

Political aesthetics: activism, everyday life, and art's object in 1960s' Japan

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ABSTRACT *Around 1960, revolutionary forms of activism and critique emerged to challenge administrative forms of politics and daily life. In Japan, despite massive strikes and widespread protest, the ruling party used a Diet majority and riot police to renew the USA–Japan Security Treaty. After this display of force, this party's new administration sought a new legitimacy, and a means to assuage and co-opt the defeated opposition, through promoting a depoliticized everyday world of high growth and consumption, and a dehistoricized national image in preparation for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Among those activists who emerged to contest this new cultural politics, a diverse group of young artists worked to repoliticize daily life through an interventionist art practice. Their practices arose out of a particular local, playful art practice, whose focus on the material debris and spaces of the economic expansion led to an engagement with the transformations of daily life. Focusing on the art practices connected with the yearly exhibition, the Yomiuri Indépendant, I examine the advent of a critical art examining the everyday world of Japan in the late 1950s and early 1960s, reflecting on its complex relation with an internationalized art world and domestic art scene, mass culture, and domestic protest movements. Examining the history of this art illuminates the state's investments in a normative cultural order, and a particular configuration of the politics of culture in the early 1960s.*

KEYWORDS: 1960s, politics of culture, post-WWII Japan, aesthetics and politics, art activism

That art on the one hand confronts society autonomously, and, on the other hand, is itself social, defines the law of its experience. (Adorno 1997: 348)

I begin with two narratives: one familiar to students of post-WWII Japanese history, the other, familiar to students of avant-garde art in Japan ca. 1960.

Protest in Japan punctuated much of the late-1950s, and reached a crescendo in 1960 during the demonstrations and strikes over the revision and renewal of the US–Japan security treaty, raising fears in the United States of revolution, anarchy, and a Kremlin triumphant in East Asia. After the treaty's midnight ratification on June 19, and the June 23 resignation of Prime Minister Kishi, however, the streets cleared, and by August, newspaper polls showed support for the successor administration of Prime Minister Ikeda at the highest level recorded for any post-WWII government, save for the Yoshida Cabinet at the signing of the Peace Treaty.¹

Contemporaneous with the protests of the late 1950s, the yearly Yomiuri-newspaper-sponsored art exhibition, (conventionally called the Yomiuri Indépendant, or Yomiuri Anpan for short)² came into its own, as a new crowd of young artists fled the Socialist Realism tendencies at the rival Japan Indépendant to engage in an explosive, anarchic art of objects, installations, and action/performance works. The exhibition became a crucible for the production of art and art groups of an increasingly provocative nature through to the

final exhibition in 1963; the following year, in January, barely one month before the exhibition was scheduled to open, the newspaper announced that it would permanently cancel the exhibition. Participating groups and artists went on to a diversity of projects, but one of their number, Akasegawa Genpei, was visited by police that same month, and ultimately prosecuted and convicted for the crime of money imitation (Marotti 2001a and 2001b). Here I propose briefly to sketch the relationship between the Yomiuri Indépendant as a crucible for the emergence of this critical art that came to confront the state, and the former, familiar picture of protest and cooptation.³ It is my argument that the two are reciprocally illuminated by an examination of the cultural politics at play in both. Behind the backs of the millions who participated in spectacular mass protest, the under-examined transformations in daily life contributed to the weaknesses of the political opposition and opened the way for effective depoliticizing strategies by the state. Similarly, by virtue of its exploration of the everyday world and its objects, artistic practice centered on the Yomiuri Indépendant exhibitions opened the way for a critical examination of this daily life. It investigated otherwise little-examined aspects of this transformation of the lived world, and brought artists into conflict with the state's investments in a normative cultural order. I offer this brief sketch of the above as an example of the interpenetration of art and politics during the global moment of the 1960s.

The spectacle of politics, and the politics of spectacle

The Occupation of Japan had combined democratizing reforms and a new Constitution with, for the sake of geopolitical expediency, the reversal of initial pro-labor and pro-left policies and the resurrection of large parts of the old order. The intertwined strategic objectives of containment, fortifying American interests in Asia, and showcasing American-led modernization globally led to choices that increasingly compromised stated progressive political and economic goals. These measures included the rehabilitation of rightists who had been initially purged, maintaining or restoring political advantages for elites, and destruction of the newly created activist labor unions. These all followed from the earliest, central compromise of democratic objectives: the retention of the emperor and the return of forms of imperial state authority within single party rule, and the promotion of historical narratives obscuring issues of war responsibility – especially imperial responsibility (Bix 2000; Dower 1999; Harootunian 2001; Schaller 1985, 1997; Schonberger 1989; Takemae 2002).

Contestation over the American-sponsored revitalization of much of the old order continued during and after the Occupation under the general banner of 'postwar democracy', fighting for expanded political opportunity and against remilitarization and a return to authoritarian government. Despite the escalation of protest actions in the late 1950s, the failure in 1960 to prevent the Security Treaty from being revised and renewed ('Anpo') – despite massive strikes throughout the country and ever-larger demonstrations outside the National Diet and the Prime Minister's residence – seemed to point to the limited effectiveness of these political tactics in the face of an (at best) indifferent ruling bloc. Despite accusations of force and violence,⁴ the protests were primarily spectacular, and supplicatory, in nature, seeking to move hearts and votes through the visible demonstration of their committed opposition: even during the Diet compound incursions, protestors stopped short of actually entering the Diet building itself, and the huge strikes of June were not sustained. However, especially damaging to the opposition was the state's tactical shift from confrontation, with naked force, to consolation, based on providing material comforts.

The grounds of political debate shifted virtually overnight with but a single change of Prime Minister. Much activism had found a mobilizing focal point in the figure of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke. A former Tōjō Cabinet member and high-level colonial administrator for Manchuria who had close ties to *zaibatsu* industrial combines and the military, and

incarcerated in Sugamo prison for three years during the Occupation as a suspected class-A War criminal, Kishi was one of hundreds of thousands deported by the Occupation under General Matthew B. Ridgeway in 1951.⁵ Less than six years later, Kishi was Prime Minister. He seemed to represent a direct return to fascist Imperial Japan, an impression strengthened by his efforts toward revising the Constitution, suppressing teachers, and expanding Police authority. The key role of this over-determined figure in backing the US–Japan Security Treaty renewal obscured the complexities of Japan’s Cold War position, in which economic prosperity was tied directly to America’s Asian wars and strategic policy and Japan’s own troubled history of war and colonial expansion in Asia. These issues receded before the nightmare vision of Kishi as a revivification of the old order.⁶ The May 19, 1960 dispatch of 500 police inside the Diet Chambers and their televised, forcible extraction of Socialist members from their sit-in outside the Speaker’s office, prior to a surprise vote on the treaty in the Lower House, persuaded many others of Kishi’s duplicitous nature, and brought universal press condemnations (Packard III 1966: 242–251).⁷ Kishi’s resignation just after the Security Treaty renewals diffused a potentially volatile situation, and provided many with a kind of substitute, compensatory victory (Igarashi 2000: 140–142; Schaller 1997: 159–161).

This gave his successor, Ikeda Hayato, room to defuse the situation. He quickly formed a cabinet full of new, younger faces (and the first female cabinet minister, Nakayama Masa, appointed as Welfare Minister), demonstrating continuity and confidence against expectations of persistent chaos, and signaling a new governmental outlook. Ikeda’s government immediately adopted a ‘low profile’ (*teishisei*), replacing the violence and confrontational policies of Kishi with well-orchestrated public gestures towards reconciliation with the opposition parties. When a nine-month struggle at the Miike coal mine in Kyushu flared up in a massive confrontation in July, Ikeda and his new labor minister, Ishida Hirohide, negotiated to re-submit the dispute to mediation, an action that ultimately brought an end to the conflict, the last major action by an activist union in post-WWII Japan. The workers had sought to link the strike to the Security Treaty protests, a move that left them similarly vulnerable to the new tactics of the Ikeda government. Conciliation ended a visible, violent spectacle of class conflict, and handed labor a major defeat (Price 1997: 214–218).

A notable exception amongst the new faces in the cabinet was Yamazaki Iwao, placed in charge of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the National Public Safety Commission – policing. Yamazaki had been Home Minister in the Higashikuni cabinet, and had thus presided over an unreconstructed security apparatus from Imperial Japan – including the notorious *tokkō* police. His seizure of newspapers for publishing the famous picture of General MacArthur and the emperor in September of 1945 directly led to the October 4 ‘Japanese bill of rights’ directive freeing political prisoners, ending the Peace Preservation, lese-majesty and other repressive laws, and dismissing heads of most major police bureaus – including Home Minister Yamazaki himself (Takemae 2002: 236, 238). The choice of the notorious Yamazaki points to an underlying repressive counterpart to the Ikeda administration’s public conciliatory stance. When a rightist assassinated Socialist Party Chairman Asanuma Inejirō in October, however, Yamazaki took responsibility and resigned, leaving the position to longtime Yoshida Shigeru protégé Sutō Hideo. Prime Minister Ikeda himself delivered an unprecedented eulogy for his deceased political opponent, and the emperor dispatched sympathy and condolence money to Asanuma’s widow, the first time that such a gesture had been made for someone neither in the cabinet nor with an imperial appointment. All three gestures worked to prevent the incident from becoming an effective opportunity for remobilizing opposition to the government.

At the same time, Ikeda further undercut opposition (and especially electoral challenges from the Socialist Party) with promises for action on improved social security, tax reductions, and public projects, and, at the end of the year, through announcing a sweeping program of national ‘income doubling,’ pledging to fulfill this goal within ten years. By

promising to deliver high growth and substantial material benefits to all in short order, Ikeda positioned the government behind the effects of an economic expansion underway at least since the mid-1950s – one fueled by domestic consumption, trumpeted by advertising, and associated with profound changes in how people worked, lived, and conceived of their lives. Everyday life in urban Japan by the late 1950s was changing at all levels, and yet, apart from an explosion of enthusiastic advertising, television, and light journalism,⁸ the *effects* of this transformation constituted the great unaddressed political phenomenon of the period. This was in spite of the fact that many of its *causes* were directly related to the security arrangement with America, including Korean War procurements, a transistor and television industry arising from technology transfers, and continuing beneficial trade arrangements.

More than just an electoral ploy, Prime Minister Ikeda's strategy was able to take advantage of these transformations already underway to ease and displace the memory of naked state force and thwarted demands for democratic participation. The elaborate performance of conciliation, the abandonment of Constitutional revision, and calls to 'respect social order' promised a path away from violence and confrontation, while the prospect of true economic benefits had a real appeal for people whose recent memories included post-WWII starvation conditions and devastating economic contractions.⁹ The confidential assessment of the American Embassy at the time was that, to stay in power, conservatives needed economic prosperity and the adoption of a 'progressive, more liberal image, in order to undercut the left's fixation that contemporary Japanese conservatism is no more than the old pre-war militarist conservatism in disguise.'¹⁰ The state's promise of order, and to deliver 'the good life' and 'income doubling' within a decade, became a primary means for co-opting dissent.¹¹ And thus, with the everyday world increasingly becoming both the very grounds for state political legitimacy and the agent of depoliticization, the stakes for artistic investigation and intervention into daily life were inherently high.¹²

The Yomiuri Indépendant: art finds its object

Outside of the 'official' art establishment's patronage networks, the Yomiuri Indépendant was in constant dialog with the Japan Indépendant, sponsored by the Japan Arts Association. The Japan Art Society (*Nihon bijutsukai*) was closely connected with the Communist Party, and thus, although entry was free and open (the definition of an *Indépendant*), political and stylistic preferences came together so that by the 1950s the exhibition was dominated by art inspired by a Socialist Realist reportage style.¹³

In an era well-punctuated by protest, the Socialist Realist yoking of artistic expression to polemical affirmation of the power of the people appealed to many as supporting the best goals and aspirations of postwar democracy. But towards the end of the 1950s the representations of ever-larger raised fists were beginning to appear rather pitiful and ludicrous to a new generation of artists.¹⁴ As postwar democracy's possibilities receded and popular protests met with failure, Socialist Realist representation came to be seen as a form inadequate to the politics of the contemporary situation.¹⁵ Despite the eclecticism with which it was practiced in Japan, it nonetheless substituted a reified gesture of political commitment for actual artistic engagement through practice.

Politically committed artists faced a choice. Many continued to soldier on with reportage at the Japan Indépendant, but others were drawn to the problem of form, as they attempted to construct an art that could speak to their situation, and their time. Examining the complexities of the contemporary everyday context, these artists focused upon the artistic object, and upon the *practice* of art itself. Yet this is to speak of the end results of a complex dialog; this art arose out of an enthusiastic and committed kind of playful competition at the Yomiuri Indépendant.¹⁶

While there had always been an undercurrent of oddities at the exhibition, the majority of Yomiuri Indépendant exhibits in its early years were fairly conventional, and spoke to the practices of a wider amateur art world and the economy of images in general: notably, *portraits* of famous figures predominated.¹⁷ The Indépendant exhibition's initial effect was not in artistic forms so much as in its democratization of a previously closed institutional space. With the mere payment of a nominal exhibit fee, the Yomiuri Indépendant allowed anyone access to display art within the walls of the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum in Ueno Park, the same place in which many prestigious art groups and collections were exhibited. During the annual exhibition, works of professional artists hung next to children's drawings; amateurs with no access to patronage networks could hang anything, without having to pass through a jurying process.¹⁸

The first signs of change underway at the Yomiuri Indépendant came in 1955, as the exhibition attracted a number of young artists of a new generation. From this period onward the Yomiuri Indépendant came into its own, with the steady proliferation of increasingly provocative and bizarre objects, performances, and installation works. The apparent vitality of this art won over a number of established art critics; for example, it prompted Hariu Ichirô, who had previously supported the reportage works of the Japan Indépendant, to begin to champion a return to Dada.¹⁹

Akasegawa Genpei, one of the young artists of the Yomiuri Indépendant, gave a tongue-in-cheek account of how the *object* emerged:

I held in my hand the explosive to fuse fiction and the real world and I could foresee that flat and closed pictorial space could now be twisted out in to three dimensions. At first, our timid attempts to protrude further from the picture surface progressed rapidly. Wood, rope, shoes and cooking pans were all used. Then steel ribs, car tires, scrap metal were brought into play; the protrusion leapt from 17 centimeters to 30, and then on to 1 meter. This soon went beyond the boundaries of what the picture surface could support and the projections began to fall off. In this way the picture was left behind and we began to look at different kinds of objects lying on the floor.

It was by doing this that we learnt what an *object* was. (Akasegawa 1985b: 86)

This is something of a caricature, but Akasegawa's depiction nevertheless locates the origins of this new practice in an unexpected organic extrusion from conventional framed works, and thus captures the sense nonetheless of the dynamic dialog in forms that was underway at the Yomiuri Indépendant. Akasegawa's term for the 'object' is the French term, *objet*; at the Yomiuri Indépendant, this came to be shorthand not for something aestheticized, but rather for an object that, first of all, was put under a kind of radical scrutiny. There was the expectation that the artist's gesture of setting forth the object implied a kind of suspicion: whether it was a specially assembled art construction, or an everyday item sitting there with little or no embellishment or reconfiguration, it was to be interrogated like a criminal, for a yet-unknown crime. Encouraged and legitimated in turn by a new critical appreciation of Dada, and the readymades of Duchamp, artists continued to expand their practice in this huge potential field of action and investigation.

The works described as *objets*, objects, were often uncanny, bringing waste materials together into organically suggestive shapes, or objectifying isolated parts of the human body. Toyoshima Sôroku's output illustrates the circuitous route such work could take: around 1960, as a member of the group 'Neo Dada', Sôroku's work consisted of pieces such as 'Junk Put on the Wall' (*Kabe oki no janku*), a fantastic, looping frenzy of old painted tatami mats, or assemblages featuring large, jagged pieces of broken glass jutting from the surface.²⁰ With the breakup of the Neo Dada group, Toyoshima departed from this form of junk art to produce a series of works fusing metal scraps together into increasingly well-formed, organic, and provocative creations.

His 1962 works for the exhibition, “The Collaborative Work of the Crowd Personified”, and the complex piece “The Trouble with Me and You” (*I to YOU no toraburu* – lit. ‘The Trouble with I and You’), emerged as finely detailed, smooth, rounded forms that might be well taken to be puzzlingly figurative. In the former, the undecidability of the figure leaves open the question of *what* the ‘crowd’ of the title has created.²¹ We might see in both the notion of ‘crowd’ authorship, and its paradoxical result, a variant of the Surrealist quest for the profound disclosures of a truly ‘automatic’ work, a search that was being revisited by a number of Toyoshima’s contemporaries.²² In the case of ‘The Trouble with Me and You’, giant organelle-like, pod-shaped bodies were clustered together on their stands, connected by cords to wall-mounted electrics.²³ Discrete yet congregating bodies, with electrical umbilici: a hidden life of objects and debris emerging from new patterns of daily life?²⁴ Or is this us, reduced to unrecognizability and concealed dependencies by this daily life? The undecidability of these forms plays against the title’s promise to identify – what? Our trouble? Is that what these forms constitute? But then, where are the ‘I’ and the ‘You’? Or is that very formulation itself the problem, and the work an exploration of deeper structures of connection missed by an I/you perspective? All of these readings are possible within the ambiguities of the title’s language and the context of the Yomiuri Indépendant works.

Such contextual potentials have tended to be overlooked in retrospective examinations of these and other works. For example, in the biographical entry in the exhibition catalog for a recent retrospective, Toyoshima’s penchant for scrap metal materials was associated directly with his childhood play with similar items left in the rubble after the end of WWII. Despite the ubiquity of such aesthetic claims, and their reductiveness, we might reconsider this gesture for what it leaves out: the origins of the material, the scrap metal itself, in the then-contemporaneous economic expansion, and the puzzling, uncanny link between such debris and war posited by this characterization. Rather than returning us to the narrative origins of a ‘postwar’ Japan and the aesthetic preferences of an individual artist, this latter link is ultimately decipherable only through considering the connection between Japanese prosperity and war in Asia.²⁵ While Prime Minister Ikeda’s shift in strategies of political legitimation effectively obscured such connections, the Vietnam War would exhume these issues again for millions of protestors later in the decade.

Artists’ explorations of the uncanny potentials of the discards of the everyday world expanded in the practice of ‘installations’ to consider massive repetitions of materials and objects. The hundreds of whiskey bottles constituting Yoshimura Masunobu’s entry in 1961, ‘Mr. Sadada’s Reception Room’ (*Sadada-shi no ôsetsushitsu*), created a cramped standalone room within the exhibition room.²⁶ Entered in the exhibition under the ‘painting’ category,²⁷ the work suggested an everyday world confined, menaced, and enabled through constant, numbing intoxication – increasingly the very definition of salaryman existence, but also a favorite romanticized preoccupation of defeated political activists, and indeed of avant-garde artists. The bottles were allegedly the products of Yoshimura’s own particular everyday life: the empties from get-togethers with the other members and associates of group Neo-Dada at his atelier in Shinjuku, the ‘White House’ – although such a claim was manifestly preposterous, albeit hilariously so, and in fact the bottles were obtained from the neighborhood liquor shop owner, whose daughter was being tutored in art by Yoshimura. Such insider jokes often coexisted in combination with the uncanny formal aspects of works to produce a multi-level critical representation of daily life, beginning with self-critique (and playful self-mythologization), and expanding outward to a more general reference.

The development of the categories of action and performance at the exhibition was also closely linked to the evolving significance of the objects. Although initially derived from the ‘Action Painting’ of contemporary, well-known American and European artists – many of whom had put on exhibitions and demonstrations in Japan – the practice of ‘*akushon*’, action, came to encompass experiments investigating the very notion of artistic practice as a

general category of action, and agency. This was to develop a focus increasingly pointing beyond the 'art' institutional frame to a general consideration of the possibilities of action – and even direct action – through their practice.

Group Zero Dimension dispensed with the art object entirely by adopting the then-still-surprising 'happening' format: during the 1963 exhibition, group members took over a gallery room, laid out futon mattresses on the museum floor, and reclined to stare for hours, motionless, at an Edo-era explicit erotic print (*shunga*) stuck onto the ceiling (Akasegawa 1985a: 169, 196). While a part of the group's own, distinct vocabulary of ritualistic performance and gestures, the 'action' performed at the exhibition amounted to a dramatization and attack upon the very act of museum exhibit-viewing as a form of sedentary voyeurism.²⁸

Nakanishi Natsuyuki's entry at the last Yomiuri Indépendant exhibition, in 1963, combined objects and performance elements, the artist's own body, and spectators. The work's title, 'Clothespins Assert Agitating Action (*sentaku basami wa kakuhan kôï o shuchô suru*)', was a pun conflating 'political agitation' and the 'agitation' (*kakuhan*) of washing machines: a fine example of the humorous yet nonetheless serious concern these artists had with the relation between political action and the transformations of daily life brought about by the new booms in mass consumption.²⁹ Yet during the prior year, this shy artist, together with Imaizumi Yoshihiko, had begun serious planning for an ultimately aborted guerrilla art installation that would have placed a guillotine in the plaza outside of the Imperial Palace.³⁰

In Nakanishi's Yomiuri Indépendant installation, the masses of clothespins, like strange swarms of aggressive metal insects, coalesce into half-formed images, including something resembling a mushroom cloud.³¹ The feeling of attack and transformation was strengthened by large rents in the canvasses, looking as if they had been torn by live clothespins; yet the holes, taken with the egg forms of the compact objects, suggest an ovulatory version of Akasegawa's narrative of objects extruding themselves from canvasses. One set includes an egg covered in the complex forms employed in Nakanishi's 'Rhyme' [*In*] series of paintings, echoing their complex meditation upon pattern, repetition, and texture – in the midst of a piece in which such concerns were translated into clothespins and cloth.³² Nakanishi himself showed up in the exhibit room with a face and body covered with the pinching, aggressive clothespins. When not shocking patrons by his appearance, Nakanishi, his friends, and others in on the joke, would surreptitiously affix clothespins to the clothing of passersby, who would then unwittingly extend the work out into the everyday world.

Including one's own body in works as a kind of strange object framed the promise and excitement of doing artistic work *within the artifact itself*, by entering into its enigmatic surface and partaking of its uncanny nature. The practice dramatized a central concern developing from this art: the desire to take the emergent critical, active art practices into direct contact with the everyday world. An art that blurred the boundaries between art and performance expanded conventional notions of the 'work' to posit 'action' as an explicit problem for consideration.

Many of the works at the Yomiuri Indépendant were as short-lived as the yearly exhibition itself: rather laboriously, they were created for the space, and then simply abandoned after the exhibition, leaving behind only impressions, rumors, and occasionally, photographs. Performance pieces were by nature ephemeral. While there were a number of carefully crafted *objets* and other works, their content was equally specific to the time and place of exhibition: when re-exhibited, they required a space to recreate the Yomiuri Indépendant's anarchical atmosphere. This accounts for the elusive, dissatisfying element noted by many artists in retrospective shows. Ultimately, Akasegawa may be right in stating that the real work the artists produced was the space and energy of the Yomiuri Indépendant itself. It was this created space that in turn nurtured and energized artistic activity that would overflow its institutional frame.

Although the end of the exhibition was not officially announced until early 1964, many artists recognized the likelihood that the 1963 Yomiuri Indépendant would be the last. In late 1962, the exhibition site, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, issued a set of new regulations, inspired by many of the above works, forbidding 'unpleasant noise or high temperatures', things that rot or smell, that incorporate 'bladed instruments' or other potentially injurious objects, works that were possibly contrary to health laws and offensive to viewers, or that soiled the floor with sand, and the like, or that featured objects hung from the ceiling.³³ This was also the year that the exhibition spilled out of the museum, with works such as Takamatsu Jirô's 'Cord' (*Himo*) which featured a plastic rope, studded with objects, narrowing to a line of packing string running through the museum, out the doors, and all the way to Ueno station, a key commuting landmark nearly a kilometer distant.³⁴ Both Takamatsu and the aforementioned Nakanishi were inspired by their prior participation in the so-called 'Yamanote Event'. In this 1962 event, artists carrying strange art objects boarded Tokyo's central circular subway line, the Yamanote, put on white face paint, and proceeded to improvise ritualistic happenings in the train cars and in extended performances on station platforms. In so doing, they injected their defamiliarizing artistic practice into this everyday space of commuting, a nexus of transformation under economic expansion and urbanization – and a peculiar space of concentrated itineraries and bounded interactions.³⁵ The manifesto for the event imagined possibilities for the 'agitation' of its witnesses, using a physics-influenced vocabulary of voids, aggregates, molecular attraction, and agitation.³⁶ Subsequent to the performance, round-table discussions in late 1962 with Kawani Hiroshi and Imaizumi Yoshihiko, the editors of the radical art magazine, *Image (Keishô)*, and artists Akasegawa Genpei and Kinoshita Shin led to the theoretical foregrounding of the anarchism-associated concept of 'direct action' (*chokusetsu kôdô*) in their artistic practice itself as it expanded into intensified, critical and provocative engagement with everyday life – including Akasegawa's 1000-yen project.³⁷

Police broke up protests outside the museum in 1963 by artists whose works had been summarily removed the previous year, for 'assembling without a permit'. Itoi Kanji and Nakajima Yoshio's performance with objects on the steps, with Nakajima dressed only in underwear, ended with the arrival of a police car, sirens blaring, and their arrest (Hariu 1998: 279). In a sense, the Yomiuri Indépendant artists' attention to, and attempted interaction with, the wider context was met halfway by the political authorities themselves. When the Yomiuri announced the following year that it would no longer conduct the exhibition, most artists were upset, but not shocked.

The end of the Yomiuri Indépendant was part of a general pattern in the early 1960s of pressure to tidy up symbols that detracted from the presentation of a Japan reborn into happy prosperity (Aso 2002; Igarashi 2000: chapter five). This became increasingly oppressive as the 1964 Olympics drew near, the event that was to symbolize Japan's triumphant emergence from under the clouds of wartime and occupation, standing on its own as a showcase of America-sponsored modernization. During the year of the Olympics, the Yomiuri Indépendant was cancelled, and Akasegawa was interrogated by police for his 1000-yen printed works – leading to his indictment in 1965.³⁸ Both incidents spoke to the expansion of cultural policing within the broad program of affirmative cultural production and repression that typified the post-1960 political scene. At stake was the defense of daily life from politicization – at the very moment in which its depoliticized image of imminent prosperity and comfort was enabling a new configuration of hegemonic politics. Once a series of art practices emerged to intervene in and critique this quotidian world, they too were targeted – with the ironic result of further radicalizing a portion of this community, and giving art such as Akasegawa's 1000-yen works notoriety and political prominence.

In a certain sense, agents of the state became this art's most enthusiastic appreciators, albeit negatively, identifying nascent political potentials within it. Analogous contemporaneous examples abound, of course – such as the notorious state responses to leftist works in 1950s' America, or conversely, the coordinated Cold War support for Abstract Expressionism.³⁹ And what were the practices that attracted repression, and energized artistic activism? Interestingly, they anticipate the key strategies associated with the explosive activism marking the second half of the 1960s in Japan: the analysis of the everyday world through its signs and fragments for the operations of hidden forms of domination; the focus on local practice, the here and now, as a space implicated in larger structures and events, and the locus either for their replication, or transformation; strategies of radical defamiliarization and disidentification against unconscious forms of routine; the unearthing of hidden connections to politics and history in the simplest object of daily life; and above all, the identification of the world of the everyday itself as the central space for investigation and transformation.

Notes

1. As discussed by Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II to Secretary of State Christian Herter, August 12, 1960.
2. The exhibition was actually called the Japan Indépendant (*Nihon Indépendant*), the same name as the Japan Art Society's exhibition inaugurated in 1947 with 141 participants, falling to 19 during the second exhibition in November of 1948, and skipping a year in 1949. When the Yomiuri Shinbun company announced in September of 1948 their plan to open a rival exhibition of the same name in 1949, they were met with complaints and not a little confusion. The initial Yomiuri-sponsored exhibition drew 958 participants. In 1955, the newspaper changed the name to 'Yomiuri Nihon Indépendant,' and in 1958, to 'Yomiuri Indépendant.' From the beginning, artists distinguished the two by consistently referring to the Yomiuri exhibition as the Yomiuri Indépendant (or Anpan), and reserving 'Japan Indépendant' for the Japan Art Society's exhibition. The nickname, 'Yomiuri Anpan', is both an abbreviation and a pun – an *anpan* is a sweet bean bun – and was popularly in use from the first. See Akasegawa (1985a: 41–42); Kaidô (1983: 6); Seki (1993: 276).
3. The term, 'crucible', is Akasegawa's: *rutsubô*. See Akasegawa (1985a: 3).
4. For example, on May 25, 1960, Supreme Court Chief Justice Tanaka Kotarô thundered against the 'organized forces under the influence of powers outside the country which attempt to overthrow by revolution the democratic system of Japan' and their 'resort[ing] to violence in the fields of politics and labor' (Undated translation, Department of State, RG 59, Tokyo Embassy Records, Box 70, '350 Japan July–Dec 1960'). Justice Tanaka called upon the courts to assert their powers vigorously against these threats.
5. Right-wing racketeers Kodama Yoshio and Sasagawa Ryôichi were simultaneously freed; Kishi had befriended Kodama during their incarceration at Sugamo. Kishi was notorious for his ties to rightist organizations, which blossomed forth again during his administration, alarming many (Takemae 2002: 247; Schaller 1997: 124–125, 155, 157).
6. Yoshikuni Igarashi argues that Kishi's political maneuvers and notorious use of police force even within the Diet rendered him 'a stand-in for the military regime ... as well as for the humiliation that this regime brought to Japan', and points to the reduction of the Security Treaty issues to formulations of 'Democracy or Dictatorship' by leading intellectuals such as Maruyama Masao and Takeuchi Yoshimi as evidence (Igarashi 2000: 136–7).
7. It was in this atmosphere that Kishi made his famous dismissal of the protestors in favor of a silent majority purportedly in solidarity with his views: 'I think that we must also incline our ears to the voiceless voices. What we hear now are only the audible voices, that is all' (*Asahi Shinbun* [evening], 28 May 1960, translated in Packard 1966: 245).
8. Advertising reached 1.5% of GDP by 1959 (Partner 1999: 153).
9. Discussed in MacArthur to Herter, August 31, 1960 and the confidential memo of September 1, 1960. See generally Department of State, RG 59, Tokyo Embassy Records, Box 70, '350 Japan July–Dec 1960' for a variety of opinions of US and Japanese officials and citizens concerning Ikeda's prospects.
10. MacArthur to Herter, September 1, 1960.
11. On the particular vulnerabilities of Anpo opposition to such tactics, see Takabatake (1978). For an exploration of the politics of everyday life in a contemporaneous situation, see Ross (1995).

12. As Nakamura Takafusa and Simon Partner both point out, Ikeda's 'income doubling' plan merely took advantage of trends underway long before 1960, and did little to alter them. As Partner states, it instead best demonstrates 'the power that can accrue to an ideological slogan if used shrewdly and at the right time' (Partner 1999: 188; Nakamura 1994: 209–210).
13. The style in practice in Japan was often much more eclectic than the orthodox varieties in evidence in Eastern Europe and the USSR: surreal and fantastic interpretive images often hung next to paintings of 'Uncle Ho' embracing children, or protestors beaten by police. Yet despite this eclecticism, most were nonetheless recognizably reportage or agit-prop in character. See Nihon bijutsukai (1972).
14. Akasegawa complains in a retrospective essay of his depression over seeing these cartoonishly distorted fists during his participation in the Nihon Indépendant in 1956 and 1957 (Akasegawa 1985b: 85).
15. Support for both the reportage style and the JCP itself was also eroded by contemporary events, particularly Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism, and repression in Hungary in 1956, which contributed to fracturing the left and tainting Socialist Realism by association. The American government's covert and overt promotion of Abstract Expressionism (and the undermining of Socialist Realist art) across Europe created echoes in the art trends in Japan as well, such as the undermining of the 1959 Communist Youth Festival.
16. Many of the Yomiuri Indépendant artists took part in the major protest actions of the time. See, for example, the account of the artists of the group Neo Dada during the June 15, 1960. Diet demonstration in Yoshida (1982: 96–97).
17. Akasegawa credits these 'Sunday painters' for giving the exhibition its free, honest, and unpretentious atmosphere, and making a space for further radical play (Akasegawa 1994: 64–66).
18. This was true of both of the Indépendant exhibitions, the essential political meaning of the independent label: these exhibitions purported to inject democratic practices into the hitherto closed art world. Artist, poet, and critic Takiguchi Shûzô complained in 1956 of the loss of these goals at the Indépendants – crude ideology at the Nihon Indépendant, and – at that moment – too much dependency on the conservative corporate sponsor at the Yomiuri Indépendant (Takiguchi 1992b: 50).
19. See for example, Takiguchi (1992a: 51); Akasegawa (1985a: 74–78); Hariu (1998: 276), discussing his January 1957 article in *Mizue*.
20. See *Ryûdô suru bijutsu III: Neo Dada no shashin/Art in Flux III: Neo-Dada Witnessed, Photo Documents* (1993: 26, 32), for photos of these works, and generally for discussion of the Neo Dada group and the subsequent activities of its participants.
21. See *Neo Dada Japan 1958-1998* (1998: 82) and *Nihon no natsu – 1960-64* (1997: 47) for photos of the work.
22. It was a central concern, and authorizing concept, for the early activity of the Music group (*gurûpu ongaku*), which included Kosugi Takehisa, Tone Yasunao, Mizuno Shûko, Shiomi Chieko, Tanno Yumiko, and Tojima Mikio. Conventionally rendered as 'Group Ongaku' in English, the group's name is in fact meant to parallel that of the journal, *Littérature*, (founded by Aragon, Breton and Soupault in 1919), asserting their analogous claim to liberating music in its entirety. They claimed that, by adding improvisation to Music Concrete's *objet sonore*, they achieved the 'universality of automatism' and true concreteness (Marotti 2007). See Tone (1960: 15–16), and their 1960 work, 'Automatism (*ôtomatizumu*)' (Group ONGAKU 1996).
23. See *Neo Dada Japan 1958-1998* (1998: 74), and *Nihon andependan ten: Zenkiroku 1949-1963* (Seki 1993: 273) for photos of the work.
24. Takashina Shûji saw in the complexities of the piece 'the volition of an autonomous system beyond that of its creator' (Seki 1993: 273).
25. It was also in the 1960s that Japan's economic connections to Southeast Asia came to reduplicate those present during WWII – fulfilling an American strategic goal from the late 1940s, but also adding another layer of connections to wars past and present.
26. For photos of the work, see *Ryûdô suru bijutsu III: Neo Dada no shashin* (1993: 48–49 and 72), and *Neo Dada Japan 1958-1998* (1998: 73).
27. In her astute analysis of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Arts Festival, the first Olympic cultural festival to showcase the arts of the host country, Noriko Aso points out how the canonical, naturalized aesthetic categories for art exhibition in Japan were thoroughly integrated within the state's hegemonic cultural politics (Aso 2002). This suggests another dimension in which artistic practice at the Yomiuri Indépendant (and indeed, in many of the avant-garde practices of performance at the time) acquired a further political charge in its trampling of these categories.
28. On the actions of this group and its performance vocabulary, see KuroDalaiJee (Kuroda Raiji) (2003).
29. For a photo of the original work, see *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (1994: 153), and *Nakanishi Natsuyuki: shiroku, tsuyoi, mokuzen, e* (1997: 10). Note that these catalog's translation of 'kakuhan' as 'churning' misses the title's political significance.

30. This action was contemplated in the wake of suppressions and rightist terrorism that had followed a short story featuring a fantasy sequence in which the Imperial family is beheaded during a revolution. The Imperial Plaza was also a major focal point for Occupation-era struggles: dubbed 'People's Plaza', this contested space was a key rally site until protestors were banned from it; during a forcible reoccupation of the Plaza in 1952, police killed two protestors and injured 2300, making over 1000 arrests (Takemae 2002: 481, 494–495). The two artists contemplated a couple of versions for working, but nevertheless artistically spectacular, gigantic guillotines, or as an alternative, filling the plaza with miniature versions (Marotti 2001a: chapter 4). Such planning was not unique – artists from the Neo Dada group seriously debated blowing up the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (the host site for not only the Yomiuri Indépendant, but the Nitten exhibition, the center for the patronage networks of the art establishment, and a periodic recipient of Imperial visits) at one point in 1960 (Yoshida 1982: 96, 103).
31. Ōka Makoto and Nakahara Yūsuke both commented on this strange assertion of life by the clothespins in their reports on the exhibition for the Yomiuri Newspaper. See Seki (1993: 269–270).
32. See *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (1994: 171) for a photo of the 'Rhyme '63' eggs. For the 'Rhyme' [In] series of paintings, see Nakanishi Natsuyuki: *shiroku, tsuyoi, mokuzen, e* (1997: 41–47).
33. See Hariu (1998a: 278–279) for the full list. Kazakura Shō pointed out to museum workers that the restriction against works emitting 'unpleasant smells' would in principle be violated by every painting employing oil paints (Akasegawa 1985a: 194).
34. See Akasegawa (1994: 93–97), for photos of the work and its extension to Ueno station. Imaizumi Yoshihiko suggested the extension of the work to Takamatsu, and he and Nakanishi actually carried out stretching the line through the museum to the train station. See Imaizumi (1986).
35. Mark Augé analyzes the analogous spaces of the Paris Métro in his study, *In the Metro* (Augé 2002).
36. The text of the invitation is reproduced in *Keishō* (1963: 15), and Akasegawa (1994: 33–34), and is translated in Marotti (2001a: 161–162). The Music group (guruppu ongaku)'s Tone Yasunao shared in this tendency, characterizing their improvisational performances – and Surrealism's 'convulsive' ideal – in terms of magnetism and subatomic particle interactions (Tone 1961: 7–8).
37. See Note 3 for my writings on this project of Akasegawa's. On the significance of 'direct action' (*chokusetsu kōdō*), in this context, see Marotti (2001a: chapter four).
38. I chart the evolution of state action against Akasegawa – from the discovery of his art in a book by the 'League of Criminals' (*Hanzaisha dōmei*) during an police search of the League's office, to its referral to a special police anti-counterfeiting section, to an extended series of interrogations by police and prosecutors, and on to the further discretionary decision to indict Akasegawa and prosecute him as a serious criminal (Marotti 2001a: chapter two).
39. For the exemplary case of the film, *Salt of the Earth* (Biberman 1954), see Schrecker (1998: 309–358); for the politicized support for ostensibly apolitical Abstract Expressionism, including covert funding and extensive use of patronage networks, see Saunders (1999).

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Special terms

akushon アクション

anpan アンパン

chokusetsu kôdô 直接行動

Gurûpu ongaku グループ音楽
I to YOU no toraburu IとYOUのトラブル
Hanzaisha dômei 犯罪者同盟
Himo 紐
Kabe oki no janku 壁起きのジャンク
kakuhan 攪拌
Nihon bijutsukai 日本美術会
Nihon Indépendant 日本アンデバンダン
rutsubô 垺埒
Sadada-shi no ôsetsushitsu 殺打駄氏の応接室
sentaku basami wa kakuhan kôï o shuchô suru 洗濯扱み
shunga 春画
teishisei 低姿勢
tokkô 特高

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William Marotti received his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 2001. He was the Woodrow Wilson postdoctoral fellow for 2001–2003 at NYU's International Center for Advanced Studies, participating in their 'Project on the Cold War as Global Conflict.' Following another postdoctoral fellowship, at Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute, and a visiting position at the University of California, Santa Cruz History Department, he is now an assistant professor in the UCLA History Department. His main research interests are post-WWII Japanese cultural politics, Cold War and everyday life, art and activism, and the global 1960s.

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