

Stephen Barber

# Teiji Furuhashi's *Lovers*: Digital Resuscitations of the Moving Body in Tokyo and New York

This article examines the solo work *Lovers* (1994) by Teiji Furuhashi, a prominent member of the influential Dumb Type group in Japan's theatre and dance scene from the 1980s onwards. *Lovers* was Furuhashi's only solo work; he died shortly after its installation at a Tokyo art centre in 1994. The essay examines the work in the context of themes of mobility, migration, and shifting corporealities in Japan across the post-war decades, especially through the key event for art and technology of those decades, which was the Osaka World Exposition of 1970. *Lovers* was commissioned by the arts laboratory of a Japanese technology corporation, Canon Inc., and incorporated what at the time were innovations in moving-image elements within theatre and dance. But those technologies rapidly became obsolete, and the essay explores the dilemmas about the digital experienced by the curators of the New York Museum of Modern Art in 'upgrading' *Lovers* to show it in their galleries in 2016–17.

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'LOVERS' is Teiji Furuhashi's sole moving-image installation work, made in conjunction with other members of the Dumb Type performance-art group. It contests barriers and borderlines to exploratory corporeal movement, repudiating those power-embedded strictures through interventional action. *Lovers* was created in 1994 as a unique work, but it also has an intricate future and past, both in its survival for future installation and its drawing upon the dynamics of human population movement in Japan, pre-eminently that of migrant or constricted bodies.

Borderlines and barriers, and the preservation of uncontaminated insularity, have often been perceived as integral to the distinctive existence of Japan as a country. The Perry Expeditions of 1852–54 and the US post-war Occupation of Japan of 1945–52 appear historically as isolated aberrations in that history of enforced boundaries, always to be urgently

reconsolidated as soon as the intruders or invaders have departed. Contemporary Japan is seen as one of the global powers least permeable to migration from other countries, while being historically subject to immense internal migration, as for example in the 1950s and 1960s north-to-south migration of rural populations, and the post-Fukushima catastrophe migration from areas of potential contamination (including the Tokyo megalopolis) to areas perceived as ecologically purer, such as Japan's southern islands.

Many boundaries in Japan may be invisible or virtual ones, marked in the projection/performance installation of Furuhashi's *Lovers*, both in the form of imposed, inflexible tenets of how the human body should move and restrict itself, and also in envisioning how such perceptions can be dissolved. Spatial power, in relation to movements of autonomy or liberation, may exert itself virtually. The

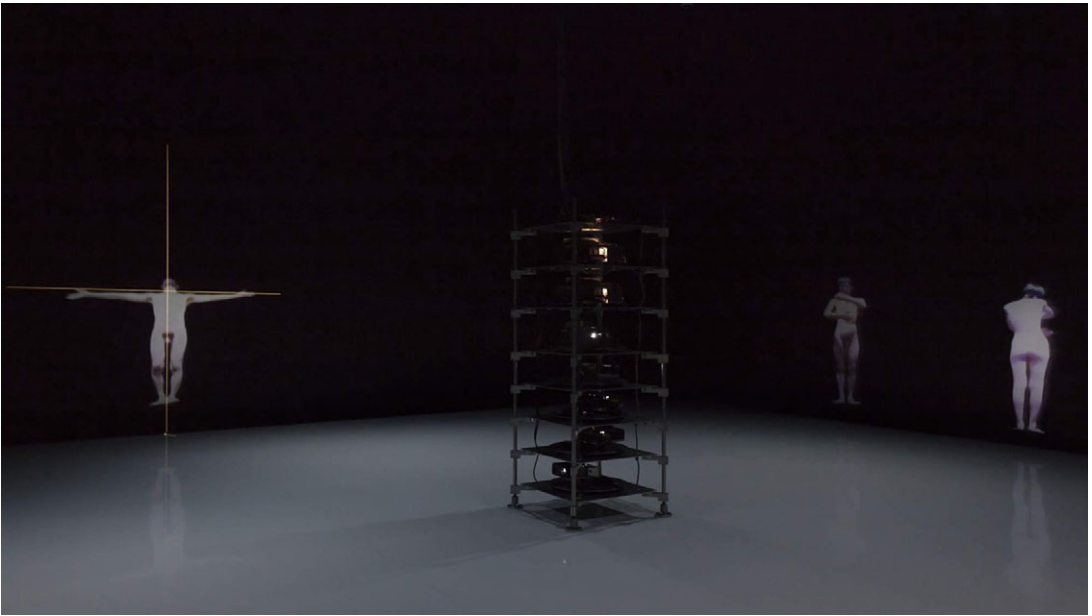
French writer and dramatist Jean Genet, speaking about one of his many incarcerations, emphasized the way in which the most powerful boundaries are those which are least visible: 'One of the finest inventions of the [Penal] Colony of Mettray was to have known *not* to put a wall around it – it's much more difficult to escape when you have to cross a bed of flowers.'<sup>1</sup> Often, invisible boundaries only become tangible entities through the evidence of their traversal (via trampled flowers, in Genet's example), resulting from a collective, insurrectional or individual transit across space.

Furuhashi's *Lovers*, as an artwork and in his comments on it, highlights the amalgam of technology and corporeality which – though it has its many precursors – began to be experienced as an engulfing and unforeseen development in the 1990s, with the abrupt rise of digital urban corporate culture that coincided with the first decade or so of Dumb Type's performance work in Kyoto. People working in computing often speak of the 'migration' of data – in the form of data moved from an obsolete and precarious system to a new, enhanced system – as something which becomes urgent when the initiating system fails or risks a meltdown in which its data would vanish. That migration may take place from analogue to digital systems, or it may be transacted between now-failed systems of the early digital era, that of the 1990s, and more standardized digital systems of the 2010s or 2020s. This is precisely the process that the technologies and corporealities of *Lovers* endured in 2016 in the preparations for its new installation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, when its obsolete original digital coding was reconfigured, and the installation was 'migrated' in order to inhabit the domain of new technologies. 'Migration' is a multiplicitous term, like that of the title of *Lovers* itself; it can intimate a liberating corporeal transit without which there could be no survival, or it can indicate a movement which is subject to extreme constraint.

Migration, in relation to performance works (as well as all other representations), now integrally involves contestations and interventions. Over the past two or three decades, the

conjoined dimensions of corporeality and technology have become inextricable, even when invisible, in human bodies' tracking and making detectable, and also in those bodies' transmutation into newly incarcerated or constrained entities. In its distinct variants from 1994 and 2016, Furuhashi's performance-based moving-image installation *Lovers* illuminates the dynamics of those corporeal and technological manoeuvres, and this article asks the question: How does *Lovers* now mediate the dynamics of migrancy, loss, exclusion, disorientation, and perpetual interstitial movement, which have been fundamental experiences of urban life in Japan, at least since the 1950s, in the country's great internal, north-south migration of that era? Then: How does the spectator's contemporary experience of *Lovers* remain a crucial one in perceiving boundaries as being powerful but breakable formations, in Japan and also globally?

*Lovers* was first installed and exhibited in Tokyo, at the Hillside Gallery space, in September to October 1994 as part of a wide programme of experimental performance works conceived by Japan's Canon media corporation, in the form of its arts laboratory, Canon ArtLab (Figure 1). The latter was a prominent promoter and supporter of innovative digital art and performance in 1990s Tokyo, but ceased to exist, after curatorial disputes and the withdrawal of corporate funding, in 2001. *Lovers* is usually credited as a 'solo' work of Teiji Furuhashi, but it was programmed and funded by the Canon ArtLab, which contributed the technology necessary to realize the work, and much of the conception and design of *Lovers* was developed by another member of Dumb Type, Shiro Takatani. Four years after its first installation, Canon ArtLab exhibited *Lovers* again in Tokyo in 1998 at the Spiral Hall performance space, and it was also shown at the New York Museum of Modern Art and other venues. Before the Canon ArtLab was dissolved, it had donated several copies of the technology and the projectors necessary for future installations of *Lovers* to art museums such as the New York Museum of Modern Art. *Lovers* no longer existed in one, unique technological version and had become multiple.



**Figure 1.** *Lovers* at the Hillside Plaza art centre in Tokyo, 1994. Audience members moved freely in the spaces between the projection tower and the walls. (Image recorded by the production's commissioning body Canon ArtLab; copyright expired following its dissolution in 2001.)

*Lovers* generates a part-digital, part-analogue environment. On the screens, which border the darkened, cube-shaped space, five young, unclothed figures appear to be perpetually in transit, always walking. They cross over each other's paths – sometimes moving steadily and slowly, sometimes in abrupt acceleration – and their spectral figures then become transparently layered over one another. But each figure remains autonomous, never connecting with and never acknowledging the other figures. The installation's spectators enter the space and, as they move around it and observe the five projected figures' movements, they become themselves an integral part of the performance and its evocation of boundaries. The promotional text for *Lovers'* installation at Hillside Plaza gallery described that physical interaction: 'Sensors in the centre of the space are activated by the visitors' presence, triggering words and images to move and react on the wall. Sensors that dot the ceiling are triggered to project messages down on to the floor, creating boundaries.' The spectators are confronted with those projected texts imprinted on the

floor at their feet as well as across the five spectral figures. One text, inspired by Genet's work, among other sources, declares: 'Do not cross the line.' When a spectator stands directly in front of one of the figures in the installation (the figure of Furuhashi himself), that figure gazes back at the spectator for a time, but then plummets backwards into darkness, arms outstretched, and vanishes (Figure 2).

The technology driving *Lovers* was prominently evident for all spectators within the performance space in the form of a metal tower in its centre, holding numerous projectors: five computer-controlled moving-image projectors, each playing laser discs, and two 35mm-format slide-projectors. As a result, the work held both an aura of mystery generated by its strange, ghostly figures, always about to vanish into darkness, as well as an explicit demonstration that the performance was technologically driven, through multiple and synchronized projections. In that way, it evoked one of Furuhashi's inspirations for *Lovers* in the work of the British moving-image innovator Eadweard Muybridge, whose 1880s work *Animal Locomotion* also features



**Figure 2.** *Lovers* at the Hillside Plaza art centre in Tokyo, 1994. Image shows the director, Teiji Furuhashi. The presence of an audience member standing in front of this image would cause the projected figure to plummet backwards. (Image recorded by the production's commissioning body Canon ArtLab; copyright expired following its dissolution in 2001.)

walking human figures against darkness; Muybridge also used the moving-image projection of multiple corporeal forms in public demonstrations of his work in the 1890s to audiences in Europe and the USA.

Furuhashi's *Lovers* appears, retrospectively, as an initiatory work, experimenting with new digital technology in performance, while simultaneously interrogating the parameters and limitations of that new technology, and also deploying it to refuse and to castigate boundaries placed upon human freedom of action and movement, especially relating to sexual experimentation. But since Furuhashi died in the year following *Lovers'* first installation, 1995, it may also equally appear, in retrospect, as a last-gasp, terminal work, rather than the first in a future sequence of performance experiments. It is therefore a work imbued with death and abandonment, accentuating its own imageries of falling and of disappearance. And with the 'vanishing' too of the work's primary creator, Furuhashi, *Lovers'* capacity to survive into the future also fundamentally shifted.

In 2016, the New York Museum of Modern Art decided to try to resuscitate the obsolete digital technology of *Lovers*, twenty years after the projection installation was first exhibited there. Digital technology, especially in relation to performances and projections, is inflicted by an acute regime of obsolescence. 'Migrating' such technologies as those of the mid-1990s presents intractable boundaries and extreme lines of resistance. In many ways, it would be far easier to update the film-celluloid technologies of moving-image based projection installations of the 1960s, such as those of the performance works of the Vienna Aktionist artists, requiring only an act of copying or duplication, since the original media of documentation – 8mm or 16mm film celluloid – are still actively produced now in an almost identical form (albeit a specialist one) to that of the 1960s. But digital technology, as with Furuhashi's body as it appears in *Lovers*, is always in the act of imminently vanishing, leaving almost no trace.

When the New York museum curators examined their archives for the remnants of

*Lovers*, they discovered that its technologies – holding their representations of borderlines, and those of boundaries’ contestation – were already almost entirely obsolete. This was only twenty years after that technology had appeared to hold the most cutting-edge, innovative work in digital art performance. Even so, the Museum of Modern Art decided to try to reactivate *Lovers* through a total restoration that involved migrating most of its digital data and its technologies to new systems and materials. The intention was to exhibit *Lovers* again, for the first time in that institution since 1995.

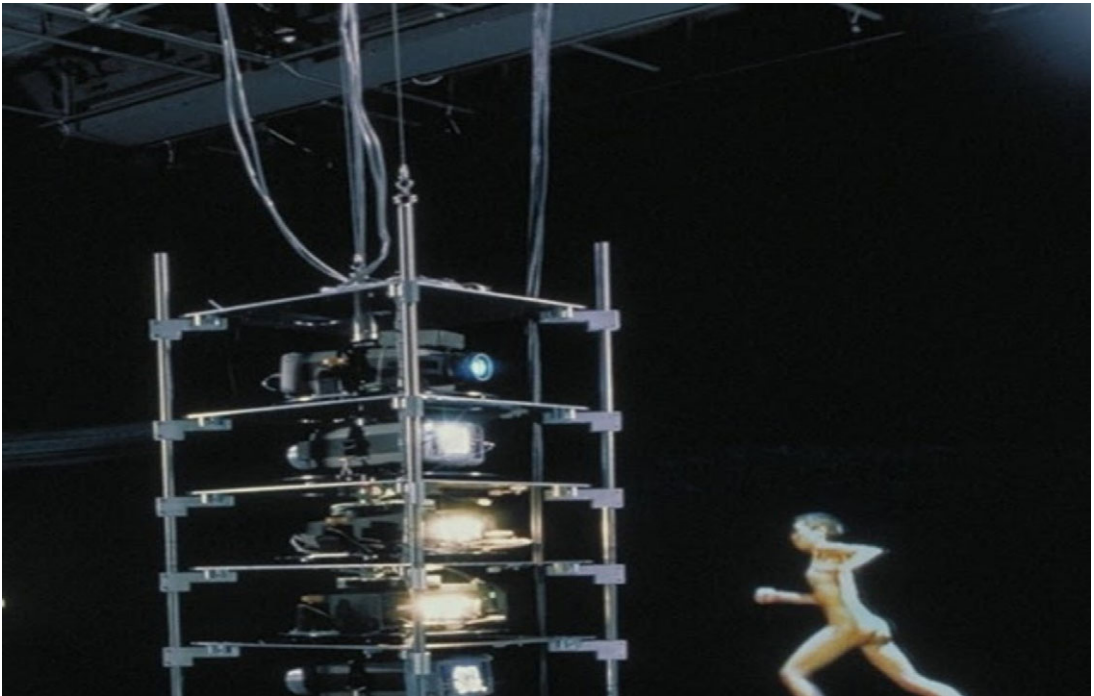
As well as the obsolescence of the technology of *Lovers* and the intervening death of the work’s creator, Teiji Furuhashi, a further obstacle was that the corporate generator of the original performance technology – the Canon ArtLab – had ceased to exist. The Canon ArtLab had donated identical copies of all of the required technological data and tangible materials for *Lovers* to several art museums worldwide in the second half of the 1990s in order to demonstrate what a cutting-edge digital corporation Canon Inc. was at that time, with its particular supportive focus on contemporary art and performance. As a result, a further dilemma for the New York curators was that, by transforming their donated copy of *Lovers*, they risked generating an entirely new variant – potentially an aberrant mutation – of the original work, which would then exist in a different format from all of its other surviving archived copies. They risked contravening the boundary of what Furuhashi may have intended for his work.

At first, the technology of *Lovers* was totally incomprehensible to the computer experts who assisted the New York curators. *Lovers* comprised an idiosyncratic mix of analogue and digital components that reflected the specific mid-1990s moment of its making, when digital technologies of projection were still only emerging. In particular, *Lovers* used the media of laser discs, which had become obsolete. The work would now have to be overhauled into an entirely digitalized and standardized format. *Lovers* is not alone in presenting those dilemmas of lost time and memory, and a parallel example would be

the 1998 CD-Rom project by the prominent French artist Chris Marker, *Immemory*, now unplayable in its original format. The New York museum’s specialist curator and technologist, Ben Fino-Radin, documented the data migration of *Lovers* in a report, emphasizing his view that, in order to be exhibited again, the work’s obsolete technology had to be discarded. He also argued that, if a work such as *Lovers* were to remain perpetually confined to an art museum’s archives, and never to be brought out for exhibition, it would eventually disappear or die completely (Figure 3).

According to Fino-Radin, ‘The original LCD video projectors and the behind-the-scenes control hardware needed to be replaced due to their instability and rarity. This meant a full-on re-implementation of the original control and timing hardware and software would be necessary.’<sup>2</sup> After great difficulty and the participation of numerous specialists, some of them old enough to be still familiar with mid-1990s projection technologies, Fino-Radin reached a point at which he was fully satisfied with the complex technological resuscitation of *Lovers*, and wrote: ‘Immediately we knew we had nailed it. The motion of the figures was dead-on, and maintained synchronization for hours. High fives were exchanged.’<sup>3</sup>

The final version for installation in New York was then assessed on-site by Furuhashi’s fellow members of Dumb Type, Yoko and Shiro Takatani, who had both been closely involved in the original work. They discarded that sense of successful finality evoked by Fino-Radin, and made many changes to the performance installation, focusing on fine-tuning the relationship between the never-meeting figures who walk and cross one another. The installation was then exhibited at the New York Museum of Modern Art from July 2016 to April 2017, displayed partly in its status as a contemporary performance work focusing on corporeal interventions and the dissolution of imposed boundaries to movement, and partly in its status as a historical, archival work which had been formative in the now-pervasive use of digital technologies of screen-projection in



**Figure 3.** *Lovers* at the Hillside Plaza art centre, Tokyo, 1994. Tower of laser disc projectors in foreground, with immersive projections on surrounding walls. (Image recorded by the production's commissioning body Canon ArtLab; copyright expired following its dissolution, 2001.)

current theatrical and dance cultures worldwide.

One question that could be asked about that technological resuscitation of *Lovers* is whether it also encompassed the spectral bodies that figure within it. It could equally be argued that those re-mediated or re-mediatized corporealities were rendered doubly spectral by that process, having first been conjured by Furuhashi in 1994 in a distinctive and idiosyncratic way, then subsequently reanimated by art-museum technologists in 2016, and made to perform again as technologically standardized figures, incarcerated within that migrated data. How did those bodies respond to their technological transmutation? The museum's curators argued that, if they were not reanimated, they would expire altogether. But it may be that the essential corporeality of *Lovers* exists somewhere else, belonging beyond *other* boundaries or parameters to those of technological reconstruction. A further option would have been to exhibit *Lovers* in its exposed state

of obsolescence, malfunction, and disintegration. It is, after all, a work that projects the fall into death.

Most valuably, the reconstruction of *Lovers* possessed a sonic dimension in the discovery by the New York curators of a recorded trans-Pacific telephone conversation from 1994 between one of the Museum of Modern Art's then curators, Barbara London, and Teiji Furuhashi in Kyoto. The intention of the conversation was to generate information for an essay to accompany the installation of *Lovers*. The raw material of the recorded vocal conversation itself was placed on the museum's website in 2016. Furuhashi's voice, speaking in English, itself appears spectral, hesitant, existing in interstitial sonic space, and is unable to frame answers to several of the curator's questions, such as one on spectatorial voyeurism ('I don't get the question').

The vocal conversation serves to evoke the five projected figures in *Lovers* who inhabit

autonomous zones and do not meet one another. However, Furuhashi is able to answer two questions – on the technology incorporated into *Lovers*, and also on the work's title. He comments that the integration of digital technology into the performance work gave him 'the circuit to explore myself . . . the technology can get inside of me.' In his perception, the term 'lovers' is a multiple, manipulable one that risks becoming what he calls a 'negative term', unless its boundaried exclusivity and restrictiveness can be annulled, and the term then expanded, in what he calls a 'promiscuous' way, without boundaries, in order to encompass all sexual or non-sexual acts, and all human and non-human participants.

More widely, beyond that specific instance of its technological reanimation for exhibition in New York from 2016 to 2017 – an installation already now obsolete, six years later, in 2023, with the introduction of new projection technologies that have annulled those of 2016 – *Lovers* is also a work whose restless and relentlessly moving human figures evoke the histories of population displacement, and the migrational traversal of boundaries, in Japan, and perhaps globally too. Those movements in Japan, across the past five decades, have taken many forms, from internal migrations from the north to escape intolerable rural poverty, occasional and highly visible migrations from other countries, and also migrations intended to escape contaminated environmental conditions, especially those spreading out from the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe on the north-eastern coast of Japan in 2011. All such migrations in Japan have their focus in a megalopolis, whether the Tokyo/Yokohama/Kawasaki or the Osaka/Kyoto/Kobe conurbations, which, in such acts of migration, are either aimed for as enticing spaces, or else fled as contaminated zones.

Alongside *Lovers'* status as an innovative performance work which prefigures the use of moving-image projection that has now become pervasive within global performance cultures – and as a work that ostensibly survived its New York Museum of Modern Art restoration in 2016 only through intensive data migration – it possesses another,

distinctive set of resonances in its connections with the history of population migration *within* the boundaries of Japan. And because of the relative non-national specificity of *Lovers* as a performance work, it may also illuminate cultural and urban histories of displacement and transmutation globally.

At the same time, it is clear that Furuhashi's concern was pre-eminently with Japan itself and its 1990s regime of censorship, corporeal restrictions, disregard of the rise of AIDS and of those dying from it (including Furuhashi himself), and its imposition of preventive boundaries. As noted earlier, Japan is often perceived as a country which actively deters or disallows migration from other countries, and that historically has elevated ideas of 'ethnic purity' which require the placing of rigid borderlines around Japan's territory. By contrast, migration *from* Japan has been extensive and frequent, encompassing great population migrations of the beginning of the twentieth century, especially to Peru and California, or, in more recent contexts, the movements of artists in the 1960s, such as Yoko Ono and Takahiko Iimura, from Japan to the USA and Europe, and also those of many young contemporary artists to urban artistic centres such as Berlin, London, and Paris.

As well as a performance work exploring the contestation of borders and their prohibitions, *Lovers* – when the work is perceived within the metropolitan experiential contexts crucial to the work of Dumb Type and to Furuhashi in particular – also especially evokes Japan's immense internal migrations of the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of intense post-war poverty. It is valuable to juxtapose *Lovers'* obsession with lines and borders with the spatial and topographical dynamics of that social migration, whose vector extended from north to south, especially from Japan's isolated rural areas of Hokkaido, Aomori, and Akita to Tokyo. Urban historians of Japan often view that internal migration – with its mass population movement of often unruly new citizens, totally unused to surviving in the city and frequently driven to crime – as the main initial cause of the great rise in Japan's security guard and surveillance

systems, which transformed the appearance of its cities at the end of the 1960s, with numerous guards positioned outside every building. The historian Yuriko Furuhashi makes an explicit link between migrancy, surveillance, and technology:

The birth of the Japanese security guard business in 1962 was, in fact, a direct result of the intense immigration of the uprooted rural population into the Tokyo metropolitan areas. Two massive construction projects led by the [Japanese] state – the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and Expo '70 in 1970 – further accelerated the growth of the security guard industry in Japan . . . The introduction of the closed-circuit television (CCTV) for crowd control purposes during the Tokyo Olympics also marks an increasing confluence of the burgeoning security and electronics industries.<sup>4</sup>

Those dynamics of human migration, technology, and surveillance are also those of *Lovers*. The amalgamation by Japan's 1960s state-security culture of methods of corporeal and technological deterrence was especially evident at the immense, state-sponsored cultural and corporate event which Furuhashi mentions: the Expo '70 World Exhibition, attended by over 64 million spectators and designed to showcase Japan's new technologies. Expo '70 was rigidly controlled with many thousands of security guards. The Expo's *Official Report* (1971) records that the vast majority of the security guards were recent migrants from Hokkaido and Aomori. In effect, they had been hired to protect against the danger that their fellow migrants would infiltrate and cause disruption in the Expo site. In addition to that internal threat, the city-sized Expo site was tightly bounded away from the adjacent city of Osaka, which, like Tokyo, had been the location of fierce street protests throughout the 1960s, contesting the US military presence in Japan and especially the use of airbases in the Tokyo region for the pursuit of the war in Vietnam. The state-controlled Expo site's visitors and the insubordinate urban population of Osaka had to be segregated for the event's six-month duration.

An especially insightful document of the volatile dynamics of Japan's 1960s internal population migration is a film by the then young artist Masao Adachi, *A.K.A. Serial Killer*

(1969). At the beginning of the following decade, Adachi would travel to the Palestinian camps and make his documentary film, *Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War* (1971). (The Japanese Red Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine were then allied groups struggling for the liberation of Palestine.) Adachi then lived covertly in Beirut for over twenty-five years, and collaborated with the Lebanese performance artist Rabi' Mroué, before being deported back to Japan and imprisoned there. But in the late 1960s, Adachi was still directly concerned with the internal migration from Northern Japan of young figures who then often drifted from city to city, in a state of aimless transience. Adachi's film records the many desolate urban locations through which one particular young drifter from the northern island of Hokkaido, Norio Nagayama, had passed. During his restless travels, Nagayama infiltrated a US military base, stole a gun, and then used it to murder several security guards and taxi drivers. In the course of Adachi's subsequent mapping of Nagayama's incessant movements across invisible borderlines, he visited and filmed the Expo '70 site outside Osaka, still under construction at that time. Adachi only ever films the urban sites through which the serial killer Nagayama had passed, and never the figure of Nagayama himself, who had already vanished into incarceration prior to his eventual execution by the Japanese authorities.

A further central impetus behind the 1960s creation of Japan's security guard industry was to provide corporeal boundaries within its cities' spaces, working alongside Japan's riot police to annul dissent and urban interventions. Many experimental theatre groups of that era undertook street performances in the plazas of Japan's cities directly alongside ongoing street riots and protests, such as the performances of the Zero Jigen group in Osaka and of the Tenjo Sajiki group in Tokyo. The director of the Tenjo Sajiki group, Shuji Terayama, was himself an internal migrant from Japan's north, from the Aomori region. Many of Japan's seminal artists of the post-war era emerged from that north-to-south population movement. One of the most



prominent choreographers of that era, Tatsumi Hijikata, had also migrated from the north, from the Akita region, in the 1950s. As with many other transient figures of that time, his first occupation in Tokyo had been that of a criminal, operating as a thief and burglar, before eventually shifting his attention to work in choreography from the end of the 1950s and creating the world-renowned Ankoku Butoh dance form.

Japan's internal migrations, such as that of the 1950s and 1960s, have been accompanied by occasional migrations from other countries, notably, in the early 1990s, from Iran. As a result of a complex visa scam, promising well-paid work in what was then one of the world's most affluent cities, many hundreds of young Iranian men found themselves stranded and itinerant in Tokyo, and rendered homeless. They were forced to inhabit the grounds of a large park in the east of the city, Ueno Park, where they made bare livings either through prostitution or by selling illicit plastic cards for telephone kiosks – a now-obsolete and forgotten mid-1990s technology that parallels the redundant media of laser discs used for the first performance installations of Furuhashi's *Lovers*. Invisible barriers were generated in that park between its usual population of homeless Japanese men and those new arrivals from Iran. An American writer and filmmaker living in Tokyo, Donald Richie, observed the many police signs displayed in the park to guard citizens against those migrants: signs which closely resonate with the texts of spatial and corporeal prohibition incorporated by Furuhashi into the performance space of *Lovers* in that same era. Richie wrote in his journal:

I feel admiration for the sheer ability to survive shown by these men. The Japanese pretend not to see them, but they are aware . . . In Ueno Park, the police have put up signs: Watch Your Handbags. Do Not Buy Illegal Telephone Cards. Do Not Loiter in the Park at Night.<sup>5</sup>

A further, contemporary manifestation of internal migration and itinerancy in Japan has been that resulting from the danger of contamination following the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster at a power plant

alongside Japan's north-eastern sea-coast following a powerful tsunami, generating nuclear meltdowns and explosions. Although exclusion zones were erected around the disaster site, a strong feeling developed that the contamination was borderless and could engulf other regions of Japan, including the Tokyo region directly southward from Fukushima. Many people began to flee from Tokyo and relocate to areas that could be perceived as beyond contamination, and ecologically pure, such as the islands at the southern topographical extreme of Japan. Numerous Japanese performers and artists travelled north from Tokyo and attempted illicitly to infiltrate the perimeter of the Fukushima exclusion zone and to undertake performance or moving-image based works in close proximity to the source of contamination.

But other performers and theatre artists headed in the opposite direction. Probably the most prominent of those internal migrants was the renowned theatre director Toshiki Okada, who relocated from Tokyo to a large southern island of Japan, Kyushu, four months after the Fukushima disaster. Necessarily, that relocation, beyond the megalopolis, and whether transient or permanent, impacted to some degree upon his approach to his theatre work and its preoccupations. In an interview from two years later, Okada, speaking of Tokyo, emphasized his current sense of the dissolution and disappearance of that city in which he had lived and developed his work: 'More and more after the disaster, I felt that I could not identify myself with Tokyo . . . I even thought that Tokyo was something already over, or already lost, for me.'<sup>6</sup> That sense of a disintegrative finality or loss – with an accompanying perception of a pervasive vanishing – resonates with those same preoccupations as they appear in Furuhashi's *Lovers*.

The construction of the stigma of corporeal contamination, alongside attempts at spatial quarantining, were experienced directly by Furuhashi in the Japanese state's mid-1990s response to AIDS. The reaction to that stigmatizing (or rendering invisible) of AIDS sufferers eventually led to the formation of

numerous activist groups in Japan. Many of them emerged too in the Fukushima region following its calamity – with the aim of campaigning for the permanent closure of Japan’s nuclear industry, among other demands – but faced a situation in which activism alone could not alter the irreparable raw data of contamination. That corporeal, spatial, and technological data of contamination – recorded on innumerable digital monitors installed in the Fukushima exclusion zone since 2011 in order to assess the level and persistence of danger – also appear to connect with the spatial environment of *Lovers*, in the work’s intermittent sonic beeps and its awry technologies, and also in the movements of its vulnerable, isolated figures, who appear unable to ally and combine themselves in order to form a combative power of intervention or resistance.

In conclusion, *Lovers* provides illuminations into issues of the delineation, exploration, and traversal of borderlines, and into the regimes of power, desire, and intervention that configure those boundaries and their migration or cancellation, embodied in corporeal and technological forms in the projected figures of *Lovers*. (They also do so in Furuhashi’s own vocal insights into his creative process, especially in the 1994 conversation with the curator Barbara London.) In particular, the corporeal transience and migration directly evoked by *Lovers* forms an aperture into Japan’s own formative population movements (as with those of the 1950s and 1960s from north to south, noted above), leading to its enduring culture of tight surveillance and guarding, while also bringing such seminal figures of Japan’s 1960s performance culture as Hijikata and Terayama to Tokyo.

The location of Furuhashi and Dumb Type in Kyoto also inflects that destabilization of the megalopolis as a centre of state power and art influence. The recently enhanced sense of Japan as a country subject to catastrophe, already engrained with its history of seismic urban destruction and floodings, emerged through the contamination unleashed by the 2011 Fukushima disaster, leading to new population movements, which resonate with

the corporeal itinerancy of *Lovers*. *Lovers* is also a work which, at least retrospectively, evokes a fall into death, enacted in the installation by Furuhashi’s arms-outstretched backwards plummet. That movement too is part of the multiplicity of movements into void space generated by *Lovers*.

*Lovers* presents dilemmas for its own future survival. It may well be that future installations of the work world-wide will be drawn from duplications of the rewired technologies created by New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 2016, since it is always far easier for any arts centre simply to loan and adopt pre-existing, functional technologies than to try to work with obsolete, disintegrated technologies of malfunction. But the reconfiguration of *Lovers* may form a profoundly different entity from that which, for example, I experienced as a spectator at Tokyo’s Spiral Hall in 1998, now potentially propelled, in its standardized form, beyond the technological boundaries of what Furuhashi had intended.

Is that reconfiguration still a technology that can, as he said, ‘get inside of me’? Two (or more than two) *Lovers* now exist, perhaps contrarily, in the variants left unattended and forgotten in the archives of the several art museums to which the Canon ArtLab donated copies, and the new, technologically ‘migrated’ variant exhibited and seen in its immediacy by many thousands of gallery spectators in New York in 2016–17. New manifestations of *Lovers*, such as the one exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (together with future manifestations) certainly possess the merit of allowing young artists and performers, who had no chance to experience the work’s original installations of 1994–95, the opportunity to inhabit its mysterious spatial domain, which projects an endless loss and which also interrogates the fraught experience of human figures’ traversals of borderlines, now far more pervasive and urgent in the contemporary world than when the work was first created and exhibited.

Crossing beyond borderlines may appear to offer the potential to realize previously restricted corporeal experiences or enable new means of survival, but that crossing can

also lead to new demands and into precarious environments. Jean Genet, in his 1957 essay *The Tight-Rope Walker*, envisioned an arduous crossing that led to an emergence into a terrain beyond borders. He was addressing himself to a young acrobat and lover, Abdallah Bentaga, who subsequently (after the writing of the essay) fell from the taut line of the tightrope, and whose body was smashed as a result. Genet wrote: 'You will experience a bitter period – a sort of Hell – and it will be after this crossing through a darkened forest that you will emerge, the master of your art . . . This is one of the most moving mysteries of all.'<sup>7</sup>

## Notes and References

1. Jean Genet, *L'ennemi déclaré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 223 (my translation).
2. Ben Fino-Radin, 'Art in the Age of Obsolescence: Rescuing an Artwork from Crumbling Technologies', <<https://stories.moma.org/art-in-the-age-of-obsolence-1272f1b9b92e>>, accessed 12 June 2023.
3. Ibid.
4. Yuriko Furuhashi, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 145–6.
5. Donald Richie, 'The Persian Journals' (unpublished manuscript, 1992–9), p. 6–7.
6. Toshiki Okada, interviewed in *Subaru* journal (Tokyo), March 2013, p. 223.
7. Jean Genet, *Le funambule*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 9 (my translation).