

03 EI ARAKAWA



Dictionary of Ei Arakawa
 Excerpts from a Preliminary Edition
 REIKO TOMII

Arakawa: This lexiconic study concerns Ei (b. 1977), a performance artist who came to New York in 1998, not Shūsaku (b. 1936), a conceptualist who came to New York in 1961. Just like the younger filmmaker Kurosawa Kiyoshi who has to contend with the qualifier, “not Akira, no relation,” Ei stands in the shadow of his well-known predecessor.

Collectivity: Arakawa’s *modus operandi* is characterized by collectivism. For his breakthrough performance, *Mid-Yuming as Reconstruction Mood* (2004), he gathered together six non-artist women to perform with him. Since then, gathering a team of collaborators became an integral part of his work. While he mobilized eight fellow international art students from the National Academy School of Fine Arts (NASFA) and the Art Students League in *On Kawara’s Esperanto* (2004), he invited eighteen fellow international students from the Peridance Center to dance

in *Metropolis* (2005). (He was a student at NASFA and Peridance at those times.) Although his conception and deployment of collectivism is highly fluid and temporal, he has recently formed two groups, “Grand Openings” (with Reena Spaulings affiliates) and “Togawa Fan Club,” whose memberships are relatively stable.

Construction: See *Mood*.

Grand Openings: See *Collectivity*.

History: Historically conscious, Arakawa makes frequent historical references in his work. Artists to whom he has paid homage or otherwise alluded include: Kusama Yayoi; Gutai’s Murakami Saburō; Tezuka Osamu (*Astro Boy*); Donald Judd; and Dan Graham. *RIOT THE BAR 2005* was inspired by the Stonewall Riot of 1969 (Pl. 3.1). See also Kawara, On.

PLATE 3.1

Ei Arakawa
RIOT (neon sign) from *RIOT THE BAR 2005*
 2005
 Performance at Bard College, Annandale-
 on-Hudson, N.Y.
 Neon sign: 5 x 16" (12.7 x 40.6 cm),
 edition of 3 + 1 A.P.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Kawara, On: A prominent conceptualist known for his *Date Painting* series, On Kawara presents Arakawa with the riddle of internationalism and identity, compelling the younger artist to create a series of works. Arakawa first made a fake *Date Painting* while flying back from Tokyo to New York. Having incorrectly translated “Duty Free” into Esperanto in this airborne project, he devised a performance, *On Kawara’s Esperanto*, in which international art students mass-produced *Date Paintings* on wood with the correct word, *Senimposta*, written on them. These fake On Kawaras were immediately “deconstructed” and turned into constructivist sculptures. The two projects, together with his research paper on Kawara’s signing practice in the *Bathroom* series (1952), were then turned into a video, *Make Your Name Foreign* (2005), which premiered at PoNJA-GenKon’s* first art-history conference, held at Yale University (Pl. 3.3).

Mood: Arakawa on “mood” in *Mid-Yuming as Reconstruction Mood*: “If ‘reconstruction’ is our group’s desire, the performance is a temporal condition of our desire that creates ‘mood.’ This ‘mood’ signifies music that is mid-Yuming. It’s about a ‘construction’ of mood. Mood is the installation. Mood seems more spatial than objects in my performance.” Arakawa on “mood” in *On Kawara’s Esperanto*: “If the ‘constructivist’ objects at Greene Naftali are art works of Ei Arakawa, then what are the other parts of the performance that happen all at the same time? Maybe these objects look like art works, but, in fact, they are a part of the production of mood as art.”

Music: Arakawa’s use of blasting music, selections of which are often informed by historical references, is instrumental in creating a “mood” in his performance. See also *Mood*.

Multiplicity: Performative scenes Arakawa choreographs are deliberately chaotic. In his work, the artist himself is hardly the center of attention. Neither are the performers’ bodily acts the sole element of his work, be it a grand jeté in *Metropolis* (2005) or crawling in *Two Grahams* (2007) (Pl. 3.4). His works are varyingly comprised of multiple elements—including “construction” of some sort (which is often followed by destruction), blasting music, artist’s books (produced in advance or during the performance), and video projections—which, together with task-oriented or mundane movements, generate a multifaceted “spectacle” that refuses to offer a single meaning but encourages his audience to be multitasking in their observation.

Name: Name is closely tied to identity in Arakawa’s mind. To create a fluctuating identity, Arakawa authored *Make Your Name Foreign* as Huang-chuan Yi, using the Chinese reading of his Japanese name. See also *Kawara, On*.

Reena Spaulings: A fictional gallerist, created by John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad, with a cast of collaborators that includes Arakawa. The namesake gallery was opened in 2004 in New York’s Chinatown, where Arakawa presented *Mid-Yuming as Reconstruction Mood, Toward A Standard Risk Architecture* (2006), and *Two Grahams*.

Temporality: A perennial multi-tasker, Arakawa introduces multiple layers of temporality in his performative work: the physical time of performance; the temporal existence of the team assembled; and historical time(s). See also *History*.

Togawa Fan Club: See *Collectivity*.

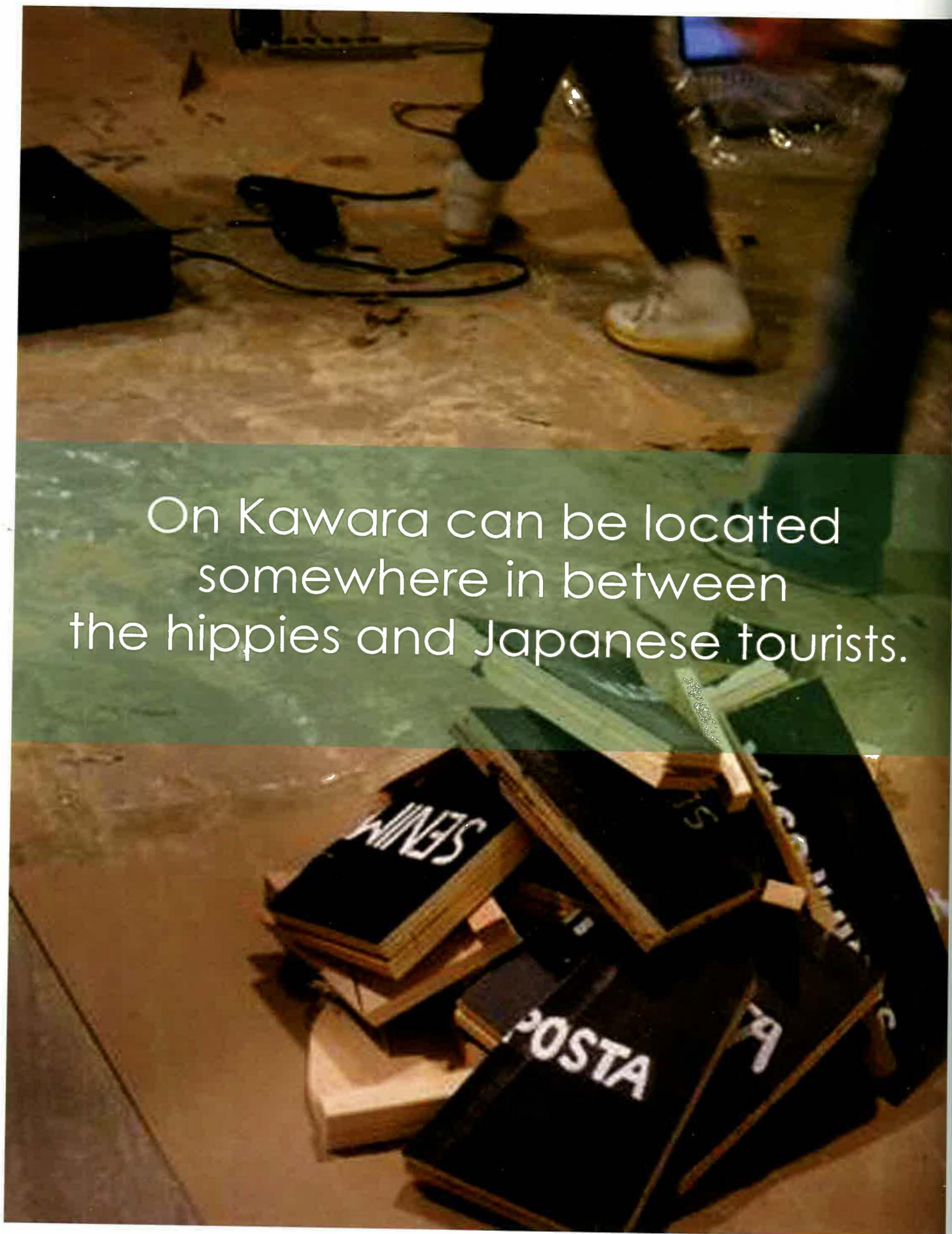
Yuming: A female singer-songwriter active and popular in Japan since the 1970s.

*PoNJA-GenKon (Post-1945 Japanese Art Discussion Group/Gendai Bijutsu Kondankai) is a scholarly listserv group.



PLATE 3.2

Ei Arakawa
Scene from *1979 Pink Floyd as Reconstruction Mood*
2007
Performance at Royal College of Art, London
PHOTO: WILL LEACH

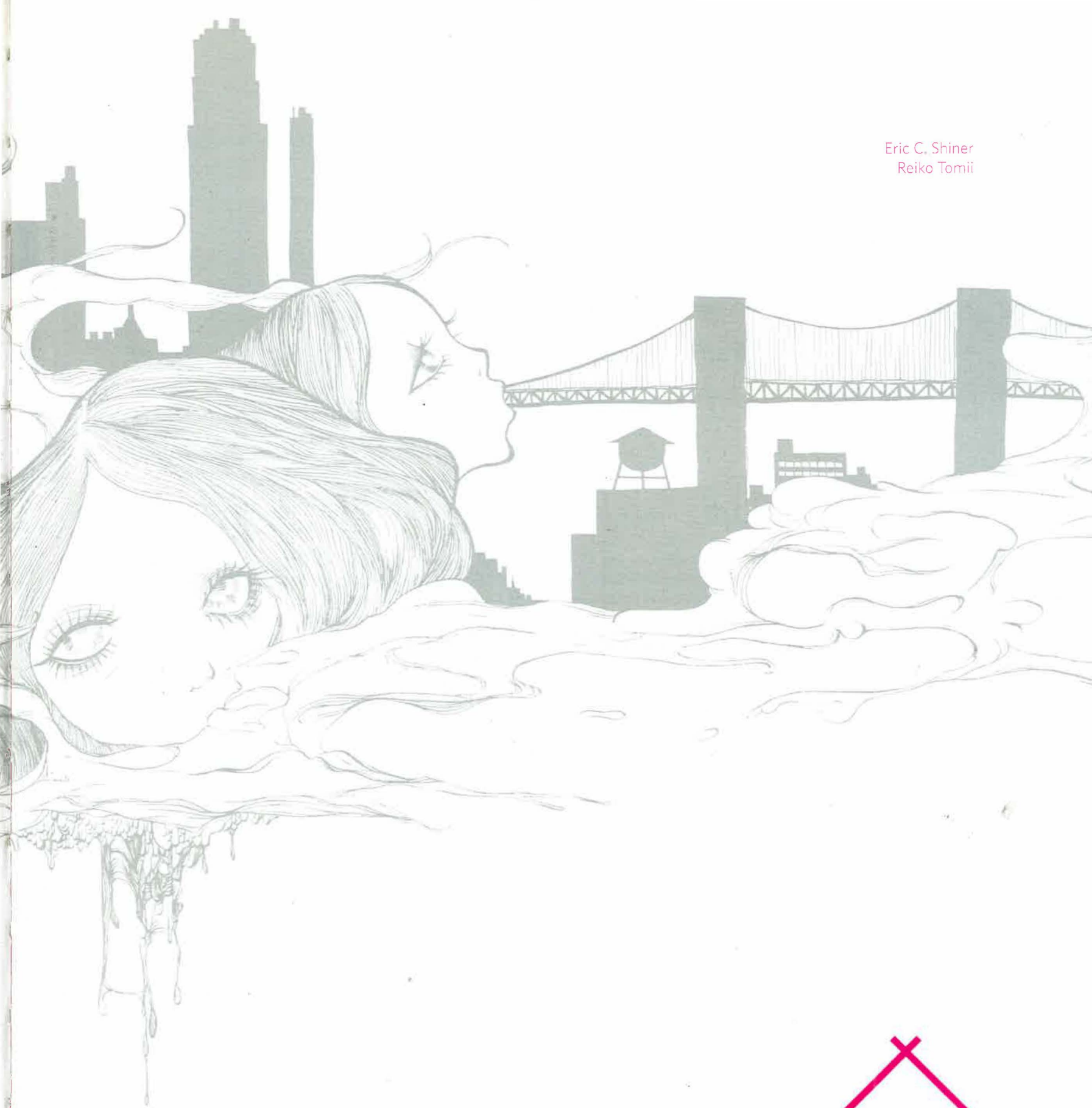


On Kawara can be located
somewhere in between
the hippies and Japanese tourists.

✕ PLATE 3-3

Ei Arakawa
Still from *Make Your Name Foreign*
2005
Video
13 minutes 39 seconds
Collection of the artist
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Eric C. Shiner
Reiko Tomii



**MAKING
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