

# KOKI TANAKA

## *Vulnerable Histories (A Road Movie)*

August 25 – November 11, 2018

In view of the worldwide rise of nationalism, populism, and xenophobia, the artistic social studies of Koki Tanaka (b. Tochigi, Japan, 1975) focus on how we live together in societies. Realized especially for his exhibition at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, the project *Vulnerable Histories (A Road Movie)* (2018) highlights an example from Tanaka's native country, the mutual incomprehension and mistrust between *Zainichi* Koreans and ethnic Japanese, to plead for vigilance toward racism and discrimination. The project centers on a series of conversations in various settings between two protagonists who have not met before. Shadowed by the artist and his camera team, they travel to various locations in Tokyo to grapple with questions of (their own cultural) identity and how to take a stand against the simplistic worldviews of racist groups. The films that grew out of the project illustrate that coexistence and mutual appreciation are possible if we talk to each other: private as well as public conversations are key. The exhibition provides a framework for continuing the exchange of ideas Tanaka initiates. Visitors are encouraged to approach the "live speakers" who will be present in the gallery for the entire duration of the presentation. Various representatives of the art and academic worlds will join them to foster further discussion in a variety of formats.

The *Zainichi*, ethnic Koreans whose families have lived in Japan for several generations, face a growing tide of resentment and vilification. Their ancestors came to the country as—more or less voluntary—labor migrants in the first half of the twentieth century, when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule. During the next few decades, they were subject to a restrictive policy of cultural assimilation, so they were obliged to speak Japanese. After the demise of Japan's colonial empire, many Koreans returned to their home country—those who decided to stay in Japan were now stateless. The long history of forced assimilation and marginalization has left a deep imprint on the relations between Koreans and Japanese, although the history behind the hostilities that have flared up with novel intensity in the twenty-first century goes even further back, to before the colonial period. The *Zainichi*'s contemporary enemies claim that their presence is "harmful" to Japanese society. The ca. 700.000 Koreans currently living in Japan (out of a total population of 127 million), they say, are de-facto beneficiaries of a state that allegedly accords them preferential treatment. These accusations are easily shown to be baseless, but that does not stop rabble-rousers from agitating, especially on the internet, where they vilify their victims as "vermin," tell them to go back to Korea, and even threaten to kill them. The Japanese government has been slow to respond to this development. A so-called "Hate Speech Act" passed in 2016, but Japan still has no anti-discrimination law or even an unambiguous legal definition of discrimination.

In contrast with the rhetoric of racism, which seeks to dehumanize its victims and entrench their alleged "otherness," Koki Tanaka's *Vulnerable Histories (A Road Movie)* underscores his protagonists' shared humanity. Inspired by the motion picture *Before Sunrise* (1995), the plot of the seven films that grew out of the project centers on the conversations between Woohee Chung, a *Zainichi* Korean who lives in Japan, and Christian Hofer, a Swiss national whose Japanese great-grandparents immigrated to the United States around 1900. Tanaka explores individual recollections of specific situations as well as the collective memories of communities: unconscious beliefs informed by the experiences of family, friends, and acquaintances. The filming took the two to various places in Tokyo and Kanagawa that have special bearing on the relations between *Zainichi* Koreans and ethnic Japanese and serve as backdrops for an ongoing dialogue about personal experiences, the social situation in Japan and around the world, and the potentials and facets of community life in general. This exchange of ideas is enhanced by encounters with several experts on *Zainichi*-Japanese relations. The protagonists meet a member of Housenka, a civic initiative that works to reconstruct the events around the massacres of Koreans after the Great Kantō earthquake in 1923. The Korean community was blamed for the natural disaster, which devastated large parts of Tokyo and caused widespread chaos; armed citizens organized in militias and the military then conducted a campaign of targeted killings. The Japanese government includes these deaths in its general commemoration of the Korean victims of the earthquake; Housenka, by contrast, seeks to promote a more comprehensive historiography, complementing the government's official account of the events with the reports of contemporary

Curator:  
Heike Munder  
(Director, Migros Museum  
für Gegenwartskunst)

On the occasion of the  
opening a monograph will be  
published by JRP|Ringier.

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witnesses. The protagonists also learn more about the long shared history of *Zainichi* Koreans and Japanese by attending a lecture by the sociologist Tong-hyon Han, who is *Zainichi* Korean herself. Han sheds light on the roots of the current political situation; for over a century, misunderstandings, (legal) restrictions, and violent altercations have poisoned the relations between them.

Based on the premise that a climate in which some members of society are cast as others and excluded must never be accepted as a “social reality,” the exchange of ideas Tanaka stages within the microcosm of his project underscores the more general insight that active efforts to achieve mutual understanding and a lively discourse are vital for tolerant communities sustained by fundamental sympathy. The exhibition in the museum’s basement galleries invites visitors to immerse themselves in the films and join the two protagonists on their road trip. The key scene is a conversation structured as an interview that takes place, in a nod to the title, inside a car. Discussing personal recollections, the memories of relatives, and the knowledge gathered in the course of the project lets the protagonists understand the pain and profound sense of personal insecurity caused by an atmosphere poisoned by racist agitation and chart possible ways toward a coexistence based on humanist values. Setting out from an individual example, the project approaches the universal question of which kind of society we want to live in and which values we are prepared to defend when populist sloganeers denigrate and marginalize some of our neighbors. The protagonists’ shared voyage during their fourteen-day stay in Tokyo is presented as food for thought and the starting point of a dialogue that will continue in the museum’s galleries. For the entire duration of the exhibition, so-called “live speakers” will be present; visitors are encouraged to approach them and engage them in conversation in various formats. Representatives of the art and academic worlds will join the visitors to explore spaces of discussion for an exchange of ideas about tolerance, solidarity, and mutual appreciation.

The “live speakers” roles will be developed and cast in cooperation with MA students at the Institut Lehrberufe für Gestaltung und Kunst, HGK FHNW, Basel; the Zurich University of the Arts (context module, Marcel Bleuler and Benjamin Egger; MA program in Fine Arts, Rory Rowan and Philip Matesic; postgraduate program in Curating, Dorothee Richter), the artists’ group Neue Dringlichkeit, and others.

Curated by Heike Munder (director, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst), the exhibition is Koki Tanaka’s first solo show in Switzerland. A monograph accompanying the exhibition will be released by JRP|Ringier.

Koki Tanaka (b. Tochigi, Japan, 1975) lives and works in Kyoto. His art has been on view in numerous countries, including, most recently, at Kunsthaus Graz (2017), the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle, Berlin (2015), the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2014), the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and Tokyo (2013), the Museum of Art, Seoul (2013), the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2012), the Taipei Contemporary Art Center (2012), and the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2007). Tanaka was Japan’s official representative at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 and received Deutsche Bank’s Artist of the Year Award in 2015. In 2017, he contributed work to Skulptur Projekte Münster and the 57th Venice Biennale.



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Director / Artist  
Koki Tanaka

Protagonists  
Woohi Chung, Christian Hofer

Lecturer and Project Adviser  
Tong-hyon Han

Lecturer  
Masao Nishizaki (Housenka)  
Legal Adviser  
Takahiro Akedo

Lecturer for Preliminary Study Session  
Tadahito Yamamoto (the Center of  
the Tokyo Raids and War Damage  
in Tokyo)

Director of Photography  
Shinya Aoyama

Sound and Sound Editor  
Ryota Fujiguchi

Lighting Design  
Atsushi Sugimoto

Camera Operator  
Yasuhiro Moriuchi

Production Manager  
Saki Tanaka

Production Assistants  
Natsuko Odate, Yoshiki Masuda

Camera Assistants  
Miyazawa Hibiki, Natsumi Oikawa,  
Kana Nishio

Recording Assistant  
Izuta Kadoaki

Coordination Assistant  
Yukino Sugaya

Drivers  
Hiroaki Yoshida, Shunsuke Takamizawa

Researcher  
Miwa Negoro

Cocktail Maker  
Atsushi Sugita

Background Cast Members  
Maki Hayashi, Chen Ay-Wen,  
Shihoka Imai, Yurika Kanda,  
Hitomi Kazama, Haruna Kobayashi,  
Takuya Misawa, Kaori Miyano,  
Ken Sasaki, Sakura Tokiyama,  
Yukinobu Watanabe, Wu Yin Feng,  
Hiroaki Yoshida

Filming Equipment Support  
ARTISTS' GUILD,  
RAKUDA STUDIO Co., Ltd.

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Shinya Aoyama

Sound Editing  
Ryota Fujiguchi

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DEAN SHIMAUCHI TRANSLATIONS

Legal Translation  
Maki Higashikubo

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Keijiro Suga, Yoshitaka Mori,  
Akihiro Kitada, Sunhe Cho,  
Kyongfa Che, Kyung Hee Ha,  
Maki Nishiyama, Mihoko Nishikawa,  
Tomoko Yabumae,  
Mami Suda (ARTISTS' GUILD),  
Jin Kurashige (ARTISTS' GUILD),  
Ryota Fujitsuka (Aoyama Meguro),  
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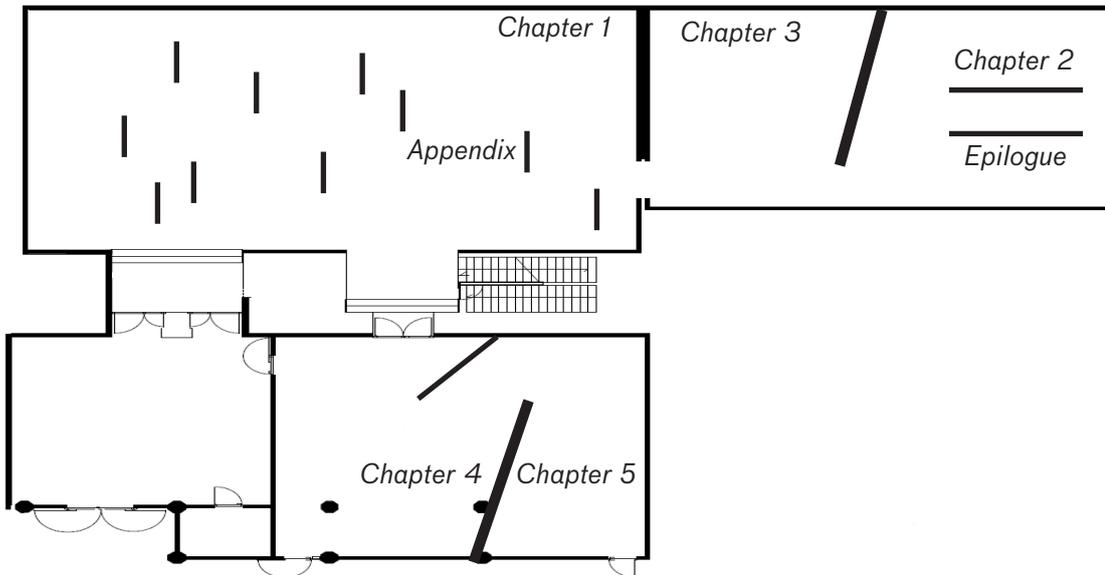
Arts Commons Tokyo,  
Art Management of Socially Engaged Art |  
The University of Tokyo  
General Incorporated association,  
Housenka,  
Mujinrto Production,  
Narita International Airport Corporation,  
Vitamin Creative Space,  
Yoshiko Isshiki Office

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**Vulnerable Histories (A Road Movie)**

2018

Installation consisting of 7 videos, 10 photographs, 9 posters, 3 wall prints

Commissioned by Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Courtesy the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou and Aoyoma Meguro,



*Chapter 1: Two Letters*

*Reading 1: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)*

1-channel video on monitor (colour, sound)  
24:09 mins



*Chapter 2: Situation*

1-channel video on monitor (colour, sound)  
14:36 mins



*Reading 2: Provisional disposition allegation case of prohibition for hate speech (2016)*

*Chapter 3: Kawasaki*

*Reading 3: Resolution on the elimination of hate speech (2016)*

*Reading 4: Rabat Plan of Action (2012)*  
1-channel video projection (colour, sound)  
22:15 mins



*Chapter 4: Housenka, Arakawa River*

1-channel video on monitor (colour, sound)  
19:44 mins



*Chapter 5: Night*

1-channel video projection (colour, sound)  
19:35 mins



*Epilogue: Reflective Bar*

*Reading 5: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*

1-channel video on monitor (colour, sound)  
18:33 mins



*Appendix: Day off*

2-channel video on monitors (colour, no sound)  
03:58:29 mins (total duration)

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