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Projector in Japanese Post-war Art  
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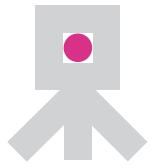
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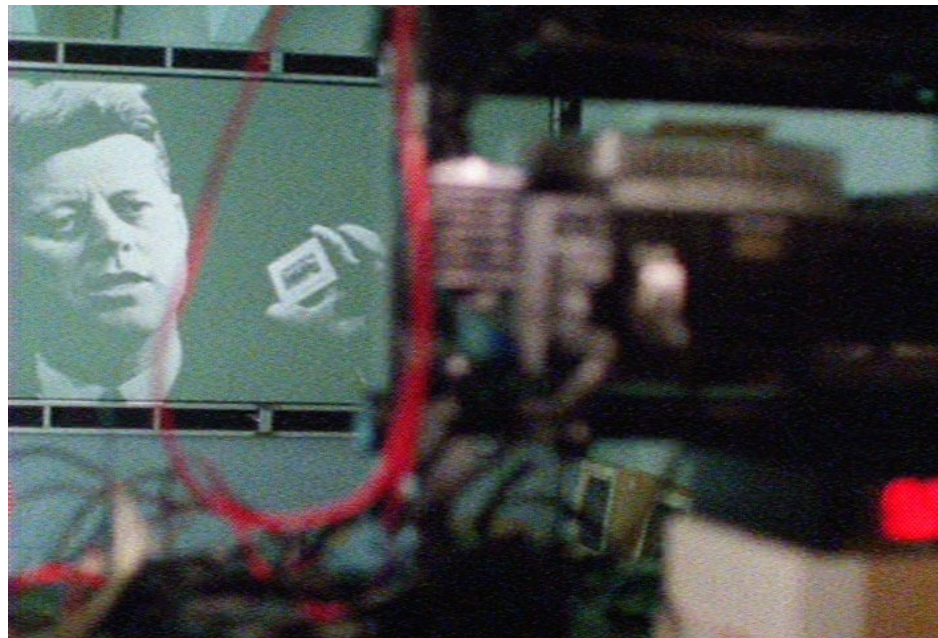
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## Image after Image Reconsidering the Fabric of Slide Shows

- 10 Paige Sarlin  
**The Work of Ending**  
Eastman Kodak's Carousel Slide Projector
- 20 Tina Weidner  
**Final Days. The Slow Demise**  
**of Slide-based Artworks**
- 32 Julian Ross  
**An Infant with four Breasts?**  
Intermedial Uses of the Slide Projector  
in Japanese Post-war Art
- 38 Hilde Van Gelder, Jeroen Verbeeck  
**Reverse Magellan**  
Allan Sekula's Last Slide Sequence
- 48 Lilian Haberer  
**Rhythm of the Interval. Projection,**  
**Circulation and Fragmentation**  
**of Images and Words**  
in Tris Vonna-Michell's Art practice
- 58 Helen Westgeest  
**The 'Slideshow Effect' in Video Art**  
Akram Zaatari's *On Photography,*  
*People and Modern Times*
- 66 Dork Zabunyan  
**Ascetic Slideshows**  
Abounaddara and the Stream  
of Images of the War in Syria



# An Infant with four Breasts? Intermedial Uses of the Slide Projector in Japanese Post-war Art

**Julian Ross** Post-war Japanese art has been a subject of curatorial and research attention in recent years with major exhibitions and English-language publications. While the interdisciplinarity of the art scene has been highlighted in these activities, much of the focus on the research has been on the ways in which conventionally separated media came into interactive play through collaborations between artists. In focusing on different artistic media – which the Japanese at the time called genres (*gyanru*) – research on post-war Japanese art has neglected a technological medium that belongs to no particular artistic discipline and embodies a mixture of media as part of its intrinsic quality: slide projections. Since early on in the emergence of post-war Japanese art, slide projectors remained a regular feature in performances and installations for decades to come. The slide projector was one of the only technological media that remained relatively consistent during a period of media development, convergence and obsolescence. Focusing on the use of slide projectors on a wide spectrum of artistic activity in the 1950s–70s provides us with a through line to consider the ways in which artistic production in Japan shifted in character over the two decades.

The interactions between different conventionally separated media are what characterises post-war Japanese art above all else. Nevertheless, during the period, the approaches to such interactions experienced significant changes which were illustrated in both theoretical writing and artistic practice. In the mid-1950s, the notion of *sōgō geijutsu* (total work of art, or, synthesis arts) was promulgated by critic Hanada Kiyoteru and put into practice by the artist collective Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop). By 1966, the Fluxus concept of intermedia was translated, reinterpreted and discussed among the Japanese artists who began describing their artistic practice using the newly imported term. At least initially, the two concepts appear to be interchangeable but a closer analysis reveals that disparities were recognised at the time. As the projected image became a regular feature in these twenty years, the slide projector became a stable constant between these shifts in approach to mixing different media. By selecting a number of multi-media presentations by Japanese artists of the period, the following article will propose that comparing the use of slide projectors between them would demonstrate the differences between the two approaches to medium interaction: *sōgō geijutsu* and *intermedia*.<sup>1</sup>

## Sōgō geijtsu

The notion of *sōgō geijutsu* (synthesis arts) came about in the immediate post-war years where a culture of synthesis (*sōgō bunka*) achieved prominence with the founding of the Synthesis Culture Society (*Sōgō Bunka Kyōkai*) in 1945 and the inauguration of the journal *Sōgō Bunka* (Synthesis Culture) that ran between 1947 and 1949. Initially indicating a unification between mass popular culture and ‘high-art,’ *sōgō geijutsu* was taken up by art critic Hanada Kiyoteru

1. Intermedia is italicised in order to distinguish between the Japanese use of the term and its use in the critical discourse of the United States.

and film critic Satō Tadao in the 1950s to describe medial forms, such as theatre, musicals and cinema, that brought together conventionally separated artistic media. The notion of *sōgō* is clearly drawn from Richard Wagner's widely discussed Gesamtkunstwerk, or, 'total work of art'; however, as Miryam Sas has pointed out, totality (*zentaisei*) in the Japanese context did not necessarily indicate a unified experience usually subscribed to Wagner's approach, but rather, 'a chaotic multiplicity.'<sup>2</sup> Suggesting cinema's ability to activate a synthesis of all other arts, Satō described the totalisation in the process of destructing boundaries between media – 'in essence, it is about grasping the moment of totality in the process of destruction, and grasping the moment of destruction in the process of totalisation.'<sup>3</sup> The creative potential of breaking boundaries between media underlined in *sōgō geijutsu* was taken up by the artist collective Jikken Kōbō, whose work with slide projectors helps us illustrate the ways in which the concept was put into practice.

Jikken Kōbō was a collective active between 1951 and 1958 and was comprised of young artists brought together from different disciplinary practices. Led by art critic and mentor Takiguchi Shūzō, Jikken Kōbō's members included musicians Takemitsu Tōru, Yuasa Jōji, Ichiyanagi Toshi, artists Yamaguchi Katsuhiro and Kitadai Shōzō, music critic Akiyama Kuniharu, light engineer Imai Naoji and a number of others. Sponsored by Tokyo Tsūshin Kōgyō (which later became Sony), the group established a number of 'auto-slide' works using an Autoslide projector developed by the company that had the capacity to automatically synchronise tape recorder and slide projector. The resulting works presented at Dai'ichi Seimei Hall on 30 September 1953 all involved music and voiceover narration that accompanied a sequential presentation of projected slide images.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the different media in the performance was in service of a narrative that brought them all together. While the slides contained hand-drawn animation and photographed objects, they were drawn and staged to accompany a story and were presented in a frontal manner that maintained a distance between the work, audience and space.

### An infant with four breasts

By 1960, the approach to medium interaction proposed by *sōgō geijutsu* was deemed problematic by a number of artists. In their 1960 manifesto, the Three-Person Animation Circle (*Animēshon sannin no kai*), an animation collective, declared that their approach to the 'synthesis (*sōgō*) of genres' was to go beyond cross-media trends of recent years and would initiate the

2. Miryam Sas, 'Intermedia 1955-1970', in: Diana C. Stoll (ed.), *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, New York, 2012, 138-157. In the most comprehensive overview of *sōgō geijutsu* to date, historian Ken Yoshida has pointed out that Hanada Kiyoteru considered the distinction between 'high-art' and 'low-art' insubstantial and suggested art must communicate with the masses to have any political viability. See: Ken Yoshida, 'The undulating contours of *sōgō geijutsu* [total work of art], or Hanada Kiyoteru's thoughts on transmedia in post-war Japan', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2012, 43. For Hanada, therefore, all art was already mixed and in perpetual communication with one another. As such, Hanada's interpretation of *sōgō geijutsu* anticipated the ways in which medium interaction would be discussed in the 1960s as *intermedia*. See: Kiyoteru Hanada, 'Geijutsu Sōgō-ka towa nanika' [What the Synthesis of Arts

Means], in: *Hanada Kiyoteru Zenshū* vol. 8, Tokyo, 1978, 244.

3. Kiichi Sasaki, Kiyoteru Hanada, Kōbō Abe, Kyōsuke Masaki, Satō Tadao, Susumu Hani, Yūsuke Nakahara, 'Jyanru no sōgōka to junsuika' [The Synthesis and Purification of Artistic Genres], in: *Abe Kōbō Zenshū* 11, Tokyo, 1998, 121-140. Here, I use the translation of the sentence in Yoshida 2012, [reference 2], 44.

4. The four Autoslide projections presented at the event were: Yamaguchi Katsuhiro and Suzuki Hiroyoshi's *Shiken hikōka W.S.-shi no Me no Bōken* [Adventure of the Eyes of Test Pilot W.S.]; Fukushima Kazuo and Fukushima Hideko's *Minawa wa Tsukurareru* [Water Bubbles Created]; Kitadai Shōzō, Takemitsu Tōru, Suzuki Hiroyoshi and Yuasa Jōji's *Mishiranu Sekai no Hanashi* [Story of an Unknown World]; and Yuasa Jōji and Komai Tetsuro's *Resupyugu* [Lespugue].

transcendence of personal boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Manabe Hiroshi, a member of the collective, lamented the ways in which even the synthesis of media had become formulaic despite their original intentions of breaking out of patterns, referring to what he saw as the failures of *sōgō geijutsu*.<sup>6</sup> In a cartoon that accompanied the short essay, he mocked *sōgō geijutsu* by suggesting that the process was like two humans with two breasts breeding to give birth to a deformed infant with four breasts.<sup>7</sup> Some years before the arrival of intermedia as a term, Manabe attempted to discover an alternative mode of medium interaction to what was offered by the critical discourse on *sōgō geijutsu*. Assessing the use of slide projectors in his experiments allow us to better understand how he was attempting to reconfigure medium interactions.

As part of an evening of works by the Three-Person Animation Circle in the Sōgetsu Art Centre, Manabe Hiroshi presented his reinterpretation of animation in the form of *Marine Snow - Animation for the Stage* (1960).<sup>8</sup> Inspired by the science documentary *Marine Snow - The Origin of Oil* (1960) produced by Tokyo Cinema, Manabe illustrated microorganisms of the deep sea that accompanied a story of a drowning man, which was itself based on a radio poem by Kijima Hajime. Apart from the intertextual layers of its source material, the performance became a predecessor to what would later be described as *intermedia*. As well as being an early example of multiple-projection in its use of both film and slide projectors, the performance involved live tape music and a dance performance by *noh* performer Kanze Hideo and his collaborators. Despite the involvement of many media, Manabe attempted to avoid an experience of saturation for the audience by staging an interplay between the media in a way that marked their separation: intermittent moments of black screen signalled the switch from screen to stage. Comprising of photographs taken during the making of the science documentary, the projected images of the slides similarly oscillated between light and darkness. Although Manabe attempted to present a dynamic interplay between different media, the result was described by critic Tōno Yoshiaki to be the equivalent of 'children holding hands'.<sup>9</sup> Still, the juxtapositions of the media straddled a balance between pre-arranged systems and live performance. Despite being unified by a central narrative, *Marine Snow: Animation for the Stage* demonstrated a shift away from *sōgō geijutsu* towards what became the foundation of *intermedia*.<sup>10</sup>

## Intermedia

As Miryam Sas' title of her 2012 article 'Intermedia 1955-1970' indicates, medium interaction in Japanese post-war arts is often categorised by its continuity in approach rather than changes of its conception. Indeed, art critic Ishiko Junzō reminded his readers in his 1967

5. Yōji Kuri, Hiroshi Manabe, Ryōhei Yanagihara, 'Atarashii Imēji o Saguridasu tameni <Animēshon 3nin no Kai> no Manifesuto' [The Three-Person Animation Manifesto: Toward the Creation of New Images], *SAC Journal*, vol. 7, 1960, unpaginated.

6. Hiroshi Manabe, 'Keisan no Jikan' [Time for Calculations], *SAC Journal*, vol. 6, 1960, unpaginated.

7. For the cartoon, see: Manabe 1960 (reference 6), unpaginated.

8. Sōgetsu Art Centre (1958-1971) was the major centre for avant-garde arts in postwar Japan. Managed by Teshigahara Hiroshi, it was built in the basement of the Sōgetsu Kaikan in Akasaka, Tokyo, a school for flower arrangement ran

by his father Teshigahara Sōfū (1900-1979).

9. Yoshiaki Tōno, 'Chūmoku subeki jikken-teki na undo Animēshon san'nin no kai' [A noteworthy experimental movement: Three-Person Animation circle], in: Yoshimi Nara, Kiko Nomura, Kaoruko Ōtani and Haruo Fukuzumi (eds), *Kagayake 60-nen dai*, Sōgetsu Art Centre no Zenkiroku, Tokyo 2002, 328.

10. The three members of the Three-Person Animation Circle --Kuri Yōji, Yanagihara Ryōhei and Manabe Hiroshi-- also presented a collaboration using Autoslide projectors called *Mukashibanashi shōnin kishitsu* [Old Stories of Workers' Temperaments] at the Sōgetsu Art Centre from 3-28 April 1963. Unfortunately there is very little information available on this performance.

article, published in the pamphlet for the five-day event Intermedia at Runami Gallery, that the collapse of boundaries between ‘genres’ (*gyanru*) was already discussed ‘once upon a time’ as *sōgō geijutsu*.<sup>11</sup> In Ishiko’s opinion at the time, the emerging concept of intermedia seemed to revisit conceptual territories that had already been covered. On the other hand, some artists and critics considered *intermedia* to mark a significant shift in approach to medium interaction from what used to constitute *sōgō geijutsu*. Coined by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins in 1965, intermedia loosely describes works that explored the gaps between different media.<sup>12</sup> After being imported into Japan by an article written by filmmaker Imura Takahiko, intermedia was incorporated into the lexicon of the Japanese arts community in the late 1960s —often in opposition to *sōgō geijutsu*.<sup>13</sup>

Finding the notion of totality (*zentaisei*) problematic, the art critic Ichikawa Miyabi directly referred to the term of *sōgō geijutsu*, which was commonly used in discussion, to delineate his definition of *intermedia*:

Intermedia art is disassociated from the totality (*zentai*) that is structured according to coordinates. Rather, it is a scattered totality (*bara-bara zentaisei*). In other words, it is an uncoordinated totality where the total being of the individual is kept from being obliterated.<sup>14</sup>

In describing the ‘scattered totality’ of *intermedia*, Ichikawa favoured the use of the word *kongō* (mixedness) over *sōgō* (synthesis, or, totality) as the individual media retain their own being, albeit in co-existence with others. In a similar line of analysis, artist Tone Yasunao considered *intermedia* to outline the interrelations between medium, space and audience. For Tone, the characteristic of *intermedia* is its ability to reveal the interrelations within the structures by virtue of its interconnected nature. In an essay reflecting on the Intermedia Art Festival, a five-day event in Tokyo he helped organise in January 1969, Tone marks the difference between *sōgō geijutsu* and *intermedia* to be the ways in which the latter attempts to revive an interaction with the world.<sup>15</sup> While *sōgō geijutsu* was a reconstruction of genres that had been separated by modern art according to their individual sensual functions, *intermedia*, for Tone, went beyond interactions between media to also encompass bodies and their perceptual faculties.<sup>16</sup> In its call for artworks to stage an interplay beyond the medium involved and with the surroundings, Tone’s interpretation of *intermedia* resonates with Dick Higgins’ proposal to explore the field between ‘art media’ and ‘life media.’<sup>17</sup> Once again, the use of slide projectors in projection-based performances demonstrates the particularities pertaining to *intermedia*.

Japan’s first ‘psychedelic show’ incorporated slide projectors and staged an interaction of different media in ways that Tone Yasunao and Ichikawa Miyabi understood to be what constituted *intermedia* as a term. Staged at the Angura Pop Discotheque in Shinjuku,

11. Junzō Ishiko, ‘Atarashii Chikaku Undōryoku no Hakken o’ [The Discovery of an Impetus for New Perceptions], in: *Intermedia*, Tokyo, 1967, unpaginated.

12. Dick Higgins, ‘Intermedia’, *Something Else Press Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1966, 1.

13. Takahiko Imura, ‘Special Report! Seismic Rumbles from the Underground’ [Tokuhō! Meidō tsuzukeru andguraundo], *Post*, <<http://post.at.moma.org/sources/3/publications/89>> [03.09.2015].

14. Miyabi Ichikawa, ‘Jizoku suru Jikan to Fukusū no Basho’ [The Continuation of Time and the Multiple Spaces], *SD*, vol. 79, 1971, 123.

15. Yasunao Tone, ‘Kyodai kaijyō geijutsu to shiten no intermedia’ [Intermedia as an art for large auditoriums], *Shōten Kenchiku*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1969, 7.

16. Yasunao Tone, ‘Geijyutsu no Chikaku-hendō – Expo kara Hippi made’ [The Diastrophism of Arts: From Expo to the Hippies], *Bijutsu Techō*, vol. 289, 1967, 106.

17. Higgins 1966 [reference 11], 2.



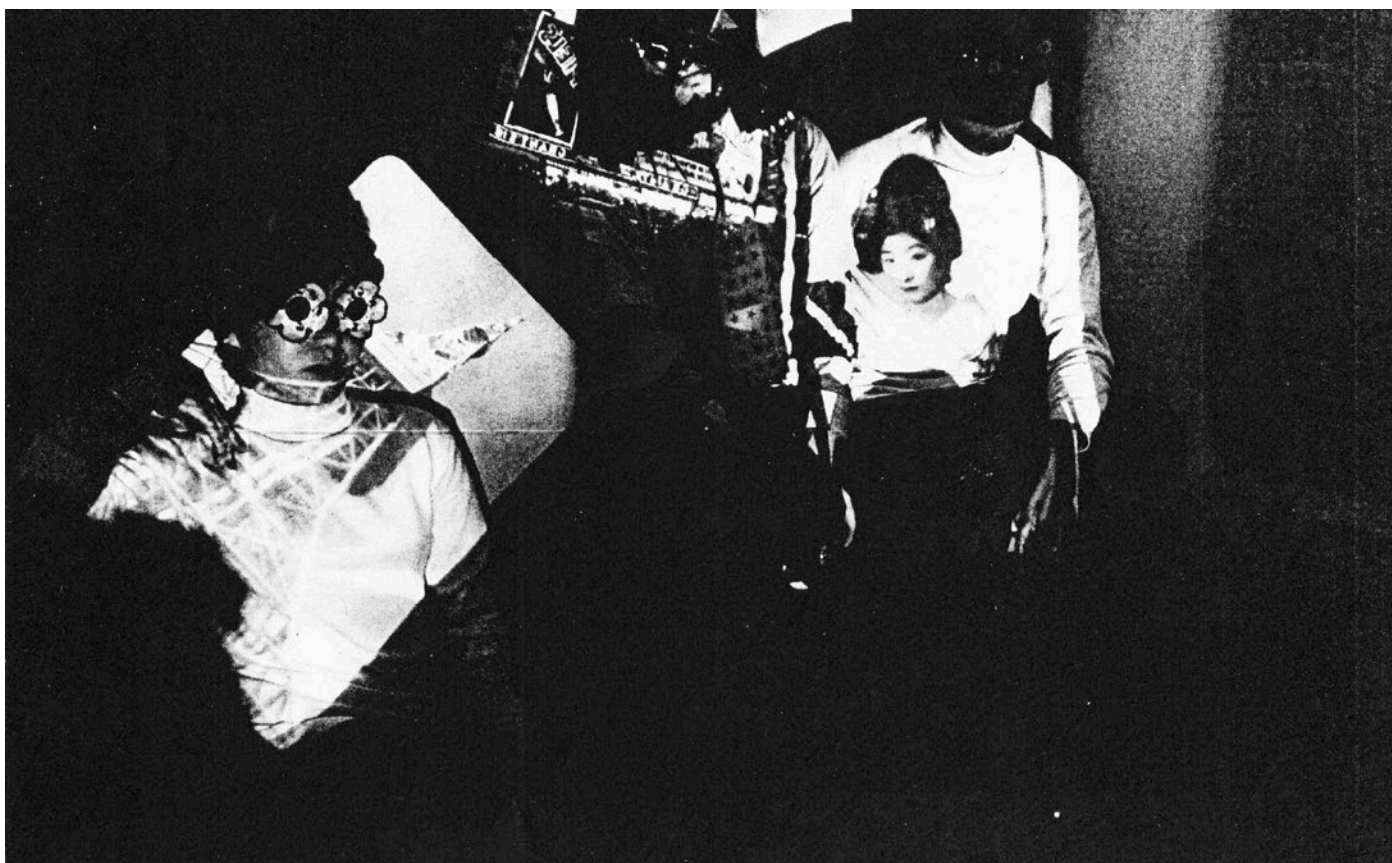


Figure 1  
Photodocumentation of event. *Angura Pop Psychedelic Series #1: Cinema Feel-In* (1968).  
Photographer unknown, reproduced in Ōsaki, 'Kikai wa kuzure, Kotoba wa owari' (As the machines collapsed, words came to an end), *Asahi Gurafu*, vol. 2301, 29 March 1968, 37.

central Tokyo, *Angura Pop Psychedelic Series #1: Cinema Feel-In* (1968) was organised by filmmaker/photographer Kanesaka Kenji and PR promoter Kazumata Kōichi on 24 February 1968 and involved collaborations with artists Shinohara Ushio and Shūzō Azuchi Gulliver, filmmakers Ōbayashi Nobuhiko and Miyai Rikurō, as well as the all-female dance troupe, the Bizarre Ballet Group.<sup>18</sup> Held over three hours, the show involved film, slide and light projection, strobe lights, sculpture presentations, dance performances and body painting. The lively event appropriated Western psychedelic culture for local youth while also providing an opportunity for collaboration between artists of different disciplines.

As much as the conceptual tenets of *intermedia* shaped the structure of the event, the venue itself also provided conditions upon which work, medium and audience could communicate. Closed in 1969, the short-lived Angura Pop was one of the first discotheques to emerge in Tokyo and housed many performances and events while running commercially as

18. For more information on Angura Pop, see: Aki Fujii, 'Kabushikigaisha Ebichūkaikan ko Okuni Jin kisō no Shinohara Ushio sakuhin to Kojima Shinmei sakuhin ni tsuite' [On the works by Shinohara Ushio and Kojima Shinmei donated by the late Okuni Jin of Ebichūkaikan Co.], *Tokyo-to gendai bijutsukan nenpō kenkyū kiyō*, vol. 17, 2014, 106-117.

a popular spot for night entertainment. Situated in the basement of a six-storey building, the layout of the space divided the room into two floors where visitors could view performances from different vantage points. As such, the unique arrangements of Angura Pop encouraged artists to explore possibilities going beyond the frontal arrangements of cinemas and theatres. The mobility of the small gauge and slide projectors allowed the performers to move the projected image during the performance onto the walls, audience and the dance troupe who were all dressed in white full-body tights. Projected onto the walls, bodies and audience from different directions, the use of slides depicting *ukiyo-e* paintings in the performance reflected the interpretation of *intermedia* proposed by Ichikawa and Tone where interactions taking place between media also encompassed the audience and space. In an image that illustrates the interactivity taking place, one art critic described the projected slide images to be like an optical light tattooing of the bodies.<sup>19</sup> Kanesaka stated ‘the aim of the show was to awaken our audience into a new sensory experience by exploding their daily senses with sound and light. In other words, we aimed for emancipation through the expansion of sensorial boundaries.’<sup>20</sup> In seeking an alternative to the immobile, frontal and pre-arranged use of the slide projector, Kanesaka and his collaborators illustrated the principles of *intermedia* as described by Tone and Ichikawa.

Situated between photography and film, the slide projector was a technological medium that was incorporated into different medium interactions by Japanese artists in the post-war years. Remaining relatively consistent in its appearance and structure, the slide projector became a constant during the evolution of mixed media presentations in the 1950s and 1970s. As *sōgō geijutsu* was discussed among artists in the 1950s, ‘autoslide’ works produced a synchronicity with other media that became conducive for theatrical narrative presentations. Replacing *sōgō geijutsu* by the mid-1960s, *intermedia* as a concept encouraged artists to seek inter-relations not only within the work between media but also between the work, space and audience. Artistic practice that channelled *intermedia* began to use the slide projector as light projection that could be emitted in all directions, underlining the inter-relations between the constituents of the performance. As artists continued conceiving medium interactions in different ways into the late 1960s and early 1970s, installations became central to artistic practice. Again, slide projectors – particularly the Kodak Carousel projector invented in 1962 – featured regularly, and often with other media, in ways that emphasised the experience of time that was no longer pre-arranged for the visitor. Focusing on the use of a single technological apparatus allows us to illustrate the ways in which changes in approach to medium interaction shifted artistic practice.

19. Ōsaki, ‘Kikai wa kuzure, Kotoba wa owari’ [As the machines collapsed, words came to an end], *Asahi Guraifu*, vol. 2301, 1968, 44.

20. Kanesaka in Ōsaki 1968 [reference 18], 44.