Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-77) was multi-talented, painting, writing novels and plays, and directing and producing theatre. His mother was a pacifist and a Christian, and Murayama himself converted to Christianity in reaction to being assaulted for expressing his own pacifist views. After a short stint studying philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, he left for Berlin to study art and drama. Murayama encountered the European avant-garde, but was first drawn to Wassily Kandinsky’s constructivism. Constructivism’s detachment from reality disturbed Murayama, and upon returning to Japan he collaborated with artist, dramatist, and designer Yanase Masamu (1900-45) to create the MAVO art movement. MAVO drew on Dada to create what might be labeled performance art today.

Murayama was drawn to the proletarian theatre movement, and applied avant-garde aesthetic principles to theatrical creations. Beginning in 1930 he was arrested multiple time under the Peace Preservation Law. Although he recanted his communist views in 1934, he continued to work with socialist theatre companies. In 1940 he was arrested along with the other leaders of the New Cooperative Troupe. After WWII Murayama helped re-establish the New Cooperative Troupe, but political disagreements within the troupe led to its dissolution. In February 1959 he helped re-organize it into the Tokyo Art Theatre Troupe.

Murayama’s early loves were painting and German philosophy. His love of art won out and he left Tokyo University for Humbolt University of Berlin. His experiences in Germany led him to create MAVO, which sought to break down the borders between art and everyday life. The MAVOists were committed to fighting social injustice, drawing Murayama toward the proletarian theatre.

In Murayama’s view, entertainment should serve a socio-political function, so he began to stage adaptations of works such as Don Quixote and Robin Hood as Marxist fables. His 1927 play *Sukāto wo haita Nero* (*Nero in a Skirt*) was censored by the authorities for being a criticism of the Imperial House. In 1929, the play *Bōryokudan-ki* (*A Record of Gangsters*) also drew the ire of the authorities because it glorified the resistance of Chinese communist labour leaders who were suppressed violently by the Japanese military in 1923.

After being arrested once again in 1932, Muroyama was finally released in 1934 after recanting his communist affiliation and disbanding his theatre company. Before 1934 was over, however, he was once again producing a play, this time an adaptation of Shimazaki Tōson’s (1872-1943) novel *Yoake mae* (*Before the Dawn*, 1929). Arrested again in 1940, he was in and out of jail during the war. While on probation in 1945 he went to Korea, and then to Manchuria.

Muroyama returned to Japan in December, 1945, and began re-forming the New Cooperative Troupe in 1946 along with Kubo Sakae (1900-58). Divisions within the communist movement about the best path to a revolution in Japan led the troupe to disband. Muroyama still did not give up theatre, creating the Tokyo Art Theatre Troupe in 1959, and taking productions on tour to China and Korea in 1960 and 1966.

JOHN SWAIN