

Ei Arakawa: Notes for 2010



Clip: Ei Arakawa/Mari Mukai/Gela Patashuri/Sergei Tcherepnin, *Hurt Locker Instruments*, 2010, performance, Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, Photo: Casco, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Audience = City = Social Space = Bodies

X wavering **expectations** (what they want)

Exclusions/Inclusions, Non-administrative:

Non-service

Position of audience (spectators, participants, **being deceived, cheated, lied to**)

Position of objects (such as momentary force, movement, weight of materials)

Position in context (social meaning of art, painting, history)

Unfixed Architecture/Constellation (handling hierarchy)

Bodies/Movement

Music/Sound (?)

Objects (the media through which we make contact)

Image

Text (magazines, or other meaning productions)



A scan of an advertisement in *frieze* magazine.

Here, I would like to write about something that I am currently researching, that is

Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop) as well as about some of my past performances and their method of organisation. Some kind of connection might be there. Jikken Kobo is an art group that formed in Japan in the 1950s. They were a collaborative group of visual artists, composers, and theatre designers, who worked together in Tokyo for roughly 6 years and were active under the guidance of the prominent Japanese Surrealist literature critic, Shozo Takiguchi. However, information on Jikken Kobo is scarce, most of my English source material comes from an unpublished PhD dissertation by a New York based art historian, Miwako Tezuka. So for those of you who are interested in Jikken Kobo after reading these notes, please look at Miwako Tezuka's detailed work, which is available online from Colombia University for about \$20.

Miwako Tezuka, *Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop), Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s*, Thesis, (PhD), Columbia University: New York, 2005.



Grand Openings poster



Clip: Ei Arakawa and Nikolas Gambaroff, *Two-Alphabet Monograms*, 2009, performance, Atti Democratici, Bolzano, Photo: Christian Fusco, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Pro Choice, Vienna; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

There has been a wave of avant-garde performance groups in modern Japanese art since the 1920s (see *Nihon no Dada 1920-1970* [Dada in Japan], edited by Shirakawa Yoshio, Tokyo: Hakuba Shobo and Kazenobara, 1988, republished in 2005/2006 from Suisei-sha, Tokyo). Some of its leaders were educated in a foreign country, or had first hand experience of the avant-garde in Germany and France. For instance, another of my favourite art groups is MAVO, who initiated the Futurist-Constructivist

movement in pre-war Japan after spending 11 months in Berlin around 1922 engaging with local artists such as choreographer Mary Wigman. The leaders of MAVO appropriated what they had experienced in Europe and translated it into their own practice when they returned to Japan. This appropriation, however, developed different narrative structures to those of the continental art movements, this was due to the cultural and political circumstances as well as the notion of individualism particular to Japan. Traditionally, Japanese society was structured primarily around concepts of collectivism, the notion of individualism is an import from the West, which has been internalised by modern Japanese society. Since 2004 – as I am almost always working as part of a group – I have been interested in how those groups, and specifically those that are Japanese, formed, and then eventually dissolved throughout history. I am interested in the administration of group activities and in how group dynamics are produced.

Shown here is a Yoga-like performance made together with Karl Holmqvist. We moved our bodies in response to the notion of ‘united’ or ‘untied’. Sometimes the movements were in response to a word as Karl Holmqvist read from his own poetry, appropriating the song, *United* by Throbbing Gristle.



Clip: Karl Holmqvist featuring Ei Arakawa, *A BODY LETTER PHYSIQUE*, 2010, performance, Galerie Neu, Photo: Bogislav Ziemer, Courtesy of artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin

Subjectivity and **Inter-subjectivity**

To draw attention away from the individual performer/artist, or to redistribute it between 2 or more performers.

The relationship between myself and the other members of the performance.

How do power relations exist? Co-dependency?

My own contributions as well as those made in response to other members contributions.

Do not direct too much, rely on each member's improvised decisions during the performance.

Criteria of grouping

Fixed members or not?

The notion of 'Insider' and 'Outsider', and how that changes during the course of the production.

Artists and non-Artist members

Specific community (**not a universal body**)

Some of you may already know about Gutai art group, an art group that formed in Japan in the 1950s. Gutai were recently represented at the Venice Biennale and in Documenta 12. Their works are widely recognised; being held in several public collections outside Japan, and later this year their artist made magazines, originally produced in the 1950s, are being re-issued.

Many Japanese artists in the early to mid twentieth century belonged to an association of artists' groups, this is particular to Japan's art system and stems from the craft associations of pre-modern times. Gutai also seemed, at least in the beginning, to be more of a formalised artists' association rather than a contemporary art group whose formation often appears as more fluid and organic. Yet Gutai's activity was not confined to the formal boundaries of an association and they were able to remain fluid. This was especially true of the group's mentor Jiro Yoshihara who continued to distribute their self-published magazines outside Japan. Jackson Pollock, Allan Kaprow, and Simone Forti are just a few of the artists who were informed about Gutai's practice through their magazines, if not by experiencing one of their performances.

A turning point came for Gutai in 1957 when they connected with the French painting movement, Informel, when the critic Michel Tapié visited or rather 'escaped to Japan' after the movement began to fade in France. Gutai was introduced to Tapié in order to reinvigorate the Informel. To me this was unfortunate, as it meant that Gutai began to shift their production toward more wall-object productions in response to market interests. This could be due to the way Gutai worked with a structure of mentoring. Their activities were always heavily dependent on the leadership and sponsorship of Jiro Yoshihara, who owned a large cooking oil company in Japan. Gutai continued to practise up until 1972, although some of its original members became disillusioned

and decided to leave the group much earlier. On the day of Jiro Yoshihara's death Gutai will cease its activities. I am sorry that the way I write this suggests that I am skeptical of Gutai.



Kissing the Canvas (postponed), 2008, performance, New Museum, New York, Courtesy of artists and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

As a comparison to Gutai, Jikken Kobo, founded in 1951, was a mystery. This is probably because of the short life-span of the group. They collaborated on theatre productions (similar to Gutai) and sometimes they made commercially commissioned films – their work was often driven by the latest technology available following the end of WWII.

There is now a renewed interest in, or re-evaluation of performance art of the recent past especially within Western institutions. This might be an incentive to the current 'Jikken Kobo campaign', galleries seem to be 're-discovering' Jikken Kobo; at Art Basel 2010 Taka Ishii Gallery from Japan screened some of Jikken Kobo's films (in which I was also involved). Last year Annely Juda Fine Art in London showed some of Jikken Kobo's artists, followed by another small show in Karlsruhe in the art space Mayerei. There was also a section of Jikken Kobo's work in the Gwangju Biennale 2010. I am hoping that this interest from within the art market and institutions will help to increase understanding of the wave of performance art groups that came out of Japan, otherwise this wave will exist merely as incidental fragments of history, that somehow disappear without a trace ... Mavo, Jikken Kobo, Gutai, High Red Center, Neo Dada Organizers, Zero Jigen, and most recently, Dumb Type ...



A flyer for M for Mavoists (... and so on).

In relation to the historicity of performance I recently made a work at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. Above is an image of the flyer. The University of Michigan is famous for its football team, with the iconic blue or yellow 'M'. For this performance, commissioned by the art history conference *PoNJA GenKon*, I collaborated with historians of post-1945 Japanese art, and collected a list of significant 'M' subjects in that field. The university's logo was adopted as part of the performance.



Clip: *M for Mavoists (... and so on)*, 2010, performance, University of Michigan Museum, Ann Arbor, Photo: Jacob Proctor, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop)

Ballet: The Joy of Life (ikiru yorokobi), November 16, 1951

Relief: A Passage To Another Dimension (ijigen eno michi), Feb 1952

The Fifth Presentation (an automatic slide projector with synchronised tape recorder), September 1953

Arnold Schönberg Concert in 1954

Experimental Ballet Theatre, March 1955

Theatre: Pierrot Lunaire in December 1955

Cafe Fugetsudo in Shinjuku, Summer 1956

Film: Silver Wheel in May 1956

Cafe Fugetsudo in Shinjuku, Summer 1957



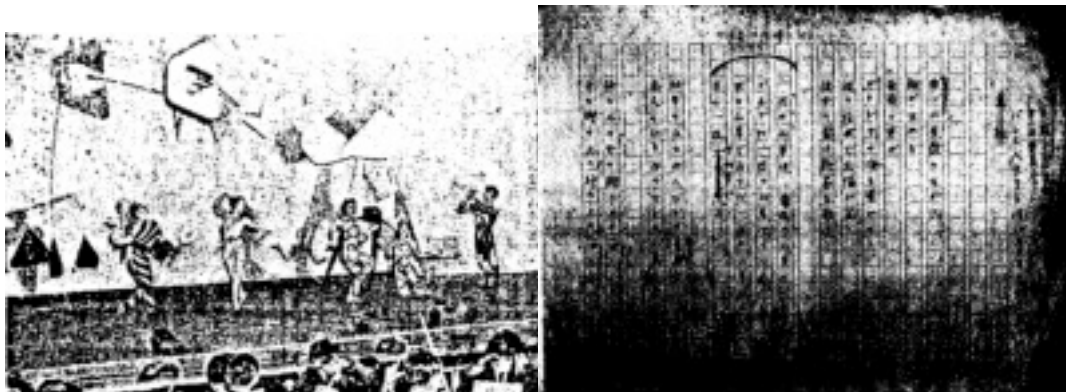
An image of Jikken Kobo found online.

According to Miwako Tezuka, 'Jikken Kobo has been in existence in the field, paradoxically, as an absence (...) Indeed, the group has been thought of as an urban myth, something plausible but not definitive. The Kōbō – “the workshop” - existed in Tokyo, the capital of art and politics, but only as a creative movement and not as a physical institution.' This is quoted from page 26 of the text I noted previously.

Often they referred to their activity as a 'presentation', rather than an 'exhibition', probably because Jikken Kobo had two main 'departments'. One was visual art and the other music. Their first presentation was a ballet commissioned in relation to a major Picasso retrospective in Japan. The ballet was called *The Joy of Life* (Ikiru Yorokobi) after Picasso's painting of the same title seen here.



Picasso: *The Joy of Life*



The Joy of Life

I like that the first occasion for the group to act was commissioned from outside the group, instead of having a manifestation that emphasised their autonomous status. It was sponsored by *Yomiuri* newspaper in Japan who were eager to gain readership by supporting liberal cultural events in the period immediately after the war. Some of Jikken Kobo's earliest members met at a workshop organised by an art school during the summer of 1948. This led to the formation of ongoing informal meetings amongst them. Eventually they connected with Shozo Takiguchi, who was something like Jikken Kobo's 'modest' mentor. It was Takiguchi who suggested that a group of artists should collaborate on producing a ballet for a commission from the news company. This may sound opportunistic, but in Japan art production often comes out of the commercial sector due to the nature of the traditional role of 'artist' in society. Moreover, Shozo Takiguchi, who was also a literature critic, always provided a form of guidance for their creative dignity, and although he was never the official patron of the group it was he who suggested the name Jikken Kobo. Perhaps he functioned more like a modest guardian than, say, a leader (which was the case with Jiro Yoshihara's role in Gutai).

Jikken Kobo usually consisted of 14 main members during their 6 years of activity. The 'visual art department' was represented by Shozo Kitadai, Hideko Fukushima and Katsuhiro Yamaguchi, and the 'music department' was often represented by Toru Takemitsu, Joji Yuasa, and also the poet, Kuniharu Akiyama (in fact, after Stravinsky's visit to Japan in 1958, Toru Takemitsu became known internationally through this contact). Throughout these 6 years they consistently made 'presentations' and also maintained ties with their sponsors for both theatre and ballet commissions. Jikken Kobo's music department organised a Arnold Schönberg concert as part of a presentation in 1954, which was the earliest of its kind in Japan. For one of the Jikken Kobo presentations in 1953, they collaborated with Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Company, which was later to become Sony, the company provided them with an automatic slide projector and a synchronised tape recorder.



The fifth presentation program



An awning design for PS1

Grand Openings is the the artists' collective I am part of. We organised a performance in Vienna 2008, for this, Vienna born artist Josef Strau helped to complement our performance. Below is a text borrowed from Josef that was used in this Grand Openings performance:

voices for the transformation of an art space.

the **ART ACTION GROUP** performs voices to express nomadism, voices of non-nativeness. german nativeness is chosen to address the field of experience. experience is worth more than opinions. let us wrap experience up in fiction instead of in opinions, until we cannot distinguish experience from fiction.

the art action group should choose to formulate difference and dissidence even, possibly.

these are notes for the art action group, notes for a new space of cultural attitudes.

suggestions to describe the contemporary cultural space.

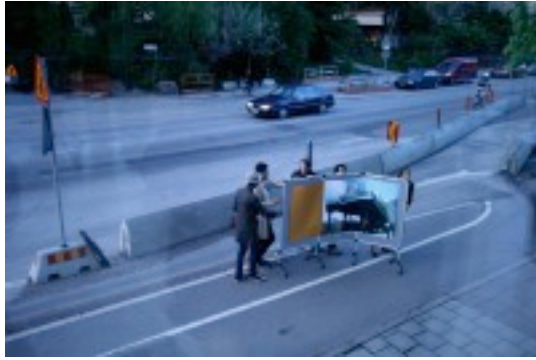
the art action group is more a poetry action group. its first and maybe only medium is language. it is a theatre.

these assumptions on german culture are fictional, should be perceived as fiction, they are like many other fictions born in the experience of reality, but they are suggested as fiction. its main character will be the "dissident". the dissident is neither native nor nomad. he is not satisfied to express political difference, he needs cultural difference. cultural difference can only be acted, not just explained like political difference. the dissident observes the main forms of behaviour which are the vehicles of nativeness and transforms them creates and cultivates behavioural forms. emphasizing not only nomadism but as well praising forms of instability etc. like anti-architectural modes as are for example strongly manifested in the procedures of sukka building.

here are examples of the fictitious analysis of the behavioural modes. they are written quickly, unconcerned almost, in a mode of *écriture automatique*.

Text by Josef Strau

‘Grand Openings has so far focused on group activity with fixed members. It is a performance collective that consists of five different ‘commitments’; a performance artist (myself); a painter/musician/writer (Jutta Koether); a gallerist/artist/singer (Emily Sundblad); a curator (Jay Sanders); and a composer (Stefan Tcherepnin). We have been working collaboratively since 2005, and our most recent performance was in Sweden where Emily Sundblad comes from originally.’



Clip: Grand Openings, *Grand Openings High Liners*, 2010, performance, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, Photo: Bonniers Konsthall, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

What is Scenario?

Design/Planning/Organising impulse (Time Restraints)

Often without rehearsals (although this is not always on purpose)

Design that aims to remove itself, and that continues to shift in form throughout the performance and post-performance.

CHAOTIC, and yet it is a struggle to produce meaning

Some brief scenarios, to-do lists, **not an overview**

New York/Brooklyn:

Localised Group? Out of Reena Spaulings Fine Art

Public/Commercial

Friends/Admirers/Influences (mostly friends in New York)

Jutta Koether, Bernardette Corporation, Reena Spaulings, Nora Shultz, Sam Lewitt, Henning Bohl, Merlin Carpenter, Continuous Project, and Etc.

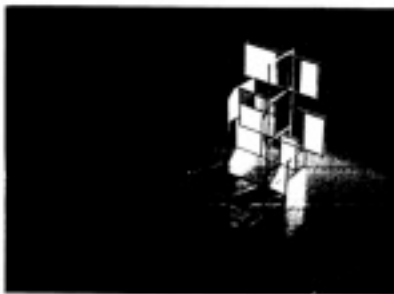


Fig.119. Kishōi Shōzō, *Space Modulator*, 1957, wood and paper, 28.0 x 202.0 cm (variable), Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba.



Space Space

The image on the left is Shozo Kitadai, and the image on the right is a photographic artwork by Kiyoshi Otsuji. Katsuhiro Yamaguchi created the construction in this photograph solely for the photo shoot. In 1956 Jikken Kobo made a promotional film commissioned by the bicycle industry, it was called *Silver Wheel* (Ginrin). The sound was created by Toru Takemitsu. The film was a sort of theatre commercial, but it is very theatrical, funny, surreal.. The image of the moving bicycle parts seemed eerie yet at the same time light hearted.

Clip: *Silver Wheel* in May 1956 (not allowed for re-print)

Dance Like Movement

Anxiety to stay in one place?

Everything must move?

How does 'this make use of a circuit of energy that is neither inside or outside, before or after the event?'

How is this 'never really owned by any one participant but passed around as the specific spatial concept of the performance?'

Production time?

Design Problem

Fear of being organised?

Regulations, freedom, or both



Mari Mukai is a friend, and self-taught carpenter.

When I do a performance I often construct temporary buildings throughout its duration . These are built with the help of several collaborators, such as Mari Mukai. Usually I fly to the place of the performance some 4 or 5 days in advance, sometimes

just 2 days, and try to source materials, acknowledge those who invited me, and do a performance. The majority of the locations are in the cities in Europe; New York; sometimes other parts of the USA; and more recently in Tokyo and Seoul.

In 1955 Jikken Kobo was involved in 2 theatre works. The image seen in the Taka Ishii gallery advertisement in *frieze* magazine shows a photograph of a robot like structure which was used in the performance called the Experimental Ballet Theatre by Jikken Kobo, from March 1955. They also performed their experimental form of Noh theatre called Pierrot Lunaire (tsuki ni tsukareta piero) in this structure December 1955, after Arnold Schönberg.



Fig.112. Kitada Shūei, made of Pierrot (left: drawing; right: as worn by the performer), 1955, painted wood.



Fig.113. Kitada Shūei, made of Pierrot (left: drawing; right: as worn by the performer), 1955, painted wood.

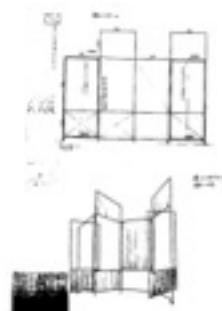


Fig.117. Kitada Shūei, mobile designs for Pierrot Lunaire, 1955, ink on paper.

Some stage materials from Pierrot Lunaire.

Their final activity as a group seems to have been the installation of a Bauhaus style Café Fugetsudo in both 1956 and 1957. Here they gave concerts and poetry readings that related to the installation. Jikken Kobo naturally dispersed in 1957 and members shifted into primarily solo activities, although many carried on collaborating afterwards as well.

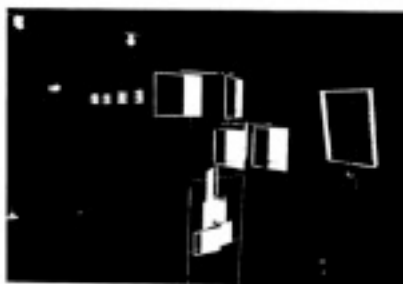


Fig.41. Jikken Kōbō, Summer Exhibition for the Enjoyment of a New Vision and Space by the Members of Experimental Workshop Jikken Kōbō menshi ei yoru anorachi (shikaku to kōkan o tenochimu natsu no shikashijō), 1956, installation view, Fugetsudo, Shinjuku, Tokyo. Photograph by Kitada Shūei.



Fig.45. Fugetsudo, interior view, a wall-embedded sound system on the back wall, Shinjuku, Tokyo, 1955.

Café Fugetsudo



Clip: TEPPICH (Ei Arakawa and Sergei Tcherepnin), *Sky, Horse and Death*, 2009, performance, ICA, London, Photo: Tom Medwell, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Or



Clip: *I am an employee of United*, 2010, performance, Galerie Neu, Berlin, Photo: Bogislav Ziemer, Courtesy of artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin

I said, a Sort of a Scarecrow = Someone misheard, Social Scarecrows
Scarecrows = audience = architecture?

Group Comedy

Attention to the specific moment/situation, power relations

How to vary the power relations?

What can I offer, in relation to the city (**Not necessarily site-specific**)



An Exchange with Yuming; Ei Arakawa and Mari Mukai, homelessness, YUMING CITIES, 2008, performance, Yokohama Triennale, Kanagawa, Photo: Keizo Kioku, Courtesy of artists and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Here is a photo taken in Japan in 2008. During this half hour performance, I reconstructed the architecture from memory. I had experienced this space as a teenager. It evoked a utopian fantasy although it related to commercial Pop culture. I was part of a fan club for Yuming, a singer, for 10 years, and went to see her in concert in this space every year. The majority of people at her concerts were women; it was a very feminine space, one in which I felt very comfortable. During the concerts there was an opportunity for someone to sing with her on the stage, lots of fans raise their hands so she could pick someone. I raised my hand as well. Then she told me from the stage, ‘You must be gay as I see the way you raising hand!’ (although she didn’t used the word gay, she implied it). This singer was among the audience at the performance in 2008: she came to my performance. The performance also included a large print out of my interview with the producer of this singer. The performance created a reciprocal experience.