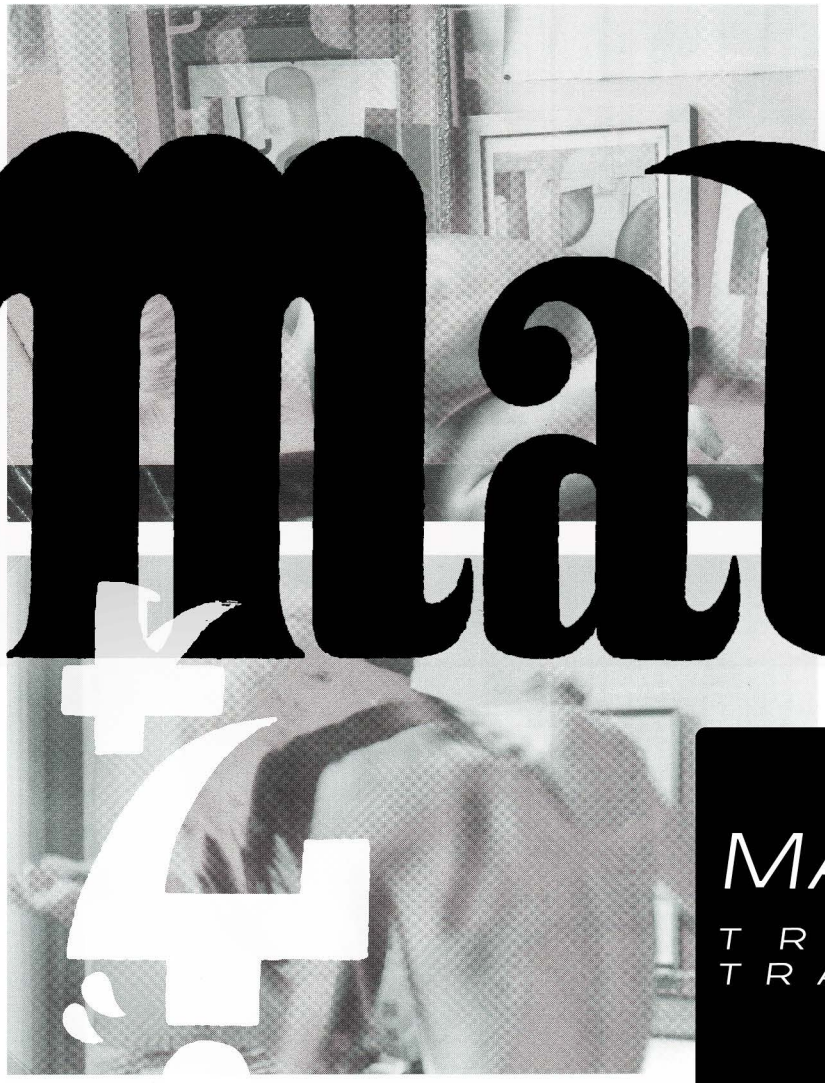

# MAVO-RICKS:

## TRANSGENDER TRANSGRESSIONS IN 1920S JAPAN

BY JOE NICKOLS

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# CONTENTS

# NOTES

Japanese names are given in their indigenous format of family name followed by a given name.

As Mavo members present varying embodiments of gender, both in terms of transgender and gender ambiguity, the use of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* singular is used throughout the dissertation. This is done to avoid unnecessary gendering.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Joanna Wolfarth, who nurtured my initial interest in Mavo and helped the direction of this research.

This project is the culmination of a year's worth of support, comments, discussions and teaching from the History of Art and Archaeology faculty at SOAS. Words cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to the department for everything that I have learnt and achieved at SOAS this year. Special thanks to Dr Stacey Pierson and Dr Elaine Buck, who both encouraged me to apply for the course; Dr Charlotte Horlyck for their never-wavering support and the countless Teams calls; Dr Pamela Corey who fostered my theoretical understanding; Dr Jenny Preston who inspired me with their perspectives on Japanese art; Dr Simon O'Meara whose kind comments kept me going with my writing; Dr Andrea Janku for fuelling my passion for Gender Studies; Dr Illana Webster-Kogen for their writing workshops; and Dr Malcolm McNeill who offered great advice on the content of this project.

I would also like to thank my patient family who have let me talk to them at length about the contents of this paper, maybe they will now become queer anarchists (?!). Their support has been invaluable, and I am incredibly grateful to all of them, particularly my parents.

The intellectual stimulation of my friends and cohort has also been important in producing this dissertation. Frankie Leo Dytor has been especially wonderful; they continually inspire me in my work and have helped shaped this piece in so many ways through kind commentary and advice.

# ABSTRACT

In their 1923 “Mavo Manifesto” (Mavo no sengen), the early 20th century anarchist collective Mavo promised to revolutionise society through a reconceptualization of artistic production. The collective used carefully constructed visual arts, performance, and creativity to challenge directly the rigid social and cultural hegemony that the Japanese state had implemented. Since the mid-19th Century, Japan had been forced to modernise and industrialise by implementing Eurocentric ideologies, such as gender and sexual binaries, within its society. Enforced heteronormative performativity was part of a national mission to establish and control an industrious workforce and military. The issues of autonomy, identity, and subjecthood culminated in the 1920s as artists, writers, philosophers, and politicians reflected upon the state of society and delt with the rise of homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia, and nationalism. By synthesising interdisciplinary artforms with contemporary philosophy and social critique, Mavo refuted the regulatory matrix imposed on their bodies within the oppressive framework of the regime. This dissertation explores the methodology Mavo employed to subvert this state sponsored oppression, focussing on works that relate to bodily control and gender visuality.

# PROLOGUE

In order to situate the discourses explored by this dissertation, it is first necessary to establish a brief overview of the Mavo movement.

On 28th August 1923 rocks were thrown onto the glass roof of the Takenodai Hall, which housed the 10th annual Nika Art Association exhibition. As the glass shattered, raining down on the institutional judging panel below, the Japanese art scene was transformed as a new movement asserted its existence. The Nika Art Association judges fled outside where they were confronted by roughly thirty artists whose work, having been rejected from the exhibition, was now on display in the surrounding park; a red flag with the singular word "Mavo" draped down the building. These maverick artists sought social and artistic transformation, reacting against the prescriptive boundaries of the art establishment. Mavo, with its anarchist grounding, was able to accommodate these desires for change, producing a movement of interdisciplinary artistic radicalism. This presentation of art and performance as protest at the Takenodai Hall would be indicative of all Mavo output until its demise in 1926.

After returning from an eleven-month study abroad in Germany, Mavo was founded by Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-77) in July 1923. Whilst in Germany, Murayama, choosing to

neglect their studies, participated extensively in the European art scene, developing a particular interest in dance and interdisciplinary art practice. On their return from Germany in early 1923, Murayama brought back an extensive knowledge of European art and thought, leading them to appoint themselves as the leading "interpreter of European modernism". Murayama had little formal training, but this did not prevent the charismatic creative from publicising themself as a visionary artist, emphasising their emotional response over artistic skill. The lack of formal training was important to their public image as their self-taught status provided an outsider status that would endorse their anarchic anti-establishment values.[1] By existing firmly beyond the formal Japanese art system, Murayama, and other Mavoists, would struggle to gain patrons and support. However, this prompted Mavo to investigate alternative avenues for exhibition venues, benefactors, and even art production, which, in turn, fuelled their ideological drive towards individualism and disrupting the rigidity of social conventions.

The group embodied the Hungarian philosopher Max Stirner's (1806-56) anarchic utopia: a union of egoists. The principle of this utopia was that multiple individuals could exist in harmony as long as there was a respect for members respective 'ownness', which is described as an authority of the self.[2] This respect for individuality may account for the sheer variety of Mavo's output that included: painting, publishing, photography, performance, cultural critique, theatre design, architecture,

**Fig. 1** Yanase Masamu, *Mavo Gathering,* Cartoon drawing (Manga), 1923. Published in *Mavo,* No. 2 (September. 1924). The image depicts an early Mavo meeting consisting of (clockwise from left): Murayama, Ogata, Kadowaki, Ōura Shūzō and Masamu, who is shown with their back to the viewer.

[1] Gennifer Weisenfeld, *Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1905-1931.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 31.
[2] Myanard Whitlow, "Max Stirner and the Heresy of Self-Abundance." *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 7, no. 4 (1950): 284-285.

and soundscapes. Mavo strived to represent the struggle of daily life in their work, and also to include their audience in their art production; this culminated in the production of six issues of *Mavo* magazine that would enable a reflexive connection between the movement and its followers. Inclusion in this anarchic collective was as fluid as their art practice, with members exhibiting freely within and outside Mavo. As no cohesive lists of official members were published even ascertaining "foundational" members is difficult (Fig. 1). Other than Murayama, significant members included: Yanase Masamu (1900-45), Takamizawa Michinao (1899-1989), Okada Tatsuo (1900-37), Ogata Kamenosuke (1900-42), Kadowaki Shinrō, amongst others.

Within Mavo, Murayama promoted their theory of 'conscious constructivism', described as the negation of tradition to propose alternative realities constructed around daily life. The artistic practice appealed to members eager to challenge the elitist precedents propagated by the official art system. Conscious constructivism's emphasised the critique and destruction of existing society to enable a liberation of the self, removed from hegemonic oppression. The theory championed originality and opposed slavish copying as an act of containment. Mavo's social critique initially revolved around the commercialisation of daily life, with many early works employing collage to parody the homogenisation of society through industrialisation. Exhibitions of this early work were unlike anything Japanese audience were familiar with and caused a stir. The art critic Asaeda Jirō deplored the movement's inclusion of mixed media, to which Murayama wrote an impassioned response that encapsulates the Mavo mission: "constructivist art knocks down and destroys the interior boundaries between... arts... [and] areas of life...".[3] This destruction of 'boundaries', whether legal or social, would become increasingly integral to the movement.

On the 1st of September 1923 the Great Kantō Earthquake devasted Tokyo, killing over 100,000 inhabitants and damaging 70% of the city's housing. The earthquake exacerbated social inequality and xenophobia, provoking Mavo into a fervour of revolutionary activity in response. In the wake of the earthquake, the government enacted martial law, using the destruction to secure hegemonic power by assassinating left-leaning figures of the period,

[3] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 71.

such as Ōsugi Sakae and their family.[4] Mavoists, too, were hounded by the police and regularly arrested; Yanase, particularly, faced brutal police oppression, being beaten and bayonetted, by military police over a 5-day period. The earthquake also triggered vigilante justice that resulted in the massacre of many Chinese and Korean residents. This attack on bodies that refused to obey the required performativity of citizenhood transformed the Mavo output, which responded by becoming more assertive in disrupting the state's oppressive social matrix. The group began to explore performance and installations as a way to awaken the public to the oppression of the Taishō government. These works would often display members in acts of nonconformity; through transgenderism, public nudity, and depictions of masturbation Mavo rejected society's rigorous bodily control, instead, it asserted bodily autonomy.

However, the government stranglehold over self-autonomy culminated in 1925 with the enactment of 'The Peace Preservation Act', which gave the police powers to imprison any person who undermined or threatened the government's policies. By 1928 the death penalty could be implemented. As the policy could be applied at police discretion the legal limitations were boundless. Though the earthquake fostered a frenzy of artistic production by Mavo, the government's strict censorship programme eventually forced the movement to disband in 1926.[5] The movement's ideological emphasis of individualism could not compete with the enforced programme of national homogeneity. The need for a cohesive anti-government movement was filled by Marxist and socialist collectives, who produced graphic art and manga, which could efficiently respond to the ever-changing political landscape in a popularist format. Mavo had been opposed to Marxism due its anti-individualist tendencies. In an essay Murayama acknowledged the difficulties movements faced in producing radical works in opposition of an authoritarian state.[6]

Though short-lived, Mavo transformed the Japanese art world; eschewing conventional format of hierarchical art production, incorporating interdisciplinary artforms, championing performance and installation work, advocating equality, giving a voice to

[4] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 78.
[5] The third issue of *Mavo* magazine was denied distribution, making the collective financially unstable.
[6] Peter Eckersall, "From Liminality to Ideology: The Politics of Embodiment in Prewar Avant-Garde Theater in Japan," in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, ed. Harding James M. and Rouse John (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 241.

erased and oppressed identities, and promoting the importance of self-hood within their work, all of which challenged the government's social matrix and programme of homogeneity.

# INTRODUCTION

During the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-26) periods the government installed strict laws and social conventions that aimed to create obedient citizens by linking nationalist ideology and strict regulations of bodily functions. [7] By regulating the body the state produced a standardised performativity that defined the boundaries of subjecthood, which was used to constitute citizenship. The state's praxis was to construct a cohesive homogenous national body unified under the emperor, which became known at the *kokutai* (lit. national body). [8] In authorising citizenship through specified performativity, the state produced a barrier for anybody that defied the socialised conformity; containing these nonconforming bodies in a state of abjection. Within this system, individualism and self-autonomy were discouraged, with any deviation from the national programme being considered treasonous. Mavo's work attempted to subvert the imposed boundaries of bodily performativity to rupture the state's oppressive control of individuals. Through performance, photography, and paintings, Mavo protested the censorship nonconforming bodies, and visualised an alternate construction of society that accepted individualism and equality. Through a close reading of Mavo work, and

[7] Igarashi Yoshikuni, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. (Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.
[8] Eckersall, "From Liminality to Ideology", 231.

employing gender and queer theory, this dissertation assesses the methodologies Mavo implemented to disrupt the nationalist state's programme of bodily control.

Mavo sought to transform society fundamentally, positioning themselves as revolutionaries and believing in the revolutionary power of art. [9] The movement's manifesto, published in 1923, proclaimed their desire to lead social change, "We are standing at the cutting edge. And will forever stand at the cutting edge. We are unrestrained. We are radical. We will revolutionise. We will advance . . .". [10] The reference to cutting is indicative of much of Mavo's work: whether through collage, with literal cutting, or with performances and architecture, Mavo were slicing social conventions apart and proposing alternative visions of society. Mavo were politically aligned with anarchism, promoting destruction of the state's social structure, out of which an alternative less oppressive society could flourish. The principles of Max Stirner were particularly important to Mavo ideology as Stirner promoted social liberation through the negation of societal conventions to reveal a true self. Mavo members would use nudity, masturbation, and transgenderism to subvert these social conventions and deny the authority of the state, thereby exploring a form of uninhibited selfhood.

Murayama encouraged the group to represent the lived experience of subalternity within society. By visualising identities or activities that had been pathologized, Mavo prevented total erasure of heterogeneity by refuting the state's silencing of nonconformity and abjection. Each member of the collective engaged in multi-disciplinary practices, all centred on presenting subversive visuality or experience. Due to each outcome being a singular extension of the maker(s) and their anarchist mentality, this dissertation does not limit itself to assessing a singular genre. Even Murayama commented that Mavo were dedicated to creating works that utilised and embodied "entirety of all life", so it would not be appropriate to limit the scope of included material. [11] Owing to varying factors, only a handful of Mavo works have survived to the present day. [12] Most known works have been

[9] Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Mavo's Conscious Constructivism: Art, Individualism, and Daily Life in Interwar Japan." *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 65.
[10] Toshiko Ellis, "The Japanese Avant-Garde of the 1920s: The Poetic Struggle with the Dilemma of the Modern." *Poetics Today* 20, no. 4 (1999): 727.
[11] Tomoyoshi Murayama, "Sugiyuku Hyōgenha" (Expressionism expiring). *Chuō bijutsu,* no. 91 (April 1923): 14.
[12] Mavo were regularly policed, with works regularly banned or seized.

passed down through archival photographs, or images contained in the six issues of *Mavo* magazine that were published from July 1924 to August 1925. [13]

Mavo consciously included European and Japanese philosophy in their methodology, producing works that reflected Hegelian anarchism and Nietzschean anti-bourgeois attitudes. Many Mavoists would regularly publish essays and articles exploring the issues of the day, and subsequently embody their theorisations in their artistic practice. Despite the centrality of theory to the movement, the existing writings on Mavo are predominantly empirical, archival, or chronological, with limited application of critical theory. Gennifer Weisenfeld's *Mavo: Japanese Artits and The Avant Garde 1905-1931* (Pub. 2002) remains the definitive monograph on this topic, providing a thorough historiographical account of Mavo within a wider historical record. The research serves as an invaluable archive for this project, which aims to build on Weisenfeld's history of the movement, exploring more directly the discourses Mavo engaged through their portrayal of gender and sexual disobedience, the corruption of expected performativity, and the instability it produced.

Through social disobedience, hyperbolic mimicry, and obscenity Mavo sought to reveal the state's oppression of bodily autonomy, regularly confronting the signification of (non)subject status. Mavo's work often visualised or represented the lived experience of subaltern or nonconforming bodies, particularly in embracing transness and queerness in their constructed visuality. The rise of sexology journals in the 1920s produced a public that was engaged in discourse, able to comprehend Mavo's transgressions against prescribed heteronormativity. [14] Lee Edelman hypothesises that queerness possesses a "strategic value" to expose the symbolic reality of society, and therefore threatens the hegemonic structures that perpetuate a standardised subjecthood. [15] Mavo's embrace of social deviancy to produce a liberated self emulates Lee Edelman's "Death Drive" theory, which advocates for queer people to embrace their assigned deviancy as an act of protest. Through the application of

[13] The magazine contained images of multiple members, displaying their collage, painting, performance, and dance.
[14] The Taishō period, retroactively referred to as the era of *Ero-Guro-Nasensu* (Erotic-Grotesque-Nonsense), was marked by the public interest in queerness and the complexity of gender and sexuality.
[15] Lee Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive." *Narrative* 6, no. 1 (1998): 24.

queer theory, such as Edelman's, and consideration of Judith Butler's theories of performativity, this dissertation offers an investigation into Mavo's social subversion.

Chapter 1 explores the regulation of gender that occurred during the Meiji and Taisho periods to form the *kokutai*, and the subsequent acts Mavo adopted to subvert this control. Chapter 2 investigates Mavo's use of performance and space to disrupt state authority, awakening their audience to the oppression in society. Finally, Chapter 3 returns to the body, to discuss the emancipation of the self through sexual liberation.

# REGULATING THE BODY

## CHAPTER 1

The Meiji government implemented Eurocentric biological determinism as the grounding for identity construction, overturning the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) conventions of tonsorial, sartorial, and cultural signifiers that produced gender identity. The Tokugawa methodology of gender signification produced multiple genders that could not be recognised within a binary system. The indigenous Japanese social structure was devoid of homophobia and transphobia, with bodies able to transition through multiple gender identities within their life by altering their appearance, it was only with the arrival of European modernism that identity erasure took hold in Japan. [16] The Eurocentric matrix was installed to convey national "civility" to Europe and America, demonstrating that Japan was their equal in a modern global society. Any reference to Tokugawa-style identities or lifestyles became a threat to the national programme and was expunged from social

[16] See, Gregory M. Pflugfelder's *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

acceptance. This chapter explores the development of Taishō gender regulation, and the way Mavo embodied alterity to subvert its authority.

The drive to implement conventions of "civilised Western" nationhood in Japan was encouraged by prominent Meiji intellectuals and government officials who saw it as a tool to overturn the unequal treaties Japan had been forced to sign in the 1860s. [17] The project of "civility" depended heavily on performativity, with the *kokutai* becoming an instrument to convey an idealised vision of modernity to an international audience. By ascribing desired performativity to bodies, the government were delineating the parameters of citizenhood. In other words, the repetition of prescribed performativity produced social acceptance and legal protection of the body that performs it. The act of repetition is central to naturalising acts of government as indisputable, including gender construction, which, as Judith Butler has asserted, is constituted through "doing" rather than being an innate and immutable identity. [18] The rejection of Tokugawa conventions was symbolised by the enforced adoption of European dress and performance among government officials. In 1880 Inoue Kaoru (1835-1915), the foreign minister, announced the European conventions that officials were required to display, including courtesy towards women. [19] The government officials used balls to demonstrate their newfound "civility" to international visitors; often inviting women to these parties to demonstrate their chivalry towards them, affirming women as a submissive prop to uphold male dominance.

By the turn of the century the Westernisation programme was being contested by an increasingly powerful militarist faction, who considered European performativity a form of national impotency or social effeminacy, denying Japan its own internationally authority. [20] The militarist bloc proposed a return to historic Japanese values, defined by the masculinity of past great military leaders. [21] Ironically, this return to Japanese values failed to overturn the Eurocentric binary matrix of gender and sexuality, refusing to acknowledge the

[17] European and American citizens had extraterritoriality. Amy Stanley, "Enlightenment Geisha: The Sex Trade, Education, and Feminine Ideals in Early Meiji Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3 (2013), 540.
[18] Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily, "Gender Undone: Subversion, Regulation and Embodiment in the Work of Judith Butler." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 4 (2006):
[19] Jason G. Karlin, "The Gender of Nationalism: Competing Masculinities in Meiji Japan." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002), 46.
[20] Karlin, "The Gender of Nationalism", 56.
[21] Karlin, "The Gender of Nationalism", 77.

complexity of pre-Meiji identities.[22] By the Taishō period the conceptualisation of strictly coded gender binaries was ingrained in society, "sex" had become a category of containment which could not be destabilised; bodies that defied the repetition of commanded acts of gender were imprisoned, violated, or, in some cases murdered. This threat to the body ensured that the social restrictions of gender became a regulatory operation that naturalised the state's hegemonic power.[23] The act of gender nonconformity, therefore, became a strong political act of defiance.

Mavo regularly transformed their bodies into representations of gender nonconformity in performances, installations, and photography to challenge the limitations of state dominance. This transgressive act was often presented through transgenderism, which this essay defines as any act that disrupts the naturalisation of the gender binary or the normative presentation of gender.[24] Through sartorial and tonsorial queues, similar to the conventions of the reviled Tokugawa era, Mavo produced a gendered body that was in defiance of social and legal convention; the 1873 Tokyo Misdemeanour Code specifically prohibited bodies from presenting as a gender that differed from their assigned sex. Mavo's transgenderism tested operational parameters of this regulatory legal framework. To exist as a nonconforming gender contested the stability of defined subjecthood, the proposal of unregulated genders queries the integrity of the parameters defining the binary matrix.

This rupturing of social conventions was increased by Mavo's regular references to sex work in their output, with many Mavo performances presenting as transgendered sex workers. Sex work threatened the social mores of Taishō Japan, it was regularly policed and as branded an "antisocial act" representing Tokugawa immorality and social nonconformity.[25] Despite this, licenced sex work remained legal, mainly due to the profits it provided the government through tax. Government officials maintained that licensed sex work was needed to protect the sanctity of bodies in "refined families" from unwanted sexual advances, this solidified sex work as the occupation of an underclass whose bodies were

[22] Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-52) enjoyed being penetrated, a detail that proved problematic for Meiji-Taishō militarist historians. Timon Screech, *Sex and The Floating World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 98.
[23] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004),43.
[24] This definition is based upon Kate Borstein's approach in *Gender Outlaw* presented in Butler's *Undoing Gender*.
[25] Under Tokugawa rule, courtesan culture flourished; Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, 319.

disposable in the name of capitalism and civility.[26] The hypocritical articulation of this framework, profiting from sex work and requiring it to "protect" citizens purity, yet initiating violence against the "immoral" bodies of sex workers who enabled that protection, ensured that sex work was synonymous with abjection. Consequently, in representing sex workers Mavo transformed themselves into a body that most consciously represented the oppressed, heightening the social threat of the Mavo body.

Mavo's 1924 adaptation of German expressionist playwright Fred Wedekid's 1905 play *Death and the Devil* presented a highly sexualised performance of transgendered sex workers. Set in a brothel, the play centres on two characters: Marquis Casti-Piani, the brothel owner, and Elfriede Von Malchus, a representative of the 'International Union for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade'. The two characters represent the opposite positionality of the other, with Casti-Piani upholding strict patriarchal control over women's bodies, showing great disdain for their sex workers, whilst Elfriede reviles sex work and wishes to emancipate their bodies. Both of these characters ignore the lived experience of those who they strive to control, projecting onto them their own desires or contempt. The two characters choose to observe the sex workers secretly to prove their perspective to the other. However, neither of their projected realities are shown, and both are shocked to witness exchanges of private love, not senseless sexuality between sex workers and their clients. Casti-Piani is enraged and confused by this act, as it defied their domination over the sex workers' selfhood, who managed to establish rewarding relationships despite the demands upon their body to deny any form of selfhood. To not endure the rejection of their assumed ownership, Casti-Piani ultimately commits suicide. Elefriede, similarly, feels overwhelming shame for their actions as a self-appointed saviour. The workers have no emotional response to the rage and pain of Casti-Piani or Elefride, expressing no remorse for their pimp's demise. This only heightens the disconnect between the sex workers and the figures that claim control over them. The play mimics the Taishō social climate, with Casti-Piani representing the patriarchal control over subaltern bodies and Elefriede embodying the social movement against sex work, who argued that it "threatened monogamous marriages, perpetuated women's oppression, and

[26] Kazuhiro Oharazeki, "Anti-Prostitution Campaigns in Japan and the American West, 1890–1920: A Transpacific Comparison." *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2013): 180.

confirmed… Western stereotypes of submissive "oriental" women".[27] The anti-sex-work movements were inadvertently upholding European models of sexual morality that ultimately denied sex workers agency within the social fabric of Taishō Japan, and ensured the perpetuation of sexual propriety through heteronormative marriage.

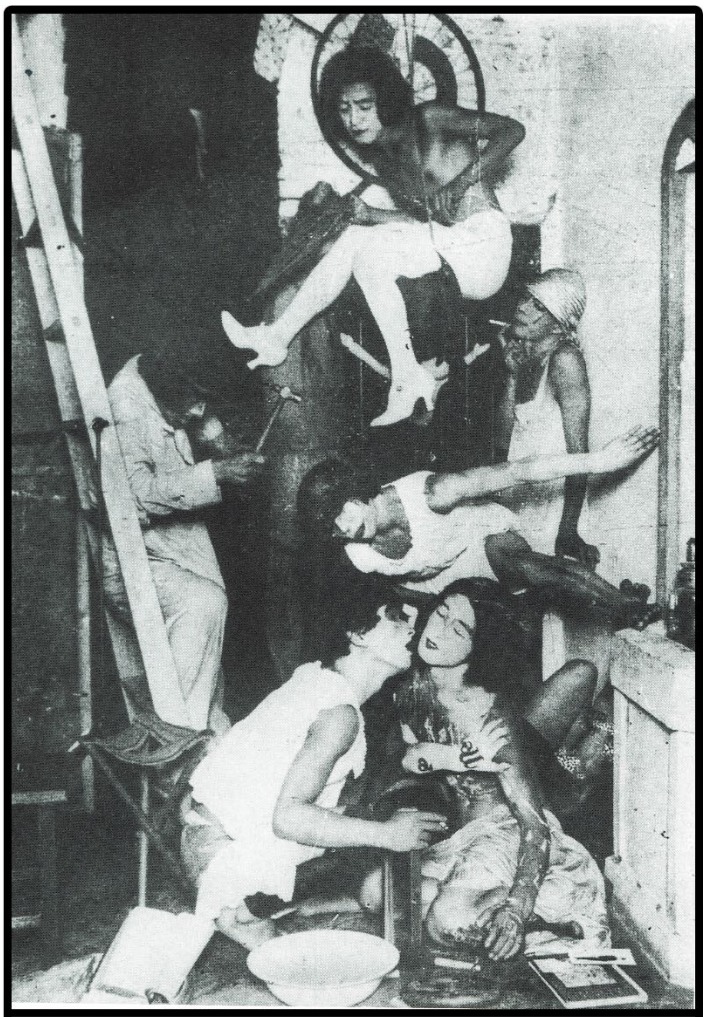

**Fig. 2** Mavo members (including: Murayama Tomoyoshi, Katō Masao, Sumiya Iwane, Yabashi Kimimaro, Takamizawa Michinao, and Toda Tatsuo) performing *Dance of Death* (Shi no buyō) from the third act of Frank Wedekind's play *Death and Devil.* Photograph published in *Mavo,* No.3 (Sept. 1924).

Mavo published a provocative image from the production charged with eroticism and the visuality of otherhood (Fig. 2). The image displays bodies in a chaotic arrangement within a claustrophobic space; Murayama is precariously balanced in a state of transgendered undress above four writhing figures whose limbs mingle in sensuous intrigue. The scene produces a form of unreality, with each performer displaying a different form of body image, refusing to represent a homogenised naturalisation of gender. To present an alternative construction of bodily norms, as Mavo is doing, proposes a resignification of those norms.[28] In presenting a multiplicity of bodily possibility, Mavo displays the reductivity of gender and sexual binaries, revealing the variations bodies can hold. The hyperbolic presentation of Otherness that Mavo presents here commands the viewer to

[27] Stanley, "Enlightenment Geisha", 541.
[28] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* 27.

acknowledge and assess their institutionalised perspective of the boundaries that have been crossed, exposing the self-regulation of the individual.

Though we do not know which part of the play this scene is referencing, the palpable sexual desire contained in the photograph ignored any form of expected civility. In overtly presenting sexuality between hybrid, transgender, and nonconforming bodies the performers, particularly with the apparent kiss between Takamizawa Michinao and Toda Tatsu at the bottom, denied the erasure of what was being branded as "perverted" or "abnormal" (*hentai)* sexuality. The fact that "abnormal" sexuality was increasingly linked with criminality in newspapers and popular fiction, imbued the performance with more tension as it demonstrated a disregard for the law.[29] The transformation of bodies into transgendered sex workers declares bodily autonomy beyond the regulatory praxis of social mores and legal prohibition. The stylised "*M*" on the arm embracing the painted body of Takamizawa signifies the Mavo branding, introducing a symbolic element of reality into the performance. This prevented the performance, and therefore the presentation of alterity, from being held solely in the realm of fiction.

In the 1924 Mavo performance *Prostitute Giving Birth to a Child* (Fig. 3)*,* written and directed by Murayama, Mavo continued to embrace sex work as the symbol of sub-altern experience. Apart from the opening act, much of the content of the play remains unknown. However, the resonance of this play remains significant. It begins with Shibuya Osamu performing the 'titular prostitute', experiencing a stillbirth before the baby ascends into heaven. The act of the prostitute giving birth to a still born baby is an allegorical performance of the lived experience of those rejected by Taishō society, including many Mavo collaborators. The

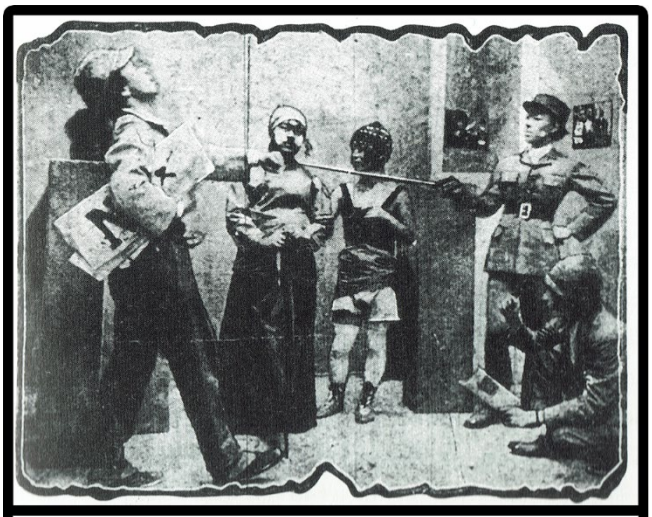

**Fig. 3** Photograph of "*Prostitute Giving Birth to a Child"* (Ko o umu inbaifu) rehearsal at Gallery Kudan, Tokyo, May 1924. Shibuya Osamu is second-left, and Murayama Tomoyoshi can be seen directing the scene kneeling on the right holding the script.

[29] Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, 316.

**Fig. 4** Performance photograph of a scene from Murayama Tomoyoshi's "*Prostitute Giving Birth to a Child"* (Ko o umu inbaifu) showing dolls being lifted up. Published in *Hōchi Shinbun,* 31st May 1925.

evocative scene displays the true hopelessness of queer futurity within Taishō Japan, where "deviant" bodies were driven into isolation or self-concealment. [30] Throughout the Taishō period motherhood was co-opted into the national mission, with the government educating women to produce future generations for the Japanese state. [31] Considering that reproduction had become a symbol of good citizenship, by presenting a sex worker enduring a stillbirth Murayama's play questions the futurity of subaltern bodies. The stillbirth scene is indicative of heteronormative oppression that denies secure futurity to any form of queerness, or otherness. [32] The state's command of heteronormative reproduction promises subjecthood as a reward for providing the state with further bodies to use and control. Since queer and othered bodies threaten the social hegemony, their bodies are denied protection or recognition. They possess no socialised future, and any attempt to manifest one is met with rejection. The death of the 'prostitute's' child represents this impossibility of future hood, which is denied to the 'prostitute' by their social value. The morbidity of the prostitute's stillbirth was undermined by the public response, who saw the scene, where five or six rubber dolls attached to a bamboo pole ascended into the air to represent the baby's ascent to heaven (Fig. 4), as highly comical. [33] This social response to the death scene belies the wider societal lack of empathy towards sub-altern body.

Shibuya's visuality in the role presented a form of complex gender hybridity; articulating a female form by stuffing their breast with newspaper, but in refusing to shave

[30] Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, 320.
[31] Donald Roden, "Taishō Culture and the Problem of Gender Ambivalence." Essay. In *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals During the Interwar Years*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 41.
[32] The production of children leads to a social acceptance that is denied to the bodies that do not. See, Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff," 29.
[33] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 229.

their moustache, co-presented 'maleness'. The installed gender binary system rejects the intermixture of its polarised categories within one body, meaning that Shibuya contested the fixity of the system.[34] Shibuya's construction of gender, featuring newspaper to mimic breasts, revealed the reductive and rudimentary nature of Taishō gender norms. In producing a rough estimation of biological determinist visuality, Shibuya proposes this visuality to be merely rudimentary and ignorant of the body as a whole. The presence of Shibuya's moustache contradicted the established symbolic register of womanhood.

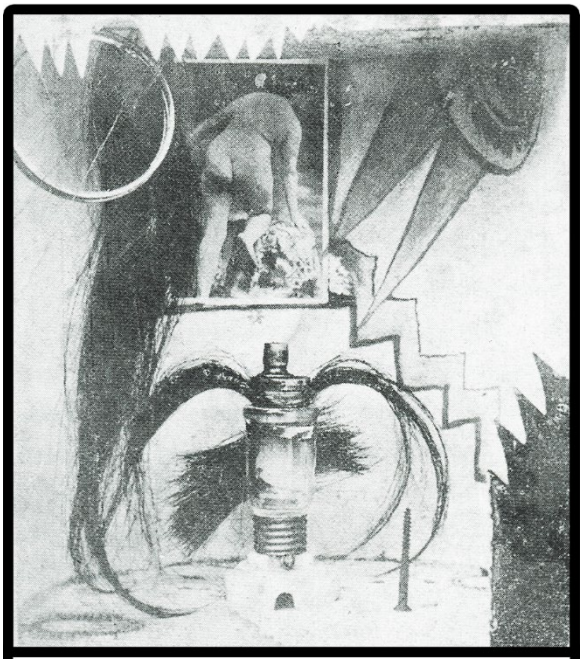

**Fig. 5** Shibuya Osamu, *Constructivist Stage Design* (Kōseishugi no butai sōchi), mixed media construction, presumed lost, c.1924.

Though the government permitted actors to "cross-dress" on stage, this social exemption of transgender embodiment was constructed to allow the continuation within Kabuki theatre for men to perform state sanctioned caricatures of womanhood.[35] The law was not designed to allow individual performers interpretation of gender construction, making Shibuya's gender presentation an act of defiance. Instead, Shibuya prioritised their own autonomy of identity construction within the role of a defined "sex worker", disavowing expected visual conformity. In their work *Constructivist Stage Design* (Fig. 5), Shibuya affixed body hair to a lightbulb to form a whimsical moustache whilst the collage of erotic photographs injects the work with further sexuality. By retaining their moustache whilst performing as the 'titular prostitute', Shibuya transposes the sexuality and individualism that they formed in *Constructivist Stage Design* into bodily form. The self-referential visuality of the moustache blurred the lines between reality beyond the stage, and the supposed fiction of the performance. Shibuya's embodiment of nonconforming gender performance heightens the subversive representation of sex work as an emblem of sub-altern identities.

[34] Nayak and Kehily, "Gender Undone," 466.
[35] Jennifer Robertson, "Theatrical Resistance, Theatres of Restraint: The Takarazuka Revue and the 'State Theatre' Movement in Japan." *Anthropological Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (1991): 424.


**Fig. 6** Cover, *Mavo,* Issue 3 (September 1924). The cover features human hair stuck down under the red tape to form a collage; censors removed the live firecrackers that had been part of the collage.

Body hair holds deeper significance for Mavo. As hair could be easily cut off and used in projects (Fig. 6), it became an important tool within Mavo to establish a tangible connection between the movement and spectators. It enabled audiences to develop a physical link with an artist's body and the authorship that that body extended over the work a viewer was engaging in; the hair imbued a sexuality into works, too, enabling viewers to possess part of an artist and fantasise about them. [36]

Importantly, Mavo used hair to signify a unity within the collective and used it to bring gender nonconformity into their daily lives. The group adopted the *o-kappa* hairstyle as a symbol of their unity, with many members adopting the bob-like fashion. The hairstyle was so intimately connected to Mavo that when it disbanded Murayama shaved their head to signify the dissolution of the movement. [37] The androgenous appearance it created caused a commotion, with the media writing extensively about it. [38] Mavo's tonsorial embodiment of gender ambiguity was often coupled with European clothing (Fig. 7), particularly the Russian style *rubashka* shirt, making their presentationism transnational as well as transgendered. Further distancing Mavo from the nationalist matrix that naturalised racial and gender conformity to the state. [39] The social significance of these identifiers is evident in the

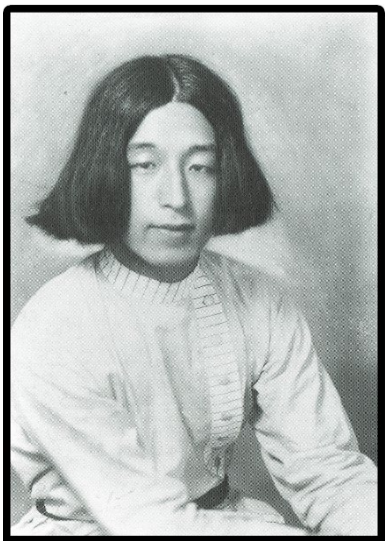

**Fig. 7** Takamizawa Michinao wearing a Russian style *rubashka* shirt and Mavoist long hair, c.1925).

[36] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 95.
[37] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 249.
[38] Murayama became so synonymous with the style that within the media they were nicknamed '*o-kappa*'.
[39] Leslie Winston, "Seeing Double: The Feminism of Ambiguity in the Art of Takabatake Kashō." In *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Kano Ayako, and Welker James. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 139.

warnings Murayama and other Mavoists received to alter their appearance during the 1923 massacres that followed the earthquake; as both the hair and shirt represented a challenge to the social order, it was feared that people sporting the fashions may be murdered as a social outsider. [40]

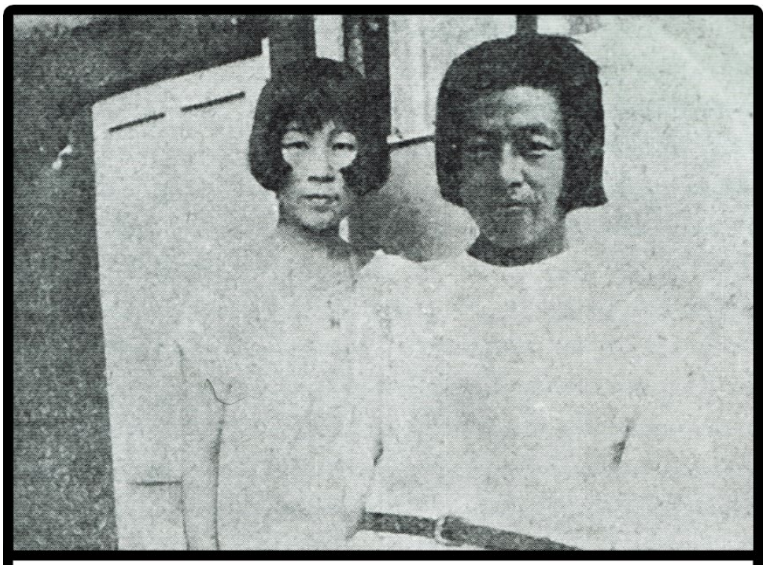

**Fig. 8** Murayama Tomoyoshi and Murayama Kazuko sporting similar bobbed hair. Captioned "couple with the same heads" (Fūfu dōtō) in Fujin Kōron, June 1926.

Androgyny, as Jennifer Robertson writes, produces a disembodied identity of an uncategorisable body that cannot be constrained by expectations of 'male' or 'female'. [41] In Murayama's own home this embodiment of androgyny was heightened by Murayama's partner, Kazuko, adopting the same hairstyle (Fig. 8). The fact that Kazuko had a successful writing and poetry career in their own right furthered the media's fascination with the couple, with Kazuko's image branded as the "masculinization of women" (*josei no danseika)*. As marriage defines bodies in relation to each other, as discussed by J. L. Austin, the visual conflation of the Murayama bodies disputes the presumption of oppositional gender roles within the institution. [42] The absence of gender markers and economic inequality within Murayama and Kazuko's relationship represented a form of marriage that disavowed patriarchal hierarchy. In denying socially conditioned normativity within marriage, the Murayama household articulated a resignification of marriage performativity that rejected the state's intervention inside matrimony. The proposed transformation of the institution was literalised through the proliferation of media interest and photographs of the couple.

[40] Weisenfled Imagining Disaster 191.
[41] Robertson, "Theatrical Resistance", 419.
[42] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London, UK: Roudedge, 1993), 224.

Mavo proposed the deregulation of the body through presenting inconsistent constructions of gendered bodies. The presentation of transgendered bodies, and gender ambiguity disrupted the naturalisation of the gender binary system within society. Disputing the homogenisation of bodily expression and the stability it claimed to confer. Shibuya's moustache and the *o-kappa* hairstyle exemplify transformations of the Mavo body into something that was neither 'man' nor 'woman', rather an uncontainable body. This body, which was in antithesis to the states programme of control, received fascination and revulsion from society in equal measures. Mavo demanded a resignification of semiotic gender expression and articulated the possibility of self-determinist bodily freedom within oppressive contexts, such as marriage. The use of sartorial and tonsorial signifiers offered a quasi-return to the indigenous Japanese gender matrix, representing an early form of decoloniality.

# REGULATING THE SPACE

## CHAPTER 2

The 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake fuelled the atmosphere of social revolution, with Mavo viewing it as an opportunity to construct an alternative society of the future. The battle cry was "From the atelier to the streets" (*atorie kara gairo e)*, with the *Chūō Shinbun* newspaper commenting that artists were producing work to restore spirit to those suffering in Tokyo. [43] The earthquake had laid waste to a Tokyo that had been constructed under the Meiji and Taishō capitalist oligarchy pressures of industrialisation and modernisation. Mavo seized the opportunity to enact complex and extensive projects in the public sphere that proposed an alternate vision for society that prioritised individual freedom. Since architecture defines the setting within which to perform, it possesses an authority over the prescription of performativity, which Mavo's work aimed to interrupt. [44] Through reconceptualising the

[43] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 80.
[44] Governments delineate the structures within which bodies are recognised. Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff," 19.

possibility of architecture and performance, Mavo sought to awaken their audience to the social pressures of the state by engaging with them directly, attempting to disrupt their spectators experience of space. By providing a visual disruption of (or within) spatial construction, the viewer would be forced to reconsider their awareness of commanded performativity.

Taishō sociologists Kon Wajirō (1888-1973) and Gonda Yasunosuke (1887-1951) both conducted ethnographic projects during the 1920s to explore the developing modernism of the era. They concluded that due to industrialised capitalism, fuelled by the state, embodiments of variability could not be accommodated. [45] The state's industrialisation programme promoted the faceless mechanisation of urban living, resulting in an anonymous consumer society that ritualised etiquette as part of a capitalist structure that maintained government control. [46] This produced an isolated populace who could only gain social acceptance by participating in homogenous mass culture, such as shopping, which was designed to subconsciously engender and control the consumer-subject. [47] This consumerist society was reviled by Mavo members, believing that the monotony of mass culture produced an unreflective and opinionless public who needed to be awaken to the system of control they were subjected to. Yanase wrote of striving to induce a "consciousness of reality" (*genjitsu ishiki*) in their

**Fig. 9** Yanase Masamu, *The Length of Capitalist Drool (Shihonka no Yodare no Nagasa),* photomontage, presumed lost. Printed in *Mavo,* No. 1 (August. 1924).

[45] Miriam Silverberg, "Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (1992): 50.
[46] Miriam Silverberg, "Constructing a New Cultural History of Prewar Japan." *Boundary 2* 18, no. 3 (1991): 79.
[47] Silverberg, "New Cultural History," 80-87.

audience that would inspire social revolution. [48] Yanase's collage *The Length of Capitalist Drool* (Fig.9) is indicative of their contempt for mass culture. By partnering inverted advertising imagery with photographs of machines Yanase likened cosmopolitan consumerism to the repetition of industrialism devoid of individual agency.

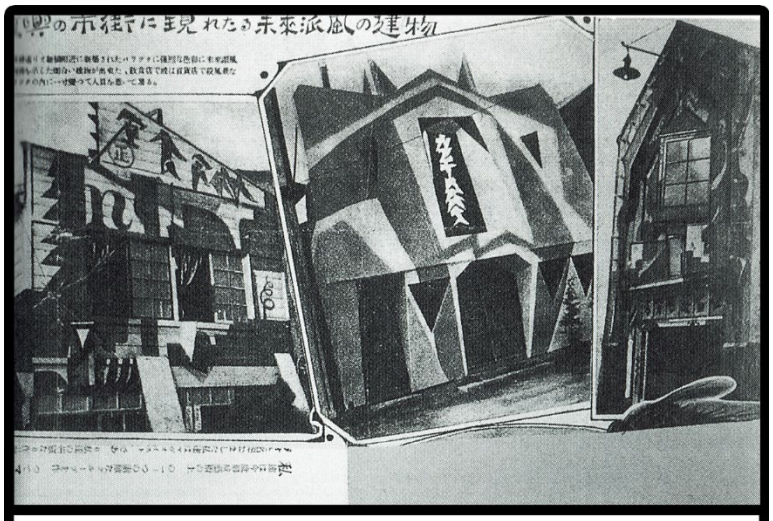

**Fig. 10** Mavo Collective, *Barracks*, Architectural decoration project, early 1924. Printed in *Chuō Shinbun* newspaper.

However, Mavo's relationship with mass culture was more complex than pure antipathy as it provided a platform within which to explore issues of daily life, and spaces to use in their protest art. One of the most ambitious Mavo works was their *Barracks* project (Fig.10), where Mavo would design facades and structures that were erected in the most damaged parts of the city. The designs featured geometric asymmetry and stylistic inconsistency, and were applied to the facades of restaurants, bookshops, and other centres of daily life. These buildings proposed an alternative visual language for the redevelopment of Tokyo, in antithesis of those who wished to rebuild Tokyo under the old model. [49] The outlandish designs transformed the building into a backdrop for modern living, forcing the public to (re)assess their presumptions of the space in which they now existed, becoming akin to a stage set. Bruce Wilshire stresses that human activities are bound by the areas within which they are performed, with the boundaries being defined by spatial, temporal, and cultural conventions. [50] The visuality of *Barracks* corrupts the cultural conventions of architecture to present an alternative setting that encourages different forms of performativity. This precludes the subconscious repetition of prescribed performance, jolting the viewer into an awareness of their autonomy.

[48] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 214.
[49] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 83.
[50] Bruce Wilshire, "The Concept of the Paratheatrical." *TDR (1988-)* 34, no. 4 (1990): 169.

Mavo's proposal of spatial alterity culminated in April 1924, with the submission of architectural models to the official "Exhibition of Plans for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital". As with most of their projects, Mavo were keen to incorporate and emphasise daily life. Here, Mavo utilised debris and materials from the earthquake to literalise the experience of the disaster within their vision. This acknowledged the loss and trauma of the earthquake in the rebuilding of Tokyo, and espoused the Hegelian principle that constructivism is born out of destruction. [51] The Mavo submissions, including Takamizawa Michinao's post-apocalyptic *Café* design (Fig. 11), were deemed some of the most interesting works in the exhibition. [52] These proposals manifest Mavo's mission to construct a world that can represent, accommodate, and recognise the lived experience of the subaltern communities, with Murayama writing that the works "destroy previous conceptions of architecture… [to] express the vision of communism… [without the] notion of "industry" controlled by capitalism". [53] This was recognised by Wajirō, who celebrated these architectural assemblages for their representation of the "consciousness and experience of the propertyless". [54] As much of Tokyo was now propertyless, the buildings represented a restructuring of Tokyo to include those who were suffering. The models reconceptualised the city to embrace the public's experience, rather than rebuild it as a space of business and faceless industry.

**Fig. 11** Takamizawa Michinao, *Café* (Kafe). Plaster model exhibited at the "Exhibition of Plans for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital", April 1924, presumed lost.

The design of the maquettes and the paintings in *Barracks* both represent forms of fantasy within reality, constructing spaces that present an alternate vision of society. As fantasy reveals what reality forecloses, the employment of fantasy in Mavo constructions

[51] Murayama was particularly vocal in their support of this Hegelian principle. Weisenfeld, "Mavo's Conscious Constructivism," 68.
[52] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 87.
[53] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 92.
[54] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 93.

contests the rigidity of state-controlled reality that conceals the possibilities it opposes.[55] This challenges the demarcation of what *is* and *is not* possible, and through the destruction of that barrier proposes an alternate. This articulation of possibility often contravenes convention and is rejected. Notwithstanding the interest they caused, Mavo's presentation of chaotic architecture received vehement criticism branding it "immoral" and corrupting the populace to inspire social disorder.[56]

After the earthquake the state regulation of bodies and space was amplified, any deviation prompted social rejection, and risked police intervention.[57] Following the earthquake members of Mavo were arrested as leftist sympathisers or for their open disobedience towards social conventions.[58] The police and vigilantes' post-earthquake reactions, in mercilessly killing and beating Korean, Chinese, and leftist citizens, heightened significance of the body. The body's visuality became the locus of integration within society, with visually conforming bodies delineating the boundary of social acceptance. This provoked Mavo to become more radical in their protest art; Murayama demanded that theatre performances needed to reflect the hardships of their audience, with the outcomes performed in their audience's workplaces, or, if a strike was occurring, works be constructed about, and performed within, that protest.[59] Murayama was reviving the potency of performance as protest, a construct that had been discouraged by the government since the late-1860s *Ee-ja-nai-ka* movement, where participants rejected nationally mandated morality through euphoric and explicit performance.[60]

Subsequently, Mavo strove to engulf their audience in an all-encompassing vision of alterity that synthesised interdisciplinary arts. Mavo worked not only on constructing disruptive spaces, but also existing disruptively within those spaces to expose the prescriptive containment of the state. By performing socially disobedient actions within dislocated spaces, Mavo actualised an alternate construction of reality beyond a mere

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[55] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* 29.
[56] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931,* 91.
[57] Harry Harootunian, "History's unwanted surplus: Japan and the Irreducible Remainder of Everyday Life", *Postcolonial Studies* 4, no. 2, (2001): 164.
[58] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 78.
[59] Eckersall, "From Liminality to Ideology", 241.
[60] George M. Wilson, "Plots and Motives in Japan's Meiji Restoration." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 3 (1983): 420.

proposal. The actualisation of fantastical installations or absurd performances prevented the naturalisation of state control in totality. The works, which often referenced sub-altern experience, refused the state silencing of alterity. [61] Refuting the state's authority to define the national body and regulate forms of subjecthood. [62] Jay Prosser proposes that governments, by inducing prohibition on socialised identities (such as homosexuality or transgender), produce a cultural unnameability that ensures a traumatic loss of selfhood as the identities can no longer be articulated. [63] By corporeally displaying alterity, as Mavo did, the body endeavours to bear its literal truth which is otherwise being denied, preventing the completion of cultural unnameability. [64]

Mavo performances were increasingly executed within public life, leaving the protected area of the theatre behind. Though the theatre would continue to be a battleground for many Mavo projects, leaving this designated zone of performativity was essential to engage more deeply with daily life, and confront a public audience with alternate bodily possibilities; for Mavo the audience's response was essential for the completion of a performance, ideally sparking a revolutionary self-awareness. [65] By incorporating the audience, or utilising undesignated theatrical spaces, Mavo blurred the divide between fantasy and reality. [66] This shattered the illusion that social elements could be bound in conventions, and therefore unveiled the fragility of the structures that claimed to bind them. In corrupting the security of the "stage", Mavo were contesting the regulation of everyday life.

[61] Allusions to homosexuality, sex work, and transgenderism were all branded "unspeakable". Only through euphemisms of "perversion" could these identities be discussed. This produced an objectification of Otherhood that could remain outside acceptability. Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 288 & 320.
[62] Eckersall, "From Liminality to Ideology", 241.
[63] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 37.
[64] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 68; see Abraham and Torok's 'Theory of Incorporation'; where bodies present prohibited identities to resolve the loss of being named. ("Introjection-Incorporation: Mourning or Melancholia," in *Psychoanalysis in France*, ed. Serge Lebovici and Daniel Widlocher (New York: International University Press, 1980), 3-16.)
[65] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 6.
[66] Wilshire, "Paratheatrical," 169.

**Fig. 12** Murayama Tomoyoshi and Okada Tasuo performing "*Dance That Cannot Be Named" (Na no Tsukerarenai Odori)* at Tokyo Imperial University Christian Youth Hall, 28th June 1924.

The antithetical visuality Mavo adopted in public spaces contested the state's symbolic register and questioned its authority to limit the identities it permitted to exist as accepted citizens. The presentation of transgendered bodies or gender ambiguity, as discussed in Chapter 1, contrived the 1873 Tokyo Misdemeanour Code that prohibited bodies from presenting as a gender that differed from their assigned sex, yet the Code permitted cross-dressing on stage. Since Mavo disrupted the specificity of the "stage" the Code's authority was compromised, and the ability to police it doubted. The performance *Dance That Cannot Be Named* (Fig. 12) demonstrated this disruption. For the performance Murayama and Okada Tatsuo adopted transgender presentism, choosing to dance in tunic dresses, stockings, and high heeled shoes, whilst Takamizawa Michinao produced the sonic accompaniment on "sound constructors".[67] The dance defied any form of conformity, with Murayama and Okada gyrating without concern for form, structure, or dance conventions. Reviews noted the sensationalist response it caused in the audience, with the viewers becoming "extremely excited".[68] It is not described how this excitement manifested itself, however, in producing any form of audience response would have been the goal of Mavo. Their mission was to engulf the audience and blur their conception of performativity, provoking the audience to enter into their unregulated world.[69]

[67] The "sound constructors" were instruments made from found objects (oil cans, logs, tin cans etc) that were rubbed together to produce sounds.
[68] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 235.
[69] At a performance in 1925, Mavo even pelted the audience with tangerine rind so extreme was their desire to provoke their spectators.

The scrambling of conventions, be they gender markers, dance structure, or sound creation, undermines any form of system that is premised on strict regulation.[70] Mavo performances were often unrehearsed to harness the potential for fluidity within the works, creating a space for reflexive interaction between the audience and participants that would reinforce the scrambling of codified behaviour and further blur any metaphysical boundaries. Mavo continually disrupted the formalisation of space, both the construction of it and the performativity within it. In performance and architecture, Mavo employed fantasy to propose an inclusive reimagining of society, free from the oppressive commands of the state. As the constraints on the body increased after the 1923 earthquake, the body became the vessel for Mavo to challenge the operational reach of laws and social conventions. The simultaneous acts of disruption, embodied through an interdisciplinary performance magnified the proposal of an alternative reality (e.g., corrupting the expected regulation of sound and dance production in one performance). It produced a similar depth of resonance within the Mavo fantasy as the literal reality. This mimicked and subverted the state's matrix of performativity, challenging the system's very authority to actualise itself.

[70] Robertson, "Theatrical Resistance", 419.

# DEREGULATING THE SELF

## CHAPTER 3

As Taishō officials felt that the national mission took precedence over personal pleasure, sexuality became a politically charged discourse. The social critic Murobuse Kōshin's (1892-1970) proclaimed that "every step toward civilisation was a step towards contempt for the body". [71] This encapsulated the government's control of sexual and personal freedom. Mavo constructed works that rejected this contempt, visually this was conveyed through overt eroticism that connected sexual freedom to personal liberation. Works that incorporated masturbation and nudity directly confronted the censorship of the body's naturality. The Mavo output presented bodily transformation and exploration as essential to discover and assert autonomy, transforming the physical body into the locus of protest. Mavo embraced the anarchic philosophy of Max Stirner who prioritised the autonomy of the individual as the ultimate weapon against the state, writing that "My own

[71] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 241.

will is the state's destroyer".[72] By constantly developing and transforming the self Stirner proposed that the body would develop an absolute knowledge of the self and therefore freedom from state control. The flux of the body would dissolve the rigid conditioning of social regulations to produce a uniqueness of the self that would be undefinable and therefore uncontainable in society's boundaries.[73]

Yanase's sketch of a police-officer gleefully stabbing a dog with a bayonet (Fig. 13), encapsulated the institutional resentment against bodies that were deemed lesser. These lesser bodies often signified the limitations of state control, producing a reaction of aggression towards the object of alterity. In their frequent presentation of bodily alterity, Mavo returned the institutional contempt for queer/other bodies in their public acceptance of difference, confronting the interventions that were employed to shame and threaten their bodies and negating them.[74] Mavo's embodiment of alterity simultaneously asserted the existence of subaltern bodies and promoted the socially degenerative act of individualism. As most performances were unrehearsed the interactions between members were instituted by the individuals, beyond their representative value as an allegory for abjection. This enabled Mavo performativity to act as a protest for the oppressed, whilst operating as an act of introspection for the individual into their own construction of selfhood. To seek for a true self within one's body, particularly through 'using' and 'enjoying' the body anarchically denied the commodification of the body by an external authority.[75]

**Fig. 13** Yanase Masamu, sketch of police in Tokyo after the Great Kantō Earthquake, Late 1923. Ink on paper.

[72] The seven editions of Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (first published 1844) that were published in Japan between 1900 and 1929 indicates the social importance their philosophy possessed. (Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "The Revival of Max Stirner." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (1974): 324); Paul Thomas, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner." *Political Theory* 3, no. 2 (1975): 167.
[73] Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "Max Stirner as Hegelian." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 4 (1985): 609.
[74] Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff," 27
[75] Whitlow, " Heresy of Self-Abundance," 286.

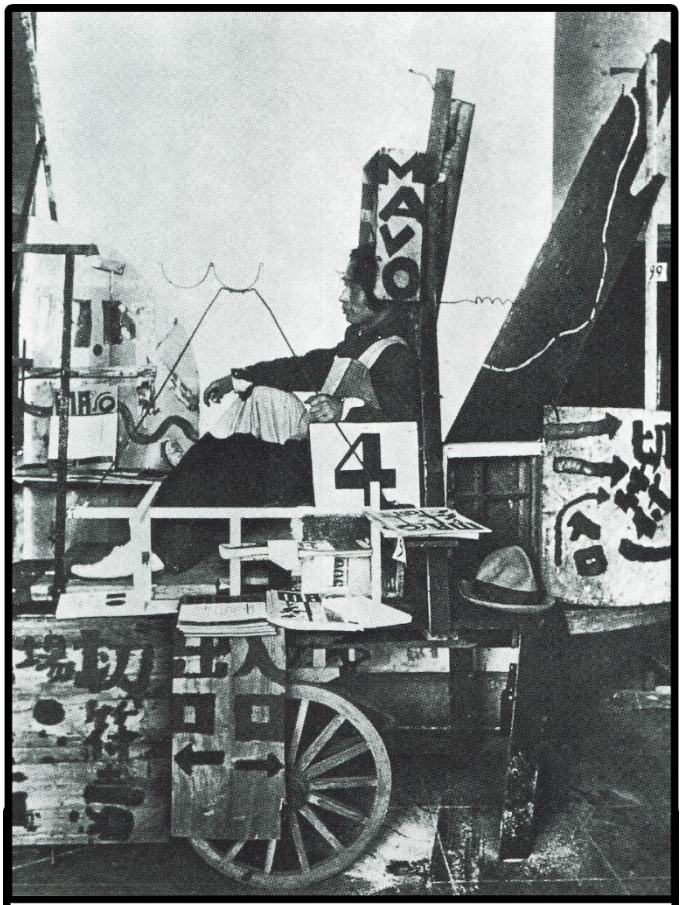

**Fig. 14** Okada Tatsuo sat in *Gate and Moving Ticket-Selling Booth* (Mon to Ken idō Kippu Uriba), 1925. Mixed media mobile sculpture.

The policing of individualism spurred artists to reassert the dominance of humanity, and the natural body over the mechanisation of daily life.[76] Okada Tatsuo produced *Gate and Moving Ticket-Selling Booth* (Fig. 14) to rupture the mechanisation of daily life through parody. Okada constructed a surreal moveable booth with discarded mechanic parts that was to be wheeled around Tokyo to sell tickets to exhibitions. The mechanic appearance of the work served no function towards the act of selling tickets, with the transaction being completed by the human that operated the machine; painted black, a human hand would appear from within to conduct the exchange. This returned the transaction to centre on human interaction, rather than the facelessness of the ticket machines that were littering the city. The absurdity of the booth confronted the unspoken processes machines integrate into society, particularly those of homogeneity and manufactured efficiency. The human element subverted the automation of everyday life, breaking down the surety of the outcome of the interaction. By challenging the fixity of the social exchange between humans and machines, Okada reintroduced flux into the everyday. [77] The mobility of the creation enabled Okada to transport their social interruption across Tokyo, ignoring the institutionalised physical and metaphysical containments of Otherness.

[76] Naoki Yamamoto, "The Machine Aesthetic and Proletarian Realism." In *Dialectics without Synthesis: Japanese Film Theory and Realism in a Global Frame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 74.
[77] Stepelevich, "Stirner as Hegelian," 613.

Okada revealed to the press that the occupant of the machine was able to remove their clothes within the booth to be naked.[78] Despite the nude body being obscured within the booth, the machine was enabling Okada to reject propriety and interact with the public domain whilst nude. By imbuing the booth with the potential for nudity it became the site of erotic fantasy, transforming a mundane action into a sexually charged human interaction. This element is essential for the disruptive potential of the work as Okada thought sexual desire lay at the core of anarchic social change.[79] Prominent anti-government social critic Tosaka Jun (1900-45) concurred, likening the government control of public morals to thought control, with the state intruding into the personal realm.[80] This amplified the transgressive power of overt sexuality to subvert government regulation. The booth, with its purposeless machinery, ruptured the guise of efficiency industrialisation imbued into machinery, returning the consumer back to their bodily urges and denying state authority over the self.

The elevation of bodily autonomy, reified through sexual liberation, over industrialisation can be seen in Yabashi Kimimaro's *My Onanism* (Fig. 15). Circulated in the fourth issue of *Mavo Magazine*, the work displays an assemblage of varying industrial materials interrupted by a white woman's sock. Through invoking onanism in the title of the work, Yabashi was deliberately disobeying Taishō civility. The title automatically encourages the sexualisation of the work's contents. The sock, like the potential for nudity within Okada's booth, prompts the viewer to imagine the body that discarded it, inviting the fetishization of the object. As this act of constructing an imagined body is mirrored in

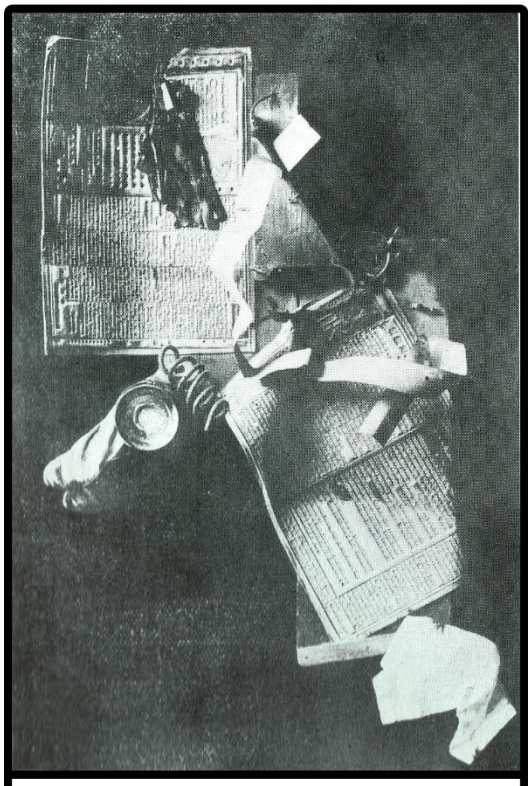

**Fig. 15** Yabashi Kimimaro, *My Onanism* (Watashi no Onani), 1924. Mixed media assemblage, presumed lost. Photograph published in *Mavo,* No. 4 (Sept. 1924).

[78] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 110.
[79] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 241.
[80] Elise K. Tipton, "Cleansing the Nation: Urban Entertainments and Moral Reform in Interwar Japan." *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2008): 707.

masturbation, where an individual fantasises their body as or with another, the sock fills the assemblage of otherwise mechanic material with human desire. The anonymity within the work acknowledges that the construction of sexual desire is unique to each observer, built up over a lifetime of experiences. By disembodying the figure of sexuality, the owner of the sock, Yabashi allows a phantasmic embodiment of sexuality to be constructed from the viewer's individual experience. The assemblage operates as a social mirror, reflecting back the construction of bodily fantasy to the viewer; this returns the Mavo discourse to Hegelianism, which suggests that self-awareness is discovered only through the reflection of the self in the Other, in this case the Other being the disobedience of erotic fantasy.[81] The soft sculptural sock sits between two bent and unusable newspaper printing plates that produce oppositional visual tension in their rigidity. The contrasts between the objects signify the contentious presence of sexuality within a society dominated by the state's industrialisation programme. Due to the government's rigid control and censorship of the media, the broken plates can be seen as Yabashi's disregard for the production of news, with the sock representing humanity and opposition to the social regulations perpetuated in controlled news.[82]

During the Taishō period masturbation was considered antithetical to society as it was a proclamation of autonomy. It demonstrated the bodies potential to fulfil its own bodily desire, denying the need to engage in collectivist activity. Masturbation contravened the state's command of reproduction and civility, prompting the act to be categorised as deviant.[83] For Mavo, who were against the proliferation of heteronormative civilisation, masturbation became a symbolic act of defiance against nationalism.[84] The politicisation of masturbation in art culminated in the writings of fellow anarchist and Mavoist Hagiwara Kyōjirō (1899-1938) who hypothesised that "art is human masturbation" as the use of imagination is engaged in both autoerotic actions and art production.[85] As masturbation

[81] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* 147.
[82] Silverberg, "New Cultural History," 68.
[83] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 244; Freud's assertion that masturbation was in antithesis to civilisation may have encouraged this decision, Thomas W Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 360.
[84] Satoshi Nomoto, "Jii to Sentan: "Mavo" to sono Shūken" (Masturbation and the Avant-garde: "Mavo" and their Reach, trans. by Joe Nickols (2021)), *Ritsumeikan Language and Cultures Research Journal 22* (2011): 54.
[85] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 243.

unites the mind and body in an act of self-service removed from the external world, physically calling forth the unique desires of the internal mind, it is the ultimate investigation of the self. From an anarchic perspective, acts that recognise the uniqueness of self, or asserts ownership of the self, pose the ultimate threat to state ownership of the body; masturbation as an act of pleasure for its own sake effects this self-authority. [86]

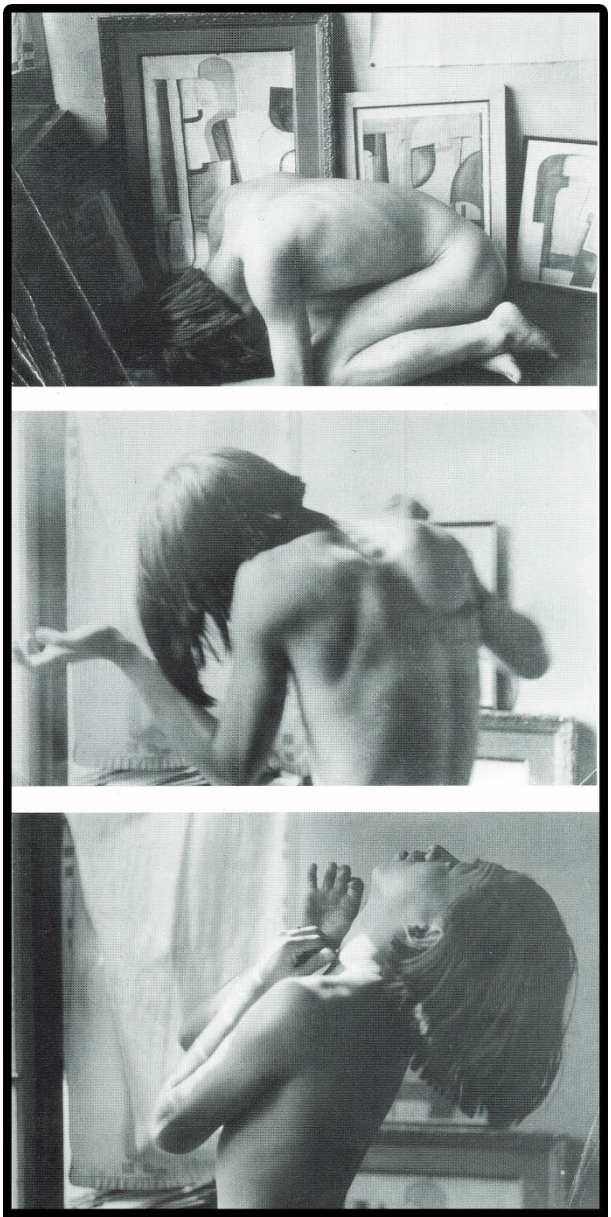

**Fig. 16** Murayama Tomoyoshi, *Dirty-Earthy Dance* (Kitanai Odori), c.1924. Photographs of dance performance.

Murayama's photographic series *Dirty-Earthy Dance* (Fig. 16), displaying Murayama's body in the throes of an ecstatic nude performance, embraced the public disavowal of sexuality, and visualised an embodiment of an emancipated self. The singularity of Murayama's nudity, and the sensuality imbued through the postures and flowing hair saturate the imagery with autoeroticism. The onanistic tonality asserts the images as investigations into a selfhood beyond state control. Though nude, Murayama's face and body are never fully exposed, maintaining an ambiguity that denies direct recognition of "Murayama" directly to their body. Butler writes that by being "called" forth by others, or society, assigns a controlled subjecthood to the body, which forms the identity of the individual externally, simultaneously erasing the physical, psychological, and emotional experience of the body. [87] Murayama,

[86] Though neither Stirner or Hegel directly reference masturbation in their work, the references to bodily enjoyment and participating in actions for the sake of the *self* would not deny autoerotism as an act of self-discovery. (Stepelevich, "Stirner as Hegelian," 611).
[87] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 121.

through the ambiguousness of their body and face within the images denies the possibility of being "called" into society through visual recognition as themselves. In denying appellation, Murayama denies their subjecthood within society.

**Fig. 17** Kinoshita Shūichirō, *R.G...,* sculptural performance of painted bodies at an exhibition in Ginza, May 1925.

As Taishō sexologists asserted that women's independent sexuality was an "abnormal sexual desire", visualising sexuality within bodies that were not identifiably "male" threatened the established social structure. [88] In blocking the viewer access to their genitals, despite presenting a completely nude body, Murayama denies the containment of their body within a gendered matrix. The sexual and gender projections of the audience cannot be applied, instead the sensuality of the skin dominates and titillates the viewer. The centrality of skin within the photographs, seen undulating in the varying poses, is significant as the skin operates as the mediating surface between the internal and external. [89] Skin can receive, uphold, and represent projections of identity, but it can also be marked by physical experience, making skin a psychosomatic surface. Anzeinu's theory of skin ego purports that ownership of skin, not just having skin, emancipates the internal self. [90] Since public nudity was pathologized, Murayama's naked body can be read a proclamation of body ownership beyond reproach of the state. Other Mavo works, such as *R.G...* (Fig. 17), included altering the familiar appearance of the body through painting onto skin, literalising alterity directly upon a body. In producing an imagined skin, it formulates a new framework of bodily introspection for the occupant of the body, offering a new perspective on bodily belonging. The body is, therefore, deregulated from the surety of the state's control as it is indefinable

[88] Weisenfeld, *Mavo: 1905-1931*, 242.
[89] Prosser, *Second Skins*, 72.
[90] Prosser, *Second Skins*, 73.

within the state's parameters. Similarly, the intimacy of Murayama's photographs emphasises the skin as a vessel of personal psychological experience, rather than purely as a definable physical body that receives projections of personhood.

The paintings surrounding Murayama in the photographs offer an alternate point of identity recognition beyond the body. The paintings, by Murayama, are physical manifestations of Murayama's internal perspective that can signify the identity of their maker. By appearing nude in front of their own work, Murayama synthesises the external physical body with the outcome of the internal mind. Murayama wrote on the use of sex and sexuality within art, noting that "sexual potency is the basis of art", which evokes a personal connection between the presented autoerotic sexualised body and the paintings. [91] For Murayama true creativity is produced through sexual liberation, which is only possible beyond the control of the state. The nudity of the body coupled with the plainness of the setting beyond the paintings removes the external world from interfering with Murayama's self-representation. The photographs display a world that is inhabited, defined, and constructed exclusively by Murayama. The photographs deny the body's physiognomy total authority to define the self. Rather, the mind, and products of the mind are given equal value in the assertion of identity. By interfacing the body and mind within the photographs Murayama visualises a complete self. It encapsulates Stirner's construction of the anarchic body, producing a self that is not constructed by or for mankind, but exists for its own sake as a unique self: "I do not develop mankind or man, but as *I*, I develop myself". [92]

The potency of sexuality endeared it as a tool of social revolution to Mavo, who used it consciously to disrupt the constraints that modern society installed upon the body. By documenting, performing, and presenting overt sexuality Okada, Yabashi, and Murayama reassert the primacy of the human body to experience and produce an individual self. Their sexualised works enter into a reflexive dialogue with the viewer, legitimising their transgressions of erotic fantasy. The public visibility of eroticism proclaimed an authority over their internal self: compelling their audience to call themselves forth rather than be formed by external forces. Mavo reconceptualised the body as a mutable object defined by

[91] In the essay *Love and Art History* Murayama asserted the centrality of sexual potency within art, writing that "sex… stands at the beginning of art". Nomoto, "Masturbation and the Avant-garde," 53.
[92] Stepelevich, "Stirner as Hegelian," 607.

the self, thereby denying the inscription or projection of state sanctioned fixed identities onto the individual. Their everchanging bodies encapsulated an anarchic journey of the self, producing a state of self-consciousness through intimate interaction with the full potential of the body. Mavo presented bodies, both singularly and collectively, that flouted the parameters of the state's definition of subject, and therefore rejected its absolute domination. Their open existence as obscenely Other only magnified their disruption, publicly exposing the limitations of the authoritarian control.

# CONCLUSION

Mavo, as a collective, represented a significant threat to the Taishō state's programme of bodily control. The group's consistent transgression of social and legal conventions rebuked the authority of the state. Particularly through their use of transgender or gender ambiguity Mavo rejected the naturalisation of biological determinism. In actualising difference, either spatial or performative, the collective brought an alternate construction of society into the rigorously regulated reality of Taishō Japan. The sexualised nature of much of their work refuted the state's intrusion into the private realm of the individual, denying the "thought control" that public morality instituted. Their revolutionary practice concurrently represented the often-erased experience of sub-altern communities and encouraged individualism. The collective embodied a proposal of a society that could incorporate the demands of the individual and those of the collective. This encapsulated the anarchic utopia, a society built upon respected selfhood beyond controlled subjecthood defined by the state.

The Great Kantō Earthquake, and the violence that ensued, including attacks on the Mavo body directly, enhanced the collective's desire for social transformation. Despite the danger to their own bodies, the collective acted as social critics, holding up a mirror to the

state oppression. Within their performative works, the group would regularly mimic the reductivity contained within social conventions by demonstrating the full and fluid potential of humanity. This open defiance of state control manifested though social deviancy, forged figures that could not be contained within the regulatory system. The interdisciplinary methodology of the movement actualised a complete presentation of alterity that would engulf a spectator, loudly contesting the silencing of nonconformity. As social critics the collective was prolific, and a consideration of their provocative articles and writings that they produced alongside their art practice, which sits beyond the purview of this dissertation, would emphasise their all-encompassing radicalism.

This assessment of Mavo sheds new light on Japanese queer history, with their work encapsulating an early form of anti-heteronormativity protest. The collective's grounding in anarchy, similarly, enables the contemplation of queer anarchy within queer theory, which has for much of the 20th century been based upon Marxism. In employing Stirner and Hegel in their own theoretical discourse, the members formulated anarchic expressions of the queer body. The constantly shifting Mavo queer body, which often obscures its own familiarity, encapsulates the Hegelian principle that liberation of the self is only facilitated through the reflection of the self in the unknown. As Mavo transformed their body with regularity, the self and the Other were often contained and reflected within a singular body. These elements open up new avenues of enquiry within queer theory that fall outside the scope of this work.

Though the maverick group disbanded in 1926, this in no way undermines the significance and importance of their work. As this dissertation has shown, Mavo did, as they proclaimed they would in their manifesto, stand "at the cutting edge", slicing through the metaphysical fabric of Taishō society, attempting to revolutionise it through their art.

# ILLUSTRATIONS

All images sourced from Gennifer Weisenfeld's *Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1905-1931*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

**Fig. 1** Yanase Masamu, *Mavo Gathering,* cartoon drawing (Manga), 1923. Published in *Mavo,* No. 2 (September. 1924).

**Fig. 2** Mavo members performing *Dance of Death* (Shi no buyō) from the third act of Frank Wedekind's play *Death and Devil.* Photograph published in *Mavo,* No.3 (Sept. 1924).

**Fig. 3** Photograph of "*Prostitute Giving Birth to a Child"* (Ko o umu inbaifu) rehearsal at Gallery Kudan, Tokyo, May 1924.

**Fig. 4** Performance photograph of a scene from Murayama Tomoyoshi's "*Prostitute Giving Birth to a Child"* (Ko o umu inbaifu), Published in *Hōchi Shinbun,* 31st May 1925.

**Fig. 5** Shibuya Osamu, *Constructivist Stage Design* (Kōseishugi no butai sōchi), mixed media construction, presumed lost, c.1924.

**Fig. 6** Cover, *Mavo,* Issue 3 (September 1924).

**Fig. 7** Takamizawa Michinao wearing a Russian style *rubashka* shirt and Mavoist long hair, c.1925).

**Fig. 8** Murayama Tomoyoshi and Murayama Kazuko sporting similar bobbed hair. Captioned "couple with the same heads" (Fūfu dōtō) in Fujin Kōron, June 1926.

**Fig. 9** Yanase Masamu, *The Length of Capitalist Drool (Shihonka no Yodare no Nagasa),* photomontage, presumed lost. Printed in *Mavo,* No. 1 (August. 1924).

**Fig. 10** Mavo Collective, *Barracks*, Architectural decoration project, early 1924. Printed in *Chuō Shinbun* newspaper, 6th March 1924.

**Fig. 11** Takamizawa Michinao, *Café* (Kafe). Plaster model exhibited at the "Exhibition of Plans for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital", April 1924, presumed lost.

**Fig. 12** Photograph of Murayama Tomoyoshi and Okada Tasuo performing "*Dance That Cannot Be Named" (Na no Tsukerarenai Odori)* at Tokyo Imperial University Christian Youth Hall, 28th June 1924.

**Fig. 13** Yanase Masamu, sketch of police in Tokyo after the Great Kantō Earthquake, Late 1923. Ink on paper.

**Fig. 14** Okada Tatsuo sat in *Gate and Moving Ticket-Selling Booth* (Mon to Ken idō Kippu Uriba), 1925. Mixed media mobile sculpture.

**Fig. 15** Yabashi Kimimaro, *My Onanism* (Watashi no Onani), 1924. Mixed media assemblage, presumed lost. Photograph published in *Mavo,* No. 4 (Sept. 1924).

**Fig. 16** Murayama Tomoyoshi, *Dirty-Earthy Dance* (Kitanai Odori), c.1924. Photographs of dance performance.

**Fig. 17** Kinoshita Shūichirō, *R.G...,* sculptural performance of painted bodies at an exhibition in Ginza, May 1925.

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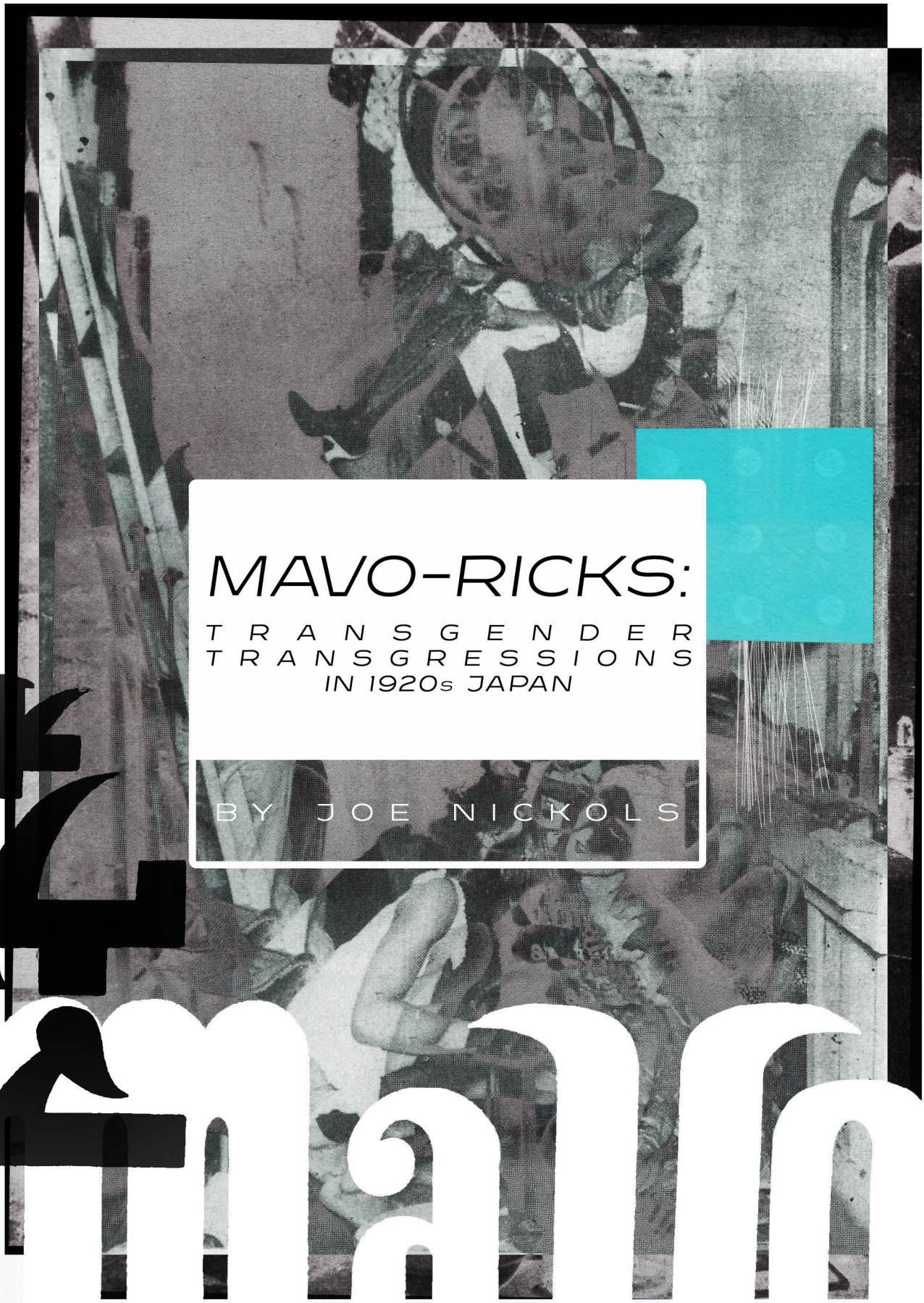

# MAVO-RICKS:

## TRANSGENDER TRANSGRESSIONS IN 1920s JAPAN

BY JOE NICKOLS