

Ulrich Möhwald



Underground People



www.marafiki.org

Group Marafiki — Friendship and Art

The name of the group comes from Swahili and it stands for “friendship and art”. Promoting international friendship and understanding through art is the main purpose of the group. **Marafiki** is composed of artists from various countries who have close ties to Japan.

Marafiki has the following major objectives:

1. Promoting cultural exchange between foreign artists and the Japanese community.
2. Furthering the dialogue between Japanese and foreign artists.
3. Providing mutual cooperation and assistance among foreign artists in Japan.
4. Organizing exhibitions and other art events that further international friendship and understanding.

グループ マラフィキー 友情とアート

マラフィキというグループの名称はスワヒリー語から由来し、「友情と芸術」を表わします。マラフィキの主な目的は芸術を通して国際的な友情と相互理解を促進することです。マラフィキは日本との親密な関係を持つ、様々な国々から来た芸術家によって構成されています。

マラフィキの主な活動目標は以下の通りです。

- 外国人の芸術家と一般住民の間における文化交流を促進する。
- 日本人と外国人の芸術家の間における交換を促進する。
- 日本に滞在する外国人芸術家の相互協力・相互援助の場を提供する。
- 国際的な友情と相互理解を助長するために、展覧会とその他の芸術イベントを開催する。

Underground People

Ulrich Möhwald

Nagoya 2003

All photos © Ulrich Moehwald
Printed at Moehwald Laboratory, Chubu University
中部大学メーワルト研究室で印刷
Reprint June 2016
2016年6月 再発行
Marafiki Projects Inc.
1-904-C, Meito-ku, Nagoya 465-0054
Tel. +81 90 2680 9798
e-mail marafiki.projects@marafiki.org
一般社団法人マラフィキ・プロジェクト
〒465-0054名古屋市名東区高針台1-904-C
TEL 090 2680 9798
e-mail marafiki.projects@marafiki.org
www.marafiki.org
www.moehwald.jp

Under ground People
Photography and text by Ulrich Moehwald
Printed by Ulrich Moehwald
Nagoya 2003
© Ulrich Moehwald

地下鉄人間

Underground People

Having been living in villages and small towns until well in my thirties, I had my first experiences riding an underground (or a subway in American) as a tourist in Paris and London in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of course the underground was not very crowded when we used it and we were much too busy understanding the system and keeping track of the stations to bother with the people around us. But we learned our way around the city – in the underground.

My first experience with the underground in metropolitan rush hour came in 1973. I had arrived at 7 a.m. at Paris *Gare de l'Est* on the night train from Frankfurt and stupidly decided to take the underground to *Gare du Nord*. So what would have been a short walk of about 200 meters on the surface, turning right just after the wicket of the arrival of the *trains de grandes directions*, climbing a number of stairs and then passing through the *Rue entre les deux Gares* to the entrance to the *trains banlieu du Nord* that were supposed to take me to my destination in the *Departement de l'Oise*, it took me almost one-and-a-half hours just to arrive at the underground platform of *Gare de l'Est*. The masses of people advanced just a meter or two with each departure of the underground below. This time I had ample leisure to study my fellow commuters. They looked as extremely tired as I felt and I got an instant understanding of the lyrics of Eddy Mitchell's song *Metro, Boulot, Dodo*.

After I moved from Marburg to Berlin in 1984, commuting to work via the underground became part of my daily routine. In Berlin, as well as later in Tokyo and now in Nagoya, I have spent about two hours daily on the underground mostly during rush hour, when the trains are over-crowded. In over-crowded trains it is almost impossible to avoid corporal contact with strangers. Hence, in a strictly psychological sense, the boundaries in which the self feels comfortable are continuously transgressed. Nevertheless, I could observe that even when corporal distance shrinks to zero people tend to uphold and mutually respect an 'aura' of personal privacy (with the exception of gropers, of course). Coming from Berlin, the underground in Tokyo was a great surprise. In Berlin most people were constantly on the watch, suspicious and hostile, always ready to react aggressively to any alleged or real disturbance of their private sphere. Not so in Tokyo, nor in Nagoya. Even in the most crowded conditions during rush hour people seem to be rather relaxed and completely centered on themselves. In Tokyo I had for the first time the impression that people at least try to uphold their privacy in a mental sense, if it is impossible physically. One expression of this relaxation of the Japanese on the underground is their habit to sleep on the train. One can see this not only in the case of overworked *sarariman* on their way to the office in the morning or back home late at night, this is a general phenomenon in which everybody indulges.

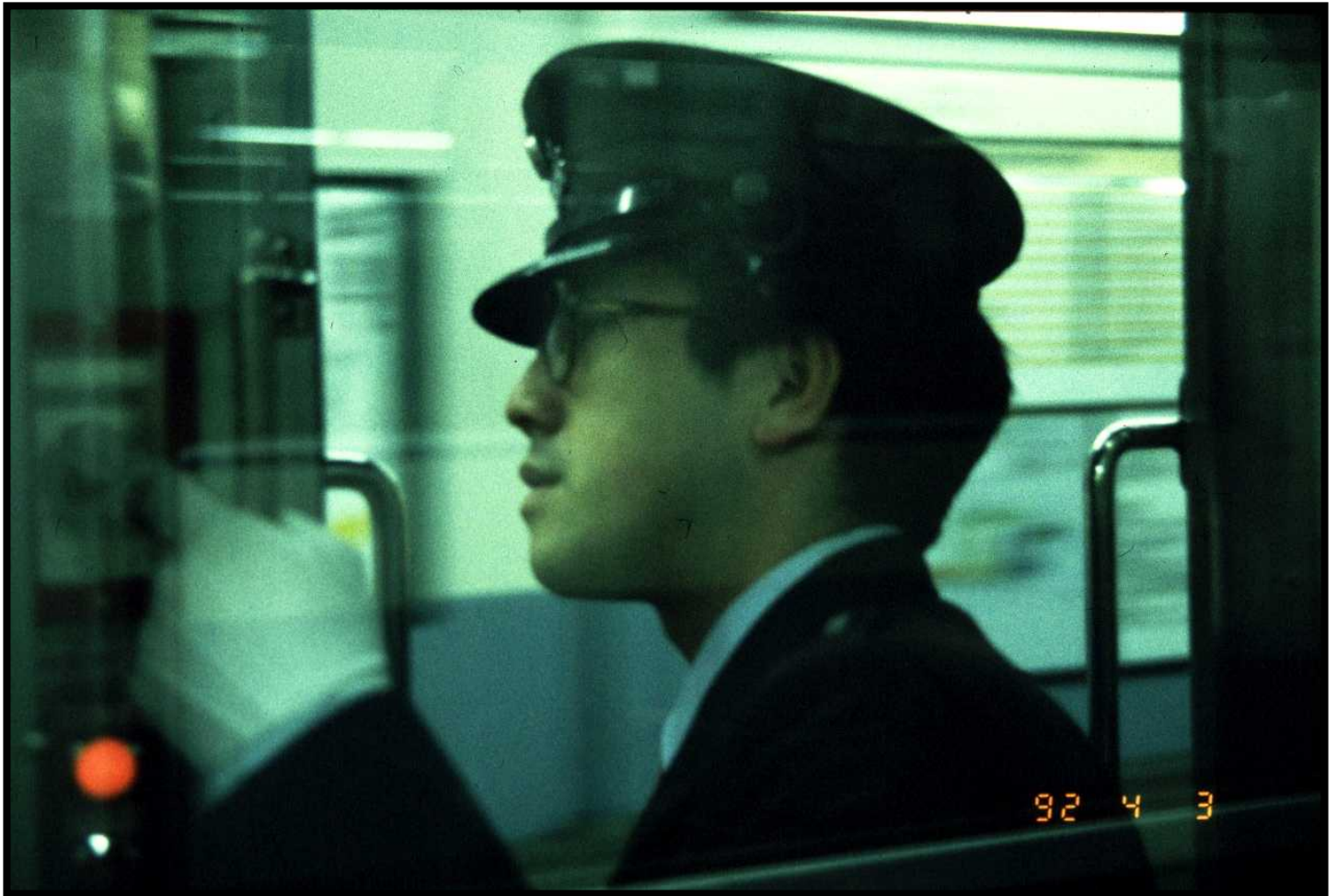
Although riding on the underground has been an integral part of my daily life since my arrival in Japan, I shot only very few photos in the underground prior to 1997. Light was a problem, which I did not know how to approach. Using a flash seemed not to be a good idea, because it would disturb the other passengers and at the same time draw attention to the fact of being photographed. For the few photos that I shot prior to 1997 in the underground I used high-speed films of 1600 ASA. But the results were not very satisfying because of big grain, flat colors and a strongly green color cast.

The idea for a new approach to photographing in the underground came, when I visited the Documenta X in Kassel in 1997. This was the first Documenta in which a larger number of photos was exhibited. It especially included important examples of the American so-called *street photography* from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. Here I saw for the first time the famous *subway portraits*, which Walker Evans had shot in New York's underground between 1938 and 1941. Evans relied on the light that existed in the underground and he tried to take the photos without being observed. He did not use the finder of the camera, but hid it under his coat with the lens sticking out between the buttons. He then posted his body in the direction of the person, whose portrait he wanted to take.

Seeing Evans' photos, suddenly everything just fell into place. His photos showed that it is important to hide your intentions, if you want to shoot interesting photos of people in the underground. And they turned my attention to black and white films. Using monochrome material would largely solve all the problems with light that are related to color. Once the problem of film was settled, what remained was the question, which camera to use. A reflex camera was out of question because of its conspicuous size and the noise during shutter release and film transport.

Checking the available light, I found out that a 400 ASA film would allow an exposure of $\frac{1}{50}$ to $\frac{1}{60}$ second at aperture 1:2. Based on this information, the decision to use a Contax II from the 1930s came almost automatically. I had found this camera accidentally in a recycle shop in Tokyo in the early 1990s, but had used it only two or three times. This camera type was produced from the mid-1930s until the mid-1950s and it is equipped with a Zeiss Sonnar lens of 50 mm focal length and 1:2 maximum aperture. Its shutter release is extremely silent and so is its film transport, because it is not equipped with a quick-cocking lever. The only problem for me is the fact, that its lens was originally produced for the American market and the focussing scale uses only *feet*, and I am not used to think distances in this kind of measurement and have to recalculate them into *meters* before setting the focus. Some time after I had shot my first photos with it in the underground, I found out that Walker Evans had used exactly the same camera type for his photos in New York's subway. But the fastest film he could use at that time had been a 200 ASA Kodak Double-X Film and there existed much less light than in today's Japanese subways, hence his exposure was three to four times longer than mine in Nagoya and he had to wait for a train stop to shoot in order to avoid blurring caused by train vibration.

I made my first trials with the Contax II in November 1997, followed by further ones in January 1998 and March 1999. In July 1999 I took several shots with a Pentax Spotmatic-F using the finder. And in March and July 2001 I tried my Contax G II that is equipped with auto-focus. The photos that I shot with the latter are quite good, but the camera is too conspicuous because of its size, especially the size of the lens, and because of the noise of the motor drive. So its really difficult to remain unobserved. In October 2002 I returned to the Contax II. In November 2002 I used again the Spotmatic F and the Contax G II, and from October through December 2002 I tried a Sony Cybershot DSC-F505 digital camera. The project itself was finished in December 2002, but this does not mean, that I will completely stop taking photos in the underground. In this sense, it is a continuing project.



Inokashira-Line, Tokyo, April 3, 1992. Pentax A3 Date-S, Cosmicar 35-70 mm, Fujichrome P 1600 D



Inokashira-Line, Tokyo, April 3, 1992. Pentax A3 Date-S, Cosmicar 35-70 mm, Fujichrome P 1600 D



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, August 5, 2000. Contax T VS III, Vario Sonnar 30-60 mm, Fujichrome Provia 400



Chûô Line, Nagoya, July 2000, Contax G I, Sonnar 90 mm, Contax TLA 200, Fujichrome Sensia 100



Higashiyama Linie, Nagoya, 1.1.2001. Contax T VS III,
Vario Sonnar 30-60 mm, Fujichrome Provia-F 400



Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, October 19, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, October 22, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, November 2, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, December 31, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Rush, Sakae Station, Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, December 14, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Ikeshita Station, Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, October 22, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Kanayama Station, Meijo Line, Nagoya, December 16, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Sakae Shinmachi Station, Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, December 14, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Chikusa Station, Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, December 14, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



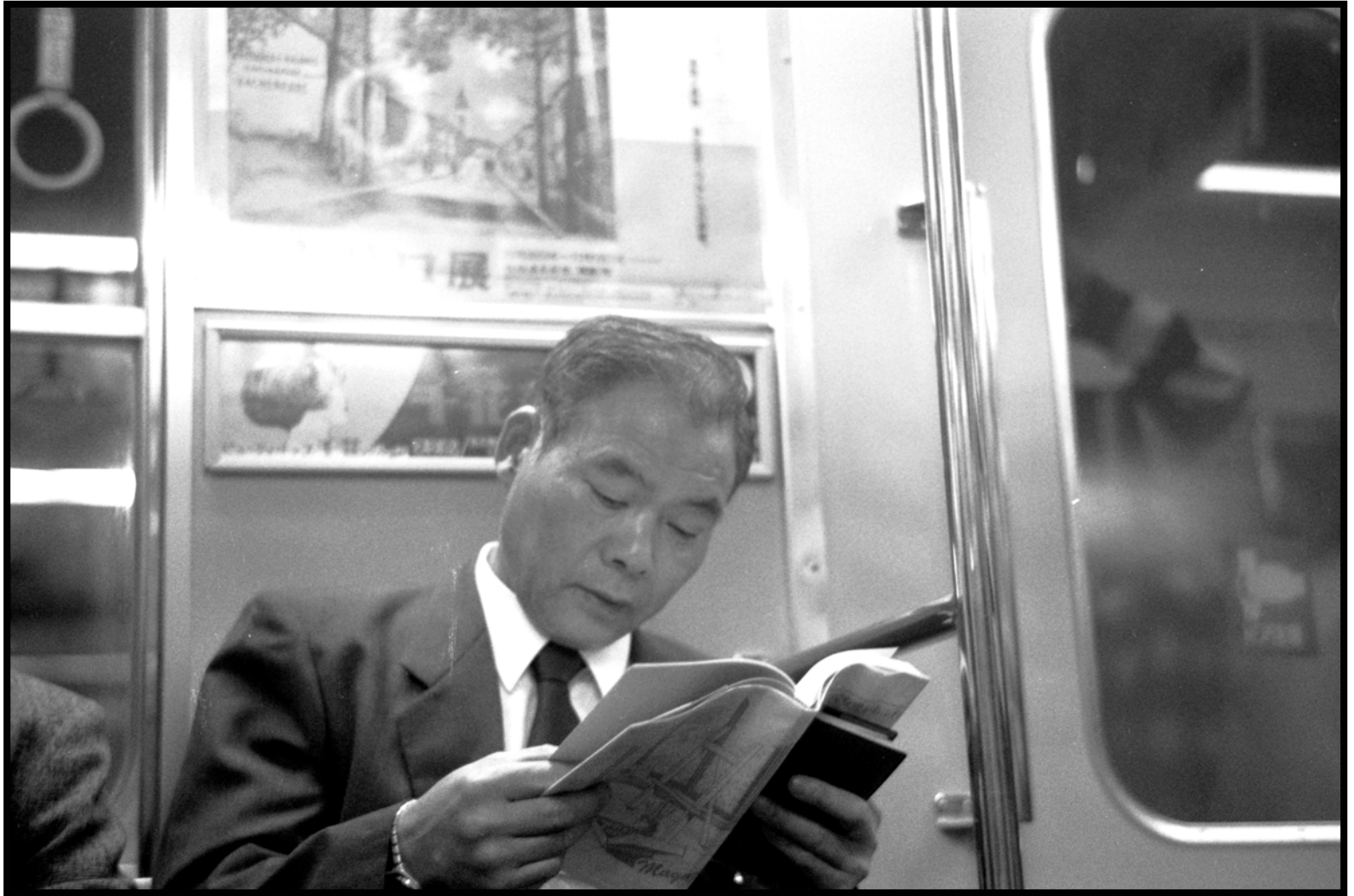
Kanayama Station, Meijo Line, Nagoya, December 16, 2002, Sony Cybershot DSC-F505, Zeiss Vario-Sonnar 7-21 mm, 4.1 Megapixel



Chûô Line Nagoya, July 9, 1999 Pentax Spotmatic F, SMC Takumar 50 mm, Kodak T-Max 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama Line, Nagoya, November 4, 1997, Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodax T-Max 400



Meijō Line, Nagoya, January 26, 1998, Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodax T-Max 400



Meijō-Line, Nagoya, January 26, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, November 4, 1997. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, January 26, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Meijō-Line, Nagoya, January 26, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, January 27, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, January 27, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, January 27, 1998. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Meijō-Line, Nagoya, March 28, 1999. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Chûô-Line, Nagoya, June 18, 1999. Pentax Spotmatic-F, SMC Takumar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Chûô-Line, Nagoya, June 18, 1999. Pentax Spotmatic-F, SMC Takumar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Chûô-Line, Nagoya, June 18, 1999. Pentax Spotmatic-F, SMC Takumar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400

Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm,
Kodak T-MAX 400





Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 4, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, March 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, July 28, 2001. Contax G II, Planar 45 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 7, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 7, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 8, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 10, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 11, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 12, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 12, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 12, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



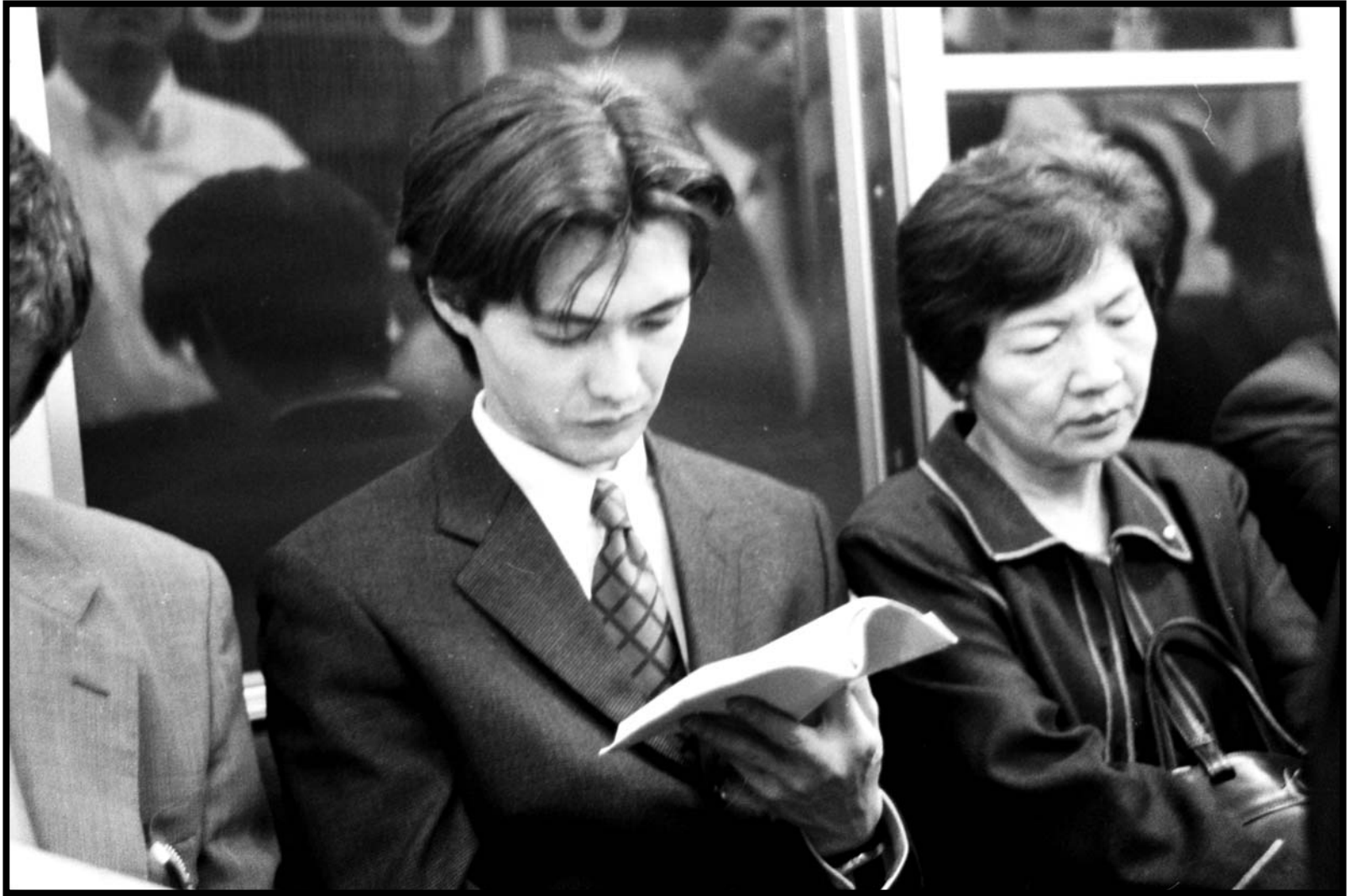
Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 13, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 13, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 15, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 15, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Nagoya, October 15, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Higashiyama-Line, Issha Station, Nagoya, October 15, 2002. Contax II, Sonnar 50 mm, Kodak T-MAX 400



Photo: Brigitte Möhwald

Ulrich Möhwald

1951 Born in a village in Northern Hessen, Germany
 1970 Entered Marburg University to study sociology, Japanology, ethnology, and Sinology
 1981 Assistant, Department of Japanology, Marburg University
 1984 Lecturer, East Asian Institute, Free University Berlin
 1987-88 Guest researcher, Institute of Social Science, Tokyo University
 1989 Researcher, German Institute of Japanese Studies, Tokyo
 1993 Associate professor, Chubu University, Kasugai
 1998 Professor, Chubu University, Kasugai

Cover photo: Ginza-Line Ueno Station, Tokyo, January 25, 1992. Pentax A3 Date-S, Cosmicar 35-70 mm, Fujichrome 400

Exhibition: "Views of and Thoughts on Japan: Camera Diary of a German Researcher"

- Tachikawa** Central Kominkan, 3/15-3/21/1991
 Nishi-Suna Kominkan, 3/23-4/4/1991
 Saiwai Kominkan, 4/6-4/19/1991
- Sendai** Central Citizen's Center, 12/2-12/6/1992
 Ichibancho Citizen's Center, 12/9-12/12/1992
 Tobu Citizen's Center, 12/15-12/20/1992
 Elle Park Sendai, 3/2-3/14/1993
- Nagoya:** Chubu Electric Power Building Showroom Harmony Plaza, German Cultural Forum 9/1-96/1994

Exhibition: "Japan Seen through the Eye of the Camera: Photo Sketches of a German Researcher"

- July 11 to 21, 2001
Tachikawa : Gallery and Tea Room 'Sayu'
- Exhibition: "Underground People"**
 November 5 to 10, 2002
Nagoya : 17th Foreign Artists Exhibition, Nagoya International Center

Exhibition: "Faces from Pelican Pete's and Misfits"

February 9 to May 2, 2003
Nagoya: Misfits

Exhibition: "Sisi Kwa Sisi: Three Way Encounters"

June 3-8, 2003
Nagoya: Marafiki Group Exhibition, Nagoya International Center