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### Review Of "Radicals And Realists In The Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection Of Modernism" By T.R.H. Havens

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light strongly suggest that ritual actors were not always beholden to presence. They could manipulate “the rhetoric of immediacy” toward ends that had little to do with soteriological prerogatives. It is here that *Daitokuji* demonstrates the full promise of the monastic monograph as a space of scholarly inquiry. In its exploration of the deep semantics of visual and material artifacts within the confines of a specific set of sites and communities, it illuminates significant ways in which the monastery—in the totality of its structures, spaces, objects, and constituencies—can serve as a topos for exploring and complicating our understanding of the Buddhist artifact and its apparently artless beholder.

*Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism.* By Thomas R. H. Havens. University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. 296 pages. Hardcover \$38.00.

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Thomas R. H. Havens's latest study provides a historical overview of the development of the Japanese arts in the tumultuous years of 1952 through 1970. His purview spans the “nonverbal arts” of painting, sculpture, dance choreography, and art-music composition, with an emphasis on the activities of the avant-garde in each of these forms. As readers will recognize, this is a gargantuan, contested, and still understudied territory, but Havens makes credible work of outlining the genesis and distinguishing features of the numerous artistic groups and movements to emerge during these decades, including Gutai, Kyūshūha, Monoha, Neo-Dada, High Red Center, and Butoh. Perhaps more importantly, he helps to elucidate the importance of institutions such as the Yomiuri Independent art show and the Sōgetsu Arts Center in nurturing the development of the postwar arts, as well as the role of such relatively behind-the-scenes figures as poet, artist, and critic Takiguchi Shūzō, editor and critic Hanada Kiyoteru, or ikebana artist and Sōgetsu Center director Teshigahara Sōfū as mentors and facilitators for younger generations of artists, musicians, and dancers. This attention to the institutional and interpersonal underpinnings of creative activity marks a continuity with Havens's previous book on the postwar arts, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan: Dance, Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts, 1955–1980* (Princeton University Press, 1982).

In addition to movements, institutions, and mentors, Havens also gives consideration to major artists in each genre, including such leading figures as painter Okamoto Tarō, Gutai instigator Yoshihara Jirō, High Red Center's Nakanishi Natsuyuki and Akasegawa Genpei, Monoha's Sekine Nobuo and Lee Ufan, composers Takemitsu Tōru and Yuasa Yōji, and dancers Atsugi Bonjin and Hijikata Tatsumi. While some of the works of these artists are also discussed briefly in the course of the study, it should be noted from the outset that Havens concentrates on outlining the broad contours of postwar art movements, rather than on providing close analysis of specific works.

Even a study with such a broad scope as Havens's will have to stop somewhere, and it is probably best to be grateful for the sweep of his study across numerous art forms, rather than regretful of genres, movements, or artists left out. Nevertheless,

among the many vibrant artistic fields omitted—including architecture, theater, film, and photography—the exclusions that seemed most serious to me were those of design and the applied arts. During the 1960s, graphic designers such as Yokoo Tadanori and Awazu Kiyoshi played an important role in connecting the visual arts with the performing arts—especially such radical movements as underground theater and Butoh—and served as an interface between the mass energy of student protest movements on the one hand and developing commercial practices and commercialized popular culture on the other. The absence of discussion of the activities of such artists makes the arts appear aloof, cerebral, and disconnected from the energy of 1960s youth culture.

*Radicals and Realists* is organized chronologically, beginning with an introductory essay on the arts under the Allied Occupation, followed by the two main parts of the text, devoted to the 1950s and 1960s respectively, and closing with a discussion of the 1970 Osaka Expo. Havens presents this last event as both a culminating celebration of the avant-garde arts and the manifestation of a new alignment between art, money, and politics in Japan that marked a shift in the avant-garde's oppositional stance towards commercial institutions and the state. A historical overview precedes each of the main sections of the study, and, as one would hope from the work of a historian, these introductions are exemplary in describing the historical circumstances and issues affecting the development of artistic expression in each era. Especially welcome are Havens's forthright discussion of Japan's "neocolonial" relationship with the United States during the Occupation period and subsequent era of security dependency and collaboration, his nuanced consideration of the "postcolonial" framework with respect to the postwar cultural situation in Japan, and his introduction of the concept of the "administered society" to describe political and social life in the 1960s. While one wishes that these historical and theoretical discussions could be developed further and were more fully integrated with an analysis of the artistic activities and artworks discussed elsewhere, these sections providing historical context will surely be one of the book's most useful features for students and non-Japan specialists.

Threading together Havens's discussion of postwar historical issues and his presentation of the activities of Japanese artists is his overall thesis that avant-garde artists increasingly rejected Western-derived modernism and sought "alternative modernities" grounded in "everyday objects and the lives of ordinary people" (pp. 124, 122), thus making them both the "radicals" and "realists" of the book's title. While this thesis provides his study with a certain narrative cohesion—encompassing such diverse movements as Neo-Dada and Monoha within the same rubric—Havens fails to give sufficient attention to the art-historical and theoretical issues that it raises. Most troubling, he never offers clear definitions of "modernism," "avant-garde," or "realism" that can be mapped with confidence onto actual artworks, artists, or movements outside Japan, such as Abstract Expressionism, L'art informel, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Pop Art, Fluxus, Land Art/Earthworks, and Arte Povera, or even to earlier twentieth-century movements such as Cubism and Surrealism.

Instead, Havens vaguely posits a postwar modernism, undifferentiated by school or medium, preoccupied by "aesthetic and formalist concerns" and "closely associated with dominant power centers in society: corporations, foundations, museums, orchestras, and the state" (p. 18). Admittedly, this portrayal is familiar from post-modern critiques of postwar institutionalized modernism, and it may serve to adum-

brate some facets of elite American and European cultural hegemony during these years. To posit a simple opposition between “modernism” (associated here with the West) and the “avant-garde” (exemplified here by Japanese artists), does not, however, sufficiently address the extent to which these two phenomena are implicated in each other. Moreover, a careful consideration of “modernism,” the “avant-garde,” and the role of “realism” as manifested in “everyday objects,” with respect to any of the Western art movements listed above, or actual artists working within them, reveals a much more complex picture than Havens acknowledges. The use of this “avant-garde/realism” versus “modernism” schema in effect gives his study an internal consistency at the expense of a real sense of relationality or even contemporaneity with the arts outside of Japan during this period.

So, this reader at least found Havens’s thesis regarding “the avant-garde rejection of modernism” difficult to accept without a more nuanced theoretical explication or indexical relationship to a body of artworks both Japanese and non-Japanese. Nevertheless, to be fair to the spirit of the work, it is clear that neither theoretical explorations nor transnational analyses are the main goals of Havens’s study. He appears eager instead to keep such discussions to a minimum in the interest of developing a cohesive narrative covering a broad and multifarious range of art forms and movements within Japan itself. In addition, rather than highlight his own theoretical framework or analysis of artworks, he strives to give maximum space to the voices of Japanese artists and critics, who are quoted extensively on the basis of interviews with the author as well as published documents.

This approach is the source of both the study’s strengths and its weaknesses. Havens provides a readable and generally well-balanced account of two fascinating decades of artistic activity; he offers lucid historical contextualizations, while respectfully integrating the commentary of artists and critics who were participants in the creation of the history he presents. As such, his study will serve as an invaluable introduction for students and nonspecialists in Japanese art, and will offer useful points of reference for specialists as well. However, in adopting a relatively distant and “objective” voice, and opting not to challenge substantially the viewpoints of his interview subjects (with a few welcome exceptions), nor to engage analytically or polemically with the works in question, nor to develop more extensively the thematic and theoretical ideas he does introduce, Havens fails to capture the antiauthoritarian shock, subversive humor, and excitement of the “radical” works he has chosen to discuss.

Those using Havens’s text in the classroom would thus be advised to supplement it with such works as Alexandra Monroe’s seminal *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1994), as well as the more recent *Art, Anti-Art, Non Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950–1970*, edited by Charles Merewether with Rika Iezumi Hiro (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007). Both of these books include extensive illustrations, provocative analytical essays, and translations of manifestos and other primary documents that are more effective than Havens’s after-the-fact interviews in conveying the creative, passionate, and opinionated voices of the artists.