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FEBRUARY 2013 INTERNATIONAL

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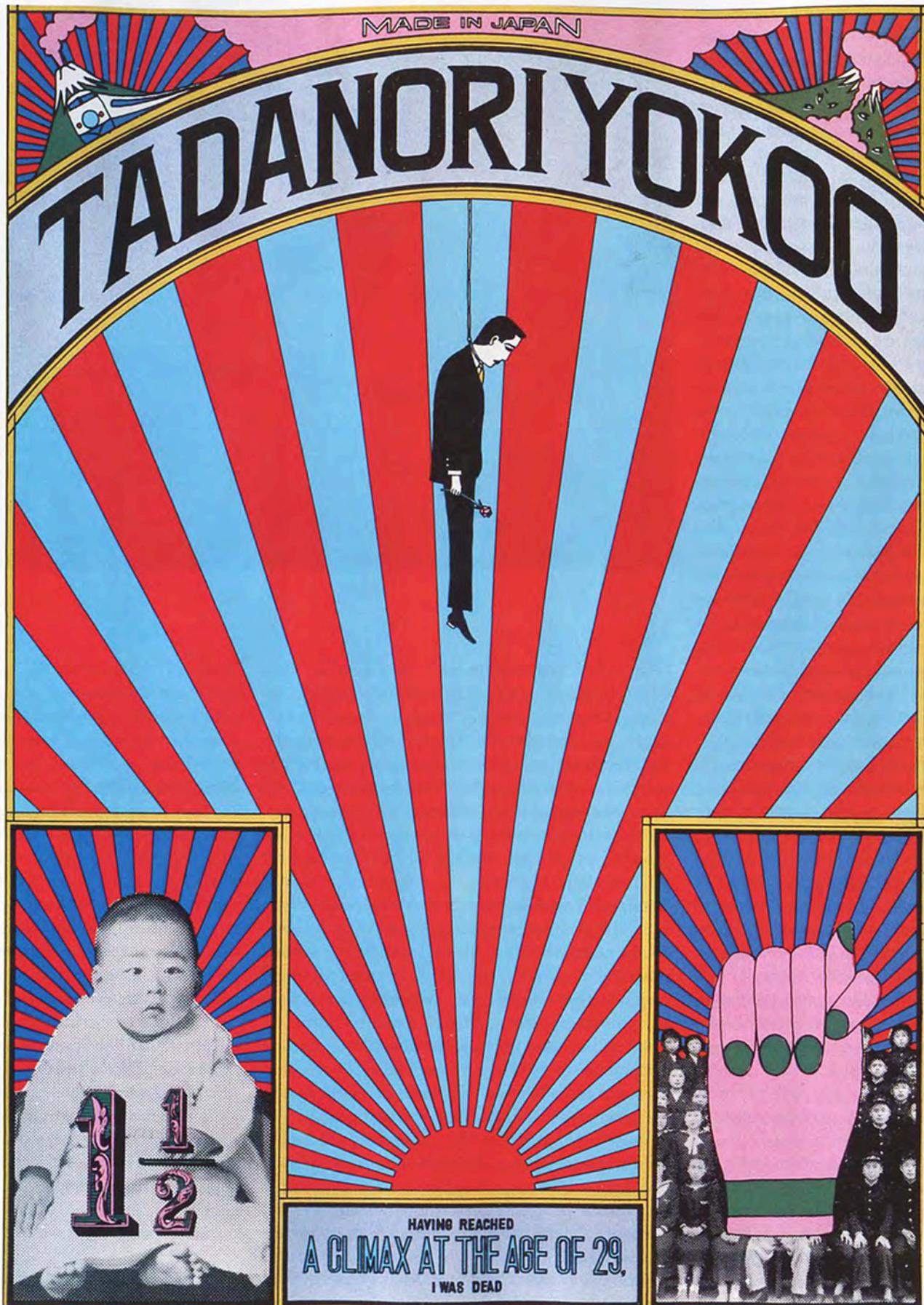


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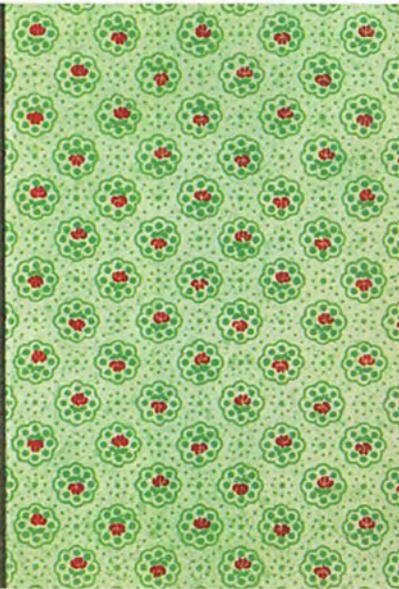
Ridgely, Steven. "Total Immersion: Steven Ridgely on the Design of Tadanori Yokoo." *Artforum*, February 2013.

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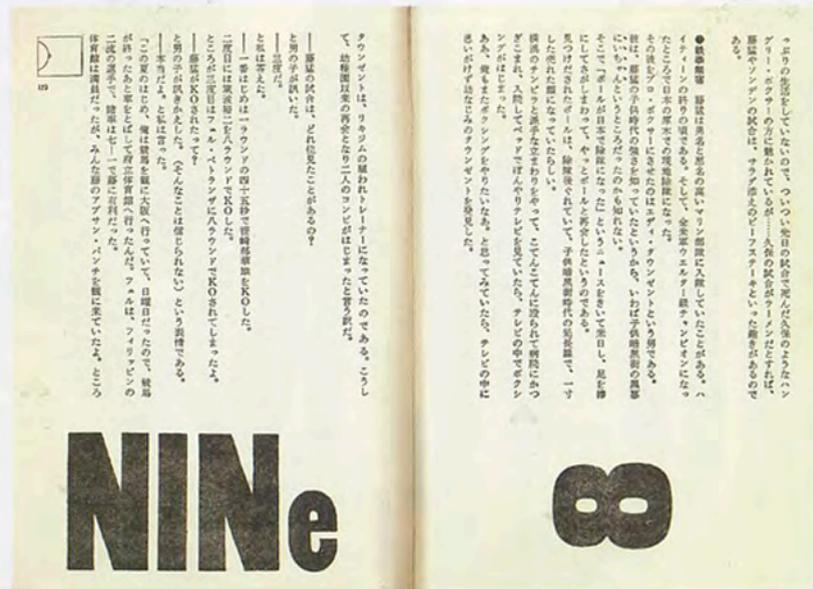
This page: Tadanori Yokoo, *Made in Japan, Tadanori Yokoo, Having Reached a Climax at the Age of 29, I Was Dead*, 1965, silk screen on paper, 43 x 31 1/2".

Opposite page: Four spreads from Tadanori Yokoo and Shuji Terayama's *Throw Away Your Books, Let's Get into the Streets* (Haga Shoten, 1967).



Total Immersion

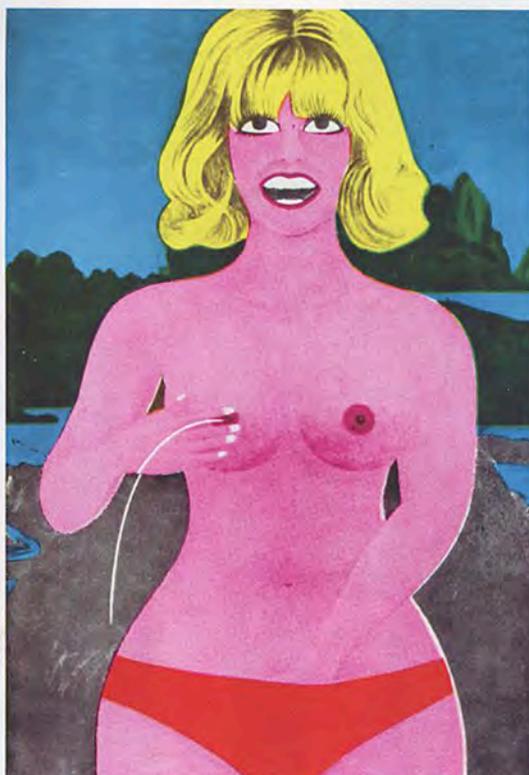
STEVEN RIDGELY ON THE DESIGNS OF TADANORI YOKOO



Ridgely, Steven. "Total Immersion: Steven Ridgely on the Design of Tadanori Yokoo." *Artforum*, February 2013.



Above: Dust jacket (front and back) of Tadanori Yokoo and Shūji Terayama's *Throw Away Your Books, Let's Get into the Streets* (Haga Shoten, 1967).



Below: Dust jacket (verso) of Tadanori Yokoo and Shūji Terayama's *Throw Away Your Books, Let's Get into the Streets* (Haga Shoten, 1967).



ABBIE HOFFMAN'S 1971 GUIDE TO YIPPIE ACTIVISM famously encouraged readers to "steal this book," but a curious volume published in Japan four years earlier, *Throw Away Your Books, Let's Get into the Streets*, may have done Hoffman one better. A collaboration between two figures central to Tokyo's cultural underground—designer Tadanori Yokoo and poet, critic, and theater and film impresario Shūji Terayama—*Throw Away Your Books* was radical even if it was not, in any straightforward sense, a handbook for revolution. Its radicality was a function of its design—and as such, it offers a unique window onto Yokoo's work. True, Yokoo is best known not for book design but for his 1960s film and theater posters. And for good reason: With their teeming yet precisely calibrated compositions and high-key palettes, these works seize the eye tenaciously, drawing it into rococo fields of appropriated imagery, visual jokes, and fanciful typography. Together such tropes forge an unmistakable signature style. Less known are projects like *Throw Away Your Books* and Yokoo's contribution to the Textiles Pavilion at Expo '70, where he ventured into architecture. Yet precisely because these undertakings constitute departures for him, they open up opportunities for understanding the breadth of his practice. Considered in relation to his own commentary on his work, such projects cast light on a figure who made a significant contribution to the '60s global discourse around art and commodity and who presciently grasped the role of design in reconfiguring the subject-consumer.

The title *Throw Away Your Books* alludes to two important texts: André Gide's 1897 prose poem *The Fruits of the Earth* (whose narrator, in the afterword, repeatedly demands that readers "jette mon livre" in order to achieve liberation from the guide to liberation they have just read) and a revolutionary 1911 tract by Japanese philosopher Ōdō Tanaka called "Out from Your Studies and into the Streets." So why would this matter in 1967? Both Gide and revolution were back in the air again in Japan, where the radicalization of universities had started earlier (and would last longer and operate at a higher intensity) than the showdowns in Berkeley and Paris. While for Japan, 1969 would be the year of barricades, the tendency to hole up on campus and struggle to hold territory in university buildings was in place by 1966. The grievances included tuition hikes and national complicity with aggression against Vietnam, and the protests were invigorated by the memory of failed mass demonstrations against the Security Treaty with the US in 1960 and by Japan's wedge position between Cold War powers. The countercultural response to this struggle was often a suggestion that students simply walk away from



Two spreads from Tadanori Yokoo and Shūji Terayama's *Throw Away Your Books, Let's Get into the Streets* (Haga Shoten, 1967). Left: Table of contents.

Yokoo presciently grasped the role of design in reconfiguring the subject-consumer.

the universities rather than try to reform or even destroy them.

Yet if students picking up *Throw Away Your Books* expected political exhortations, they were likely disappointed. Indeed, the book's appearance does not suggest it is the work of radical pamphleteers. The dust jacket is printed on both sides, as though to give readers multiple options for displaying the book's exterior. When the jacket is right side out, the front cover (bound on the right side, for right-to-left reading) features Yokoo's signature disembodied mouth (which he effectively trademarked in Japan several years before the Rolling Stones made a similar image their logo), as well as an ironic appropriation of the wartime rising-sun flag in the background—another common motif in his work. The back cover is a double parody of Warhol's Marilyn Monroe prints and of the much-travestied painting *Gabrielle d'Estrées and One of Her Sisters*, ca. 1594, which Yokoo had riffed on earlier in a poster for a butoh dance performance by the famous Tatsumi Hijikata. The alternative cover, with the dust jacket turned inside out, features lipstick kisses showered on each of the Beatles. In 1969, Yokoo would pen an essay claiming that if world revolution

were going to come in the '60s, it would be via a pop group like the Beatles: They already had a global following, so the sleeper-cell structure was in place.

Opening the book, readers find the table of contents formatted in the style of a monthly magazine. Yokoo's images for the cover and dust jacket are given title-author credit in exact parallel to Terayama's written contributions, not a common practice, and each subsection of the rest of the text is listed with Terayama as author. Most of this material consists of reprints of Terayama's work published in various newspapers and magazines since the early '60s (including several of Terayama's "In Praise of Running Away from Home" essays, which apparently inspired a number of actual runaways). Making over the book into a magazine format might be read as an ironic attempt to return these writings to their original ephemeral status.

At the end of the table of contents, we are encouraged to take advantage of the dual-sided dust jacket as well as to enjoy Yokoo's flip-book animation, printed in the upper left corner of each verso page. The DIY animation counts down from sixty-nine to zero, then shows a finger pressing a woman's nipple as if it were a button, which detonates three

explosions (perhaps H-bombs from the US, USSR, and newly nuclear China) that crack Earth into tiny fragments: END. The animation runs from the back of the book to its front, counter to the text—it ends where the book begins. The formal play continues as the ink color changes to red for about thirty pages, then back to black—a shift that seemingly mimics weekly manga practice. The text is peppered with fake advertisements: a cosmetic surgeon offering to cure underarm odor, a "Marxist-Keynesian" horse-racing magazine.

Near the end, the type shifts orientation for one segment, forcing readers to turn the book ninety degrees to continue reading. Every axis by which one might orient oneself to a book has thus been undermined: The flip-book cancels the unidirectional progression from beginning to end, the shift in typographic direction swings the vertical axis to the horizontal, and the double-sided dust jacket suggests a disarrangement of the relationship of inside to outside. Such gestures recall the dizzying axonometry of El Lissitzky's publications, but if Lissitzky revealed the inescapably ideological nature of form while disrupting traditional readerly and perspectival orientation (as Yve-Alain Bois has shown) with distinctly

mock mainstream taste. But Yokoo's irony does not perform that kind of separation—it can be better understood as an affiliative maneuver that draws him closer to his subject and to his audience. If the flickering, nickelodeon-like flip-book and the many allusions to comics situate *Throw Away Your Books* in an unmistakably demotic register, this chimes with Yokoo's larger counterintuitive operation: He used camp and its leveling effects to communicate. And in turn, he communicated in order to heighten the consciousness of his audience and clarify the connections among ideas.

TERAYAMA AND YOKOO'S CRITIQUE of the book is paralleled by comments Yokoo made during an interview two years later. The remarks were published in the January 1969 issue of a short-lived but important journal, the *Design Review* (*Dezain hihyō*), that ran from late 1966 through 1970 under the leadership of graphic designer Kiyoshi Awazu. As Yokoo recounts his career, which began while he was still in high school and included a stint at the stylish and influential Nippon Design Center (NDC), he traces

an internal conflict and its resolution: At first, he says, he was ashamed to put his talents to work for his clients' profits, but after growing disenchanted with the NDC's elitist modernist aesthetic, he embraced the notion that design should reflect the desires of the public—and this led him to approach the idea of design-as-commodity with a fresh perspective and no shame.

The result of this return to commodified design was that Yokoo could claim, without remorse, to be a "commercial designer." The wounds caused by acknowledging this position were severe, he claims, but nevertheless, "I was able to dissect the situation using those wounds, and found within myself a resistance against the power of this mysterious thing called commerce. My target became perfectly clear. I think the group of designers who wear the label of 'graphic designer' with such pride these days are aware only of the realm of design itself, so they're only grasping a fragment of the massive beast of commercialism. They stand at the foot of this monster with zero sense of danger." Yokoo's primary objection to this limitation is the way it

makes designers "blind to reality" and disconnected from the lived experience of the public. They are made blind, in other words, to the dangers of the monster—but Yokoo's exit and return to self-consciously commercial design kept him aware of the risk of his position.

Yokoo laments the lag between the moment a particular style has social potency and the time (several years later) when that style is popularized and achieves critical recognition. So while modernist design before the '60s might have inhabited an anti-establishment position, that oppositional thrust was lost when the same type of design was rolled out in the mid-'60s. Yokoo senses that an effort to communicate with the general public has led graphic designers to avoid taking an oppositional stance—for by 1969 a psychedelic style was in and of itself hardly oppositional—and that without expressed consciousness of social crisis, actual communication becomes impossible.

What we find in Yokoo's position on commodified art is a perfect example of counterculture's adjustment from full-spectrum market boycott



Left: Page from *Shōnen Magazine*, May 31, 1970, designed by Tadanori Yokoo.

Right: Tadanori Yokoo, *A la maison de M. Civeçawa*, 1965, silk screen on paper, 41 x 29".





Above: Tadanori Yokoo, Textiles Pavilion, 1970, Osaka, Japan.

Below: Tadanori Yokoo's billboard for Expo '70, Osaka, Japan, 1970.

Yokoo's position is a perfect example of counterculture's adjustment from full-spectrum market boycott toward a more precise consideration of who is exchanging what with whom, and on whose terms.



toward a more precise consideration of who is exchanging what with whom, where that exchange is occurring, and on whose terms. The standard model of a continuum from independent to sellout does not give us language to discuss the full complexities of the interaction between artistic design and money. Yokoo's model is both more simplified (we are all embedded and implicated in the market) and more complex (the commodity affords opportunities to communicate and bridge social divides).

YOKOO'S MOST PRECISE AND LEGIBLE CRITIQUE would be leveraged against Expo '70, the massive government-corporate collaboration that closed the '60s and that, in the words of sociologist Shun'ya Yoshimi, "mobilized" the antiestablishment artists in its service, effectively co-opting them. It would, however, be more accurate to claim that Yokoo and the other artists who created the Textiles Pavilion—including filmmaker Toshio Matsumoto and composer Jōji Yuasa—attempted to stage an interventionist critique of the expo within its very

grounds. For the Japanese state, the point of Expo '70, held in Osaka, was not only to announce the nation's prosperity but to cast this announcement as a kind of full recovery and rebirth after the war. (The symbol of the expo was Taro Okamoto's Tower of the Sun, a new kind of dawn.) Years before the fair opened, as it became clear that sponsorship money would allow for the realization of all sorts of elaborate installations, artists and critics began questioning whether and how to participate in what might easily devolve into an exercise in nationalist propaganda. In the end, everyone from the members of Gutai to the founders of Jikken Kōbō participated, while others, such as composers Iannis Xenakis and Karlheinz Stockhausen, came from abroad. Commissioned installations reflected the sponsoring industries tangentially, if at all, and often undercut them. Still, critics such as radical filmmaker Nagisa Ōshima would chide participating artists for falling prey to false hope, for enabling a spectacular demonstration of the capacity of the state apparatus to assimilate even its most seemingly rebellious citizens.

Yokoo's contribution to the Textiles Pavilion was the architectural design of the building itself, a full-size billboard outside it, and an official poster. The sweeping, ski-jump-shaped silver roof of the building, together with a central red silo bristling with permanent red scaffolding, appeared from the front as a brilliant conflation of Mount Fuji and the Japanese flag, while the billboard in front of the structure, painted in the style of film advertisements, replicated the pavilion and clearly marked it as a commodity. Yokoo's poster completes the theme of branding by clarifying that the commodification of the nation was intended to launch Japan into the global imagination as a tourist destination (in exchange for dispatching groups of its own flush tourists abroad). The poster adds a fleet of commercial jumbo jets to the sky above the pavilion, a branch of cherry blossoms in full bloom, and a gaggle of kimono-clad women waiting to welcome guests into the quaint *ryokan* and hot-springs resorts. But a man being photographed behind them (with the pavilion as backdrop) suggests that it was Expo '70 that was the tourist destination, and that the Japanese themselves were going to be the tourists consuming their own country as product. Indeed, an enormous number did visit Expo '70—ticket sales exceeded half of Japan's entire population.

The Textiles Pavilion poster was in some ways a subtler extension of one Yokoo did in 1968, a faux advertisement for the real estate sale of the entire national archipelago. This second poster ran together with the main one while Expo '70 was under way, in a May 31, 1970, profile of Yokoo in the most popular weekly manga magazine of the time,



Left: Tadanori Yokoo, poster for Expo '70, 1970.

Right: Page from *Shōnen Magazine*, May 31, 1970, designed by Tadanori Yokoo.



Shōnen Magazine. The cherry-blossom branches at the top of the fake ad form a visual match with those in the expo poster, as do the central sun image and the radiating rays. The 369,773.13 square kilometers of “Nippon-koku” (the country of Japan) are for sale for the low price of ¥61.0675 trillion, or \$169.63 billion in 1968. This amount roughly equals Japan’s gross national product that year, when it surpassed West Germany to become the world’s second-richest country. Yokoo’s critique, then, extends beyond the way the nation is being packaged and sold and the way nationalism itself has become a form of brand loyalty. Rather, this is a critique of the larger framework in which nationalist pride has been channeled and transferred from expansion of national territory to expansion of national wealth. Yokoo sees that this effort to find a less violent and more productive home for suppressed wartime nationalism (by channeling it into triumphant narratives of economic recovery and expansion) will not only reproduce the coercive politics of collective mobilization but also set Japan up for another massive defeat after another total war.

Yokoo seemed to immerse himself in economic nationalism at this moment in the same way he had reimmersed himself in commercial design—as a method through which to better understand how systems work, and to get a better vantage point on what sorts of desires were being projected onto the GNP, the politics of graphic design, the status of the book, and various formations of revolution. This kind of heuristic immersion links his practice to Takashi Murakami’s and that of other Japanese contemporary artists who take up the circuitry of commerce and the visual language of design—and these practices may productively be understood as owing more to Yokoo and the legacies of modern Japanese design, and less to Warhol, than is commonly perceived.

Comparisons of Warhol and Yokoo risk a facile equation premised on visual similarities. On a deeper level, however, what the two do have in common is their understanding that they could enter preexisting systems—of publishing, of commerce, of design—to effect alterations of the old dynamics of the avant-

gardes. If these avant-gardes embraced design to reconfigure the relation between art and life, Yokoo understood early on that such efforts always end in the co-optation of radical procedures and styles, that commercial graphic design had become a veritable science of visual communication, *already* a strategy of shaping viewers’ perceptions and inducing them to buy (in). So he torqued that industry of perceptual manipulation toward his own ends—with an insistence that we are immersed in commerce from the start. But his “design subject” can never comfortably acquiesce to that immersion: At every turn, Yokoo’s work confronts that subject with incendiary aesthetic or conceptual devices, disrupting the smooth merging of self into lifestyle, consciousness into commerce. Grasping that there was no outside from which to buy in, Yokoo worked from the inside out. □

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