

Seiko Mikami in Europe

by Andreas Broeckmann, Berlin

(originally published in Jung-Yeon Ma, Tomoya Watanabe (eds.): *Seiko Mikami: A Critical Reader*. Tokyo: NTT Publishing, 2019, p. 74-92)

There was probably never any doubt about the fact that Seiko Mikami's work was deeply embedded in Japanese culture, its understanding of nature, the human, and technology. She was a Japanese artist, even if she spent much time outside of her home country, living in the United States during important, formative years, and later working in Europe a lot, responding to the strong interest in her work and to the frequent invitations that she received to participate in exhibitions and festivals.

Indeed, when we look at Seiko Mikami's CV, the number of exhibitions that she had in Europe is striking. Throughout her career, starting in the 1980s, she regularly had presentations in Japan, where most of her major works were also produced. Between 1989 and 1994 she had a number of shows in the United States, especially in New York. But after 1994, there seem to have been no further exhibitions of Mikami's works in the US, and only one in North America, namely the presentation of the installation *gravicells* at the Mois Multi festival in Quebec City, Canada, in 2007.

Yet, starting in 1993, there were quite a large number of exhibitions in several European countries, sometimes returning her several times to the same venues with new works. The bulk of these exhibitions were presentations of her major installation projects, *Molecular Informatics*, *gravicells – Gravity and Resistance* (with Sota Ichikawa), and *Desire of Codes*. The significance, marked by this fact, of the support that Seiko Mikami received from Japanese curators and institutions will be acknowledged more fully, elsewhere in this publication. For the question about her success in Europe, however, it is important to note that over the years Seiko Mikami had, in Japan, access to the best media art facilities and technical and curatorial support, especially at the CANON ArtLab, at the ICC, and at YCAM, which made it possible for Mikami and her collaborators to produce a string of works at such a high qualitative level. The foundation of Mikami's international success was laid in Tokyo, and Yamaguchi.

There are multiple reasons for the success that ensued in Europe. At the core are, of course, Seiko Mikami's aesthetically and artistically convincing works which dealt with themes around the human body, perception and techno-politics, themes which were intensely discussed since the early 1990s and which her works managed to address in particularly interesting ways. An aspect of the international recognition is also the consistently high technical quality of the work over 20 years. Especially in the 1990s, audiences and curators of media art exhibitions could not always be sure whether the art projects would really function properly, and during the full duration of the exhibition. For Mikami's work, this was always the case. The technical support that she and her collaborators offered was excellent, making sure that the experience of exhibition visitors was smooth and undisturbed by technical glitches. And another aspect was that for all their technical finesse, the presentation of Mikami's rather large installations was quite affordable also for medium-size venues. Practical issues like this, or the clever technical design that made it possible to install, for instance, *gravicells* with a relatively small number of assistants, were things that Seiko

Mikami had thought about, and that made it indeed easy enough for many exhibition venues to present her installations.

Another characteristic of the situation in Europe was that, beginning in the early 1990s, there was a growing interest in the digital technologies, an interest that was fuelled both by economic and industrial, as well as by social concerns. As a result of these concerns, a number of cultural institutions were created, and there was public support for exhibition projects and festivals to reflect on the emerging digital culture. These different venues would be looking for strong artworks, like Mikami's, to show in their spaces and programmes. And because of Europe's federal structure, such venues were, at least between 1995 and 2010, active in almost all of the individual European states, each of which had its own strategy for media arts funding. Therefore it is not surprising that Mikami's work was shown in so many different European countries, in Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, France, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland. Some of these venues – like the V2_ Organisation in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, or the annual festivals in Maubeuge and Creteil, France – are exemplary for this conjunction of new industrial politics, and the emergence of a cultural infrastructure that would welcome works like those created by Seiko Mikami. An analogue situation probably also opened up the opportunity for Mikami's later exhibitions in China and Korea, from 2007 onwards.

But besides such structural reasons and besides her critical creativity as an artist, an important key for Mikami's success was also her personality that brought forth strong, personal relationships with curators and organisations who were happy to bring her work back several times, and if only to have an opportunity to spend time with Seiko on her visits during the setting up and exhibition periods. We will return to this aspect a little later in this text, when we encounter some of these people. It was a privilege to be friends with Seiko, a friendship that would not only be connected to her artistic work, even though there was always a lot of her personality and her way of thinking that made it into the works. Engaging with the work also meant engaging with her. Seiko Mikami was one of the artists from whom we can learn something about the world by experiencing and studying their work. This is true for other artists too, but in Seiko Mikami's case it was a very special, challenging experience, a very special journey that she took us on through her work.

Paths to and in Europe

There are several paths on which Seiko Mikami's work became known in Europe in the first half of the 1990s. Curiously, it seems that these paths – I have identified four – were paved separately and are not directly connected.

The first path takes us to Vienna in Austria. The Vienna-based gallerist Hubert Winter, whose gallery is still operating today, saw work by Mikami, in June 1992, in an exhibition staged by the New York art agency Creative Time in the vaults of the Brooklyn Bridge, called "Art in the Anchorage". A few months later, in November, Winter wrote to Creative Time (by fax, as was usual at the time), asking for a contact to the artist – who got back to him only ten days later (again by fax), beginning a cooperation that would lead to a life-long contact, and to Mikami's first exhibition in Europe, in June 1993, in Winter's gallery. Here she presented nine *Suitcases*, containers of biohazard material, in the display windows, placed on a conveyor belt.

Hubert Winter remembers: "I had seen Seiko Mikami and her work in New York, in an exhibition arranged by Creative Time. I then contacted Seiko Mikami from Vienna and offered her to realise a work in the context of an exhibition series called 'Window Shopping'. The work Seiko Mikami proposed was difficult to realise because we had to build a conveyor

belt for suitcases, like the ones on airports, and with the means available we could only build a miniature version. The motor created big problems, but in the end the suitcases travelled along our display window for several days, enjoyed both by ourselves and by the public, since the conveyor belt was operating day and night."

Hubert Winter confirms that it was initially the artistic quality and Seiko Mikami's engagement with critical, ecological issues, that elicited his interest: "At that time, Vienna was (and still is) a difficult place for this kind of visionary work. There were only rudimentary beginnings of an ecological awareness, even though Austria had been playing a prominent role through its rejection of nuclear power." He believes that, "the work of Seiko Mikami, if it was brought again to greater public attention today, could make a significant contribution to our understanding of the art of the 1990s. She was a pioneer!"

Yet, beside this interest, Winter and his team also encountered an important trait of Seiko Mikami's way of interacting with curators and venues. When, a few weeks before the planned opening, she realised that finding the requested conveyor belt might be a problem, she offered: "This can be a non-functioning conveyor belt," and added: "If you cannot get one, I will make do without it (let me know)." This readiness to accommodate her requirements to the possibilities of the venue was typical. Throughout her career as an artist, it was clear for everybody involved that Seiko Mikami would always work to the highest possible aesthetic, productional and technical standards, but that she would not insist on things that were non-essential. This made working with her an often very satisfying, even inspiring experience for curators: one would always get precise instructions from her about spatial and technical requirements, and about the type of additional help that would be needed. The assistants and collaborators that Seiko would arrive with were experienced, courteous and knowledgeable people that left no doubt about the necessity of them actually having to be there. It was up to the organisers to make the most out of the situation that they could offer to the artist. Instead of being overly demanding, Mikami encouraged curators to be welcoming and eager hosts.

The second path to Europe was paved when an artist friend of Seiko's, Kit Blake from New York, included her work in a multimedia presentation at the temporary project space "UNITn", run by the artist organisation HILUS at Kunsthalle WUK in Vienna, at the beginning of 1993. (Although this happened at the same time as the preparations for the exhibition at Galerie Winter, also in Vienna, there was no contact between the organisers of the two venues at the time.) HILUS, an intermedia research project by artists, curators and technicians which operated from 1992-1996, organised a performance, exhibition and discussion programme under the title "UNITn, 250 square meters for art with new technologies", from January to April 1993. One of the HILUS members, Herwig Turk, had met Kit Blake a year earlier at the Media Art Biennial in Leipzig, Germany, which they both participated in as artists. Turk invited Blake to come to "UNITn" and to report about his work and about the art scene in Williamsburg, then a very dynamic district in Brooklyn. Kit Blake came to Vienna in March 1993 with video and audio tapes as well as with many slides that, besides his own materials, he had collected from his artist friends Perry Hoberman, Seiko Mikami, Gen Ken Montgomery, and the video collective The Outpost (who also sent a Videodisc!). This presentation, entitled "Five Kinds of Noise", consecutively discussed the five artists and presented slide, video and audio materials of each artist simultaneously, embedded in a lecture by Blake that combined artistic with cybercultural issues. The part about Mikami contained, amongst other things, video footage of her exhibition, *Information Weapon: Media Bombs* (1991). In the catalogue, Mikami was referred to as a "technological sculptor, a Macintosh hacker, and editor".

Herwig Turk explains why this presentation left such a vivid memory, especially of Seiko Mikami's artworks: "Even then, Seiko's works were visually striking and formally powerful;

she used protective clothing from clean room production sites, signage relating to biohazards, all of it somehow 'pop' combined with critical, current topics. She was living in New York at the time and was part of the art scene there, but she also brought her experience as a professional computer game player into the works. Personally, I met Seiko several times after UNITn, in New York in '93, in Rotterdam in '96 and '98, in Vienna again in '97, and in Berlin in 2006 and '07). I was impressed by her sharp mind and determination and had the privilege of interesting conversations with her about the impact of technology on our worldview, culture and bodies, a theme that was a bridge between our respective artistic practices."

This introduction of Mikami's work to the critical media art scene in Vienna in 1993 had been preceded by an encounter with Kit Blake in New York in the late 1980s, followed by Kit's visit to Japan in 1988/1989. He remembers: "When I visited Seiko in her Tokyo studio I found her sitting amongst a huge pile of discarded portable CD players. She was smashing them with a hammer, in order to extract the laser eye. Seiko was just like that red light: always on, and when she got excited, the glow would intensify and pulse rapidly." Soon afterwards, Kit Blake curated the exhibition "Tweaking the Human" at BND Gallery in Brooklyn (1991), in which Seiko participated. A lasting friendship evolved between them, and Kit was able to give Seiko advice on her cultural survival in the US: "A short while after Seiko moved to New York she complained to me that men on the street were speaking to her. I told her, 'Wear sunglasses, then they can't make eye contact.' She did so, hardening her interface to the city, and proceeded to make more adjustments to her style in order to filter NYC's invasive urban environment. Appropriately, at that time she was developing her 'bio-work' where she investigated membranes and physical interfaces to the human body."

Thus, Seiko Mikami's first two exhibitions in Europe happened almost simultaneously, yet unrelatedly, in Vienna in 1993, one being an exhibition in a commercial art gallery, and one a multimedia lecture done by an artist friend from New York. Both happened not at major media art venues, but at private art initiatives. (Mikami's work was presented at the *ars electronica* festival in Linz, Austria, only in 2005 and 2012, and she never had a show at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany.) The performance lecture by Kit Blake appears as one of her exhibitions in Seiko Mikami's CV, indicating that she saw it as a sort of exhibition in its own right and as one of the opportunities through which she first got known in Europe as an artist.

A third, again unrelated path to Europe led Seiko Mikami's work to Scandinavia where she participated with the installations *Information War*, *IC Missile* (1990-1991) and *Borderless Under the Skin* (1991) in a touring group exhibition called "Japan i Dag" ("Japan Today") that was organised and first shown at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Humlebaek, Denmark, in the summer of 1995, and that then went on to venues in Oslo, Norway, Turku, Finland, and Stockholm, Sweden, in 1995-1996. The following year, in the spring of 1997, this exhibition was also shown at the MAK, the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, in Vienna – bringing Mikami back to the Austrian capital city, four years after her first appearances there. (And, to conclude the concurrent returns to Vienna, the robotic arms from Mikami's installation *Desire of Codes* would be presented in the summer of 2010, in an exhibition curated by Gottfried Hattinger at Künstlerhaus Vienna, entitled "Space Inventions". The other two components, the wall and the compound eye projection, were shown at the same time in Dortmund, Germany, in the exhibition "TRUST", as part of ISEA2010 RUHR.)

The "Japan Today" show was co-organised by the Japan Foundation and contained exhibits not only from contemporary art, but also from architecture, design, and mangas, thus presenting a programmatic range resembling that of the Japanese Media Arts Festival, JMAF, which would soon after be organised for the first time, in 1997. The catalogue text by the Danish art historian Tone O. Nielsen underscores the curators' fascination by Mikami's critical engagement with contemporary topics, like nuclear energy, biohazards, or AIDS, in an artistic

style that combines a strongly technical, machinic aesthetic with allusions to the visceral impact of these technologies on the human body. Even at this early stage we find Mikami's typical combination of the both functional and metaphorical deployment of technical elements. For Mikami, technical systems – and all the individual elements in her installations – are not only functional devices with a certain visual and functional aesthetic, but they also carry symbolical meanings through which they operate on social and political registers. Her approach resonated with the critical fascination about the cyborgian transformation of the human body, which was shared by people in Japan and the United States, as well as in Europe – and witnessed by her early audiences in Austria and in Scandinavia.

In 1994/1995, Seiko Mikami was working on an Internet-based project that became *Molecular Clinic 1.0*, with the CANON ArtLab. One of the curators there was Yukiko Shikata who used her contacts in Europe to spread the word about this new work. One of these contacts was with the V2_Organisation, originally an artist organisation from Den Bosch in the Netherlands, that had relocated to Rotterdam in 1994. The people running V2_ at the time, among them Alex Adriaansens and Joke Brouwer, came from a cultural background infused by punk and industrial in the 1970s and 1980s, similar to the context that Seiko had experienced as a young woman in Japan. Without knowing each other at the time, they shared the love of noise music and bands like Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Department, both of which had performed live at the V2_ venue in Den Bosch in the 80s. They also shared a critical affinity to technology. The radical design and hacker scene and the nascent cyber culture of the early 1990s that Seiko was part of in New York indicates how certain cultural atmospheres affected people simultaneously in Japan, in the US, and in Europe, and it was in this case thanks to Yukiko Shikata that some of them were able to find each other across continental distances. This was the fourth path on which Seiko Mikami's work became known in Europe. (And as a coincidence which doesn't surprise us any more, Kit Blake – remember Vienna 1993 – was a fan of the V2_ Organisation and actually moved in 1994 from New York to Rotterdam because of them, and went on to design the V2_ Organisation's legendary first website that launched in the following year.)

Alex Adriaansens explains how he first learned about Mikami's work: "Since the late 80s we have been in contact with Yukiko Shikata who was a close friend of Seiko Mikami. Yukiko showed us documentation of Seiko's artworks in the early 90s and we were very impressed by the work and by the topics and themes she addressed in it. It all related to the themes and topics that were also central to the artistic research and public programmes of V2_ in those days. We started presenting her work at the second Dutch Electronic Art Festival, DEAF 1995, and from this a close relationship was developed with Seiko who then participated in many of our events, including the DEAF festivals in 1996, 1998 and 2004, and in exhibitions, books, and conferences."

V2_'s festival, DEAF 1995, coincided in November that year with the premiere presentation of Mikami's project *Molecular Clinic 1.0* in Tokyo, so the online manipulation of artificial creatures that the project enabled was happening simultaneously from the venues in Tokyo, and in Rotterdam. For the audience in the Netherlands, this was one of the first art projects that used the Internet as a site of translocal and synchronous collaboration, and additionally introduced the themes of artificial life and of generative algorithms.

Alex Adriaansens indicates how strongly the themes and questions resonated with the programmatic work of the V2_ Organisation: "Most of Seiko's projects in those days related to the perception of our body and our awareness of the body. Works like *Molecular Clinic* (1995), *Molecular Informatics* (1996), *World, Membrane and Dismembered Body* (1998), *gravicells* (2004), which we all presented at V2_, were addressing our bodily perception. They engage the various information environments that our body occupies. She addressed the

nervous system, viruses, information wars, and membranes in a poetic and challenging way, in the sense of the direct bodily experience her works evoked. She had a big impact on many young artists in Japan as well as in Europe and the US, since her works were very precise, and visually overwhelming. In our conferences and book publications she addressed her work in a more theoretical context. We are happy that some of these books, as well as video documentation and interviews we did with Seiko, are still available online."

Another member of V2_'s curatorial group, Joke Brouwer, affirms that it was chiefly the aesthetic quality of Seiko's work that was so intriguing: "It was sensitive and very beautiful. And it was always of a very high quality."

This resonance of ideas, aesthetics and sensitivity led to a series of presentations that brought all of Seiko Mikami's major works since the mid-1990s, save for *Desire of Codes*, to Rotterdam, something that happened in no other venue outside of Japan. It is an example which shows how an art institution is not only there to present existing artwork, but where the work of the artist and the work of the institution coincide and develop together in an ongoing dialogue of mutual influence and inspiration.

The presentations in Rotterdam spawned other opportunities, for instance through the French curator Richard Castelli who remembers that he first met Seiko Mikami at DEAF 1996 where he also experienced the installation *Molecular Informatics 2.0*. At the time, Castelli was the curator of two festivals in France, VIA in Maubeuge, and EXIT in Créteil, and he invited the project to both festival venues in March 1998 (presented as version 3.0). Later, he would also present *gravicells* there, in March 2005. Castelli points to the broader, art historical context in order to explain the special legacy of Seiko's work: "She participated actively in a movement enhancing both the notions of interactivity and immersion." For him as a curator, the encounter with Seiko was very special: "What struck the most about Seiko Mikami was the authority; she radiated an authority that impressed even our rather macho technical director of the time, to my pleasure." And he adds: "Some claim that the voice holds the soul of a person; it is why maybe, it is her voice which I will remember the most of Seiko."

Elsewhere, it seems that the reception and curatorial attention was quite different. In Spain, for instance, Seiko Mikami had several exhibitions over the years, yet always in different venues and at the initiative of different curators. One of these contacts, which eventually led to an important book publication, was established when the Spanish artist Joaquín Ivars visited Japan in 1998 and in 2000, together with curator Natalia Bravo, to do research for his own artistic work and for an exhibition about contemporary art in Japan, envisaged for an art centre in Málaga. Ivars and Bravo met Seiko Mikami at the CANON ArtLab in Tokyo in 2000, where they were also introduced to the program curators, Yukiko Shikata and Kazunao Abe, and visited her at Tama Art University. When the planned exhibition project failed, Ivars instead invited Mikami to participate in a publishing project, "Estrabismos", for a book then published under the title of the installation, *Molecular Informatics. Morphogenic substance via eye tracking*, in 2004. It contained a text by Seiko Mikami about her different works to that date, and a text by New York-based Japanese writer and activist Sabu Kohso. The books of this series always combined texts and documentation of two artists, in this case bringing Mikami's "high-tech" approach to art, the body and perception, into a dialogue with the "low-tech" approach to music of the Barcelona-based Spanish artist Oscar Abril Ascaso. What united them was that all three, Ivars, Mikami, and Abril Ascaso, were interested in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Even before this publication, Mikami's installation *Molecular Informatics 4.0* was shown in the spring of 1999 at the reknown contemporary art institution of the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona, in an exhibition series called "Singular Electrics", curated by Jorge Luis Marzo, Rosa Sánchez and Tere Badia. Later, the installation *gravicells* was shown in two Spanish

venues, first in 2006 in a cultural centre in Gijon in the context of the "OOH Festival (Orbital Observatory of the Human)", preceding the opening in Gijon in March 2007 of the major LABoral Art and Industrial Creation Centre; and secondly at a cultural centre in the city of El Tanque, on the island of Tenerife, in spring 2007. Finally – and this would be Seiko's last exhibition in Europe during her lifetime – , *Desire of Codes* was shown in Bilbao in the summer of 2013, as part of the exhibition "Artists as Catalysts" that the ars electronica center in Linz, Austria, had organised in its "Export" touring programme, following the major presentation of the same installation at the ars electronica festival in September 2012.

Curating Seiko Mikami

The following section of this text has a different, more personal tone to it. This is because it is based on the author's own memories and on exchanges that he had with Seiko over the years. Since these are mostly personal memories, the first person singular form will hopefully be excused.

I had first met Seiko Mikami when I worked as a curator for the V2_ Organisation in Rotterdam in the 1990s. I cannot remember meeting her at DEAF 1995 and believe that probably we only presented the website of *Molecular Clinic* at the time, without bringing her over. But for the prominent presentation of *Molecular Informatics 2.0* in the gallery of the V2_'s venue the following year, Seiko was there and made a strong impression on me with the clarity of her artistic vision and the soft authority with which she managed the setting-up of the installation. DEAF 1996 was held in June and coincided with the International Symposium on Electronic Art, ISEA 1996, a large international and academic gathering of artists and theorists which meant that the pressure for us to produce a conceptually strong exhibition was particularly high.

Two years later, the conditions in the same space were less than ideal when we wanted to present *World, Membrane and Dismembered Body*, an installation that requires a level of acoustic insulation that was almost impossible to achieve there. But together with Seiko we found ways of accommodating to the situation and managed to create a strong, convincing presentation of the work.

What struck me then, and what encouraged me to discuss several of Seiko Mikami's works in my book on *Machine Art*, is the entanglement of the perceiving human body and its technological environment, an entanglement that highlights the essentially mediated nature of any form of self-reference that the human individual may have. Subjectivity can here be grasped as a potential cognitive state that results from a synchronicity of signals and perceptions. Both *Molecular Informatics* and *World, Membrane and Dismembered Body* question such synchronicity and allow the recipient, or participant, or, perhaps we should say: ... allow the performing agent to experience the split between body and ego. I was fascinated to be forced, by Seiko and her work, to have to consider the things that can happen in that split, at the site of the interface...

In the year 2000, I moved on to become the artistic director of the transmediale festival in Berlin. When in 2002 we had the opportunity to organise a large media art exhibition, curator Susanne Jaschko and I decided to invite Seiko Mikami as one of the most interesting contemporary artists working with, and challenging the impact of, digital media at the time. On this occasion, Seiko once again showed her superior production skills. When I was in touch with her in September 2001, inquiring about the availability of *Molecular Informatics* for transmediale in February 2002, Seiko efficiently wrote back: "Hi. I made quick web page for shipping cost and floor plan for my installation. Please look at [the following URL ...]." She also announced the availability of a new version of the installation that she had continued

working on: "New version will be available at next February. I did change to more small/fast computers. This version will be more experience 'Ear can see, Eye can make', but basic concept will not change so much."

The same understanding of the installations as in-flux, as ever-evolving projects was also the case for *gravicells*, which we presented at transmediale 2005, after a meeting with YCAM curator Kazunao Abe who told me about the project at the ars electronica festival in September 2004. Both Seiko and Sota Ichikawa came to Berlin for the show at transmediale in February 2005 and stayed throughout the festival. During the preparations, in November, Seiko wrote: "Sota will check program during the show and will help packing to the boxes after the show. ... We are thinking about changing sound and diagram design. The work will improve more."

There were worries in our technical team at the time because the space we had available did not have the necessary ceiling height and we had to consider using special projectors with expensive optical systems. Our technical director was still speculating about costs and efforts when he interrupted his own e-mail message, writing: "----- MOOOOMENT -- ... wait a moment! I just downloaded the excel doc [tech rider] ... gosh! [this would have been Seiko's way of saying it] ... they are so well-prepared ;)." And because of the positive experience during transmediale 2002, he was confident that things would also work out in 2005, even on a tight schedule: "... they were really well prepared for tm.02, so maybe we will be quite a bit faster than I would normally have to calculate ..."

What these passages show is that Seiko Mikami had a reputation not only with the curators, but also with technical staff, that she was good to work with and always came well-prepared. The effect of such a reputation in different European venues cannot be overestimated, because it meant that even her more complex projects were judged and recommended as "doable" among colleagues.

In January 2006, Seiko Mikami wrote to me to inform me about the possibility of getting a sabbatical leave from Tama Art University where she had held a professorship since 2000. She was considering to come to Europe and was looking for a university to host her: "I am looking for university at a place of foreign countries from today. Do you know some name and a mail address of professor of the university or Center related to the new media. I would like to go to Europe. If you have a idea, please tell me and I make contact. ... Thank you and keep in touch." After some negotiations, we were able to invite her to Berlin. Joachim Sauter, professor for media art at the University of the Arts wrote the official invitation, and I could offer her a temporary studio space at the TESLA media art lab that I was responsible for together with two colleagues. Eventually Seiko was in Berlin from July 2006 to March 2007, living in an apartment in Berlin-Kreuzberg. She was still travelling quite a bit (a.o. to New York, Gijon, and London), but she also further developed the "wall" for *Desire of Codes* which she then presented at TESLA, in a preview version, during transmediale 2007.

The way she worked on this wall was intriguing and helped me – on a yet more personal note – to conceptualise the theme for that edition of the transmediale festival, which was eventually presented under the motto "Unfinish!" Before I had found this motto, I knew that this would be the final one of the seven festival editions that I directed, and I was looking for a theme that would both signal a form of closure, and an opening up to something new, at the same time. When Seiko first announced her wish to come to Europe that year, she also mentioned the exhibition of the project that would become *Desire of Codes*: "Jan 27, my new work will show at Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden." Part of our conversations over the following months was Seiko's wish to revise this installation. When she presented it in Stockholm, she had originally thought that it was already finished as a component for the new, larger project. But then she was dissatisfied and wanted to undo and to rethink it

completely. This gave me the key example to explain what I meant by the neologism "to unfinish": to take something that looks completed, finished, closed, and to reopen it, to return it from a state of closure to one of open processuality.

Some years later, in the exhibition "TRUST", held at Hartware Media Art Association in Dortmund, Germany, in the context of ISEA2010 and curated together with Stefan Riekeles of *Les Jardins des Pilotes*, I was able to present the completed version of the "Wriggling Wall Units" and the "Compound Eye Detector Screen". And another two years later, Seiko Mikami was invited to the ars electronica festival 2012 in Linz as the "Featured Artist", a status which implied special attention during the festival, not least through a solo exhibition in the Lentos Museum of Contemporary Art. After the presentation of *gravicells* in 2005, this was Seiko's second major presence at this important festival, and it was the first occasion in Europe of a complete exhibition of the *Desire of Codes* installation.

Only weeks before this festival opened in September 2012, I was contacted first by the organisers, and then by Seiko herself, asking me to represent her, since she was not able to come to Linz herself. On 20 August, Seiko wrote to me: "Dear Andreas, I just got out from the hospital on the 18th and I apologize to your worry. I got well but I got doctor stop to travel abroad for fear of infection. Thank you very much for going to Ars and talking !!! And I'm grateful. Please talk in your own opinion. Most of DOC's article are in Japanese but I will find some English articles and send you. – Best and keep in touch. Seiko Mikami." More or less by chance, I had seen the exhibition of the installation at the ICC in Tokyo in November 2011 and therefore knew not only about the different components which we had partly already exhibited in Germany, but also about the fully-fledged version and the intricate composition of its parts.

Of course I went to Linz for Seiko and took on the assignment of a couple of guided tours and an otherwise mostly symbolic presence during the opening days, as somebody who was familiar with the artist, the work, and with some of the ideas behind it. Crucially, it created a most unusual experience during one of the guided tours for which over 50 people showed up, a crowd with which the intimate interactivity of the installation's components can barely be experienced. However, this was the festival week so we "made do", walked through the exhibition space together and talked about the work.

A special feature of the installation is the "dream state" that has been programmed to be triggered only when the sensors detect no presence of visitors in the space so that, if the technical system was conscious, it might deem itself to be alone. Then the soundscape changes to deeper, rumbling sounds, and the images in the Compound Eye Detector Screen take on a gloomier, darker atmosphere, giving the impression of a deep and disquieting "machine dream". Under normal circumstances, a visitor will never experience this, because as soon as somebody enters the exhibition space or moves in front of the Wriggling Wall Units, the machine "wakes up", occluding its moody dream state. Only when the visitors present stand completely still or sit down, after a couple of minutes, the installation "forgets" about their presence and the "dreaming" begins.

During the guided tour, I told the participants about this and got them to sit down quietly in the space. After two failed attempts, caused by somebody standing up to take photographs or some other disturbance that "woke up" the machine, we actually saw and heard the installation switching to its dream mode. It was a most astonishing experience to have with such a large number of people, witnessing this artificial "mind" drifting through its subconscious musings. We were all somewhat proud of our collective achievement, and grateful to Seiko Mikami for preparing this magical moment for us. It was a pity that she was not there in Linz to share this moment, but somehow, I guess, she was virtually there.

Two closing remarks. First, there is an unresolved question about the project that Seiko Mikami was working on in 2013/2014. She went to Switzerland several times, but we have so far not been able to find out where exactly, and who she was working with on a project that would perhaps have dealt with drones, and with artificial intelligence systems – at least that is what Seiko spoke about when we met for the last time, both acting as jury members of the VIDA art award in Madrid, in September 2013. In a way, I find it completely appropriate that Seiko would pass away with a project in mind that would have taken on some of the great technical and moral challenges of our time, challenges that we will now have to address without her, but perhaps in her spirit.

And secondly, in the context of the politics of subjectivity, Seiko Mikami was not an explicit feminist, but an implicit one. The punk in her, and the conscious, critical techno-cultural individual, reject any fixed classifications, and sided with the perspective of a multiple, queer, posthuman and composite subjectivity. The way in which people responded to her artworks was also a response to the critical, posthumanist perspective that these works conveyed. I guess that Seiko found it refreshing to experience the differences in such responses between audiences in different countries, and that it was her curiosity that made her get on that next intercontinental flight, for the next exhibition, or for the next project preparation. For me, she is still on that journey.

The author is grateful to all the correspondents who generously contributed their memories and archival materials, especially Alex Adriaansens, Kit Blake, Joke Brouwer, Richard Castelli, Joaquín Ivars, Herwig Turk, and Hubert Winter. All quotations are from personal correspondences with the author in the summer of 2018.