

“International Contemporaneity” in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond

Reiko TOMII

New York, New York, U.S.A.

“Contemporaneity” is a key term that has recently entered the theoretical discourse on “contemporary art.” Its theoretical postulation has an intriguing precedent in 1960s Japan, where the area of practice called *gendai bijutsu*—literally, “contemporary art”—was firmly established, in part prompted by a heightened sense of *kokusaiteki dōjisei*, or “international contemporaneity.” As a historical concept, “international contemporaneity” concerns not so much an objective reality or a theoretical construct as a “shared perception” informed by a given locale’s interface with the outside world. This article offers a historical examination of “international contemporaneity” as it was articulated by the art critic Haryū Ichirō in the late 1960s. The locally specific nature of the Japanese term points to a particular condition that shaped Japanese art. Above all, the coinage was informed by the peripheral place Japan had long occupied in Eurocentric modern art history. Yet what may be called Japan’s “peripheral vision” was cursed by the “catching up” mentality, which kept Japanese critics from truly understanding the innovation of the dematerialized and ephemeral practices emerging on their native soil, ranging from Gutai in the 1950s to Anti-Art (*han-geijutsu*) and Non-Art (*hi-geijutsu*) in the 1960s. Reexamining the thorny issue of “imitation” in order to devise a more nuanced methodology for studying “similar yet dissimilar” cases that embody the “contemporaneity” and “multiplicity” of contemporary art, this essay offers a new approach to incorporating locales on the perceived periphery into a broader narrative of world art history.

Keywords: CONTEMPORARY ART, 1960S, CONTEMPORANEITY, GLOBALIZATION, ORIGINALITY, ANTI-ART, NON-ART, SEKINE NOBUO, MONO-HA, GUTAI

What is contemporary art? This seemingly simple question has become increasingly relevant in today’s art scenes, which are rapidly expanding and diversifying as a result of ongoing globalization. An urgent need is felt, especially by those involved in contemporary art, to devise a more specific definition than a merely generic and typically ahistorical one (e.g., “art

of today”), with the once dominant theoretical rubric of “avant-garde” quickly fading from global art discourse, be it journalistic or critical. One promising idea has been put forth by Terry Smith, who has theoretically postulated the notion of “contemporaneity” as the conditions which characterize the new and progressive practices of art called “contemporary art.”¹

In an earlier essay, I examined the definition of “contemporary art” and the concept of “contemporaneity” from the more historical perspective of studying 1960s art in Japan.² On the one hand, my study was a direct response to the call for a scholarly examination of the rising tide of Asian contemporary art and the increasing awareness of “contemporary art” on a global scale.³ On the other hand, my focus on 1960s Japan was informed by the fact that the area of practice called *gendai bijutsu* 現代美術 (literally, “contemporary art”) was firmly established by 1970, distinct from the modern practices of *Nihonga* 日本画 (Japanese-style painting) and *yōga* 洋画 (Western-style painting), which date back to the late nineteenth century. This local development was accompanied by the art discourse that articulated the significance of *gendai* 現代 (the contemporary), as opposed to *kindai* 近代 (the modern or modernity). As the concept of *kindai* was deemed to have “collapsed” (*hōkai* 崩壊), the concept of the avant-garde (*zen’ei* 前衛) also lost its relevance, replaced by *gendai bijutsu*. This shift was not only prompted in part by the local political situations around 1970, but also underscored by a heightened sense of “international contemporaneity” (*kokusaiteki dōjisei* 国際的同時性) in art, which resulted from more than two decades of conscious interfacing with the outside world, typically Euro-America.

The formation of *gendai bijutsu* in 1960s Japan, with the awareness of *kokusaiteki dōjisei*, made an intriguing parallel with Smith’s focus on “contemporaneity” to theorize “contemporary art.” This resonance at once points to the need to periodize both “contemporaneity” and “contemporary art” and to the continuing expansion of new art practices, which was called “internationalism” in the immediate postwar decades and has, in the past decade or so, been labeled “globalism.” In this regard, 1960s Japan makes a prescient case, offering a valuable insight to the nascent investigation of “contemporary art” today.

At the same time, it is notable that the prescience of Japanese art discourse was in no small part informed by its perceived position at the periphery of modernity, vis-à-vis the putative center that is Euro-America. The condition of a given locale necessarily affects its view of itself and of the outside world. What may be called Japan’s “peripheral vision” was more attuned to the changing environment than the “central sight.” It would not be surprising if, say, in Tokyo and New York, the respective viewpoints toward the outside world were different, because by the 1960s New York came to assert its dominance in the international art world, following the rise of Abstract Expressionism. If Tokyo saw the international tendency of gestural abstraction as a “shared experience” of many regions of the world (and, for the matter, many locales embraced gestural abstraction as an international language), New York saw it as a “sign of American triumph.”⁴ It is therefore imperative to separate the *perception* of “(international) contemporaneity” and the *fact* (state) of “(international) contemporaneity.”

This separation of two modes of “international contemporaneity” is especially crucial when studying 1960s art in Japan, due to its peripheral position. Granted, in recent years, there has been a growing understanding that the development of postwar Japanese art often paralleled, and in some instances preceded, that of Euro-American art. In other words, the state of “international contemporaneity” existed in the 1960s, and Japan was a vital part of

this equation. However, its perception of itself at the time was painfully saddled by the mentality of “catching up”—that is, catching up with the West, as will be examined. Two modes of “international contemporaneity”—one as the perception and the other as the fact—demand two different types of historical investigation. While the study of the perception makes the critical discourse of the time its subject, the study of the fact feeds into today’s art-historical discourse. Lacking either makes the study of “international contemporaneity” in 1960s Japan and elsewhere incomplete.

In the study of the perception of “international contemporaneity”—which will follow this introduction—“contemporaneity” is best understood as a given locale’s perception of itself and the outside world, which was empirically shaped by its interface with another locale and/or the outside world. Simply put, “contemporaneity” is the awareness or observation that “We are contemporaneous with them at this point.” The discussion focuses on this sense of “international contemporaneity,” as articulated by the art critic Haryū Ichirō 針生一郎, and two opposing discourses it spawned toward the end of the 1960s. It will be followed by a reconsideration of the problematic of “imitation,” which accompanied Japan’s self-conscious status on the periphery. This will require a reconsideration of the still common yet often mindless discussion in art history about “Who came first?” and “Which work is original and which is derivative?”⁵ Since a reassessment of the “imitation” conundrum necessarily involves a rearticulation of “international contemporaneity,” this essay concludes with a consideration of the broader implications of such a rearticulation within the larger project of world art history. More than a compendium of local and/or national art histories, “world art history” in my definition is a networked whole of local/national histories linked through resonances and connections. The connectedness is both explicit and implicit, underscored by the idea of “international contemporaneity.”

At stake is how the multiplicity of contemporary art practice—whether undertaken by today’s artists or 1960s artists—can be incorporated into art-historical discourse in a substantive and meaningful manner in order to make the endeavor of world art history truly global. “Contemporaneity” is a valuable concept in this project, because it is an inherently comparative idea: it spatializes the sense of “now,” bringing in at least two (and potentially more) locales into consideration and thus generating a space in which multiple viewpoints may operate. Moreover, like “globalization,” “contemporaneity,” as described above, is not a novel concept. If the former, as some may argue, can easily be traced back several centuries (if not to the ancient Silk Road but certainly to the Age of Great Voyage), the latter is a vital part of the human perception of time-space throughout history. Granted, the awareness of both contemporaneity and globalization has been dramatically heightened and greatly expanded since the 1990s. Still, this qualitative and quantitative change is no anomaly but arguably part of a continuing historical development. All the more so, there is a serious need to historicize and periodize “contemporaneity.” Ultimately, the study of “contemporaneity” helps us to suspend—if not outright dismantle—the omniscient single perspective (which is more often than not Eurocentric) that we, art historians or not, are consciously or unconsciously accustomed to assume. Only by doing so, can “multiplicity”—or more precisely “multiple perspectives”—be injected into art-historical discourses, and the horizon of world art history expanded.

1. Haryū Ichirō and “International Contemporaneity”

In the history of Japanese art discourse, while the meaning of “contemporary” as “avant-garde” emerged by the 1920s,⁶ the notion of “contemporary art” evolved throughout the postwar years. As early as 1950, Yoshihara Jirō 吉原治郎, the leader of Gutai Art Association 具体美術協会 (hereafter “Gutai”), made a prescient remark concerning “international contemporaneity” on the pages of a local art journal *The Ashiya Bijutsu* アシヤ美術, named after the city between Osaka and Kōbe:

I recently saw paintings brought from America. Looking at these works that show a new tendency, I found something common between them and us. This concerns a shared *jidai ishiki* 時代意識 [“sense of the era”], and I feel much closer to [these American artists] than Japanese artists working in the outdated styles.⁷

What Yoshihara saw is not clear from the text, but his comment was made in a round-table discussion conducted for the special issue of a magazine that featured *gendai bijutsu*, which was generally defined as “after Cézanne” in the discussion. By the next year, Yoshihara certainly saw works by Abstract Expressionists, shown in the special section of the *3rd Yomiuri Independent Exhibition* 第三回読売アンデパンダン展. What Yoshihara called the “shared *jidai ishiki*”—his iteration of “international contemporaneity”—was now concretely defined by his frank acknowledgement that he preferred Pollock’s drip painting to French abstraction, the latter being more critically popular in Japanese art discourse which was primarily Tokyo-based.⁸ His awareness led Yoshihara to the advocacy of experimentalism within the collective Gutai, which he would found in 1954, gathering together young artists in the Osaka region. (The history of Gutai is entwined with the Japanese-version of “center [Tokyo] vs. periphery [other regions],” but it goes beyond the scope of this essay.)

Still, it took almost two decades before the sense of “international contemporaneity” was confidently articulated in Tokyo’s critical discourse in conjunction with *gendai bijutsu*. It was the critic Haryū Ichirō who first gave this formulation⁹ in the January 1968 issue of the general-interest art monthly, *Geijutsu shinchō* 芸術新潮. In this key text of “international contemporaneity,” Haryū observed:

In my opinion, the concept of art internationally underwent a major change around 1955 or 1956. In retrospect, the tendency called “Informel” and “Action Painting” arose like an avalanche in this transitional period. Today, all over the world, we need artists who have crossed this fault line and developed their own methodologies to decisively confront the issues of civilization and humankind, to challenge the problem of time-space in a whole manner. As far as Japan is concerned, we have now transcended the dualism of East vs. West, the choice between the borrowed Modernism vs. Japonica-traditionalism. We have finally achieved consciousness of the “contemporary” [*kontenporarī* コンテンポラリー] in the sense of “international contemporaneity” [*kokusaiteki na dōjidaisei* 国際的な同時代性]. It is natural that the younger generation quickly eschewed the domestic standard and the establishment hierarchy. The works by artists in the forefront, albeit still in a small number, contain theoretical kernels that will likely go on to transform art worldwide.¹⁰

The statement by Haryū—one of the so-called Big Three, or *gosanke* 御三家, critics

who were influential from the late 1950s onward—reveals a few key aspects of Japanese art discourse. First, the periodization “before” and “after” Informel became accepted after the emerging critic Miyakawa Atsushi 宮川淳 examined the significance of gestural abstraction and posited the paradigm shift from the “modern” (*kindai*) to the “contemporary” (*gendai*) in his landmark 1963 text, “After ‘Informel’” (“Anforumeru’ igo” 「アンフォルメル」以後).¹¹ With his use of the *katakana* word for the English word “contemporary” (*kontemporari*), Haryū may have implicitly referenced Miyakawa’s use of the French word *contemporain* in his 1963 essay. In 1965, Tōno Yoshiaki 東野芳明, another of the Big Three critics, authored a volume entitled *Contemporary Art: After Pollock* 現代美術：ポロック以後 ostensibly Americanizing Miyakawa’s formulation.¹² By linking “international contemporaneity” and the “contemporary,” Haryū was joining the discourse on the “contemporary” that occupied Japanese critics in the mid to late 1960s.

Second, “the dualism of East vs. West, the choice between the borrowed Modernism and Japonica-traditionalism” was an issue that vexed this non-Western locale at the periphery since the late nineteenth century, when the country embarked on the concerted effort of Westernization under the name of modernization. The issue embodied an inescapable aspect of modernity in non-Western locales. However, in Haryū’s formulation, “contemporary art” is a new type of art that constituted a dialectical reconciliation of these opposing ideas. In other words, it transcended the condition of modernity, hence it was emblematic of the “contemporary.” At the same time, the transcendence of the “East vs. West” dualism brought an international dimension to Japanese contemporary art.

Third, by asserting its sense of “international contemporaneity,” Haryū tacitly acknowledged Japan’s perceived position in the periphery—namely its status as a non-Western late-comer to modernism—and its persistent desire to close the gap. This “gap” and the burden of “catching up with the West” are also implicit in the title of a special feature, for which Haryū’s text was written, “12 Japanese Artists Who Can *Compete* Internationally” 世界に通用する日本の12人 (emphasis by author),¹³ which was carried by *Geijutsu shinchō* as the cover story. Three other critics also contributed to this feature: they were Tōno Yoshiaki, Kubo Sadajirō 久保貞次郎, and Hijikata Teiichi 土方定一. The youngest among the four, Tōno was an unabashed champion of *gendai bijutsu*. Kubo was an art critic who was also a renowned Esperantist and innovative promoter of modernist printmaking. Hijikata Teiichi was the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura 神奈川県立近代美術館, who laid the groundwork of modern Japanese art history, especially that of oil painting. Each writer contributed a list of up to ten names. From the aggregated pool, twelve artists were selected for the illustrated opening feature. These artists were: Arakawa Shūsaku 荒川修作, Ikeda Masuo 池田満寿夫, Sugai Kumi 菅井汲, Takamatsu Jirō 高松二郎, Yamaguchi Katsuhiro 山口勝弘 (each receiving three votes); Ay-O 嬰嘔, Isobe Yukihisa 磯辺行久, Miki Tomio 三木富雄, and Shinohara Ushio 篠原有司男 (each receiving two votes); and Fukushima Keikyō 福島敬恭, Kitagawa Tamiji 北川民治, and Kudō Tetsumi 工藤哲巳 (each receiving one vote). (No artists received the full four votes.) This roster, which may seem rather moderate in retrospect, nonetheless represented a wide spectrum of practices prevailing in the mainstream of *gendai bijutsu* at the time.

Among the four contributors, all influential and respected figures in the realm of progressive art practices, Haryū made the most forceful case for his country’s artists. The source of his confidence was, as he wrote in his text, what he had seen in Paris the year before:

Last fall, at the [5th] Paris Biennale, three Japanese artists, including one photographer, received awards. Standing in a chaotic gallery, which reminded me of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, I found Japanese works distinctly original. I don't think I was being partial to our native sons. Nakahara Yūsuke 中原祐介, the commissioner [of the Japanese representation], and I talked about several other Japanese artists who would have equally fared well [in this contest].

Two award-winning artists mentioned here were Miki Tomio and Takamatsu Jirō, both of whom emerged from the Anti-Art (*Han-geijutsu* 反芸術) movement in the early 1960s and went on to establish themselves in the nascent field of *gendai bijutsu*. As such, together with Shinohara and Kudō, Miki and Takamatsu were the most avant-garde among the twelve artists selected for the *Geijutsu shinchō* feature. The photographer referenced in Haryū's statement is Takanashi Yutaka 高梨豊, a member of the radical photographers' collective Provoke プロヴォーク. Nakahara was another of the Big Three critics.

2. Affirmative and Negative Sides of “International Contemporaneity”

Defined as an “interface with the outside world,” “contemporaneity” is an inherently comparative perspective. His trip to the Paris Biennale provided Haryū with a first-hand occasion to interface with the outside world. He evidently “compared” the Japanese artists he knew and the non-Japanese artists in the biennale, drawing a conclusion that the former should fare well. Still, it should be noted that comparison cuts both ways: while it can serve as a means of affirming the achievements of Japanese art vis-à-vis the perceived international standard, it can also be a weapon to expose and illuminate its failures. This is particularly true when comparison is deployed in peripheral locales.¹⁴

Haryū's formulation of “international contemporaneity” and its attendant mentality of comparison spawned two discourses, representing the affirmative and negative sides of “international contemporaneity” as perceived from the peripheral locale of Japan. The positive discourse was seen in the catalogue of *Contemporary Art: Dialogue Between the East and the West* 現代世界美術展：東と西の対話, the exhibition that inaugurated the new building of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo 東京国立近代美術館 at the current location near the Imperial Palace in June 1969. It included sixty-five foreign artists, encompassing a wide and eclectic range of postwar trends from gestural abstraction of all stripes to European Op and Kinetic Art. The Japanese roster consisted of twenty artists, notably including Takamatsu and Miki.

The national museum's chief curator Honma Masayoshi 本間正義 followed suit with Haryū's optimism in his catalogue introduction, providing a succinct observation of the conditions surrounding the exhibition that bore the name of “contemporary art” in its title:

Thanks to the dramatic progress of transportation in the postwar years, the international exchange of art has rapidly grown. Internationality (*kokusaisei* 国際性) characterizes contemporary art today to an unprecedented degree. What happens in Paris can immediately be seen in New York, and what is transmitted via radio wave can be immediately picked up in Tokyo. However, something more than physically measurable may be at work in conjunction with internationalism.

That is to say, the idea of “contemporaneity” (*dōjisei* 同時性), wherein [Franz] Kline’s black-and-white [abstraction] arose contemporaneously and existed without reference to Japan’s *bokushō* (calligraphy 墨象).¹⁵

Honma asserted that “in contemporary art, internationalism and contemporaneity increasingly obliterates the distinction between East and West.” So much so he even invoked the controversial claim, “Asia is one,” made by the aesthete Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 in the early twentieth century, and turned it into a new, equally overreaching claim: “The world is one.”¹⁶

One thorny issue Honma did not touch upon, but Haryū never forgot, is the question of “imitation,” which forms the negative side of “international contemporaneity.” For latecomers to modernism in the periphery, the mandate of catching up and the need to constantly measure the progress constitute a burden. And the sometimes necessary evil of imitation—which was one effective way for latecomers to learn—and the inevitable criticism against it constitute *the* curse. Haryū was well aware of this problem. In his text, he qualified his optimism by admitting:

While a small number of artists excel in originality, a majority are unable to develop their own thinking. . . . There exists a criticism . . . that although the technical standard achieved by Japanese artists is high, their works are no more than exquisitely made imitations.¹⁷

The line between “learning” and “imitating” is often elusive. Even within modernist aesthetics that holds originality in an almost absolute regard, learning from predecessors, especially the inspired examples, never lost its virtue. When the center is “predecessors,” learning engenders a dialogical relationship with it. Therefore, the significance of reexamining the positive aspects of imitation and influence as a reality of “international contemporaneity” can never be underestimated in the project of world art history. Still, regardless of the time period, the accusation of “imitation” is the most potent form of criticism and the stigma of “derivation” is hard to erase. What is more disconcerting in the case of 1960s Japan is that the catching-up mentality prevented some critics from seeing the innovations made by the country’s artists.

Partly in reaction to the celebratory tone of Honma’s exhibition, the August 1969 issue of *Geijutsu shinchō* ran the sensational opening feature, “Japan’s Glory Upheld by Imitators” 日本の垂流に支えられた栄光.¹⁸ Just looking at the title page is enough to understand its message, with Pollock’s 1949 drip painting placed above the Gutai member Kanayama Akira’s 金山明 automatic painting by a toy car, probably dating from the late 1950s (Figure 1). This was followed by nineteen pages of color and monochrome illustrations, with a list of sinners who plagiarized, for example, Andy Warhol’s serialism, Christo’s wrapped air, and Claes Oldenburg’s hole-digging, among other mostly Euro-American works. (To reflect the state of international contemporaneity, the article also featured instances of domestic plagiarism, such as certain “imitations” after the work by Takamatsu Jirō and Arakawa Shūsaku, yet another Anti-Art artist who had earlier immigrated to New York, where he made his name as a conceptualist.)

The visual indictments were accompanied by unsigned annotations that sometimes ridiculed Japanese imitators in a nakedly hostile tone, as indicated by some section head-

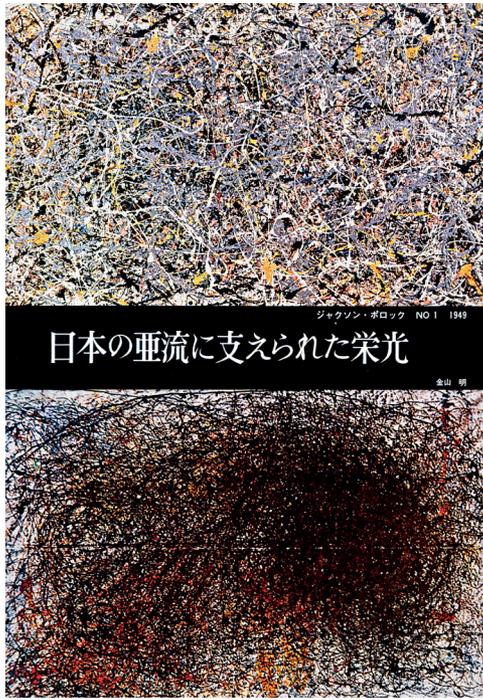


Fig. 1. “Japan’s Glory Upheld by Imitators,” title page, in *Geijutsu shinchō* (August 1969).

代美術の墮落, in the November 1968 of *Geijutsu shinchō*.²¹ Ironically, the two texts in *Geijutsu shinchō* reveal his extensive knowledge of Euro-American art criticism: this studious critic must have knowingly deployed the discursive weapon of “imitation.” It should be noted that *Geijutsu shinchō* was more moderate and mainstream than another leading art monthly, *Bijutsu techō* 美術手帖 (Art notebook), which championed *gendai bijutsu* from its establishment in 1948 and especially from the late 1960s onward. Whereas *Shinchōsha* 新潮社, which published *Geijutsu shinchō*, handled a wide array of cultural and social affairs through its book publishing and magazine operations, *Bijutsu Shuppansha* 美術出版社, the publisher of *Bijutsu techō*, specialized in art and design, catered particularly to the needs of both working and amateur artists. In fact, *Geijutsu shinchō* appears to have generally shared Ōshima’s negative view on contemporary art.

Despite the sensational title and annotative captions, however, Ōshima’s essay sounded more thoughtful than scandalous. Like Haryū, Ōshima acknowledged the significance of gestural abstraction—in particular, Jackson Pollock, Georges Mathieu, and Gutai’s Shiraga Kazuo 白髪一雄. Still, he lamented the devolution of their experimentations into sheer “fever” in the hand of followers, who turned the gesture-based abstraction into a variety of “hot abstraction” that encompassed, as he catalogued, acrobatic acts, thrilling automatism, violent actions, manipulated and scattered materials, gushing and exploding expression, agitated Tachisme, proliferating strange signs, and calligraphies reminiscent of a runaway train. This impassioned—“hot”—trend soon devolved into the hasty embrace of “gesture,” only to fade away, as though a patient recovered from a cholera-like fever. He continued:

lines which read: “Magritte Is Their Source Book” and “Following the Suit of Schöffer in Light Art.” These commentaries were most likely editorial. However, judging from the demonstrated level of knowledge of the latest art, the featured critic Ōshima Tatsuo 大島辰雄, who wrote the lead essay, must have consulted with the editors to some extent.

Little is known of Ōshima today.¹⁹ He supported the legal cause of Akasegawa Genpei 赤瀬川原平, an Anti-Art practitioner, when his *Model 1,000-Yen Note* 模型千円札 (1963)—a photomechanical reproduction of real money—became the object of criminal prosecution in 1965.²⁰ Although this places Ōshima in the more conscientious and progressive camp of the art world, he seems to have held a disapproving view of *gendai bijutsu*, as already demonstrated by another of his lengthy texts contributed to the special feature, “Degeneration of Contemporary Art” 現代美術の墮落,

Thus began [our] postwar art. From there, [Japanese art] rushed to “international contemporaneity”: it quickly changed through a series of adventures, went into an ever accelerating skid, and finally arrived at the 100th anniversary of the Meiji [Restoration].²²

The Meiji Restoration, invoked by Ōshima, occurred in 1868. In Japanese history, it is the key year that officially marks the beginning of Japan’s modernization. The year 1968—the year of Haryū’s text and a year before Ōshima’s text—was dubbed *Meiji hyakunen* 明治百年, or “Meiji 100,” and the nationwide celebrations took place, which included large-scale commemorative art exhibitions and publications. However, Ōshima’s reference to “Meiji 100” was not festive, but intended as a codeword for the century’s worth of Japan’s “imitative” modernization, through which the country attempted to catch up with the West. Later in the text, he made reference to the mentality of “catching up and overtaking” that characterized the [age-long obsession with] “overcoming modernity.” To him, the “international contemporaneity” unfolding before his eyes was not the “true kind” but merely a “cosmopolitanism that is in essence contemporary mannerism”; his negative vocabulary also included “hybrid contemporaneity,” “stateless cosmopolitanism,” and “ultra-modernist standardization.”²³ They were indeed strong words of condemnation.

3. The Problematic of Imitation

The obsession with “catching up” and the accompanying fear of “imitation” were deep-rooted, even, or especially, in the context of the avant-garde imperative to defy the status quo. Take, for example, the words of Murayama Tomoyoshi 村山知義, a leading member of Mavo マヴォ, an avant-garde collective in the 1920s. In his review of the exhibition by a rival vanguard collective, Action アクション, Murayama fired a criticism hinged upon the accusation of “imitation of the latest European trends.”²⁴ Writing for the June 1924 issue of the art magazine *Mizue* みづゑ, Murayama offered a devastating indictment: Action’s exhibition is an “imitation festival.” The group’s sins were topped by the leading member Nakahara Minoru’s 中原実 “stunningly detailed” imitation of Georg Grosz, seconded by Asano Mōfu’s 浅野孟府 “reproduction” of Archipenko; Yokoyama Junnosuke’s 横山潤之助 “adaptation” of Italian Futurist-like Constructivism, and an unknown artist’s (whose name Murayama could not even remember) borrowing of automatons from De Chirico and Ernst. The rest were the salon-style “stewing” and “deboning” of Picasso and Braque. Murayama lamented:

Oh, how slavish you all are. . . . However, it is too cruel to blame you alone. The history of Japanese painting is slaves’. . . . You all serve, firstly, the fashion of Europe; secondly, the conventional notion of “absolute beauty” and “Art” (*geijutsu* 芸術); and thirdly the misguided society.

In postwar Japan, the issue of imitation was variously viewed by vanguard artists. Yoshihara Jirō, the leader of the Gutai group, founded in 1954, firmly upheld the principle of originality, constantly admonishing his younger members: “Never imitate others!” and “Make something that never existed!”²⁵ Yoshihara himself learned this lesson in a most memorable way from a senior artist, Fujita Tsuguji 藤田嗣治 (also known as Leonard Foujita and as Fujita Tsuguharu), who knew the importance of being original from first-hand experience

in 1920s Paris, where he became veritably the first internationally recognized Japanese artist. Yoshihara kept a well stocked library of Euro-American art, and whenever the younger Gutai members came to him with their “new” idea, he would pull out some pertinent publications and demonstrate to them, “That’s already been done!”²⁶ His single-minded espousal of originality no doubt led the group to an outburst of creativity especially in the group’s early years, marked by prescient action-happenings and unique versions of gestural abstraction.

A novel approach was taken by Shinohara Ushio, a leading member of Neo Dada ネオダダ (renamed from “Neo Dadaism Organizer[s]” ネオダダイズム・オルガナイザー [ズ]). Having come of age in a new contemporary era, he was also an avid student of Euro-American art, though with a completely different goal. In fact, he embraced the philosophy of what he termed “Imitation Art”: Rather than straining to create something original that would any way end up looking like Rauschenberg, or Oldenburg, or Warhol, why not imitate them outright?²⁷ This was a sixties version of appropriation art. Or, rather, appropriation art was an eighties version of Shinohara. In one instance, he visited the Maruzen 丸善 bookstore in Tokyo, known for its foreign stock, in search of illustrated English-language publications. He found a non-art magazine (he doesn’t remember the title) with desired art reproductions and used one page from it as a basis of his “imitation painting.” That is to say, he painted it *verbatim*, by blowing up the page filled with works by the American Jasper Johns to a large canvas.

Yoshihara’s and Shinohara’s attitudes defined the two extremes of the vanguard relationship to “imitation” in 1960s Japan. Yoshihara’s absolute rejection of imitation presupposes the efficacy of formalism in examining similarity: “looking alike” becomes a cardinal sin, no matter what. Indeed, the aforementioned episode did not end Yoshihara’s condemnation, as recounted by two younger members, Matsutani Takesada 松谷武判 and Horio Sadaharu 堀尾貞治: they said to themselves, in effect, “What’s wrong with that!” (Naturally, they never said this out loud to their revered leader.)

Looking alike does not necessarily mean thinking alike. As *gendai bijutsu* increasingly departed from the conventions of painting and sculpture, the importance of strategic conceptualization newly entered the equation. The case in point was Shinohara’s “Imitation Art” イミテーション・アート, which points to the limitation of formalism and the need for different ways of looking—not just looking at the surface (style) but understanding at the concept and context beneath the surface of similar-looking works—in order to evaluate their similarity and to differentiate them. It is a fascinating fact that, as Shinohara recounted, when Rauschenberg came to Tokyo in 1964, he was at first pleased to hear about Shinohara’s *Imitation Coca-Cola Plan*—until he learned that the Japanese artist had made ten of them (Figure 2).²⁸ One imitation could be a gesture of adoration, ten imitations would raise the stakes. Whether Shinohara himself consciously theorized or not, his *Imitation Coca-Cola Plan* does pose a question to the idea of originality, be it Rauschenberg’s or any other artist’s. Rauschenberg should have known the hidden and stinging meaning of appropriation, which was a central strategy of his own. Shinohara in a sense turned the tables on Rauschenberg.

It should be remembered that the modernist dictate of originality was still operative in the 1960s. To paraphrase Miyakawa Atsushi’s formulation—that the shift from *kindai* to *gendai* is not a matter of “style concept” (*yōshiki gainen* 様式概念) but of “value concept” (*kachi gainen* 価値概念)—it is not an exaggeration to state that 1960s art saw the fundamental

shift in the artist’s preoccupations from stylistic innovations to conceptual and strategic innovations (although they are not mutually exclusive). The originality race—the race governed by the questions of “What’s new?” and “Who’s the first?”—was waged more and more on the frontline of ideas. Dripping paint, repeating imagery, making balloons, digging a hole: these instances featured in the *Geijutsu shinchō* article represented “new,” and therefore “original,” ideas. Ever an astute observer of Euro-American art, Yoshihara must have meant both similar forms and ideas, when he applied his admonition, “That’s already been done!” Still, the problem remains: he somehow stopped at the mere fact of similarity (forms or ideas). He appears to have been almost oblivious to the possibility that the same idea could be worked out differently. Hence, some Gutai members were right in secretly muttering, “What’s wrong with that.” It is a credit to Yoshihara, however, that his mantra was effective when he encouraged his members to devise their own original methodologies for gestural abstraction. It would have been all too easy to imitate Pollock’s dripping and de Kooning’s vigorous brushstrokes.

It is also true that “conspicuous imitation”—lazy imitations that do not even try to transcend the originals—continued to be a serious problem four decades after Murayama’s attack on Action. Instances of conspicuous imitation included works by some budding artists who entered their not-so-original works in the juried section of Mainichi Newspaper’s biannual *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* 現代日本美術展. This exhibition became one of the important venues for emerging artists to participate in after the 1964 termination of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, which had become a breeding ground for Anti-Art. Although “imitation” could be understandably part of their learning process, it was utterly problematic to publicly show their ill-assimilated imitation works. Their cases quickly drew criticism, as reported by Nakahara Yūsuke in the July 1966 issue of *Geijutsu shinchō*.²⁹ He was resigned to state that due to the “stylistic diversification in contemporary art,” it is more difficult to classify different types of imitation. In a sense, this general concern of conspicuous imitation was extended to the magazine’s August 1969 feature of “Japan’s Glory Upheld by Imitators.”

As a historical event, the attack on “international contemporaneity” by Ōshima and the *Geijutsu shinchō* editors may at once be excused for playing a part in the myth of originality, and be interpreted as a reflection of the curse of the periphery that shaped the Japanese view. (It must also be noted that it was provincialism par excellence for the periphery to put itself



Fig. 2. Shinohara Ushio, *Coca-Cola Plan*, 1964. Mixed media, 71.5 x 65.5 x 6.5 cm. Museum of Modern Art, To-yama.

down by borrowing the authority of the center.) Still, the nagging question lingers: Is that all there is with “imitation”? If so, the “international contemporaneity” thus achieved was nothing to take special pride in, as *Geijutsu shinchō* and Ōshima argued in their denunciations. However, the critics themselves fell into the trap of the “catching up” mentality, which prevented them from seeing beyond the veneer of “imitations.” We must therefore reconsider “imitation” from today’s perspective of multiplicity.

4. “Similar yet Dissimilar”: Hole-Diggings by Oldenburg (1967) and Sekine (1968)

The question of “original vs. imitation” and any other permutations (e.g., “original vs. derivative” and “influences”) constitutes an unavoidable issue in the study of art. In modern and contemporary art, the accelerating state of “contemporaneity” complicates the task of art historians, because “contemporaneity” frequently manifests itself through similarity in form, idea, and strategy. Therefore, merely pointing out similarity between two (or more) works is not enough. In this context, the problem of “original vs. imitation” may be recast as the examination of “similar yet dissimilar,” for not all “similarities” signify imitation or influence.

Some of the accused “imitations” in the *Geijutsu shinchō* article deserve reexamination. Among them, the most striking accusation was the comparison of hole-digging by the New Yorker Claes Oldenburg in 1967 and the Tokyoite Sekine Nobuo 関根伸夫 in 1968 (Figure 3). Both works occupy significant places in the history of 1960s art. Sekine’s *Phase: Mother Earth* 位相：大地 constituted a “Big Bang” moment of Japan’s Mono-ha もの派 (Things School) movement. Oldenburg’s *Hole*—also known as *Placid Civic Monument*—was an early example of American Earthworks, if a rare venture into the land itself by this artist.

The editorial caption to their reproductions reads:

There are many kinds of Earthworks, but Oldenburg is the originator of hole-digging. . . . [Sekine] dug a round hole, instead of a square one, piled the dirt in the same shape above the ground, and calling it a “negative-positive.” Certainly, it’s interesting, but should this qualify for “internationality and contemporaneity”? I think not.³⁰

In forcefully declaring that Oldenburg was “the first,” the editorial was curiously oblivious to Japan’s local art history which produced at least three precedents of hole-digging prior to Oldenburg and Sekine, with the foray into the outdoors being part of vanguard tradition. In 1956, Yoshihara Michio 吉原通雄, a member of Gutai, dug a small hole, 30 centimeters deep, and put a light at its bottom under the title of *Discovery* 発見 at the *Outdoor Gutai Exhibition* 具体野外展.³¹ In 1962, Miyazaki Junnosuke 宮崎準之助, a member of Kyūshū-ha 九州派 (Kyūshū School), dug not one but six or seven square holes, each about six feet deep, on the beach of Fukuoka on the occasion of Kyūshū-ha’s overnight program entitled *Grand Gathering of Heroes* 英雄たちの大集会.³² In 1965, Group “I” グループ位 of Kōbe participated in *Gifu Independent Art Festival* 岐阜アンデパンダン・アートフェスティバル held in central Japan with *Hole* 穴. For eleven days, under the scorching summer sun, the nine members silently dug a hole ten meters in diameter and filled it back in. Unlike the first two, which remained rather obscure, the hole-digging by Group “I” (pronounced “eeh,” as in “me”) received a good amount of journalistic and critical attention.³³

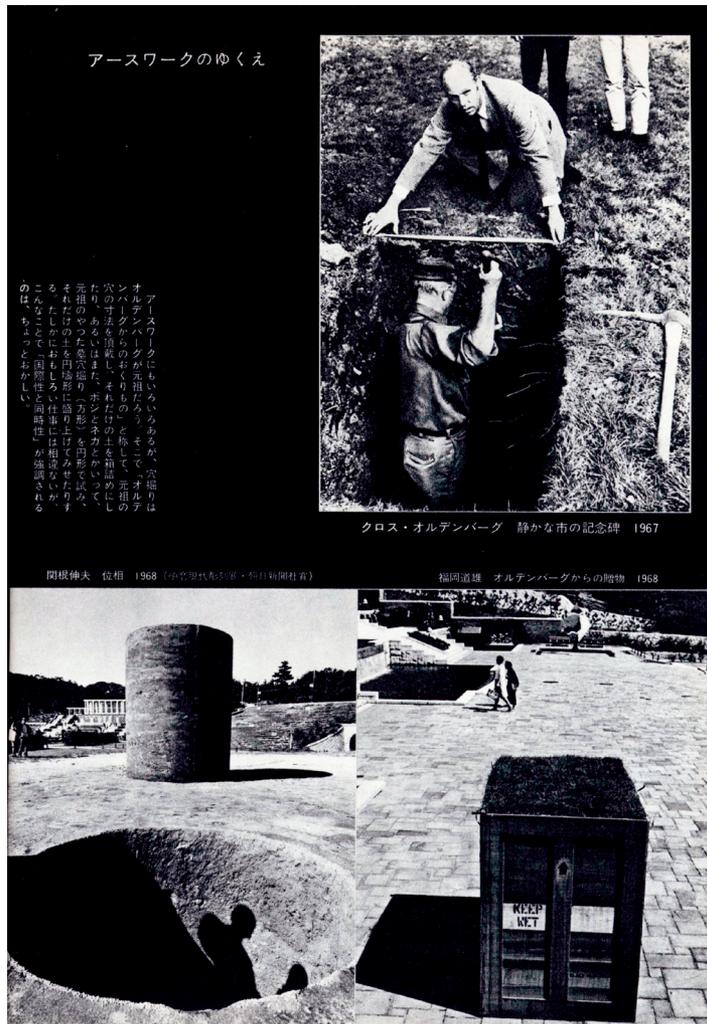


Fig. 3. A page from “Japan’s Glory Upheld by Imitators,” *Geijutsu shinchō* (August 1969). Top: Claes Oldenburg, *Hole*, 1967; bottom left: Sekine Nobuo, *Phase: Mother Earth*, 1968; bottom right: Fukuoka Michio, *A Gift from Claes Oldenburg*, 1968.

The contextual parallel is notable: both Oldenburg’s and Sekine’s hole-diggings were conducted on the occasion of outdoor exhibitions. While the former was executed for an outdoor exhibition, *Sculpture in Environment*, organized by the city of New York, the latter was realized at the first outdoor sculpture biennale at the Suma Detached Palace Garden 須磨離宮公園 in Kōbe.

In this chronology, the three instances of hole-digging, Group “I” in 1965, Oldenburg in 1967, and Sekine in 1968, make an interesting comparison. If we set aside the reverse-chauvinism of *Geijutsu shinchō* to narrowly focus on Oldenburg and Sekine, it would have been art-historically most reasonable to compare Sekine’s hole-digging to the famous local precedent by Group “I.”³⁴ However, Sekine’s hole-digging had to be compared with Oldenburg’s, which art journalism, afflicted by a short attention span, had quickly substituted for

the hole-digging of Group “I”: Oldenburg’s hole-digging at that time served as a potent and readily comprehensible symbol of contemporary art that became increasingly incomprehensible.³⁵

Art-historically speaking, it can be safely assumed that Sekine knew of Oldenburg, because he was certainly aware of the work of Fukuoka Michio 福岡道雄, which was being compared with Sekine and Oldenburg.³⁶ Fukuoka’s work, too, was created for the outdoor exhibition at Suma. Most significantly, it was entitled *A Gift from Claes Oldenburg* オルデーンバーグからの贈物. A soil-filled crate in the exact measurements of Oldenburg’s *Hole*, Fukuoka’s work made a clever appropriation of the American artist’s hole, suggesting the knowledge of Oldenburg’s work among the internationally conscious Japanese artists.

Should we start with an assumption that Sekine was aware of the hole-digging precedents of both Group “I” and Oldenburg, the similarity among the three works nonetheless stops at the mere fact of hole-digging, because the three are indeed very different works of art. The rewardless nature of *Hole* by Group “I”—which one critic described “Sisyphusian”—was alien to Sekine, as he was working on the idea of mathematical morphology concerning “congruent transformation” between a positive and negative cylinders,³⁷ which represented a thought experiment in mathematical topology (Figure 4). He hypothetically asked: What would happen if we keep digging soil out of the earth and putting the displaced dirt next to the hole? (The answer would be: The earth will become a hollow shell, holding up the displaced dirt.)³⁸

If Oldenburg made a politically fraught reference to the grave and the Vietnam war by digging a hole,³⁹ Sekine made a traditional reference. On the one hand, he referenced the famous mound, *Kōgetsudai* 向月台, featured in the garden at the temple Ginkakuji 銀閣寺 in Kyoto, which has the distinctive shape of a truncated cone;⁴⁰ on the other hand, he also learned from the age-old gardening technique of digging a hole to make a pond and using the displaced dirt to create a mound.⁴¹

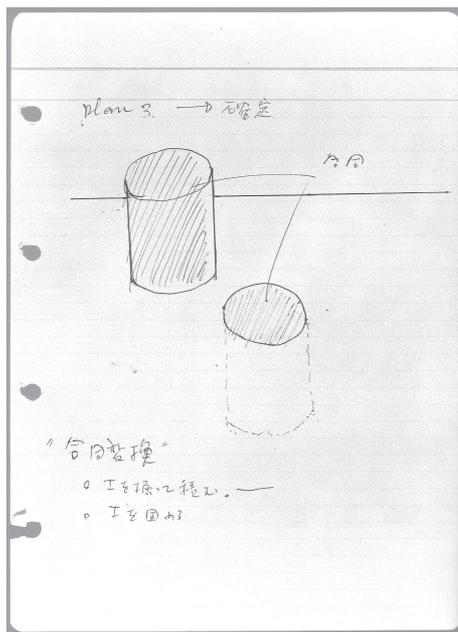


Fig. 4. Sekine Nobuo, Concept drawing for *Phase: Mother Earth*, 1968. Reproduced from Ōtani Memorial Art Museum 1996.

If hiring a professional grave digger enhanced Oldenburg’s political intention and built upon the prevailing idea of “fabrication” by others, the aspect of the artist’s physical labor, pronounced in the public performance of Group “I,” was also important to Sekine, although his labor was hidden from the audience’s eye (Figure 5). Notably, Sekine later compared his act to that of day laborers (*dokata* 土方) and protesting student radicals, emphasizing an ideology of “non-making” (*tsukuranaï* つくらない).⁴²

Like the collaborative collectivism of Group “I,” Sekine’s hole-digging was a collective act. Especially after Sekine and his artist-friends endured arduous physical labor, they

fortuitously received impromptu assistance from professional earth movers working on the site for other projects; they pitied the inexperienced young laborers unable to transfer the dirt dug from the hole into the cylindrical wood mold above the ground (Figure 6). Finally, when the work was completed, the sheer physicality of dirt compacted into a more than eight-foot-high tower impressed even the artist himself who had conceived it. This was the beginning of the Mono-ha movement.

With these contextualized comparisons, Ōshima and the *Geijutsu shinchō* editors should be able to comprehend that Oldenburg’s and Sekine’s hole-digging are two rather different works and thus be able to shake off the curse of “catching up” mentality at the periphery. To be fair to them, they are not the only ones who need a historical corrective.

The 1960s was a contentious decade because of its highly transformational nature. Today’s artists have at their disposal all the concepts, strategies, iconographies, and styles developed by their predecessors, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s; it is their birthright to learn from, appropriate, improve upon, and otherwise expand on them. When Gelitin, an Austrian four-person collective, staged *The Dig Cunt*, their version of rewardless act of hole-digging at Coney Island, New York, in 2007, the announcement proudly claimed the tradition of American Earthworks, including Oldenburg’s *Hole*. (The work critiqued the traditionally male, phallic configuration of monuments by creating a negative, female model.)⁴³ In contrast, the 1960s constitutes a watershed moment of contemporary art, and during this decade, the competition for being the first was real for many artists who lived through it. The story of Kusama Yayoi 草間彌生, who lived and worked in New York from 1958 through 1973, is heart-wrenching. As



Fig. 5. Sekine Nobuo, stripped to the waist, digging a hole for *Phase: Mother Earth*, 1968. Reproduced from Ōtani Memorial Art Museum 1996.



Fig. 6. Sekine Nobuo, his friends, and professional earth movers working on *Phase: Mother Earth*, 1968. Reproduced from Ōtani Memorial Art Museum 1996.

recent studies have demonstrated, she *was* the first, although by a slight margin, to devise “soft sculpture,” use the repetitive everyday imagery, and create a mirror-room environment. Each time, however, it was an American male peer—Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, and Lucas Samaras, respectively—who enjoyed the recognition of being an innovator, and she suffered a mental breakdown.⁴⁴ Although it might be small consolation to the artist who paid such grave personal costs to see her name retrospectively redeemed now, it is a critical and necessary corrective to history. It remains, therefore, a basic task for art historians to establish a precise chronology of events.⁴⁵

Ultimately, the competition of “Who’s the first”—and a narration of history based on this competition—is futile, because there almost always exists a prior instance somewhere in this vast world, characterized by “contemporaneity” and “multiplicity.” This is the curse of “international contemporaneity”—which makes the study of 1960s art especially challenging yet rewarding. In the case of hole-digging, Walter De Maria published an untitled concept of “digging a hole and covering it” in a text entitled “Meaningless Work” in 1960.⁴⁶ (Appearing in a difficult-to-obtain Fluxus publication, *An Anthology*, it would not have been known in Japan beyond the Tokyo Fluxus circle, if indeed it was known therein.) Although the New York artist did not perform this act, his idea of digging a hole and filling back in as a meaningless work intriguingly echoes that of Group “I,” who were based in Kōbe. Yet, again, it is dangerous to focus exclusively on the similarity. These two hole-diggings were informed by the fundamentally different contexts in which these practitioners lived. Whereas De Maria took an oppositional stance toward commercialization of art in reaction to the growing domination of the art market in New York (he specifically defined his “meaningless works” as “not mak[ing] you money or accomplish[ing] a conventional purpose”), Group “I” and other *gendai bijutsu* practitioners in Japan knew little of commodification, as the art market for contemporary art was at best nascent, if not non-existent. This situation engendered an expectation of “rewardlessness” (*mushōsei* 無償性) among the radical artists, with Neo Dada’s Ushio Shinohara pioneering in the idea of seeking publicity as “reward” in the mass media. The lineage of “rewardlessness” encompassed Zero Dimension (Zero Jigen ゼロ次元), a collective known for daring naked rituals, as well as such Non-Art collectives as Group “I,” The Play (ザ・プレイ), and Niigata GUN (新潟GUN, wherein GUN stands for Group Ultra Niigata), which all staged the collaborative performances in landscape.

If the co-existence of a multiplicity of similar practices is the curse of “international contemporaneity,” the diversity among these similar works is its loaded and shared legacy. The examination of “similar yet dissimilar” affords a methodology to articulate this diversity; and to do so will amount to a rearticulation, if you will, of “international contemporaneity” in the context of today’s world art history.

5. Lessons of “International Contemporaneity”

A little over two years after Haryū’s assessment of “international contemporaneity” in Paris appeared in *Geijutsu shinchō*, a scene of “international contemporaneity” memorably presented itself in Tokyo. Organized by Nakahara Yūsuke under the theme of “Between Man and Matter” 人間と物質, the Tokyo Biennale 東京ビエンナーレ, held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum 東京都美術館 in 1970, consciously juxtaposed the latest trends—post-minimalism and conceptualism—from Euro-America and their Japanese counterparts.⁴⁷

The Japanese roster included such important conceptualists as the elder Matsuzawa Yutaka 松澤宥, whose language-only works dated back to as early as 1961; Nomura Hitoshi 野村仁, credited as the first to deploy photography as art in Japan; and Horikawa Michio 堀川紀夫, a member of Niigata GUN known for his *Mail Art by Sending Stones* series. By then, together with Mono-ha launched by Sekine and theorized by Lee Ufan 李禹煥, these Non-Art (*Hi-geijutsu* 非芸術) practices formed the radical core of *gendai bijutsu*, making inroads into such mainstream venues as Mainichi’s Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, whose 1969 presentation featured an invitational section of *gendai bijutsu*.

The reality of “international contemporaneity” quickly became a given, rather than a novel condition. In this environment, discoursing on “international contemporaneity” lost its urgency and became secondary to interpreting emerging practices in Japan’s own locale. The artist-theorist Lee Ufan took part in this endeavor, by analyzing the state of *gendai* and brilliantly positioning the movement that would be known as Mono-ha at the forefront of contemporary art. Another artist-theorist, Hikosaka Naoyoshi 彦坂尚嘉 of Bikyōtō 美共闘 (abbreviated from Artists’ Joint-Struggle Council 美術家共闘会議), historicized *gendai bijutsu* by compiling, together with the artist-critic Tone Yasunao 刀根康尚 of Group Ongaku グループ音楽 (“Group Music”), an ambitious and detailed chronology spanning fifty years on the pages of *Bijutsu techō*.⁴⁸ Into the 1970s, both the concept and practice of *gendai bijutsu* matured into a full-fledged form.

The discourse on “international contemporaneity” in 1960s Japan had thus closed its chapter. For art historians aspiring to narrate a world art history, however, “international contemporaneity” continues to be an urgent issue of 1960s art. Simple as it may seem, the exploration of “similar yet dissimilar” practices among divergent locales holds a significant conceptual and methodological implication in this endeavor. The reconsideration of “imitation” is but one area of reexamination. Both macro- and micro-narratives are open to rearticulation. A more nuanced analysis of similar works is required, their contexts need reconsideration, and their differences must be clarified. In lieu of conclusion, I would like to outline a few lessons drawn from the study of “international contemporaneity.”

On a macro level, comparisons of “center vs. periphery” as such are at once too abstract and too general in discussing 1960s art. Narrowing the focus to “locale vs. locale” comparisons allows a move away from the ingrained “center vs. periphery” paradigm. While more expansive rubrics—such as “gestural abstraction,” “conceptualism,” and “dematerialization”—provide a shared ground for comparison, area-specific terms—such as Abstract Expressionism/Informel, Conceptual Art, and Earthworks—may have to be set aside as general tags, because such Eurocentric terminologies tend to mask the locally specific issues that surround the similar practices not only in Japan but also in any other locales. At the same time, localized terms—such as *han-geijutsu* 反芸術 (Anti-Art) and *hi-geijutsu* 非芸術 (Non-Art) from 1960s Japan—as well as local narratives must be understood on their own local terms, just as the Euro-American terms and narratives require their own localized contextualizations (Figure 7). Even when the same word is used to mean two generally similar things, as with the case of “Environments” in Kaprow’s sense and Japanese “Environment Art” (*kankyō geijutsu* 環境芸術), to understand fully it is necessary to delineate transmission and indigen-ness.⁴⁹

In world art history, it is important to construct a global perspective that incorporates

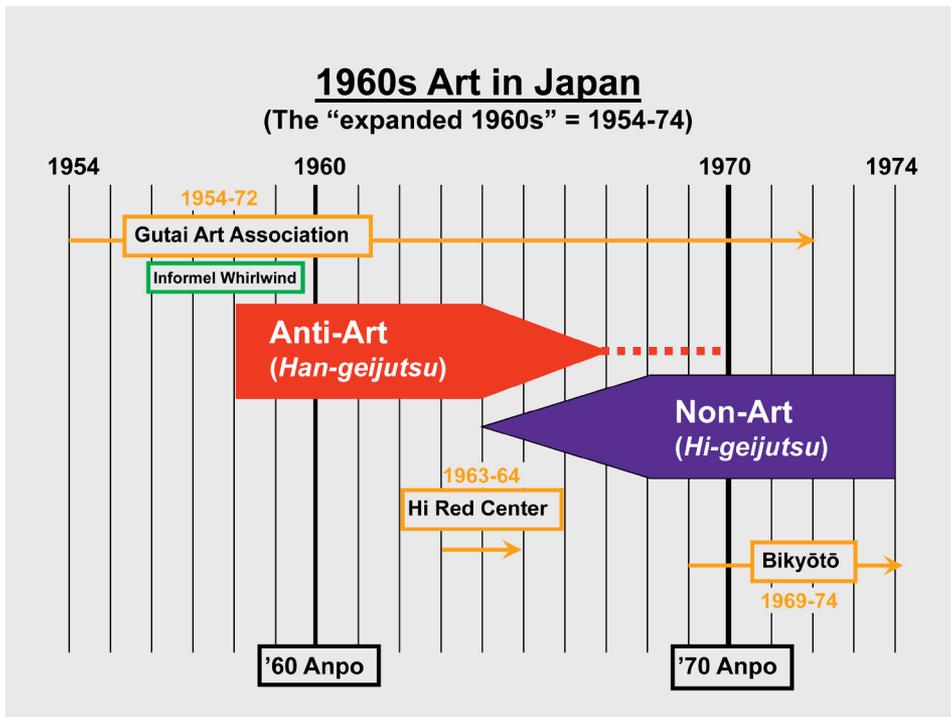


Fig. 7. Chronology of Japanese Art in the Expanded 1960s. Conceptualized by Reiko Tomii.

localized voices without subsuming them under a supposed master narrative. A lesson that can be learned from the peripheral vision, as manifested in 1960s Japan, is that one possible way to achieve this is to deploy not a familiar top-down (or “center-out”) approach but a bottom-up (or “periphery-in”) strategy, through comparative readings of various locales.

Another lesson learned from the foregoing study is that we need to intelligently examine works that look similar in terms of appearance, idea, or strategy, because, to reiterate, “contemporaneity” frequently manifests itself through similarity. In examining similarity, “connections” (which I define as “actual contacts/exchanges with or knowledge of counterparts”) are an obvious area of investigation. Crosspollinations among the Fluxus hubs, including Tokyo, and Allan Kaprow’s “discovery” of Gutai are a few such instances. In addition to “imitation/derivation,” the notion of “influence” requires a cautious reassessment. Long dominant in art history, “influence” is frequently premised upon the paradigm of “center vs. periphery.” The general assumption is that “influence” is transmitted from the center to the periphery in a singularly linear flow of time. With “contemporaneity” and “multiplicity” operating in 1960s art, “influence” cannot be the sole explanation for similarity. It is critical to conduct a more evolved analysis of similarity—especially when some similar instances have no or little evidence of actual connection or influence among them. These instances—which I call “resonances” for the lack of a better word—are not rare in 1960s art. The existence of “resonances,” in fact, characterizes 1960s art and its internationally contemporaneous state.

Some of the stunning instances of “resonances” which involve 1960s Japan include: the transgressive naked rituals staged by Zero Dimension, based in Nagoya and Tokyo, *Meat*

Joy by Carolee Schneemann in New York, and the ritualistic performances by the Vienna Aktionists, all from the mid-1960s; the idea of “Capitalist Realism” 資本主義リアリズム devised by the German Gerhard Richter and the Japanese Akasegawa Genpei only one year apart (1963 and 1964 respectively); the proposed use of telepathic power by the Japanese conceptualist Matsuzawa Yutaka (1964) and his American counterpart Robert Barry (1969); zero-value money created by Akasegawa (1967) and the Brazilian Cildo Meireles (1970s); and latex-pouring by New Yorker Linda Benglis (1969) and Tokyoite Hikosaka Naoyoshi (1970). Significantly, the analysis of the “similar yet dissimilar” sometimes uncovers hidden connections among these pairs of seemingly unconnected resonances.⁵⁰ “Capitalist Realism” of Richter (native of East Germany) and Akasegawa (a one-time leftist sympathizer) were varyingly informed by Socialist Realism, whereas the experiment by Benglis and Hikosaka were situated in the legacy of Pollock’s use of the floor as canvas. These hidden but shared inspirations and references, if not direct connections, are indicative of the ubiquitous nature of “international contemporaneity” during the 1960s.

Whether in the internationalist 1960s or the globalist 1990s, a sense of “contemporaneity” connects different locales and artists therein. (The 1990s is certainly more “connected” than the 1960s.) However, “connectedness” does not write itself into history, given the innate linearity of both historical consciousness and history writing. Connectedness must be proactively articulated in world art history in order to make it more than the sum of multiple local histories. An attention to “similar yet dissimilar” instances in many guises—e.g., resonances, influences, and imitations—makes it possible to methodically create “connectedness” and “contacts” among otherwise disparate local narratives. The most daunting task of world art history is to confront the complexity of narrating history in multiplicity.

Acknowledgments: I thank my colleagues Ming Tiampo and Hiroko Ikegami for reading earlier versions of this essay and offering valuable feedback.

REFERENCES

Ashiya City Cultural Foundation 1993

Gutai shiryōshū 具体資料集/Document Gutai, 1954–1972. Ashiya: Ashiya City Culture Foundation, 1993.

Boettger 2003

Suzaan Boettger. *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.

De Maria 1960

Walter De Maria, “Meaningless Work.” In ed. La Monte Young, ed., *An Anthology*. New York: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963. Repr. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, p. 526.

Fukuoka Art Museum 1998

Miyazaki Junnosuke 宮崎準之助. Exh. cat. Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1998.

Geijutsu shinchō 1968a

Special feature on “Sekai ni tsūyō suru Nihon no 12-nin” 特集：世界に通用する日本の12人 [12 Japanese artists who can compete internationally]. *Geijutsu shinchō* 芸術新潮 (January 1968).

Geijutsu shinchō 1968b

Special feature on “Gendai bijutsu no daraku” 特集：現代美術の墮落 [Degeneration of contemporary art]. *Geijutsu shinchō* 芸術新潮 (November 1968).

Haryū 1968

Haryū Ichirō 針生一郎. “Hiyō no yori takai kinō o” 批評のより高い機能を [Wishing art criticism to have a more functional role]. In *Geijutsu shinchō* 1968, p. 15.

Haryū et al. 1978

Haryū Ichirō et al. “Gendai Nihon bijutsu wa dō ugoitaka” 現代日本美術はどう動いたか [How did contemporary Japanese art move?]. Special issue of “Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen” 特集号：日本の現代美術30年 [Three decades of contemporary art in Japan]. *Bijutsu techō* 美術手帖 436 (July 1978).

Honma 1969

Honma Masayoshi 本間正義. “Jo” 序 [Introduction]. In *Gendai sekai bijutsu-ten: Higashi to nishi no taiwa* 現代世界美術展：東と西の対話/*Contemporary Art: Dialogue Between the East and the West*. Exh. cat. Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 1969.

Ikegami 2007

Hiroko Ikegami. “Dislocations: Robert Rauschenberg and the Americanization of Modern Art, Circa 1964.” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2007.

Mainichi Shinbunsha 1970a

Dai-10 kai Nihon kokusai bijutsu-ten: Ningen to busshitsu 第10回日本国際美術展：人間と物質/*Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter*. Exh. cat. [cover with Nakahira Takuma's photograph]. Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1970.

Mainichi Shinbunsha 1970b

Dai-10 kai Nihon kokusai bijutsu-ten: Ningen to busshitsu 第10回日本国際美術展：人間と物質/*Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter*. Documentary volume [black cover]. Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1970. See the exhibition catalogue (cover with Nakahira Takuma's photograph) and the separate documentary volume (black cover), both bearing the same title: *Dai-10 kai Nihon kokusai bijutsu-ten: Ningen to busshitsu/Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter* (Tokyo: Mainichi Newspapers, 1970).

Murayama 1924

Murayama Tomoyoshi 村山知義. “Akushon no shokun ni kugen o teisuru” アクションの諸君に苦言を呈する [My candid criticism for the members of Action]. *Mizue* みづゑ (June 1924), pp. 28–29.

Nakahara 1966

Nakahara Yūsuke 中原祐介. “Mohō o shiteki saretā Gendai Nihon bijutsu-ten” 模倣

- を指摘された現代日本美術展 [Imitation pointed out at *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*]. *Geijutsu shinchō* 芸術新潮 (July 1966), pp. 52–57.
- Ōtani Memorial Art Museum 1996
 “*Isō-Daichi*” no *kōkōgaku* 「位相—大地」の考古学 [Archaeology of *Phase: Mother Earth*]. Exh. cat. Nishinomiya: Ōtani Memorial Art Museum, 1996.
- Ōshima 1968
 Ōshima Tatsuo 大島辰雄. “Shikō sakugo no bika” 試行錯誤の美化 [Excuse for trial and error]. In *Geijutsu shinchō* 1968b, pp. 17–23.
- Ōshima 1969
 ———. “Nihon no aryū ni sasaerareta eikō” 日本の垂流に支えられた栄光 [Japan’s glory upheld by imitators]. *Geijutsu shinchō* 芸術新潮 (August 1969), pp. 1–28.
- Ōshima 1979
 ———. *Mari Rōransan ten* マリー・ローランサン展/*Exposition Marie Laurencin*. Exh. cat. Tokyo: Art Yomiuri, 1979.
- Ōtagaki 2006
 Ōtagaki Minoru 太田垣實. *Kyoto bijutsu no shin/kol/kin* 京都美術の新・古・今. Kyoto: Tankōsha, 2006.
- Pérez-Barreiro
 Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro. “Introduction.” In *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps De Cisneros Collection*. Exh. cat. Austin, Tex.: Blanton Museum of Art, 2007, pp. 13–15.
- Sekine 1970
 Sekine Nobuo 関根伸夫, et al. [panel discussion]. “Mono’ ga hiraku atarashii sekai” 〈もの〉がひらく新しい世界 [The new world revealed by *mono*]. Special feature on “Hatsugen suru shinjin-tachi: Hi-geijutsu no chihei kara” 特集：発言する新人たち：非芸術の地平から [Emerging artists talk: From the horizon of non-art]. *Bijutsu techō* 美術手帖, no. 324 (February 1970).
- Shinohara 1968
 Shinohara Ushio 篠原有司男. *Zen’ei no michi* 前衛の道 [Avant-garde road]. Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1968.
- Smith 2006a
 Terry Smith. *The Architecture of Aftermath*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Smith 2006b
 ———. “Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity.” *Critical Inquiry* 32: 4 (Summer 2006), pp. 681–707.
- Smith 2009
 Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee. *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009.

Tiampo 2007

Ming Tiampo. "Create What Has Never Been Done Before!": Historicizing Gutai Discourses of Originality." *Third Text* 21:6 (2007), pp. 689–706.

Tomii 2002

Reiko Tomii 富井玲子. "State v. (Anti-)Art: Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident by Akasegawa Genpei and Company." *Positions* 10:1 (Spring 2002), pp. 141–72.

Tomii 2004

———. "Historicizing 'Contemporary Art': Some Discursive Practices in *Gendai Bijutsu* in Japan." *Positions* 12:3 (Winter 2004), pp. 611–41.

Tomii 2007

———. "After the 'Descent to the Everyday': Japanese Collectivism from Hi Red Center to The Play, 1964–1973." In Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism After Modernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 44–75.

Tōno 1965

Tōno Yoshiaki 東野芳明. *Gendai bijutsu: Porokku igo* 現代美術：ポロック以後 [Contemporary art: After Pollock]. Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1965.

Yamamura 2007

Midori Yamamura 山村みどり. "Kusama Yayoi's Early Years in New York: A Critical Biography." In Eric C. Shiner and Reiko Tomii, ed., *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. Exh. cat. New York: Japan Society, 2007, pp. 54–63.

Yamamura 2009

———. "Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950–1975: Biography of Things." In *Yayoi Kusama*. Exh. cat. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, forthcoming in 2009.

Yoshihara 1950

Yoshihara Jirō 吉原治郎, et al. "Gendai bijutsu ni tsuite zadankai" 現代美術について 座談会 [Roundtable discussion on contemporary art]. *The Ashiya Bijutsu* アシヤ美術, no. 3 (May 1950), p. 5. Repr. in *Ashiya Shiten* 芦屋市展/*Ashiya City Exhibition 1948–1997* (Kyoto: Kōrinsha et al., 1997).

Yoshihara and Nakamura 1951

Yoshihara Jirō 吉原治郎 and Nakamura Makoto 中村真 [discussion]. "Amerika no kindai kaiga" アメリカの近代絵画 [Modern American painting]. *Kansai bijutsu* 関西美術 [Kansai art], no. 13 (May 1951). Repr. in Akatsuka Yukio 赤塚行雄, Tone Yasunao 刀根康尚, and Hikosaka Naoyoshi 彦坂尚嘉, comp. "Nenpyō: Gendai bijutsu no 50-nen, jō, 1916–1960" 年表：現代美術の50年、上、1916–1960 [Chronology: Five decades of contemporary art, part 1, 1916–1960, *Bijutsu techō* 美術手帖, no. 354 (April 1972), pp. 163, 165, 167.

Yoshimoto 2008

Midori Yoshimoto 由本みどり. "From Space to Environment: The Origins of *Kankyō* and the Emergence of Intermedia Art in Japan." *Art Journal* 67:3 (Fall 2008), pp. 24–45.

NOTES

This is an expanded version of my paper “A Peripheral Vision: ‘International Contemporaneity’ in Japanese Art Discourse, Circa 1970,” presented at the panel “Contemporaneity in Art and Its History Across Cultures,” co-organized by Terry Smith at the 32nd Congress of CIHA (International Committee of the History of Art) at Melbourne in January 2008.

All translations from Japanese are by the author.

In citing exhibition and publication titles, I provide both their original Japanese and English titles as they are, even when they do not exactly match, e.g., “Between Man and Matter” 人間と物質. Such deviation from the Japanese original in the officially given English translation is common in Japanese museum and art-related publications; capturing both is vital in correctly identifying and locating the source. In the citation list, I provide these bilingual titles separated by slashes (/); I also provide English translations of Japanese-only publication titles, enclosed in square brackets, for the convenience of non-Japanese reading specialists.

1 Smith organized the symposium “Modernity and Contemporaneity: Antinomies of Art and Culture After the 20th Century” at University of Pittsburgh in 2004 (the proceedings are published as Smith 2009). See also Smith 2006a and Smith 2006b.

2 Tomii 2004.

3 This *Positions* issue of Winter 2004 was guest-edited by Joan Kee, under the special theme of “contemporary art in Asia.”

4 It may then follow that Abstract Expressionism may be considered yet another “local” phenomenon within a global context.

5 Pérez-Barreiro, pp. 14–15.

6 For an overview of the term “contemporary art” (*gendai bijutsu* or *gendai geijutsu*), see Tomii 2004.

7 Yoshihara 1950, p. 5.

8 Yoshihara and Nakamura 1951.

9 Haryū takes credit in popularizing the idea in the 1960s, in Haryū et al. 1978, p. 18. My research is by no means exhaustive, but given the context of this article and the art-historical development, his formulation would not have gone back beyond 1967, when the 5th Paris Biennale was held.

10 Haryū 1968, p. 15.

11 Tomii 2004, pp. 619–23.

12 Tōno 1965.

13 *Geijutsu Shinchō* 1968a.

14 As Ming Tiampo has pointed out to me, this comparison is made unfailingly against a standard determined by the West. That is to say, the West as the center, by definition, is rarely compared against Japanese or other standards. Indeed, “belatedness” is an attribute of the periphery, never the center. For example, we tend to state that the formation of Japan’s *gendai bijutsu* and “international contemporaneity” is *prescient*, avoiding an alternative description, “The West is behind Japan in articulating the idea of ‘contemporary art.’”

15 Honma 1969, p. 5.

16 Honma 1969, p. 6.

17 Haryū 1968, p. 15.

18 Ōshima 1969.

19 Ōshima wrote for such art periodicals as *Geijutsu Shinchō* and *SD* and translated French literature and art books. His last known publication is Ōshima 1979.

- 20 See Tomii 2002.
- 21 Ōshima 1968.
- 22 Ōshima 1969, p. 23.
- 23 Ōshima 1969, p. 24.
- 24 Murayama 1924, pp. 28–29.
- 25 The issue of “imitation” is the flip side of originality.” For Gutai’s “originality,” see Tiampo 2007. Yoshihara’s meeting with Fujita is recounted on p. 693.
- 26 I owe Ming Tiampo for sharing an episode narrated to her by two younger-generation Gutai members, Matsutani Takesada and Horio Sadaharu. As they recounted, however, it was not Yoshihara but the young artists who had the last word, who silently retorted in the spirit of “So what!”
- 27 Shinohara 1968, pp. 131–35.
- 28 I owe this information to Hiroko Ikegami, who extensively examined Rauschenberg’s interaction with the Tokyo avant-garde in Ikegami 2007. It is being revised for publication as *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art, Circa 1964* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming in 2010).
- 29 Nakahara 1966.
- 30 Ōshima 1969, p. 18.
- 31 See Ashiya City Culture Foundation 1993, p. 287.
- 32 See Fukuoka Art Museum 1998.
- 33 See Tomii 2007, pp. 59–60.
- 34 The hole-digging by Group “I” was mentioned in Ōshima 1969, p. 26 as an “experimental and avant-garde” precedent.
- 35 For example, see *Geijutsu Shinchō* 1968b. A full-page illustration of Oldenburg’s *Hole* is prominently reproduced in full page (on p. 16) as a frontispiece to three lead essays.
- 36 I have never asked the artist himself whether or not he “imitated” Oldenburg.
- 37 For details of Sekine’s concept and production process, see Ōtani Memorial Art Museum 1996.
- 38 Sekine Nobuo, interview with author, April 2000.
- 39 For details of Oldenburg’s *Hole*, see Boettger 2003, pp. 1–21.
- 40 An insightful discussion of Sekine and his reference to *Kōgetsudai* is found in Ōtagaki 2006, pp. 12–23.
- 41 I owe this observation to Yamamoto Hozu 山本豊津 of Tokyo Gallery 東京画廊.
- 42 Sekine 1970, p. 35.
- 43 See the press release from Cretative Time, <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/performance/gelitin.html>, last accessed 25 April 2008.
- 44 For Kusama’s struggle in New York in the early 1960s, see Yamamura 2007 and Yamamura 2009.
- 45 In this respect, Boettger’s effort to examine Oldenburg’s predecessors in Europe and ascertain his ignorance thereof is a necessary step in art history (Boettger 2003, pp. 9–16, esp. p. 16).
- 46 De Maria 1960.
- 47 See Mainichi Shinbunsha 1970a and Mainichi Shinbunsha 1970b.
- 48 See Tomii 2004.
- 49 Yoshimoto 2008.
- 50 I undertook the contextualized comparisons of these instances in my paper, “Connections and Resonances in 1960s Art: An Introduction to Comparative Dialogues in a Global Context” in the conference *ラジカル! (Rajikaru!) Experimentations in Japanese Art 1950–1975*, co-organized by Getty Research Institute (GRI) and PoNJA-GenKon and held at GRI in April 2007.

要旨

1960年代における「国際的同時性」
—日本を越えた美術言説をめざして—

富井玲子

「同時性」は「コンテンポラリー・アート」の理論的考察において近年用いられるようになったキーワードである。1960年代の日本では、高揚する「国際的同時性」の認識を背景として「現代美術」なる分野が確立しており、こうした理論的用法の興味深い先例を提供する。歴史概念としての「国際的同時性」は、ある地域において外部世界とのインターフェースを通じて形成された「共通の認識」に根ざしており、客観的事実や理論的構築としての「国際的同時性」とは性格を異にする。

本論文では、まず針生一郎の60年代後期の批評に由来する「国際的同時性」を歴史的に考察する。日本における「国際的同時性」の用語は、日本美術のおかれた固有の位置—つまり、西洋中心の近代美術史において長く周縁的存在であった日本の位置—を如実に反映している。しかも、日本の「周縁的視座」は「西洋に追いつかねば」という心情に蝕まれていたため、美術批評家たちは、50年代の具体や60年代の反芸術や非芸術など、自国で台頭しつつあった非物質的で非永続的な動向の革新性を見抜くことができなかった。本論では、続いて、その本質的問題点である「模倣」について考え、現代美術の同時性と複数性を体現する「似て非なる」作品例を考察するための、より緻密な方法論を探求する。この方法を通じて、周縁とみなされる地域を、より大きな世界美術史の枠組に編入していきたい、というのが筆者の目標である。