



# Ei Arakawa & andere / others

Wie sieht Performance ohne Blick auf medienwirksame und marktaugliche Zweitverwertung aus? Ohne Pathos und Selbstentblößung? Ist es möglich, Wissen in Bewegung und Körperlichkeit zu übersetzen?

*Daniel Baumann über Ei Arakawa und den anarchistischen Versuch, ein Bild des heutigen Lebens jenseits von Abbild und Repräsentation zu entwerfen.*

What does a performance look like without an eye on media friendly, marketable secondary use, or without pathos and self-revelation? Is it possible to translate knowledge into movement and the body?

*Daniel Baumann on Ei Arakawa and the anarchistic attempt to create a picture of contemporary life beyond images and representation.*

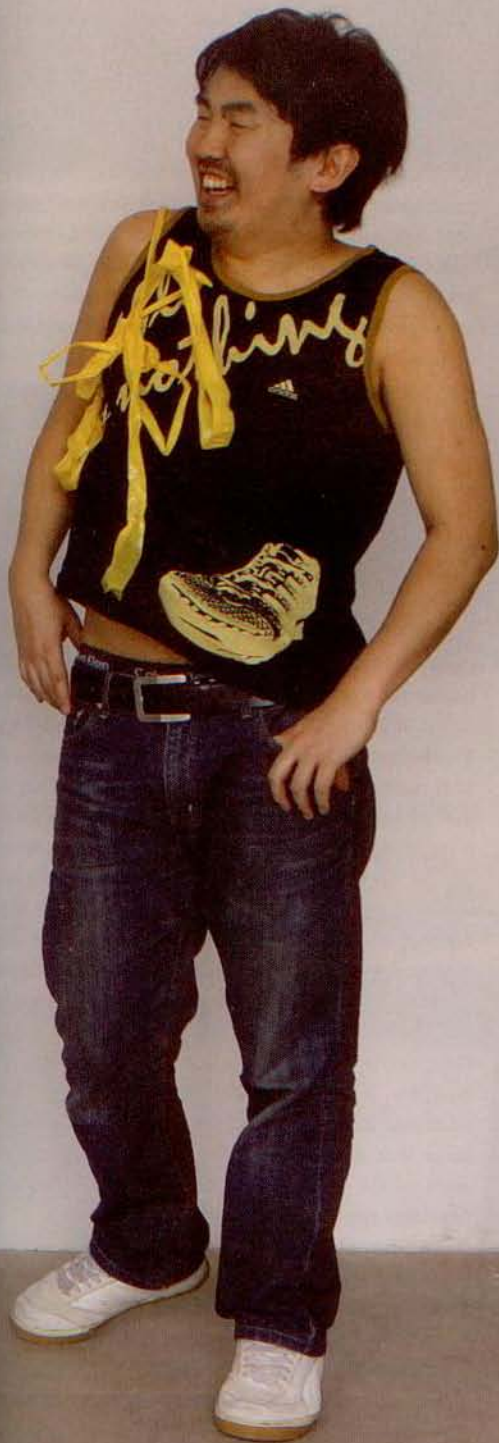


Photo: Paula Court

Folgende Überlegung: Ende der 70er, Anfang der 80er Jahre findet in der Kunst die große Verschiebung vom Gedanken zum Objekt statt. Sie hält bis heute an und hat mit der aktuellen Finanzkrise einen kleinen Rückschlag erlitten. Diese Verschiebung war Ausdruck und Folge eines wirtschaftlichen Aufschwungs und einer parallel verlaufenden Abschwächung der Ideologien, die die Nachkriegsordnung bestimmten. Im vielseitigen Reden und Publizieren über die Postmoderne und die Allverfügbarkeit des Historischen fand sie ihren ersten Höhepunkt und nahm im Alltag die Form eines vom Gefühl des »Anything goes« getragenen Hedonismus an. Plötzlich schien die Geschichte auf neue Art verfü- und verhandelbar, und die erste Nachkriegsgeneration begann, Deutungs- und Wirtschaftsmacht für sich zu reklamieren. Wilde Malerei und Neo Geo trieben den Markt an, Joseph Beuys, der Priester des anderen Kapitals, starb 1986 und die Wall Street erlebte im Oktober 1987 den großen Crash. Dazu kam die Kritik von innen, die Kritik an der Konzeptkunst, ihrer Vorherrschaft und ihren Grenzen. Noch heute liest sich diesbezüglich Jeff Walls 1985 veröffentlichte Analyse und Abrechnung mit der Konzeptkunst wie ein Krimi, denkt man etwa an Formulierungen wie: »Was an der Konzeptkunst einzigartig ist, ist daher ihre Neuerfindung des Defätismus, der Indifferenz, die der puristischen und formalistischen Kunst immer implizit ist.« Sein zweiteiliger Artikel erschien im amerikanischen »Real Life Magazine«, welches die Picture Generation aus nächster Nähe begleitete, diskutierte und dokumentierte.\* Gerade ihre Arbeiten können als Versuch verstanden werden, beide Sphären in unauflösbare Spannung zu setzen, das heißt die Welt des Konzepts und der Dematerialisierung mit jener des machtvollen und verführerischen Objekts.

Die einzige Kunstpraxis, die dem Fluch des Objekts entgegen hätte können, wäre die Performance gewesen: ihr Geschäft ist bis heute die ephemere Übersetzung von Gedanken in Körper, Zeit und Raum. Das Problem war aber, dass sie im Pathos der Selbstentblößung gefangen war und sich in den 90er Jahren primär damit beschäftigte, diese Sprache ins Medium Video zu übersetzen, um sie zu verfestigen und markttauglich zu machen. Und dann ergeben sich diese Überraschungen. 2005 bat ich Emily Sundblad bzw. Reena Spaulings um einen Beitrag für »Wednesday Calls the Future«, einer Ausstellung in Tbilisi, Georgien. Sie mailte mir ein Szenario für eine Performance, deren Uraufführung unter dem Titel »Grand Openings« im November anlässlich des Festivals »Performa05« in New York vorgesehen war und von Ei Arakawa, Jutta Koether und Emily Sundblad gemeinsam entwickelt wurde. Wir setzten es sozusagen als Vor-Premiere in Georgien in Szene. Jeder übernahm eine Rolle, Mai-Thu Perret war zum Beispiel Jutta Koether, wenn ich mich richtig erinnere. Solche detaillierten Angaben scheinen überflüssig und anekdotisch, sind es aber nicht, weil sie klar machen, dass »Grand Openings« mit der Vorstellung von Performance als Entblößung eines Ichs bzw. einer Ich-Figur brach. »Grand Openings« trat als etwas auf, was jeder machen konnte. Das war aber nicht alles, denn das wirklich Überraschende war die Performance selbst, die mich dazu brachte, Performance als ein Medium jenseits von Pathos und Peinlichkeit wahrzunehmen: das Szenario war total unverständlich, die einzelnen Teile hatten keinen Zusammenhang, es schien sich um eine grundlose Aufreihung von Momenten zu handeln, jegliche Sinnproduktion wurde dem Publikum zugeschoben und weit und breit kein Ich.

Consider this: around the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s a great shift took place in art from thought to object: its effects are still with us today and suffered a slight reverse with the current financial crisis. This shift was the expression and the consequence of an economic up-swing and, running parallel to that, a weakening of the ideologies that determined the post-war order. It had its first climax in the multifaceted discourse and publicity work around postmodernism and the universal availability of history, and in the everyday it took the form of a kind of hedonism borne by the feeling that »anything goes«. Suddenly history seemed to be accessible and negotiable in a new way and the first post-war generation began to claim heuristic and economic power. »Wild Malerei« (Wild Painting) and Neo Geo drove the market forward; Joseph Beuys, the priest of the other capital, died in 1986 and in October 1987, Wall Street had its first big Crash. On top of this came the criticism from within, the criticism of Concept Art, its dominance and its limits. Even today, in relation to Jeff Wall's analysis and final reckoning with Concept Art published in 1985, it reads like a crime story. Think of such formulations as, »What is unique about conceptual art is therefore its reinvention of defeatism, of the indifference always implicit in puristic and formalistic art.« His two-part article appeared in the American *Real Life Magazine*, which accompanied, discussed and documented the Pictures Generation from close quarters.\* Their work more than others can be understood as an attempt to set both spheres into an insoluble tension, in other words the world of the concept and dematerialisation with that of the powerful and seductive object.

The only art practice that would have been able to escape the curse of the object would have been performance art: its business has been and is still today the ephemeral translation of thoughts into bodies, time and space. The problem, however, was that it was trapped in the pathos of self-revelation and in the 90s primarily concerned with translating this language into the video medium in order to solidify it and make it marketable. And then surprises occurred. In 2005 I asked Emily Sundblad or rather Reena Spaulings for a contribution to *Wednesday Calls the Future*, an exhibition in Tbilisi, Georgia. She mailed me the scenario for a performance originally planned to be shown under the title *Grand Openings* in November on the occasion of the *Performa05* festival in New York and which had been developed jointly by Ei Arakawa, Jutta Koether and Emily Sundblad. We produced it as a kind of pre-premiere in Georgia. Everyone took on a role: Mai-Thu Perret was, for example, Jutta Koether, if I remember correctly. Such details seem redundant and anecdotal, but they are not, because they make it clear that *Grand Openings* broke with the idea of performance as the exposure of an ego or of an ego figure. *Grand Openings* appeared to be something anyone could do. That was not everything, for what was really surprising was the performance itself, which helped me to see performance art as a medium beyond the boundaries of pathos and embarrassment. The scenario was totally incomprehensible, the individual parts had no connections, it seemed to be a senseless sequence of moments and any production of sense was passed over to the audience, with not an ego to be seen. Then



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Es gab nur Präsentation, jedoch keine Repräsentation, wie die georgische Kunsthistorikerin Nana Kipiani nebenbei bemerkte.

Der in New York lebende, japanische Künstler Ei Arakawa wird oft mit dem »Grand Openings«-Projekt assoziiert. Dabei handelt es sich in seinem Schaffen um ein Ausnahmeprojekt, weil es von einer festen Crew entwickelt wird, aber auf einen gemeinsamen Ausgangspunkt oder eine bestimmte Zielvorgabe verzichtet. Bei allen anderen Performanceprojekten Arakawas steht am Anfang ein Interesse für etwas, das einen Moment der Identifikation in ihm auslöst. Dieser zieht eine Vertiefung nach sich und den Versuch, das angeeignete Material zu übersetzen und näher an Körper und Bewegung zu bringen, um ihm eine eigene Körperlichkeit zu geben.

Drei Beispiele. »Don't Think About Me, I'm Alright« fand 2004 in der New Yorker Greene Naftali Gallery gemeinsam mit Patricia Cazorla, Kimiko Fukuoka, Michiko Hoshi, Miki Ikeda, Mari Mukai, Etsuko Noda, Hisayasu Takashio und Maki Waza statt. Am Anfang des Projekts stand das Interesse für die Identität des japanischen Künstlers On Kawara und dessen Beschäftigung mit Esperanto: »Ich war davon fasziniert, zu erfahren, woher er kommt und dass er Esperanto kann, und versuchte dann eine Performance daraus zu machen, nicht um das zu illustrieren, sondern um es körperlich präsent zu machen. Für mich ist On Kawara ein Produkt der japanischen Nachkriegserziehung, die sich sehr schnell von einem extremen Nationalismus hin zu einem Liberalismus wandelte. On Kawara war auch Teil einer Esperanto Gruppe. Ich schrieb einen Aufsatz und machte eine 13minütige Videoarbeit darüber. Der Text läuft im Film als englischer Untertitel und zugleich hört man eine chinesische Stimme, gesprochen von einem Amerikaner. Das Video war größtenteils eine Diashow, die verschiedene meiner Performances dokumentierte, und mich auch dabei zeigte, wie ich ein Fake-On Kawara Bild male, während ich in einem Flugzeug sitze. Auf dem Bild stand »Duty Free« in Esperanto (obwohl ich es falsch schrieb), und man hört den Flugzeuglärm und die Flugbegleiter »Duty Free«, »Duty Free« sagen. On Kawara ist nämlich ein Duty Free-Künstler für mich. Das Video wurde für eine Kunsthistorikertagung gemacht, wo es in einer Pause lief.«

Eine ältere Fassung davon wurde während der neunstündigen Performance bei Greene Naftali gezeigt. Arakawa besuchte zu dieser Zeit eine altmodische Kunstschule in New York, um ein Visa für die USA zu erhalten. Für die Performance lud er acht seiner Mitstudenten ein, Bilder On Kawaras zu fälschen, zu zerstören und zu einer Art konstruktivistischen Struktur zusammenzuschrauben. Ein Kopiergerät in der Galerie druckte Interviews aus, die Arakawa zuvor mit den Studenten geführt hatte und in denen sie sehr persönlich über ihr Leben Auskunft gaben. Die Performance war nach diesen Interviews strukturiert, während die kopierten Seiten zu Heften zusammengebunden unter den Besuchern verteilt wurden.

2005 organisierte Arakawa als Student am Bard College das Projekt »Riot the Bar«. Es handelte sich um eine achttägige Performance, deren Ausgangspunkt ein Besuch von Stonewall war, jener New Yorker Gay Bar, in der 1969 der Aufstand gegen einen homophoben Polizeieinsatz ihren Anfang nahm, an den seither der Christopher Street Day erinnert. Heute ist Stonewall zu einem, wie Arakawa es ausdrückt, »touristischen Ort der offiziellen Schwulenszene geworden, weshalb sie ein zweites Lokal eröffnet haben, das Stonewall Bistro«. Diese Veränderung doku-

was only presentation, but no representation, as the Georgian art historian Nana Kipiani remarked in passing.

Ei Arakawa, a Japanese artist living in New York, is associated with the *Grand Openings* project. But in his work it is an exceptional product, because it is developed by a fixed crew while dispensing with a common starting point or a defined goal. All of Arakawa's other performance projects begin with an interest in something that triggers a moment of identification. This draws a process of greater depth behind it as well as the attempt to translate the appropriated material, bringing it closer to body and movement, in order to give it a physicality of its own.

Three examples: *Don't Think About Me, I'm Alright* took place in 2004 in Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, jointly with Patricia Cazorla, Kimiko Fukuoka, Michiko Hoshi, Miki Ikeda, Mari Mukai, Etsuko Noda, Hisayasu Takashio and Maki Waza. At the beginning of the project stood an interest in the identity of the Japanese artist On Kawara and his work with Esperanto: »I was fascinated to know where he comes from and his knowledge of Esperanto, and then I wanted to make a performance out of it without illustrating it, but making it physically present. I saw On Kawara as a product of Japanese post-war education, which changed very fast from extreme nationalism to liberalism. On Kawara participated in an Esperanto group too. I wrote an essay about it and made a 13 minute video piece out of it. In the film, the text of my essay runs as English subtitles and at the same time you can hear a voice in Chinese pronounced by an American. The video itself was mostly a slideshow documenting various performances I did but it also shows pictures of me painting a fake On Kawara painting while sitting in an airplane. The painting says Duty Free in Esperanto (although I misspelled it) and you hear the noise of the airplane and the flight attendant saying »Duty Free, Duty Free«. Because On Kawara is a Duty Free artist to me. This video was made for a conference of art historians and played during the break.«

An earlier version of this was shown during the nine-hour performance at Greene Naftali. At this time Arakawa was attending an old fashioned art school in New York to get a visa for the USA. For the performance he invited eight of his fellow students to fake On Kawara's pictures, destroy them and screw them together into a kind of constructivist structure. In addition, a copy machine in the gallery printed out interviews that Arakawa had made earlier with the students and which provided very personal information about their lives. The performance was structured according to these interviews, while the copied pages were bound together as booklets and distributed among the visitors.

In 2005, as a student at Bard College, Arakawa organized the project *Riot the Bar*. It was an eight-day performance that started with a visit to Stonewall, the gay bar in New York where in 1969 an uprising began against a homophobic police raid, which is commemorated by Christopher Street Day. Today Stonewall is, as Arakawa puts it, »a touristy place in the official gay scene and they opened a new space, Stonewall Bistro.« This change was documented by Arakawa for *Riot the Bar* in a brochure, which also included the program for the eight days. He threw a bar together with simple materials, where a lecture was held every evening. DJs performed

tertierte Arakawa für »Riot the Bar« in einer Broschüre, die nach das Programm für die acht Tage enthielt. Er zimmerte aus einfachen Mitteln eine Bar zusammen, in der jeden Abend ein Vortrag stattfand, Djs auftraten und Drinks wie Buttery Nipple, Sour Apple Martini oder Blow Job serviert wurden. Am ersten Abend sprach beispielsweise der Künstler Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, der 1969 aktiv dabei war, über seine Erfahrungen von damals. Im Außenbereich des Bard College installierte Arakawa Porträts von Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz und Ana Mendieta, die für ihn und für dieses Projekt die anerkannten Identity-Politics-Künstler repräsentierten. Jeden Abend listete er seine Einnahmen auf, und wenn sich die Summe gegenüber dem Vorabend erhöhte, fügte er neue Porträts der Künstler hinzu, so dass am Ende ein ganzes Feld mit ihren Gesichtern zu sehen war. **Zum Schluss der Performance wurde die Bar in einer Auktion für \$150 oder \$200 verkauft, wobei sie dann beim Transport völlig in Brüche ging.** Zwei Jahre später realisierte Arakawa »Riot the Bar« in der Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) in Berlin ein zweites Mal als »Riot the Bar«, wozu er unter anderen Bill Dietz, Sebastian Biskup, Andrew Smith, Nick Mauss, Ken Okiishi, Nora Schultz und Josef Strau einlud. »In Berlin zerstörten wir die Bar jede Nacht. Sie bestand aus verschiedensten Materialien und Sockel, die herumstanden. Jeden Tag installierten wir sie in einem anderen Raum neu, sogar im Freien, als gerade die Kreuzberger Gay Parade stattfand. Es gab keine Porträts wie im Bard College, aber ich informierte die Leute wieder über meine Bemühungen.«

Ausgangspunkt für »Most Anarchic Voice Over Ever (M.A.V.O.E.)«, der Performance, die im September 2009 im Basler Ausstellungsraum New Jersey stattfand, ist einerseits die im Westen wenig bekannte japanische Performancegruppe Jikken Kobo (»Experimenteller Workshop«), andererseits Mavo, eine Avantgardegruppierung um Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901–1977), die von 1923 bis 1925 aktiv war. Jikken Kobo begann 1951 mit ihren Aktionen, das heißt drei Jahre vor der Gutai Gruppe, die im Westen als Begründerin der japanischen Performancekunst gilt.<sup>\*\*</sup> Von Beginn an ging es dem Kollektiv um eine medienübergreifende Kunstpraxis jenseits aller künstlerischen und gesellschaftlichen Klassifizierungen, um eine Kunst, die über die Kunst hinausging, die außerhalb des Museumsraumes statt fand, sozial relevant war und sich in enger Berührung mit dem Alltagsleben entwickelte. Das Kollektiv verweigerte die Konstruktion einer klaren Identität. **Da sie kein Manifest verfasste, an keinem Ort verankert war, keine Werke hinterließ und die Aktionen kaum dokumentiert wurden, geriet Jikken Kobo in Vergessenheit.** Jikken Kobo lehnte wie schon Mavo das fest etablierte japanische Kunstsystem westlicher Prägung (»gadan«) ab. Mavo entwickelte den sogenannten Conscious Constructivism mit dem Ziel, ein Bild des modernen Lebens zu entwerfen, das sich jenseits von Abbild und Repräsentation entwickelte, dafür aber in großer Nähe zum Alltag. Zwei Jahre lang zelebrierten die Mavoisten eine umfassende anarchistische Ästhetik mit Bühnenbildern, Aufführungen, akrobatischen Performances, Architekturmodellen, Ausstellungen, Tanz, Büchern, Zeitschriften, Wanddekorationen, Skulpturen und Strukturen. Nach ihrer Auflösung radikalisierte sich Murayama, er wurde Mitglied der japanischen Kommunistischen Partei, kämpfte gegen Zensur und japanischen Militarismus und geriet dafür wiederholt in Haft. Seine Ideen eines ande-

and drinks like Buttery Nipple, Sour Apple Martini or Blow Job were served. On the first evening the artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, who had been an active participant in 1969, spoke about his experiences. In the outdoor area of Bard College Arakawa installed portraits of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz and Ana Mendieta, who represented the three known identity-politics artists for him and for the project. Every evening he made a list of his takings, and if the sum was larger than on the previous evening he added new portraits of the three artists, so that in the end a whole field was covered with their faces. At the end of the performance the bar was sold by auction for \$150 or \$200, but it broke into pieces during transport. **Two years later Arakawa produced Riot the Bar for a second time in the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) in Berlin, under the title Riot the Bar, for which he invited, among others, Bill Dietz, Sebastian Biskup, Andrew Smith, Nick Mauss, Ken Okiishi, Nora Schultz and Josef Strau.** »In Berlin we destroyed the bar every night. It was made out of a lot of material and pedestals around to be used. The next day, we moved the bar to the next room and installed it again, or even outside, when the Kreuzberg gay parade was happening. We didn't have the portraits like at Bard College, but again, I informed the people about the profit I was making.«

The starting point for *M.A.V.O.E. (killer COMMERCIAL)*, the performance which took place in the exhibition space New Jersey in Basel in September 2009 is partly the Japanese performance group Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop), which is little known in the West, and partly Mavo, an avant-garde group around Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901–1977), who was active from 1923 to 1925. Jikken Kobo began with its actions in 1951, three years before the Gutai Group, which is believed in the West to be the founder of Japanese performance art.<sup>\*\*</sup> From its very beginnings the collective aimed at a cross-media art practice outside all artistic and social classifications, a kind of art that went beyond art, which took place outside the museum space, was socially relevant and developed close to everyday life. The collective refused to construct a clear identity. **Since it wrote no manifesto, was not anchored to any place and left no work behind, and because its actions were hardly ever documented, Jikken Kobo sank into oblivion.** Like Jikken Kobo, Mavo rejected the firmly established art system in the Western style (»gadan«). Mavo developed what was called *Conscious Constructivism* with the aim of creating an image of modern life beyond depiction and representation, but in close contact with the everyday. For two years the Mavoists celebrated a comprehensive anarchistic aesthetic, with stage sets, plays, acrobatic performances, architectural models, exhibitions, dance, books, magazines, wall decorations, sculptures and structures. After its dissolution, Murayama became more radical, becoming a member of the Japanese Communist Party, and fighting against censorship where he was arrested again and again. He continued to pursue his ideas of a different kind of theatre and designed, for example, the covers for the Japanese theatre magazine *La Teatro*, which is still published today.

The story of Jikken Kobo and Mavo reads something like a portrait of Arakawa's work. This is characterised, in the first

\*\* See the detailed study by / siehe dazu die ausführliche Studie von Miwako Tezuka, Jikken Kobo (*Experimental Workshop*): *Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s*, Columbia University, 2005.



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den Theaters verfolgte er weiter und entwarf etwa die Umschläge für die japanische Theaterzeitschrift *La Teatro*, die bis heute erscheint.

Die Geschichte von Jikken Kobo und Mavo liest sich bis zu einem gewissen Grad wie ein Porträt von Arakawas Arbeit. Diese beschreibt sich zuerst einmal dadurch aus, dass sie verwirrend ist und scheinbar formlos, was immer wieder zu Ablehnung führt und den Eindruck von Langeweile hervorruft. In einem weiteren Kontext ist sie Teil jener Entwicklungen und Experimente, an denen zahlreiche andere Künstler arbeiten: der Versuch, mit den Mitteln der Kunst zu einer anderen Form von Geschichtsschreibung und Selbstverortung zu gelangen. Dabei wird Interesse für Geschichte und subjektive Erfahrung in immer neuen Konstellationen zu Kunstobjekten geformt, die gleichzeitig Autonomie, historisches Bewusstsein und das Bekenntnis zu ihrer Zufälligkeit in Szene setzen. Dabei steht man als Rezipient oft vor dem Problem, dass die Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichte auf bescheidenem Niveau verläuft, und dass diese Beschränktheit durch virtuose Gestaltung wettgemacht werden soll. Die Ausdehnung des Kunstmarktes hat viel Platz gemacht für große Mengen solcher Kunstobjekte, die alle von ihrer Tragweite überzeugt sind und in ihren abgeklärtesten und langweiligsten Varianten nichts anderes zelebrieren als die eigene Leere. So stehen wir heute vor den Objekten, nach denen wir gerufen haben, weil wir genug hatten von den Gedanken und ihren Illusionen. Und wir fragen wir uns, wo die Gedanken hin sind und wie sie sich manifestieren von Konzeptkunst, Esoterik, Idealismus und Marktzyklus materialisieren lassen. Aus diesem Grund interessiert mich Arakawas Vorgehen, obschon ich längst nicht immer alles verstehe und mir nicht sicher bin, ob die Übersetzung von Wissen in Körperlichkeit (physicality) und Bewegung tatsächlich funktioniert. Die Vorstellung aber, die Behauptung und den Versuch will ich mitverfolgen, denn jenseits von Gelingen oder Scheitern stehen diese Performances für Unabhängigkeit vom Terror des Objekts, für Freiheit und hoffentlich für Anarchie. DANIEL BAUMANN ist freier Kritiker und Kurator. Er lebt in Basel, wo er gemeinsam mit Tobias Madison, Emanuel Rossetti und Dan Solbach den Ausstellungsraum New Jersey betreibt. □

ARAKAWA, geboren 1977 in Fukushima, Japan. Lebt in New York. Letzte Projekte u. a. Non-solo show, Non-group show (mit Nikolas Gambaroff, Nick Maus und Nora Schultz), Kunsthalle Zürich; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart; Sculpture Center, (Grand Openings), NY; New Jersey, Basel; Liaison, a Naïve Pacifist, Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto (2009); Non-solo show, Non-group show (mit Henning Bohl und Nora Schultz), Franco Soffiantino Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2008). Letzte Ausstellungsbeiträge u. a. Autocenter (mit Nora Schultz), Berlin; Bulletinboard Blvd., Pro Choice (mit Patrick Price), Wien (2009); TBILISI 5. Wednesday was Thursday (mit Sergei Tcherpnin, Gela Patashuri, und Daniel Baumann), Tbilisi, Georgien; Yokohama Triennale 2008, Kanagawa, Japan; The Altoids Award 2008, New Museum, NY; Front Room at Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA; Nichts IST AUFREGEND. Nichts IST SEXY. Nichts IST NICHT PEINLICH, MUMOK, (Grand Openings), Wien (2008); Performa07, NY; Syntropia, NGBK Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (2007).

place, by being confusing and apparently formless, constantly resulting in rejection and evoking an impression of boredom. In a different context it is part of the developments and experiments that many other artists are working on: the attempt to achieve a different kind of historiography and self-positioning with the means of art. In the process an interest in history and subjective experience is shaped in ever changing constellations into artworks that simultaneously present autonomy, historical consciousness and a commitment to their contingency. As a recipient one often faces the problem that the involvement with history is often at a modest level and that this constriction is supposed to be compensated with virtuoso design. The extension of the art market has made a lot of room for big quantities of this kind of art object, which all seem convinced of their momentousness and, in their most detached and boring variants, celebrate nothing but their own emptiness. And so today we stand in front of the objects we have called for, because we have had enough of thoughts and their illusions. **And now we ask ourselves where thoughts have gone and how they can be manifested on the far side of concept art, the esoteric, idealism and market cynicism.** For this reason Arakawa's procedure interests me, even though I by no means understand it all and am not at all sure whether the translation of knowledge into physicality and movement actually works. But I do want to go along with the idea, the assertion and the experiment, for beyond success or failure these performances stand for independence from the terror of the object, for freedom and, I hope, for anarchy. DANIEL BAUMANN is a freelance critic and curator. He lives in Basel, where, together with Tobias Madison, Emanuel Rossetti and Dan Solbach he runs the exhibition space New Jersey. □

Translated by Nelson Wattie

EI ARAKAWA, born in Fukushima, Japan in 1977. Lives in New York. Most recent projects, among others, Non-solo show, Non-group show (with Nikolas Gambaroff, Nick Maus and Nora Schultz), Kunsthalle Zurich; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart; Sculpture Center, (Grand Openings), NY; New Jersey, Basel; Liaison, a Naïve Pacifist, Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto (2009); Non-solo show, Non-group show (with Henning Bohl and Nora Schultz), Franco Soffiantino Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2008). Exhibition participation include: Autocenter (with Nora Schultz), Berlin; Bulletinboard Blvd., Pro Choice (with Patrick Price), Vienna (2009); TBILISI 5. Wednesday was Thursday (with Sergei Tcherpnin, Gela Patashuri, and Daniel Baumann), Tbilisi, Georgia; Yokohama Triennale 2008, Kanagawa, Japan; The Altoids Award 2008, New Museum, NY; Front Room at Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA; Nichts IST AUFREGEND. Nichts IST SEXY. Nichts IST NICHT PEINLICH, MUMOK, (Grand Openings), Vienna (2008); Performa07, NY; Syntropia, NGBK Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (2007).

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## PORTRAIT: EI ARAKAWA

*What does a performance look like without an eye on media friendly, marketable secondary use, or without pathos and self-revelation? Is it possible to translate knowledge into movement and the body? Daniel Baumann on Ei Arakawa and the anarchistic attempt to create a picture of contemporary life beyond images and representation.*

Consider this: around the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s a great shift took place in art from thought to object; its effects are still with us today and suffered a slight reverse with the current financial crisis. This shift was the expression and the consequence of an economic up-swing and, running parallel to that, a weakening of the ideologies that determined the post-war order. It had its first climax in the multifaceted discourse and publicity work around postmodernism and the universal availability of history, and in the everyday it took the form of a kind of hedonism borne by the feeling that »anything goes«. Suddenly history seemed to be accessible and negotiable in a new way and the first post-war generation began to claim heuristic and economic power. »Wilde Malerei« (Wild Painting) and Neo Geo drove the market forward; Joseph Beuys, the priest of the other capital, died in 1986 and in October 1987, Wall Street had its first big Crash. On top of this came the criticism from within, the criticism of Concept Art, its dominance and its limits. Even today, in relation to Jeff Wall's analysis and final reckoning with Concept Art published in 1985, it reads like a crime story. Think of such formulations as, »What is unique about conceptual art is therefore its reinvention of defeatism, of the indifference always implicit in puristic and formalistic art.« His two-part article appeared in the American *Real Life Magazine*, which accompanied, discussed and documented the Pictures Generation from close quarters.\* Their work more than others can be understood as an attempt to set both spheres into an insoluble tension, in other words the world of the concept and dematerialisation with that of the powerful and seductive object.

The only art practice that would have been able to escape the curse of the object would have been performance art: its business has been and is still today the ephemeral translation of thoughts into bodies, time and space. The problem, however, was that it was trapped in the pathos of self-revelation and in the 90s primarily concerned with translating this language into the video medium in order to solidify it and make it marketable. And then surprises occurred. In 2005 I asked Emily Sundblad or rather Reena Spaulings for a contribution to *Wednesday Calls the Future*, an exhibition in Tbilisi, Georgia. She mailed me the scenario for a performance originally planned to be shown under the title *Grand Openings* in November on the occasion of the *Performato5* festival in New York and which had been developed jointly by Ei Arakawa, Jutta Koether and Emily Sundblad. We produced it as a kind of pre-premiere in Georgia. Everyone took on a role: Mai-Thu Perret was, for example, Jutta Koether, if I remember correctly. Such details seem redundant and anecdotal, but they are not, because they make it clear that *Grand Openings* broke with the idea of performance as the exposure of an ego or of an ego figure. *Grand Openings* appeared to be something anyone could do. That was not everything, for what was really surprising was the performance itself, which helped me to see performance art as a medium beyond the boundaries of pathos and embarrassment. The scenario was totally incomprehensible, the individual parts had no connections, it seemed to be a senseless sequence of moments and any production of sense was passed over to the audience, with not an ego to be seen. There was only presentation, but no representation, as the Georgian art historian Nana Kipiani remarked in passing. Ei Arakawa, a Japanese artist living in New York, is often associated with the *Grand Openings* project. But in his work it is an exceptional product, because it is developed by a fixed crew while dispensing with a common starting point or a defined goal. All of Arakawa's other performance projects begin with an interest in something that triggers a moment of identification. This draws a process of greater depth behind it as well as the attempt to translate the appropriated material, bringing it closer to body and movement, in order to give it a physicality of its own.

Three examples: *Don't Think About Me, I'm Alright* took place in 2004 in Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, jointly with Patricia Cazorla, Kimiko Fukuoka, Michiko Hoshi, Miki Ikeda, Mari Mukai, Etsuko Noda, Hisayasu Takashio and Maki Waza. At the beginning of the project stood an interest in the identity of the Japanese artist On Kawara and his work with Esperanto: »I was fascinated to know where he comes from and his knowledge of Esperanto, and then I tried to make a performance out of it without illustrating it, but making it physically present. I saw On Kawara as a product of Japanese post-war education, which changed very fast from extreme nationalism to liberalism. On Kawara participated in an Esperanto group too. I wrote an essay about it and made a 13 minute video piece out of. In the film, the text of my essay runs as English subtitles and at the same time you could hear a voice in Chinese pronounced by an American. The video itself was mostly a slideshow documenting various performances I did but it also shows pictures of me painting a fake On Kawara painting while sitting in an airplane. The painting says Duty Free in Esperanto (although I misspelled it) and you hear the noise of the airplane and the flight attendant saying »Duty Free, Duty Free«. Because On Kawara is a Duty Free artist to me. This video was made for a conference of art historians and played during the break.«

An earlier version of this was shown during the nine-hour performance at Greene Naftali. At this time Arakawa was attending an old fashioned art school in New York to get a visa for the USA. For the performance he invited eight of his fellow students to fake On Kawara's pictures, destroy them and screw them together into a kind of constructivist structure. In addition, a copy machine in the gallery printed out interviews that Arakawa had made earlier with the students and which provided very personal information about their lives. The performance was structured according to these interviews, while the copied pages were bound together into booklets and distributed among the visitors.

In 2005, as a student at Bard College, Arakawa organised the project *Riot the Bar*. It was an eight-day performance that started with a visit to Stonewall, the gay bar in New York where in 1969 an uprising began against a homophobic police

raid, which is commemorated by Christopher Street Day. Today Stonewall is, as Arakawa puts it, »a touristy place for the official gay scene and they opened a new space, Stonewall Bistro.« This change was documented by Arakawa for *Riot the Bar* in a brochure, which also included the program for the eight days. He threw a bar together with simple materials, where a lecture was held every evening. DJs performed and drinks like Buttery Nipple, Sour Apple Martini or Blow Job were served. On the first evening the artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, who had been an active participant in 1969, spoke about his experiences. In the outdoor area of Bard College Arakawa installed portraits of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz and Ana Mendieta, who represented the three known identity-politics artists for him and for the project. Every evening he made a list of his takings, and if the sum was larger than on the previous evening he added new portraits of the three artists, so that in the end a whole field was covered with their faces. At the end of the performance the bar was sold by auction for \$150 or \$200, but it broke into pieces during transport. Two years later Arakawa produced *Riot the Bar* for a second time in the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) in Berlin, under the title *Riot the 8 Bar*, for which he invited, among others, Bill Dietz, Sebastian Biskup, Andrew Smith, Nick Mauss, Ken Okiishi, Nora Schultz and Josef Strau. »In Berlin we destroyed the bar every night. It was made out of a lot of material and pedestals around to be used. The next day, we moved the bar to the next room and installed it again, or even outside, when the Kreuzberg gay parade was happening. We didn't have the portraits like at Bard College, but again, I informed the people about the profit I was making.«

The starting point for *M.A.V.O.E. (killer COMMERCIAL)*, the performance which took place in the exhibition space New Jersey in Basel in September 2009 is partly the Japanese performance group Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop), which is little known in the West, and partly Mavo, an avant-garde group around Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901–1977), who was active from 1923 to 1925. Jikken Kobo began with its actions in 1951, three years before the Gutai Group, which is believed in the West to be the founder of Japanese performance art.\*\* From its very beginnings the collective aimed at a cross-media art practice outside all artistic and social classifications, a kind of art that went beyond art, which took place outside the museum space, was socially relevant and developed close to everyday life. The collective refused to construct a clear identity. Since it wrote no manifesto, was not anchored to any place and left no work behind, and because its actions were hardly ever documented, Jikken Kobo sank into oblivion. Like Jikken Kobo, Mavo rejected the firmly established art system in the Western style (»gadan«). Mavo developed what was called *Conscious Constructivism* with the aim of creating an image of modern life beyond depiction and representation, but in close contact with the everyday. For two years the Mavoists celebrated a comprehensive anarchistic aesthetic, with stage sets, plays, acrobatic performances, architectural models, exhibitions, dance, books, magazines, wall decorations, sculptures and structures. After its dissolution, Murayama became more radical, becoming a member of the Japanese Communist Party, and fighting against censorship where he was arrested again and again. He continued to pursue his ideas of a different kind of theatre and designed, for example, the covers for the Japanese theatre magazine *La Teatro*, which is still published today.

The story of Jikken Kobo and Mavo reads something like a portrait of Arakawa's work. This is characterised, in the first place, by being confusing and apparently formless, constantly resulting in rejection and evoking an impression of boredom. In a different context it is part of the developments and experiments that many other artists are working on: the attempt to achieve a different kind of historiography and self-positioning with the means of art. In the process an interest in history and subjective experience is shaped in ever changing constellations into artworks that simultaneously present autonomy, historical consciousness and a commitment to their contingency. As a recipient one often faces the problem that the involvement with history is often at a modest level and that this constriction is supposed to be compensated with virtuoso design. The extension of the art market has made a lot of room for big quantities of this kind of art object, which all seem convinced of their momentousness and, in their most detached and boring variants, celebrate nothing but their own emptiness. And so today we stand in front of the objects we have called for, because we have had enough of thoughts and their illusions. And now we ask ourselves where thoughts have gone and how they can be manifested on the far side of concept art, the esoteric, idealism and market cynicism. For this reason Arakawa's procedure interests me, even though I by no means understand it all and am not at all sure whether the translation of knowledge into physicality and movement actually works. But I do want to go along with the idea, the assertion and the experiment, for beyond success or failure these performances stand for independence from the terror of the object, for freedom and, I hope, for anarchy.

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Translated by Nelson Wattie.

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EI ARAKAWA, born in Fukushima, Japan in 1977. Lives in New York. Most recent projects, among others, Non-solo show, Non-group show (with Nikolas Gambaroff, Nick Maus and Nora Schultz), Kunsthalle Zurich; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart; Sculpture Center, (Grand Openings), NY; New Jersey, Basel; Liaison, a Naïve Pacifist, Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto (2009); Non-solo show, Non-group show (with Henning Bohl and Nora Schultz), Franco Soffiantino Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2008). Exhibition participation include: Autocenter (with Nora Schultz), Berlin; Bulletinboard Blvd., Pro Choice (with Patrick Price), Vienna (2009); TBI LI SI 5. Wednesday was Thursday (with Sergei Tcherepnin, Gela Patashuri, and Daniel Baumann), Tbilisi, Georgia; Yokohama Triennale 2008, Kanagawa, Japan; The Altoids Award 2008, New Museum, NY; Front Room at Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA; Nichts I ST AUFREGEN. Nichts I ST S EXY. Nichts I ST NI CHT P EI NLI CH, MUMOK, (Grand Openings), Vienna (2008); Performa07, NY; Syntropia, NGBK Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (2007).

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\* Jeff Wall, »Dan Graham's Kammerspiel. Part I / Part II«, Real Life Magazine, 1985, reprint in Real Life Magazine. Selected Writings and Projects 1979–1994, Primary Information, New York 2006.

\*\* See the detailed study by Miwako Tezuka, Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s, Columbia University, 2005.