masami.

On a recent trip to Japan, Frueh visited the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the National Museum of Modern Art, and several private collections. He was particularly impressed by the contemporary art section of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which features a number of important works by contemporary Japanese artists.

Frueh is currently working on a new catalogue of contemporary Japanese art, which will be published in 2023. He plans to focus on the work of younger artists who are pushing the boundaries of traditional Japanese art forms.

In his free time, Frueh enjoys hiking in the nearby mountains and exploring the culinary delights of San Francisco's vibrant food scene. He is also an avid reader and enjoys spending time with his family and friends.
MORITI Shiroy
Born in Toyokawa, Hyogo Prefecture, 1912, in Kyoto.

Mori Shiroy: She Beasts and Men (Calligraphy)

NUOQI! 0-0000-7058-8
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