

## Megalopolis Aborigines: The Tokyo-Osaka Action Art Ensemble's 1992 Tour

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While Japan is well known for its economic power and its tea ceremony, its language is still much ignored. Homage is due to the translators of classical and modern Japanese literature, but translations of documents on contemporary culture are comparatively few. Important lags in the transmission of information about the social and cultural situation undoubtedly reinforce fundamental misunderstandings. I believe it is urgent to proceed to an effective revision of clichés and stereotypes such as the idea of difference. It has, in some cases, become obsolete to discuss distinctions between East and West, as there is—especially in Japan—an enormous curiosity and an ultra-fast assimilation of specific elements of European and American cultures, which are imported because they somehow fit a certain "Eastern" sensibility. The difference is often not where we believe it is.

### THE FORMATION OF THE TOKYO-OSAKA ACTION ART ENSEMBLE

Since 1984, the Hinoemata Performance Festival has happened every summer. It was first organized by Oikawa Nobuhiro's Scorpio-INPA (International Network Node of Performance and Art and Performing Art) office, and afterwards by related teams of artists and critics, among them Kogawa Tetsuo, Hamada Gôji, Ogushi Kôji, Takei Yoshimichi and Itô Tâli. Because of its flexibility, many young artists joined the event, and the little village of Fukushima Prefecture soon became a unique place for communication and discovery.

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From the time I began participating in these events in 1990, I imagined presenting our activities to a European audience. In the domain of experimental performance, dance and music, the well-known Ôno Kazuo, Kosugi Takehisa and Suzuki Akio regularly give concerts in Europe and America. Nevertheless, there had been no recent representations of a larger group of artists that would give a global idea of the situation of this domain.

In May 1991 I met Matthias Osterwold, director of Freunde Guter Musik, who presents, for the most part, avant-garde music in Berlin. He invited us to participate in his Urbane Aboriginale Festival, which was to be held in 1992. I asked the most original people I had worked with to think about it. As a result, Chino Shûichi, Fujieda Mamoru, Furukawa Toshimasa, Haino Keiji, Hamada Gôji, Ishii Mitsutaka, Itô Tâli, Kazakura Shô, Merzbow (Akita Masami, Azuma Reiko and Sakaibara Tetsuo), Mukai Chie, Nozawa Mika, Opera (Kakiage Nahôko and Sagara Nami), Office Trip (Takei Yoshimichi and Seidô Toshiyuki), Shimoda Seiji, Takeda Kenichi, Yoshizawa Motoharu and myself all gathered under the name Tokyo-Osaka Action Art Ensemble.

I also sent documents to Paul and Helena Panhuysen of Appollohuis, Logos Duo (Gottfried Raes and Moniek Darge) and MANCA (Musiques Actuelles Nice Côte d'Azur) Director Michel Redolfi, who all showed much interest in the project. Tokyo Gallery Surge's director Sakai Shinichi offered to help in November 1991. Together we visited the major Japanese institutions that usually sponsor contemporary art and music, but we could only gather enough money to fly to Europe: Japanese companies rarely sponsor events happening outside Japan and have difficulty understanding experimental art.

However, we finally embarked on a tour entitled "Megalopolis Aborigines," appearing at the Urbane Aboriginale Festival in Berlin from 16 to 27 October

(the Toki Doki Jidô Ensemble took part on the last two days of our performances); at Apollohuis and other venues in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, from 29 October to 1 November; in the Logos Tetraeder of Ghent, Belgium, from 3 to 6 November; and at the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain de Nice, France, during the MANCA Festival, from 12 to 15 November 1992.

### MULTIPLICITY

The diversity and openness of disciplines and directions seemed to me a necessary condition for the development of the activities of the Tokyo-Osaka Action Art Ensemble. Our "common point" is multiplicity in terms of approaches to artistic creation. We are able to realize works in collaboration with artists in other disciplines: that is, to place different domains of art in relation. Some of us even use several media simultaneously, such as body, sound and visual installations.

This refusal of arbitrary categories is clearly perceived in the work of Haino Keiji, who defines himself as being "consciously in search of an experience simultaneously involving both hearing and vision" [1]. In Berlin and Nice, he chose to play percussion in the dark hallway of the Podewil concert hall and the even darker hall of the MAMAC, using the floor and the walls as extensions of his instruments. His choice to use darkness and his refusal to oppose audience and performer—an opposition that is commonly experienced in theaters—created conditions that allowed for a kind of "seeing" of the resonances as well as a feeling of them in the body.

Another means of providing a double source of stimulation appears in the work of pianist Nozawa Mika, who superimposes slide projections above

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**Fig. 1. Furukawa Toshimasa in performance during the Megalopolis Ab-origines tour, 18 October 1992. (Photo: Johannes Zappe)**

her instrument that feature puns on the word “piano.” The visual element intervenes in the margin of the music in order to shift our attention to other dimensions of perception. Two other musicians who refuse to be referred to as such, Shimoda Seiji and Furukawa Toshimasa, produce sounds with body movements: They use simple materials such as plastic bags, adhesive tape, ropes or bricks to create resonances in such a way that they lead us to perceive silent actions as music as well (Fig. 1). Every gesture thus becomes musical, without having to be transformed into audible sound.

Daniel Charles explains this principle in his essay “The Aesthetic of Non-dualism”: “What is non-dualism? The answer lies within the question itself; it is before language itself. . . . Violence toward dualism determines the achieving of non-violence—that is to say, the degree zero of the difference. . . . We divide, obviously, but no longer by two: by zero” [2].

## TIME

Concepts of time have two main tendencies: one can be described as dramatic and linear, and seems to have been amplified at the contact of the arts and cultures of the West. The other is circular and suspensive, and has very few equivalents in non-Asian cultures. Nevertheless, these two temporalities are complementary, as one can catalyze the other, which then appears as negative: it reveals what it is not, or is revealed by its absence. For instance, a redundancy of dramatic and emotional elements might suddenly open on an empty and floating space-time, which we did not perceive until that moment. The back-and-forth movements between these two dimensions sometimes

provoke transformations in the limits of our perception.

Such characteristics apply to the work of both Butoh master Ishii Mitsutaka (Fig. 2)—who was a close partner of the founder of this dance form, Hijikata Tatsumi—and Furukawa Toshimasa, who also began his career by participating in Butoh festivals. These two figures have transformed the image of the static white painted body. While Ishii shows a lot of humor and plays expressively with the audience, Furukawa is more direct and cool, and shuns theatrical attitudes. In Furukawa’s performances, there is a

**Fig. 2. Ishii Mitsutaka in performance during the Megalopolis Ab-origines tour, 16 October 1992. (Photo: Johannes Zappe)**



dramatic dimension that develops an intrigue and culminates in the necessary climax. This dimension looks artificial, but functions as a trap of the perception, a trompe l’oeil that can be pleasant to experience. Furukawa accelerates time in a surprising manner, efficiently revealing a perspective of immobility.

Furukawa’s task is to let the absence of structure appear through the excess of structurization, circularity through linearity, silence through noise. The whole is sustained by the contrast of his natural, sometimes naive casualness and his mental concentration, which he maintains and develops from the beginning of (and probably before) the performance. Excess of movement leads to immobility. It is because we have experienced drama and emotion that we are able to go back to the absence of emotion, aware of the why.

We perceive a similar quality in the music of Opera (Fig. 3), a self-described “mixed-media-system that assembles and amplifies all forms of music.” The unit’s members, Sagara Nami (voice) and Kakiage Nahoko (compositions, keyboards) “suggest a neo-pop sound that clearly turns toward the future by willingly quoting the old. Opera employs machines in a grand orchestra and frees us from academism with a



sharp satire of modern society, creating a virtual paradise" [3]. Opera crystallizes different levels of composition methods and ideas of time in a flux of musical events that are programmed on a computer and based on both stable and swinging rhythmical patterns. The duo has developed an art of sampling and synthesis in which quotation appears humorously, according to unforeseeable interactions between the whole and the interrelated parts of the musical material. Opposed to the linear narrative form of "drama," these interactions sometimes open on a climax, which then leads to the "disorganization of time" [4].

### EVENT BEYOND EVENT

It is sometimes impossible to perceive the whole of a performance as it happens. In many cases, this condition can be explained by a principle of resonance or reverberation that provokes postperceptual phenomena. One becomes conscious, after the event, of some elements that remained "suspended." In the same way that we pay much attention to the release of a sound, the way it disappears and the space or interval between two sounds, we pay attention to the resonance of an event or a group of events.

This is probably the quality that David Moss was pointing to when he described the ability of some Japanese performers to freeze time/moments: "Why did Haino choose to leave a long silence here or there, why did the Toki Doki Jidô Ensemble choose to repeat and repeat an image of linking rhythm?" [5] Europeans were able, at the end of the 1970s, to experience this freezing technique in the performances of Butoh dancers: Tanaka Min would slip on four steps of a staircase over the course of one hour; Ôno Kazuo would reach a wall and, by stopping every gesture, reverse the perspective and transform the wall into a floor; Ishii Mitsutaka would suddenly place his hand to his ear and just listen.

Through his own special freezing ability, Shimoda Seiji frees himself from Butoh. After having shown us that his simplest gestures can be heard as music, he becomes a living sculpture moving slowly on the top of a table—proposing, with his nudity, the right condition in which to exercise one's imagination in all possible directions.

Takeda Kenichi, who plays the *Taishôkoto* (a sort of dulcimer with a type-

Fig. 3. The Opera duo (Kakiage Nahôko and Sagara Nami) in performance at the Podewil concert hall in Berlin during the Megalopolis Aborigines tour, 23 October 1992. (Photo: Johannes Zappe)



writer-like keyboard), which was invented in the Taishô Era (1911–1926), notes that "related to the way of thinking prevalent in recently industrialized Japan . . . this instrument became a sort of fashion. Radio and records were new media, and pop culture was unifying itself toward a nationalism leading to the war. . . . Playing the Taishô-koto sometimes demands facing a part of history that I didn't experience" [6]. Like some of the other musicians who participated in the project—Mukai Chie (who plays the *kokyû*, a Chinese violin whose bow is always in contact with its three strings—see Fig. 4), Chino Shûichi (keyboards and computer), Fujieda Mamoru (computer and synthesizer) and Yoshizawa Motoharu (homemade five-string double bass)—Takeda has what could be called the consciousness of a non-direct expression: what is being played is related to other events that have happened before the start of the performance or have not yet happened; thus, the performance opens on the possibility of further development.

Hamada Gôji and Itô Tâli—the most visually oriented of all the participants—also share these methods, but handle them on more symbolic levels, using primary elements such as salt, blood or latex "skin" in their performances. They regard these substances as media—that is, as connected with social and urban networks.

These ideas are linked to Henning Christiansen's "next point principle": The introduction of a point gives birth to other possibilities. This principle emphasizes the vibration and resonance of a particular event. A sound or a gesture is introduced and grows in the next parts of the performance. This phenomenon is, of course, related to the

environment, which cannot be perceived in its whole at once: perception depends on point of view. We are invited along such a path through a direct, immediate environment and also through an indirect one, which extends over the walls of the hall and beyond the limits of its presence.

The sacred *ma*—one of the main ideas in Japanese aesthetics—finds its place in this kind of resonance. Literally, *ma* is the interval between two successive things or events, in both space and time. It is thus perceptible in architecture and music, but also in literature, psychology, and so on. The *ma* can be thought of as a combination of void and disjuncture, and is a necessary element in the communication between oneself and others. One has always to preserve some void or distance, especially in human relations.

One might say that there is not much space for the *ma* to be heard in Merzbow's magma of sound (and sometimes smoke, as in the *Activiteit*-centrum of Eindhoven) or in Office Trip's foot-tapping at the rate of roughly 20,000 taps per 30 min. But this apparent absence of *ma* may reveal its overwhelming presence. Such an absence may also suggest its presence in the most microscopic moments—for example, between two waves of the electric current fueling a performance.

### THE COMPOSITIONAL MODEL OF THE TOUR

This tour was intended as an attempt to develop a structure in which the artists themselves could think about questions of organization that are essential to the development of their activities. They were to participate actively in the planning of such a project. They were to de-





Fig. 4. Mukai Chie in performance at the Podewil concert hall in Berlin during the Megalopolis Aborigines tour, 20 October 1992. (Photo: Johannes Zappe)

cide together what they wanted and needed, rather than merely participating as guests of organizations that often misunderstand the qualities of the artists they solicit. Because of the energy demanded by such a project and the lack of interest on the part of large institutions in this domain of artistic creation, there have been only a few attempts to conduct this kind of tour in

recent times. Proposals to do so have encountered severe financial problems.

Conceptual questions are no less important than practical ones. In fact, these elements are intrinsically related. In art that uses different media in combination, resolving the problem of creation and organization depends on the artist's ability to evaluate the balance between the media. A work that relates different artistic domains has to be conceived on the basis of a cognition and comprehension of each domain: that is, a collaboration between them. Synaesthetics do not arise from an innocent and irresponsible relationship between different fields of perception.

The question of relations between the artists, their works and the environment is similar. In the case of performance, a work takes place in a particular space in front of a particular audience and will have specific relations with them. The work will be conceived according to these relations, unless it remains incoherent. The project of a festival should be conceived in the same way that a musical composition, a painting or any kind of (art)work is conceived. However, it must deal not only with the medium of sound, but also with the artists, their works, the technical staff, the architecture of the concert hall, the audience, the weather, the economic and social

situation, and so on. The reverse is also true: if we think of a composition as a social model, it has to function with the same (in)efficiency.

These are the main ideas that governed the conception of the Megalopolis Aborigines Tour. The European audience showed a great interest in the program we presented and some of the artists, such as Opera, have been invited to other festivals as a consequence. I hope that such enthusiasm will have some influence on the "executive" personalities who patronize Japanese contemporary art and will help bring recognition to this kind of activity. I also hope that these events can happen sooner in Europe and America, so that Western audiences can develop more precise ideas of Japanese contemporary culture.

## References

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2. Charles [1] p. 33.
3. Charles [1] p. 30.
4. Opera, untitled, in *Megalopolis Aborigines* [1] p. 40.
5. David Moss, untitled, in *Megalopolis Aborigines* [1] p. 10.
6. Takeda Kenichi, "Taishōkoto ni yoru, sōhōkōteki pafōmansu" (Double-Oriented Performances with the Taishō-koto), *Nikutai Gengo* (Body Language) 12 (1985) pp. 57-58.

# The History of Electronic and Computer Music in Japan: Significant Composers and Their Works

Takehito Shimazu

I have not yet met anyone who can speak of music without expressing his or her opinion about the positive results that can be gained through technology. Composers have adopted various aspects of scientific methods to further enhance their works. Computer music is a concrete and symbolic result of combining the fields of science and music. However, in the environment around us, an overwhelming number of musicians are not able to effectively and creatively utilize what has been gained through this research.

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People themselves are the main reason for this failure. Scientists and engineers have little interest in integrating the arts with science. Similarly, artists have little interest in adopting science into their art. But, even worse, no social system exists to bring artists and scientists together, even if one party has great interest in the other. In particular, relationships between the arts and sciences are not strong in Japan.

At the turn of this century, scientists and engineers in several European countries were developing various electronic devices. Japan was making its own contribution through artists such as Michio Miyagi, a great *koto* master

and composer who built an 80-string *koto* outfitted with an electronic amplifier, and Kazuharu Ishida, an instrument maker who invented an electronic *shamisen*, a traditional Japanese instrument with three strings. Besides these artists, only a handful of Japanese composers, performers and instrument manufacturers have contributed to the development of electronic music in Japan.

## ELECTRONIC MUSIC IN JAPAN

The development of electronic music in Japan can be divided into four periods:

- The 1950s: the introduction and imi-