

akira akira | masato takasaka | koji ryui
post logical form



making tunnels

ROGER McDONALD

My name is Roger McDonald. I have a Japanese passport. I was born in Tokyo. My mother is Japanese. My father is English. I was educated in the UK. I live and work in Japan. I live in Mochizuki, Nagano Prefecture. I could continue writing these identifying sentences. They are true as far as I can tell. This is information which is used in official documents such as my driving license, home registration and bank account details. It is interesting that they all state 'facts', they attempt to root me to specific places, times and histories. What I have been interested in are times when I cannot state facts anymore; moments when something exceeds my subjectivity and my ability to communicate. This is one of the reasons that I chose to study Mysticism and Religious Experience for my Masters, before becoming involved in art studies.

The sentences above all exist to signify me within society and nation. They provide me with a name, a place of origin, lines of descent and thus some kind of meaning. We can say that these sentences embed me within culture. They make me a citizen. They frame me within laws, rules, obligations, contracts. And yet, strangely, my mind and body can contradict it. I can think not to follow or fit in. My body can register differences through dress or dance or dietary choice. Art or religion or extreme altered states of consciousness (self induced or otherwise) have been ways in which human beings have tried to suspend themselves above culture and out of the profane ties with nation or state. Julia Kristeva writes that "Magic, shamanism, esoterism, the carnival and incomprehensible poetry all underscore the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what it represses: the process that exceeds the subject and his communicative structures".¹ Kristeva goes on to ask under what conditions do the above fragmentary conditions of social/cultural displacement shift into actual socio-economic change or revolution? Indeed do such conditions ever exist? Or does social order and culture simply use these fragments to become stronger? Reading Kristeva I ask myself, what are the junctions which reveal the processes of my subjectivity, the edges of my cultural self? Would I recognise it if I reached it?

My cultural mould—Japan for the past ten years or so—wishes to literally transplant itself onto my subjectivity. It tries to achieve this through many channels including television and mass media, participatory democracy, ideas of heritage and cultural tradition, language and shared customs and manners. At an everyday level these channels assist me in many ways. Work, going to the supermarket or chatting with students all necessitate a sense of being commonly 'cultured'. We understand jokes, historical references and believe that communication works. By encoding me into the Japanese nation state culture something else happens. I become implicated in a larger national story or myth and all of its various histories of aggression and tribal conflict. Is it possible for me to refuse to be part of this myth machine? In actuality it is also the case that when we begin to look at real living spaces within this mythical space we see a multitude of creative ways of being: clubs, cults, communes, community groups etc. But the wider symbolic order of the nation state culture remains persistent and powerful.

I would suggest that systems of education, employment, or health care also operate by preventing individuals from reaching any excess condition of subjectivity. This is why edicts and laws and codes are enforced by authorities such as the police or local governments. We are not allowed to dance all night in a bar, we are not allowed to organise a barbecue party by the river at night, we are only allowed to alter our own minds with prescribed medicines and drugs such as alcohol and tobacco and Lipovitan D.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984

And, as the late Terence McKenna said, these medicines are intended precisely to nurture and support wider economic systems which require mass cheap labor. Have you ever thought why coffee, tobacco and alcohol are the three principal drugs (dope) officially sanctioned by this culture and indeed encouraged? Work harder, keep going, stay awake, binge drink and get a hangover.

There are pockets where the exceeding of subjectivity are sanctioned within culture – we can perhaps point to religious temples and monk training as the oldest. Festivals and carnival are also strong remaining aspects of Japanese culture, but today highly policed. The archetypes remain though. I don't think it is so easy to erase the archetypal memory of such events.

We live in an age when 'culture' stands for some generalised form of 'goodness'. It has come to mean anything and everything. Culture is proposed to regenerate towns and cities and to bring a sense of worthiness. We see this tendency particularly strongly in many regional art projects across Japan in the last ten years. What is the 'culture' which is being nurtured here? I would like to pose the question in another way – what kind of subjectivity is being proposed? This is a question addressed to individuals, rather than to a bland sense of community. What goes on in your mind and body? Are you left suspended? Suspension of subjectivity is something which most modern cultures do not encourage. One of the most significant jobs of the nation-state machine is to keep the subject together through various social apparatuses, to prevent it from disintegrating too much. Here the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are useful in mapping the inherently unstable, leaking subject. In their readings the subject is in decline. The individual or group is constantly criss-crossed by endless lines of influence which compose and re-compose us. The subject is a site of experimentation and what they term de-territorialisation. Deleuze and Guattari call this state one of "Schizoanalysis or Bodies without Organs". In a little known but interesting essay titled 'Machinic Junkies', Felix Guattari writes about "machinic dope as indispensable to the subjective stabilisation of industrial societies". Guattari cites the Americans as being masters of this kind of 'doping' in order to maintain social order, but he also refers to Japanese society as one which is crazy for "machinic buzz". He concludes the essay by writing "subjective formation concocted by dopings can either get things moving again, or kill them slowly over a low flame... new horizons or nothing". The process of suspending subjectivity is by far from easy.

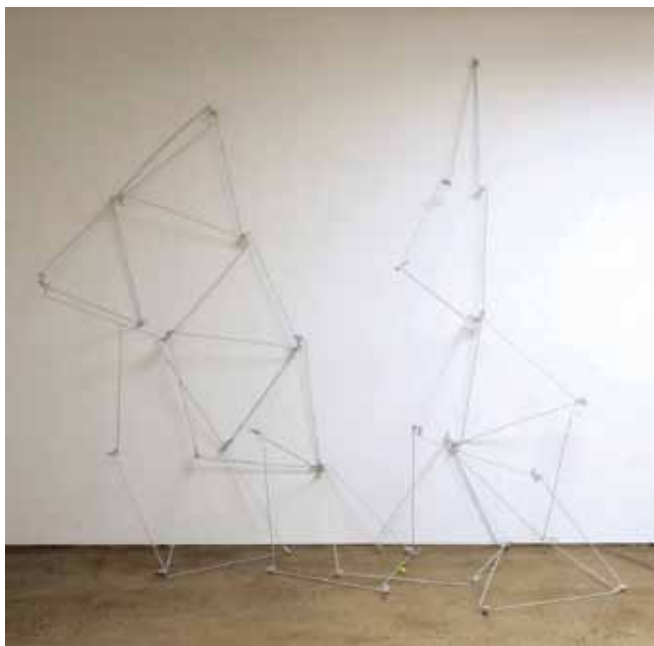
Slavoj Žižek has spoken of 'false engagement' and the ease of appearing to be critical. This is something to think about, particularly in relation to the arena of art practice today. Žižek suggests that sometimes the most subversive thing may be to do nothing, to withdraw and 'step back into thinking'. Deep thinking about what is going on in society or self is certainly one powerful way of suspending subjectivity and experimenting with different subject formations, lines. Withdrawal as a form of action is carried out by many radical thinkers through the last century. In Japan I am reminded of Ishikawa Sanshiro who was inspired by the example of the British socialist and gay rights campaigner Edward Carpenter in the early twentieth-century. Ishikawa returned to Japan after a period of exile from Japanese fascism to pursue a life of individual democracy in the countryside. For these thinkers, the nation-State culture was something to be challenged through withdrawal from the dominant symbolic order and the creation of others.

I would like to close this writing with an excerpt from another figure who consistently urged for the questioning and de-territorialisation of all boundaries – subjective and geographic. Although never overtly political, John Cage held an anarchist position which was reflected in his compositions, drawings and life.

*We don't need government
We need utilities.
Air, water, energy
Travel and communication means
Food and shelter.
We have no need for imaginary mountain ranges
Between separate nations.
We can make tunnels through the real ones.*
John Cage, excerpt from *Untitled Anarchist Poem*

Roger McDonald is a curator/writer living and working in Tokyo. He is a founding member of AIT, a non-profit contemporary art platform which creates a range of programs and events in Tokyo. He also runs MAD (since 2003), the first systematic artist in residence program in Tokyo and curates experimental events, symposia and exhibitions. He teaches at Tama, Musashino and Zokei Art Universities and is one of the program directors of the MAD courses at AIT.





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Front cover: Koji Ryui, *Quantum Entanglement* (detail), 2010 Photo courtesy the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney
Page 2 and above top: Masato Takasaka, *ANOTHER PROPOSITIONAL MODEL FOR THE EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADYMADE WANNABE STUDIO MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS 1994-2011* (rjreturnal return to productopia–new psychedelia megamix) (details), 2011 Photos courtesy the artist
Page 5: Akira Akira, *Whatever could have happened for things to have come to this?* (detail), 2011 Photo courtesy the artist
Rear cover bottom left: Koji Ryui, *Egg*, 2010 Photo courtesy the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney
Rear cover bottom right: Akira Akira, *Spillberg (black) No.2*, 2009 Photo courtesy the artist

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